

Transcript for Episode 104: Interview with Na Kim

Episode Duration: 38:36

JENN: Hello and welcome to the latest episode of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. For new and returning listeners you may know you can find the podcast on Tumblr at [Minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com](https://minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com), or on Twitter @MinoritiesinPub. The podcast can also be found on Apple Podcast, iHeartRadio, Spotify, TuneIn, and GooglePlay.

For this episode I'm really happy to welcome Art Director Na Kim at FSG, which is part of one of the Big 5 pubs. And I have not had an art director on. I've had on someone who did typesetting, Claudia, several years ago early on in the podcast though. I have not had a designer, someone who does one of the most critical elements of publishing and I think it's something we definitely do not talk about enough. So, I'm so happy to have you on, Na Kim.

NA: I am so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

JENN: So graphic design. Y'all are basically the frontlines. Do people realize that you're on the frontlines when it comes to the interior, when it comes to the covers, which is the biggest promotional piece of a book? You know, like, do you think people will recognize that?

NA: Well they say don't judge a book by its cover but it seems to happen quite often, so. Yeah it's a pretty integral part of a book.

JENN: Yeah, and when I talk to people in publishing and, mind you, I'm talking to a lot of liberal arts majors, and I was a liberal arts major, and I am fuzzy on if that really incorporates fine arts or not or if graphic design is kind of part of fine arts when we look at academic study at least.

But the huge proponent of publishing or the, kind of biggest visual goes to editorial, especially acquisitions. I don't work in editorial at a major publisher, I do that in freelance and whatnot. For me, I feel like being in production or managing editor and, you know, even copyediting, these are also very critical roles of what makes a book a book. And we work very closely with you—

NA: Yeah.

JENN: a—in design and the art directors and the associate art directors and the designers and the junior designers and everyone who really makes this happen. So can you talk a little bit about how you got into publishing via this route? Because I don't know, were you always looking at design, always looking at arts and then it was just a matter of figuring out where that would take you career-wise?

NA: I actually don't have a graphic design background. I went to art school in Maryland Institute College of the Art with the intent of becoming a painter, so, I was originally a painting major, switched to sculpture, then illustration because I decided if I'm paying this much money to go to art school I should probably learn something that can get me a job. And studied illustration, got some editorial work in the beginning. But honestly, I was just so broke at the time that I didn't have internet, or I had a pay-as-you-go phone where I missed a bunch of calls for work, and just fell back into bartending and waiting tables for years before I realized working in publishing was an option.

And I got introduced to publishing at first through an art director named Charlotte Strick who at the time was an art director at FSG. She gave me my first freelance illustration cover for one of her books and that's how I got introduced to it and realized, oh, this is, this is a career path, this is something I can do for a living.

So basically that was my introduction and, you know, I really enjoyed doing this. I liked the turnaround time, the amount of what I'm putting into it and the results I'm seeing, so. But I didn't have a graphic design background so I decided I needed to move to New York From Baltimore. And I emailed Charlotte asking if she knew anyone or if she needed a free intern so that I could learn how to type and design covers and luckily Patti Ratchford at Bloomsbury was able to take me for two days a week and that's how I got my start.

JENN: And so you really wanted to come to New York City?

NA: Well in Baltimore, I was just, I, you know, it's like a velvet ditch there, where it's... I loved it and it was comfortable but I wasn't doing anything career-wise or something sustainable outside of the restaurant industry. I decided I needed to learn some new skills and that was going to happen in New York.

JENN: So how long have you been in book publishing though?

NA: I started interning for Patti at Bloomsbury in the fall of 2012, so it's been about 8 years now. I can't believe it's been that long.

JENN: That's a great trajectory as well. And so, were you at Bloomsbury and moved to FSG or were there some things in-between?

NA: Started as an intern at Bloomsbury, and then got hired as a designer there, then I moved to Crown for about a year, and then I moved to Simon & Schuster for about a year, and then landed at FSG.

JENN: Oh so you've almost ran the gambit.

NA: It was a little bit of a Goldilocks situation. This house is too big, this house is too small. And you know, I kind of ended up where I first started in a sense because my first experience in publishing was with FSG.

JENN: I have a lot of questions especially about the artistic aesthetic, and maybe they are unfair questions for someone who wishes they were, you know, artistically inclined in some way. I do wish I had pursued that when I was younger, you know, it's like, where would I be now?

NA: It's never too late.

JENN: I'm just so tired. To have like— I was looking at some friends of mine who are also writers and they said, they keep looking up other things to procrastinate from writing, so one poet was like, I just took up glass blowing.

NA: Yeah, I've been looking into that as well.

JENN: Yes. It's like, I really should finish my book.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: You know what I should do? Basket weaving. That's useful. And it is.

NA: All of it sounds really appealing to me.

JENN: Right? Like using your hands. I love it. Just doing that.

NA: Yeah. It's very satisfying.

JENN: I think so.

But I feel like there's just something that can and can't be learned. And I, I feel like that from an editorial perspective as well. You know, I became more and more critical over time and I had to learn that critical sensibility to be able to read and decipher what is this doing, what is this, how does this work, maybe think about the market, maybe don't think about the market. But I feel like in, especially book design and cover design, there's so many things you're thinking about, right, you're thinking about how you're going to translate a book, the content, to a visual aesthetic that is pleasing. The determining factor can vary, right?

NA: Yeah.

JENN: In terms of who decides what. Like I do and don't know how it works. But I've been in those cover meetings and I've seen some things happen.

NA: You never can predict how it's going to go, if it's going to be one round, two rounds, three, four, five. But I do agree with you, that the way, like, critical thinking and reading is, and your interpretation of it is more important than the actual, your skills or execution because that's all stuff you're going to learn on the job.

JENN: Really? Like someone will actually be able to help you think about layering and textures and also marketing and how to read different kinds of descriptions. Because I also, I was very close to the creative director at my previous job and they have so many great designers at my current job as well. And I always was interested in like, the way the conversations went, where someone who was completely non-artistic, was just like, I don't even think we need imagery, we just need to do block lettering. You know, I would like us to do the same thing we've done for the past 25 years, you know.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Or even willing to take that chance because their aesthetic isn't there, but the aesthetic change is, collectively. You know, like, we can't have the same covers as the eighties unless you're really looking for that eighties vibe.

NA: You can have an eighties cover as long as you make it relevant and new. It's good to have something be relatable but you still want it to feel fresh at the same time. I guess what I was saying is, I think, especially if you're new to design, I think that all of that can be learned as long as you're open to it and you want to and you're thirsty to be better at it. I mean, I'm sure there are people who are naturally better at this because they've been practicing it for long or, or knew that it was an interest of theirs earlier on but everything I know about design I learned on the job. I knew nothing about it before then.

JENN: I imagine there are multitudes to that, right? Like the conversations that are happening, the other books that you're seeing, managers, marketers, publicists, book buyers, all that stuff is coming into play. Is there maybe an example or way to—like, if I come to you and it's like, this is—and I'm going to be so blasé when I say it, a coming-of-age-story that looks at friendship, love, and etc. and vineyards, and da da da. You know, like, are you getting that kind of descriptor, are you actually able to read the books?

NA: I think when I first started, I wasn't even thinking about that stuff, I was just trying to set the type correctly and make sure it doesn't look like shit.

Whereas now with a little more experience, I'm being much more considerate about those aspects of publishing, about marketing, about how it's going to look online, is this gonna, like, who is this book for?

[10:01]

NA: So yeah, when you say, coming-of-age novel, like, it definitely sends off different alerts in my mind about, okay, that tells me who this book is for, in some sense or another.

JENN: Because I think people just don't know, you know, like we do these—especially in the children's lit realm, because I think in the adult lit realm cover reveals aren't really a thing.

NA: Yeah they're not, they don't happen as often.

JENN: Kid lit realm—

NA: Like a big title, or a really, really big book.

JENN: Yeah. In the kid lit realm, these things are happening every other week, it's ridiculous. And you know, and I'm like, oh pretty cover. But sometimes I just don't remember a book, you know what I mean? Like I'll look at the cover, I think it's a pretty cover but that doesn't always tell me what the book is about. Or it's like I love the cover, and I think there's just so many things about, I judge books by the cover just like you said at the top

NA: Yeah—

JENN: But at the same time, I still need to know what the book is about. Team effort.

NA: I almost feel like a lot of publishers are making it ambiguous on purpose now. They almost want it to be generic and just kind of a pattern or something palatable to get people's attention. I don't really think that's what we do at FSG, I think... I think from my experience and all the places I've worked at, they're very trusting of the art department to come up with new ideas and new ways of presenting these books so I feel very fortunate about that aspect of working where I work.

JENN: Mmm mmm. I agree with you because I think some people have told me, oh this imprint, you can tell this is this imprint because they always do what you said, you know, the patterns, da da da, they never do faces, or da da da or—

NA: Yeah, back of a woman, you know, back of a woman's head with like, big, gigantic type you can read across the room. And it's like, not to say I'm not guilty of doing that here and there as well.

The thing about that is, I think that publishers should give readers the chance to figure it out on their own too and kind of— I think they should give the readers the benefit of the doubt, that they have the intelligence to figure out what it is. I think a lot of publishers worry about intimidating readers and sometimes that results in a bland or generic cover because they're afraid something new might scare them away.

JENN: Or a slapdash kind of cover too.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Where certain things that should be noticed aren't noticed. That's what I've seen at places as well, where it's like, did you not think about that? Especially in children's lit. It's like, did you not?

NA: Yeah.

JENN: These are for the kids.

NA: Yeah, it's always good to think about who the book is for and keeping that in mind while designing and putting the book together.

JENN: So I also want to note that, Na and I, we met at last year's Star Watch, which seems like eons ago considering where we are now.

NA: It looks like a decade ago. Back then we were rising stars, and now we're fallen stars.

JENN: We're isolated stars.

NA: We're isolated, we're red dwarves just... in isolation.

JENN: And Na Kim is also an honoree. Will it embarrass you if I read a little bit?

NA: Probably but sure, you go.

JENN: It's all about sharing the love.

But the FSG publisher, Mitzi Angel, says that Na Kim has risen through the ranks with grit and verve in a style wholly her own. She has a perfect palette like a singer has a perfect pitch. And she names a bunch of your, just like, these phenomenal covers and colors, and just amazing things that you have contributed to FSG over the years.

And that you also do freelance, which, that's gonna be a follow-up question. I wanted to make sure to bring that up to showcase that, you know, how important and how valued people in this area should be and are.

So yay, I'm very happy to have met you and that you got that recognition. And also talk a little bit about how that happened, you know what I mean? Like the publishers recognizing what you bring to the aesthetic and to the voice and vision of FSG as a whole, and also takes time, right? Because you need to understand what and who FSG is as a brand, you know. We can't get away from the fact that we are brands, we are part of brands.

NA: Yeah and I think publishers are becoming more aware of that and moving more towards having a clear brand and message.

And first of all, Mitzi Angel, as her name suggests: an angel. And she's being way too kind in what she says about me but she's also super sharp and kinda knows what the company needs and is willing to take the risks that we just talked about. So I feel really lucky to have someone there I can communicate with freely and kind of talk about these things openly and be given the chance to make these risks even if they don't always pan out.

JENN: And it's not always quantifiable right because just like the book itself, these are all subjective things.

NA: Yeah, I think it sorta comes down to taste

JENN: Always.

NA: Which is all different, it's constantly changing. But I think there's a certain kind of sensibility that FSG books have and FSG authors have and it's kind of, how that's represented in change throughout time and with different books, they can vary but it, the sensibility is always the same. So it's kinda just having that quality shine through in the text or the cover, whatever it is, have that same kind of feeling.

JENN: Because I always feel as though it's not always, it's not always paint-by-numbers, quite literally.

NA: It's a little trickier because FSG books are pretty literary and some of the books are tough to read. But I can't really put it in words, which is probably why I'm not a writer and just use pictures to show what I'm talking about.

JENN: I think about that a little bit too, like when we look at literary and then when we look at children's books and then we look at an academic, and I worked for an academic press and now like, real 180, going to children's books. People are like, what's it like working in children's books? And I was like, I don't know what to tell you. Like, the content is cuter, that's basically it. You know what I mean?

NA: Working in childrens actually seems much harder.

JENN: It's a lot of content. It's consistent levels of content and various formats for the same content. I did not realize how many books you made of the same book, you know what I mean?

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Like, just like. You make a hardcover and a paperback, I knew what. But then it's like, we have three different types of audio, we have a library bind edition, we make board books, we

might make a conversion of the paperback. We might make it look just like, a Step into Reading, you know, and then we might make it a mini reader. And I'm just like, why do you need these things? Like, who?

NA: Step into reading? I'm just going to go and run and get a pack of cigarettes for a bit.

JENN: And I'm just like, wait what, and like the GLB and the LGB and the POB and I was like, what?

NA: Yeah, what, what's that—

JENN: Yeah, yeah, in trade you just probably got like, you got the ebook, the hardcover, the paperback, and the audio, right? That's pretty much.

NA: I mean, yeah. You can pretty much sum it up into those four categories and as a cover designer, you know, unless we're redesigning the entire cover, it's a pretty easy transition from one to the next.

JENN: Yeah, it's, it's been interesting. I very much enjoy it. But sometimes you just, if y'all's knew how much went into these books that you just sit and enjoy, you don't know.

NA: No.

JENN: You don't know how much paperwork and meetings...

NA: I think a lot of people don't realize how far in advance we start working on these books.

JENN: Oh my Gosh. Yeah Especially these picture books. Or my end is picture books. I don't know if you do any highly illustrated titles but—

NA: Very rarely and honestly, we have a separate interior department that takes care of most of that so we're very fortunate that they're there.

JENN: Yeah, yeah. It's a lot. So I always have respect for the designer and I'm always like, I'm really sorry to rush you but they really want it today...

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Not Friday. Can you do [that]? The author asked for more things. Can you do that?

NA: It's funny how whenever, whenever it comes to the art department, we need to give it back in a day.

JENN: Yeah...

NA: For the past two weeks—

JENN: Design asked for this already.

NA: [Laughs]

JENN: You didn't give them the copy. You didn't give them the copy to the jacket. They cannot do this tomorrow. They've been waiting for the jacket copy for a month and yet—

NA: And yet—

JENN: —it's due to production tomorrow.

NA: And yet she persisted.

JENN: Just like she kept those emails going.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: I have a special place in my heart for y'all's because I'm just like, I just don't want to piss them off.

NA: It goes both ways. I have the utmost respect for our managing editor and that whole department. They're truly the backbone of publishing, like we would be doomed without management.

JENN: I'm realizing that because when I mess up it's like, oh okay, that's... that's not great.

NA: You know, anything we have to lay down the law I usually go to my managing editor and ask her to do that because people respect her.

JENN: Oh good. Yeah. Everyone, like, some people are like they'll listen to you more than me, and I was like why? We're asking the same question? Ah, I dunno.

[20:00]

NA: I'm in the art department so they're like, do you even know how to read?

JENN: [Laughs] I'm just going to ask someone to tell you.

NA: I need somebody... Man, a little more respect too to make the big moves for me.

JENN: I'll get there, I'll get there. I'll be like, you guys, can you please do this? I need it tomorrow. Thank you. Hugs and kisses! Or just, or not either because we're in a time of Corona so nothing. Virtual high fives.

NA: Hope this email finds you [well] in these uncertain times.

JENN: Yeah. I feel so guilty. I feel so guilty. I'm sorry to send you another email. [Laughs]

NA: I feel terrible every time I have to follow up on something.

JENN: Like I'm so sorry. But I have to. Because I'm like ... I'm making mistakes, so I just need you to bear with me.

NA: The show must go on.

JENN: It must, it must.

And so speaking of freelance, like I do freelance, not I'm managing editorial freelance, thankfully. A lot of my freelances come word of mouth, I did something for someone and then they heard of me, or 'cause I'm Black and they need someone Black—

NA: [Laughs]

JENN: --the characters are very Black so I benefit that way too.

NA: There's a shortage of brown people in publishing, so.

JENN: Yeah, yeah, and especially I think in design, like a lot of the design staff, at least in my area, the most POCs are Asian.

NA: Yes, I agree. Off the top of my head, one Latina designer, and one African American designer, and pretty much ends there. I mean, hopefully there are more and I'm just not aware of them, but there aren't enough.

JENN: Definitely. And that's a huge position to be in, right? Is the design area. Because I definitely would like to see more. Especially brown people.

So at least if there are freelancers out there, are there ways that they can, like, kind of get their foot in the door, get to know art directors, because, also, again, if y'all's aren't invited to the conferences, if you are not invited to these kind of, I guess, job fairs, if job fairs still even exist and all that stuff. If y'all's are not in the room, right—

NA: Yeah.

JENN: —Showcasing that there is something beyond editorial, and even publicity, because I think some people are aware of publicity as much as editorial.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: But this position, I don't know if they're going to graphic design schools or schools with those programs or schools with just people like yourself, who were "I didn't do graphic design, I did this area of art."

I'm just wondering how we're going to get those kinds of people and how does those people, or how are they able to get to you-- in a professional manner, not in a, let me just find you because I was on this podcast, you know what I mean? How do we get our names out there, especially if you don't know anyone, especially if you're at, I don't know, Wisconsin, right? I mean. But you're really good at what you do.

NA: But I mean, why not just find it through this podcast too, you know? I definitely sent a lot of cold emails when I first started. To a lot of people still working in the industry now, they don't remember me, but I remember them not responding to me, which is totally fine.

JENN: I remember people too. I do know.

NA: Yeah. I was like "Hi, my name is Na Kim, I'm really interested in book covers, I'm wondering if you can look at my portfolio and give me some advice?" Ninety percent of them didn't respond. But I try to be mindful of how I got here and it took a lot of help and a lot of chances that people took on me without any experience so I would say send those emails to art directors and ask them for advice or to look at your portfolio or where to begin. A student from MICA just wrote me last week and I finally was able to respond with a full list of answers.

And I think we want young people to be interested in book cover design, especially minorities to be interested in this field. But I think a lot of the problem comes from the fact that people didn't even know this exists as a trade at all. Like I definitely didn't know that this was even an option until I kind of just stumbled upon it.

JENN: Are there, in your recommendation, spaces, places that we could find these people? Like our outreach could be better? Should I be going to FIT, should I, because I feel like the publishing programs themselves...

NA: Oh yeah.

JENN: —Are not necessarily doing jurisprudence to really have people understand publishing.

NA: Yeah. So I think a lot of book cover designers, they all come from SVA. Like I almost want to say...

JENN: You mean School of Visual Arts.

NA: Yeah. Seventy, maybe 75% of the book cover designers I know have gone to SVA. Because they have a lot of, or they've had a lot of professors in the past be book cover designers. And so a lot of my colleagues and I talk about, maybe more of us should be teaching, or try to get a class in print design or book cover design to kind of show these kids that this is available if they're interested. Because as everything moves to digital, I think there's, I don't think there's less interest in print design, but people don't really see that as an option as much anymore.

But you know, there were no book cover design classes when I went to college, which is not that... I mean maybe it's a long time ago, 2009 I graduated?

JENN: It's not that long ago, not at all.

NA: Yeah it could be longer.

I think the only way to know that it is an option is work with book cover designers as their mentors or something. That's the most common way, but I almost feel like it should start even sooner than that, like high schoolers should know that this is an option. Because it takes a while to get here.

JENN: You mean get here as in to actually get into publishing itself?

NA: Yeah. I think it's a really small tight-knit community and like you said with freelance, most people get jobs through word of mouth. I didn't send a portfolio anywhere. It wasn't until I was working for a few years and people can see my work that I started to get any kind of freelance work. But basically, everybody knows everybody else within book cover design and we find talent through recommendations or by seeing their book being published.

We also go to the SVA, obviously it's not happening this year, but they have portfolio days and we'll definitely check it out every year to see if there's any new talent that would be interested in book covers.

JENN: And so, you mentioned you cold-called at the time, and I've done like the testing and stuff like that, for copyediting and whatnot. Would you say, and this may be kind of obvious, one of the biggest and most important things to have, is a portfolio on your website. Even if you have no clips, you know, because there are writers who don't have clips and that's a big thing that people are concerned about, is I don't have any clips. But at least with design, I feel like you are producing something. You can produce, kind of like, this is my take on this, this is my take on that. It doesn't necessarily have to be a paid job upfront.

NA: Absolutely not. Yeah. There are so many books out there that you can redesign, tons of classics you can work from. So it's important to practice that a little bit before showing your work.

And I think this is where— I see a lot of illustrators that are interested in becoming book cover designers like myself. And I realize the biggest hurdle for them is that they'll have this beautiful illustration but it won't be in the context of the market like you said, or the typography will be way off. You know, there are these two components, it's the art and the type and if those things don't line up, it can be really distracting in terms of where to give your feedback. So the illustration could be great but the type could be a mess, and if they say, "oh what did you think of my book cover?" then you might be directing your feedback into the wrong part of it. They just want feedback on illustration as opposed to the design, which are two separate things.

JENN: I've had a lot of conversations with, again, my friend, who's the creative designer at my old job, and I'd show him covers and be like I don't like da da da, and he'll be like yeah, it doesn't really tell me this and da da da da da.

And, you know, I really like bouncing those kinds of ideas off of him to see what he thought and what he thought of it, as somebody who's been in the business 30 years, and who either moves along with the business or doesn't.

For me those are very interesting conversations. I don't know if that's how it is for everybody, but they're just so important too, for me to understand where so-and-so's coming from, for them to understand where I'm coming from. And, you know, once you know someone's aesthetic, I feel like you can work better with them.

NA: But also, I feel like for book covers, people should rely less on their own aesthetics as a designer. It's like not about you. It's for the author, it's for the readers, it's for the publisher, people spend years sometimes working on this book. It's not about your aesthetic, it's about what's good for the book.

JENN: Mmm.

NA: So, people who are tied up in what their style is or what their look is, maybe you shouldn't bother with this, because it's not really about you. It's a service to something else.

JENN: Oh snaps, keeping it real.

NA: I think it's good to have a certain, I'm going back to sensibility but, it's okay to be intuitive about what you're making and go with feeling, but at the end of the day, it's not like your work of art, it's somebody else's book cover.

[30:00]

NA: So it's really, really important to keep that in mind.

JENN: Yeah, I would love to say, talk about that with the art director of my anthology. [Laughs] And how they pushed back on me for just alignment of text and I said, “wow okay.”

NA: You should definitely give your designers and art directors the trust they deserve.

JENN: Absolutely.

NA: Because you know, we’re here for a reason, we know what we’re doing. But yeah. It also shouldn’t be like a vanity project.

JENN: Yeah, I totally agree. Because there’s so many feelings that get involved, necessarily or unnecessarily. And I’ve seen, like, the authors be unhappy and I hate seeing authors be unhappy. And at the same time, I’ve also seen authors ask for ten different things and not like every, anything.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: And then you’re just like, you just wasted our time. And you’ve lost our grace and goodwill towards you, so you just take what you can get, right? So I feel both sides too. I’m just—

NA: I feel like with time, like you kind of learn to differentiate the two. Whether or not it’s just an author being fussy or if we’re not doing them justice. I mean everybody wants the author to be happy. I think that’s really, really important, but if they don’t have the clarity to see what they need because they’re so attached to it. Then I think it’s also important for us to kind of speak to them or the editor to speak to them and say, “hey we’re on your team, this is for you, this is for your success, so trust us a little bit.”

JENN: Yeah. My last question is going to be, and we kind of already tapped into this, about cold-calling or cold-emailing more so, because we don’t want people, do not do that.

NA: Yeah don’t call me. Ever.

JENN: Do not. Please God, don’t do that. Cold emailing instead of just. I’ll say that again.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Make sure you have your portfolio get feedback on your work before posting it too. But are there any other kinds of suggestions that you might have, especially for junior designers in the making?

NA: Sure yeah. One part of the mailing thing is I think if you're emailing someone, you should know who you’re talking to and where they work. Because it... I made the same mistake when I started out, I was eager to get work, so I sent my portfolio to a bunch of, like a list of publishers

that I had contacts for, and I'm like, why did I just send nude drawings to Scholastic, you know? Like it didn't make any sense. They're like, oh I think your work is a little too adult for Scholastic and I felt like an idiot.

I would say, do a little research, look into the kind of books they work on and publish, know if that culture is right for you, if that's the sort of work you want to do. Because I get a lot of talented illustrators who email me children's work and I'm like, wow that's really beautiful but I have zero experience in this so aside from general notes, there's not a lot of feedback I can give you.

Also another thing I did when I started out is, I would send my work to art directors that I thought might be interested in it, and said any notes are appreciated, or if this is not for you, if you know of one or two art directors that might be interested in this work, I would really appreciate to know what they are.

It doesn't hurt to ever ask or to reach out for help. I think people are a lot more willing to help you than what it might seem like. And people should be willing to help younger people a lot more, because they all started somewhere.

JENN: Is there kind of like any resources you might recommend? SCBWI, which has been a really great place for illustrators, but again that's children specific.

NA: It's a little bit outdated and I don't know if it's been updated in a while but there's a website called Book Cover Archive that I used to look at a lot when I first started. Just look at as many covers as you can. When you're a junior designer, you're working on a ton of mechanicals. You're mostly doing mechanicals. And I learned a lot by doing these kind of—I mean, it's not a very creative aspect of the job but it's necessary and I learned how to set type. Oh this designer that I really like used this trick to do it. I read a lot of interviews with other book cover designers I admire. What else?

I think it's just, I know it sounds really cheesy but it's a willingness to continue to learn and to take criticism well and just move forward after that and just work hard.

JENN: There's just so many kind of mystique to the industry itself and especially to different roles so it feels more accessible then.

NA: I remember what I was going to say for junior design. I think you should take risks and just like make shitty book covers sometimes. Everyone I think, especially after doing this for a few years and looking back on really, really terrible covers, I can kind of see, oh these were bad but these are directors were patient with me and gave me a chance because I was still trying to say something.

You know, like you don't want to be a junior designer and play it safe. You don't want to design something predictable or that somebody who has been in the business twenty years can just

crank out. You want to see that exciting kind of new perspective on things and you want to see that they're trying to look for new solutions to the same old formula.

So, I would say take risks instead of trying to make something look perfect because that is more important than knowing how to put something together that looks pristine at that point in your career.

JENN: That's really helpful and makes a lot of sense.

NA: I don't know about anyone. Maybe somebody, another art director is like, why are you telling them to make bad work.

JENN: Well you gotta start somewhere, you know what I mean? You don't get good immediately, like. [Laughs]

NA: Yeah, that's the thing. You're going to get good if you put in the time. Just make sure you put in the effort on the way you're thinking and the way you're reading and really know that. I think it's really important that you love reading to have this job.

JENN: Praises. It's important that you like reading to work in publishing. It helps, trust me, it helps.

NA: This is a job of passion so make sure that you really, really love literature before getting into this.

JENN: Because you're going to live and breathe it friend, you're going to live, breathe it, sleep it all of it.

NA: Yeah.

JENN: Thank you so much Na Kim for being on. And you do have a website for which we can look at your wonderful illustrations and work yes?

NA: I think a lot of them are broken but. I think my book covers are on NaNaNa.Kim.

JENN: So that's 3? NANANAKIM?

NA: DOT KIM.

JENN: Oh. DOT KIM. Okay. NANANA DOT KIM. K-I-M.

NA: But mostly I post my new work on my Instagram.

JENN: Sweet.

NA: NA_SON. Like, Nah, son.

JENN: I know one of your colleagues who appreciates that. [Laughs]

NA: You know, because I'm Asian, a lot of people think my name is Na Son.

JENN: False.

NA: I'll see links to my work and they're like Na Son.

JENN: Close enough. Thank you again Na for your time and congrats again for being a PW superstar.

NA: Congratulations on winning the whole thing, damn.

JENN: Again, feels like ages ago. [Laughs]

NA: Eons.

JENN: Eons. Man, what a time. What a time. That was a good open bar too. It was a nice open bar.

NA: It was a great open bar.

JENN: But when they shut it down, they shut it *down* too, they're like, you have to go.

NA: Great open bar, excellent people watching.

JENN: So, thank you.

NA: Thank you.

JENN: And thank you all for listening. Once again this is Minorities in Publishing that you can find on Tumblr at MinoritiesinPublishing.tumblr.com and on Twitter. Take care.

[38:36]