

Transcript for Episode 128: Interview with Matt Mendez

Episode Duration: 50:15

JENN (INTRO): Hello and welcome to the 10th anniversary year of the Minorities in Publishing podcast, I'm your host, Jennifer Baker. The Minorities in Publishing podcast first aired on August 14, 2014. And this year, I'll be celebrating with new guests, return guests, and some book giveaways. For new and returning listeners, you may know you can find the podcast on Tumblr at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com as well as on Twitter and Instagram @minoritiesinpub. You can also sign up for the monthly MiP newsletter for info on new episodes, guests and industry news, as well as job or writing opportunities. Minorities in Publishing is available wherever you listen to podcasts, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Tune In, and I Heart Radio. It's also available on the podcasting hosting server Libsyn, L I B Y S N. Thanks so much for listening, and hope you enjoy this episode.

JENN: Happy New Year, everybody. I am hoping your 2024 is chill, that your end of 2023 was restful and peaceful as possible. And hope you're entering this New Year with goodness and love and all that wonderful stuff that is much deserved by everybody. I am so happy to be speaking to Matt Mendez, the author of *Barely Missing Everything* and *The Broke Hearts*. And that's a duology. Is that fair to say?

MATT: I would say so, yes, they're companions.

JENN: I guess when we think duologies I think people might think more of the fantasy and all that stuff. But I feel like they stand alone. And yet, when you read *The Broke Heart*, I mean, there's the consistent references to what happens in *Barely Missing Everything* because everyone has been so affected by that. And we're watching them on this journey. So, I can't wait to talk to you about like, the one-two punch of those books. And also, Matt wrote this lovely story collection called *Twitching Heart*.

MATT: Oh, thank you so much. And I would for sure say that all three books are in the same like universe that I'm constantly writing and working on. All three books all have characters that interchange, they all take place in the same neighborhood, like the themes I'm working on are all kind of tied together. And to me the world that I'm working in and kind of writing towards, they're all to me this one kind of ethos in place. So even though *Twitching Heart*, which was published way back in 2012, and is an adult book, there's definitely elements and aspects of that book that carry over into the two young adult novels that were published you know, many years later.

JENN: I've been thinking a lot about this as especially as someone who teaches and works with writers, you know, either in an editorial space or workshop space and whatnot, do you feel like *Twitching Heart* helped prepare you to write *Barely Missing Everything* and *The Broke Hearts* and whatever is coming next. And therefore, you know, each book kind of propels you, in a way, with your craft to be able to write the next one.

MATT: Oh absolutely, and really in multiple ways. So *Twitching Heart* was written mostly when I was in grad school. So I was literally learning how to write stories in grad school. So I was getting my MFA in creative writing and in fiction, and the 10 stories that are in *Twitching Heart*, the stories that I was workshopping and getting feedback from my cohort, my peer group, and my writing professors who were really helping me hone those stories. And at the same time, I was kind of learning to find my voice there. And what I was finding important as a writer, and exploring the world, and the stories that I was interested in telling selves, you know, learning craft, learning how to tell stories that I like to write, and then also the world and the characters that I wanted to explore. So there's these two different things kind of going on at the same time. And there's definitely, those two things. Just build and build on top of each other. And then I started writing *Barely Missing Everything* before *Twitching Heart* was even published. So there is definitely this forward momentum that was coming out of *Twitching Heart* that immediately led to *Barely Missing Everything*.

JENN: And so then with *The Broke Hearts*, did you know that that was going to come once *Barely Missing Everything* was done? Did you know you wanted to continue to follow these folks?

MATT: Well, there was a second book on the contract. It didn't have to be a companion book or anything to do with *The Broke Hearts*. So my first impulse was to kind of start new and write something completely different. but kind of like when I was writing *Twitching Heart*, the story for *Barely Missing Everything* in this the world I was right when kind of bubbled in from watching heart the world of *Barely Missing Everything* and the neighborhood and the feel and the kind of the themes I was working with the same thing happened with the bro cards where this character from *Barely Missing Everything*. Danny, who was this third friend of the best friends and barely miss Kendrick and there's one there's JD, who are these friends, these best friends. And then Danny who completed the trio of high school buds, he was the third character and he wasn't a point of view character and *Barely Missing Everything*. But his story was one that was just super interesting to me. He was this kid who was going to kind of get the dream that a lot of us have these first generation second generation Mexican American kids, he was going to get to go to school, his parents had set him up, he was going to go to college, he was going to be the first kid and his family to get there. And he was going to kind of live this "American Dream," I'll put that in quotes, he was going to kind of have this thing that a lot of us were pursuing this chance of higher education, this chance to make your family proud this, this thing that we're all kind of working to provide to our kids, he was going to be the kid that gets it. And he didn't really have a point of view in *Barely Missing Everything*. And I kept thinking about this, this young person's life going into college and what that was going to be like, so I just couldn't let that story go. I wanted to write what his story was going to be because everybody thinks that story is the happily ever

after. And that there's going to be no story there that everything's going to be this yellow brick road for this young boy. And it turns out it is yellow brick road just for the Wizard of Oz. It's full of tribulation. And it's full of kind of a false promise. And that's the novel I wanted to write after *Barely Missing Everything* or that I couldn't let go of and then I ended up writing that novel too.

JENN: That's nice when there is kind of this organic nature to it. Because I've been talking to even more kid lit writers and they tend to get multi-book deals, or do you need two-book deals because of the age group, right, like they're trying to get folks to publish before the age group ages out, quote, unquote, or to build the career in a different way or a similar way to adult. But you know, for some adult writers, they get like a little bit of a longer post publication at that first book. And so it's nice to hear that you're like, No, this was something I really wanted to do. But it also read naturally, because there's this progression for everybody of what happens after. And so we're following like you said, they're three characters in *Barely Missing Everything*. But it's not a spoiler to reveal that one dies, it's mentioned very early on in the set, and it's in the copy. So that's why I'm not spoiling anything. So now we're with JD and Danny but we also get different mediums, right? We get like past stories to understand more folks like the villain the way those as fighters, right, especially the male, the screenplay that you have, because JD is a screenwriter and Danny's a visual artist. And so, it really felt like we're watching something after that kind of high school moment. Because why YA is really usually confined to high school, but it's like there is life after that. And life, as you say is not tied nicely in a bow. It is not like we have prom and everything's great, like they dealt with a big trauma that is still very much affecting them and that they're working through still as teams when you progress from that story when you kind of have this finite ending in one way. And you progress with them in a new way an extension of who they are like how was that for you as a writer to just be able to see beyond that but to also write it?

MATT: So it was a little bit of a challenge right because *Barely Missing Everything* ends on these kind of final notes. So at the end of *Barely Missing Everything* Juan, he dies and he is killed by the police at the end of *Barely Missing Everything* and his friend group is thrown into turmoil JD who was his best friend, watch some actually killed he's traumatized by this. He ends up making this rash decision and joining the military right after that; Danny who was at the party that Juan and JD leave. He's, also, you know, also traumatized, although he didn't witness the murder in the killing of his friend but he loses his best friend and he's hurt. He's sad, depressed, and he feels guilty about having this future up after high school. But they've lost their friend. They've just graduated high school, which is this endpoint for young people high school is this big, huge milestone. And then there's like, well, what do I do now? Those four years when you're in high school graduation is this huge milestone that everybody in those four years is working towards. And there's this afterwards. It's like, well, what are you going to do after high school and everybody's kind of looking towards that.

I wanted to write the story of like, hey, well, now you're in the afterword. What is that? Like? What is this frontier you're on? And these kids are on this frontier, and they're beginning to realize, like, hey, life really never stops moving. They're at this point that they're supposed to be in the future. They're here and everything that happened in the past, they're still dragging along

with them. And they're supposed to be preparing for this future. And they're like, well, now what do we do? Danny is starting college. His father, the Sarge is putting all this pressure on him to graduate college. But he really doesn't understand what that means. And really, his father who's never been in college doesn't quite know what that means either. And he can't help him navigate that. JD, who's joined the Air Force realizes really, really quickly that life is real. He's got a real job. And he learns in six months that he's been in the Air Force for six months, and now has to deploy. And things are really real, then they're still having to deal with the past that hasn't let go. And these two boys are wondering if their friendship is even still viable, which I think a lot of young people learn when they finish high school, is that they can still be friends with the people they were friends with just six months ago, their lives are moving in such different directions and at a really fast pace. And that's what a big part of the book is about is friendship and growing up and how we maintain our friendships, how we move into the future, when your heart's really kind of broken. And these two boys are really heartbroken.

[11:33]

JENN: What kind of is a thread throughout the book is this inability to communicate. The finding of vocabulary and the ways in which their respective art allows them to do that, or meeting a new person like Isabel, Isa for JD, or, like, there is points where JD is very honest. And then points where he can't communicate. And Danny seems like the one who's less able to communicate in certain ways, depending on the person, especially with Sarge, but they do you have that relationship and banter that is really important, as they're realizing like life in itself is finite. It's not a, I don't want to bestow this, "It's a heavy novel, *The Broke Hearts* is this heavy novel," because it's real. It felt like a very real novel. You know what I mean? The dialogue, the experiences, the realizations, the fact that people don't necessarily forgive. It's very real to me, you know what I mean, especially with JD and his dad, he's like, I don't want you to be happy. And his dad was like, what? And I was like, that's real. I was like, you know, that's real honest. I respect it.

MATT: For sure, that's, I think, one of the main, the main truths of the book. And one of the main things that I was trying to write about this book is like, these boys from a very young age, don't learn how to communicate and talk to each other. And they learn how to through this, really kind of, circuitous routes. And a lot of it starts with their dads. So to me, that was a really important part of the book was to write about fathers and sons, how young boys learn how to become men is to have their hearts broken. And that's kind of like the overarching, *the broke hearts*. So like the novel starts with in a flashback, which is unusual for a novel. And

JENN: Some of us rely a little too heavily on the flash. I think that's true. Yeah, I think it really works with yours, because it really establishes character in a real way that because it comes up again, it's not like you did it. And then you never do it again. You know, it comes up every few chapters that were like, "Oh, we're continuing the story about this fight."

MATT: Right, I don't start it in prologue. Right. So I mean, there's plenty of novels that start in prologue, the way the novel is structured, and these continual *lotería* style flashes where we

learn about the father. So in order to write a father/son story, I wanted to have the Sarge, which is Danny's father, and then Danny and show the relationship in the present story, and show this tension between a father and a son. But I wanted to start it with another father/son conflict and realize that the Sarge just didn't become the Sarge. One day he wasn't born this kind of rough, single minded guy that he started off this sensitive kid, and that it was his relationship with *his dad* that made him the Sarge. As the stories progress, you realize that the way that these fathers are raising their kids, their sons, isn't to teach them to be bad people, or to be mean. That it's done with this kind of tenderness that still somehow make for them, as they grow older, less tender - it's protective, its defensive. It's a way to teach these boys to survive. And it's done with the best of intention. But it cuts off this tenderness that these boys have. And they learn how to be tender in these different ways. They heal their hearts in these much different ways that are subtle, that they take these other creative outlets - Danny learns how to paint murals, and he shows how much he cares about other people through his art, but maybe not as directly as he could. And the same with JD who wants to write and wants to express themselves in these different ways. And it's never like you say, as with direct communication, these boys just don't have the tools for that. And those tools I wanted to show get kind of plucked from them early on,

JENN: And it felt very immediate. That flashback, you're like, oh, okay, and especially since names are shared and whatnot. So if you're really coming into it a bit cold, like I am, I was coming into *The Broke Hearts*, not having read, *Barely Missing Everything*, and having context. And so he was like, Whoa, there's stuff going down. You know, and then you see, like, another urgent thing happens on Danny's side, he's dealing with something else. On top of everything that you've conveyed as well, just a very rich novel that has so many explorations and something that I've been having conversations with folks, too, for my YA, is the parents are very much present, and sometimes in kidlit, YA, I include YA in that, and I'm having conversations with my YA novel, is that the presence of parents is really imperative because their choices affect their kids, right. And sometimes YA, middle grade, etc, we're really looking at the kids and we should be because that's, they're the main characters and all that stuff. And we can't dismiss the impact of not just society, or one's immediate ecosystem, or, you know, school community. But the parents, the parents are so crucial. Oh my god, I know who you are. And so I've wanted to ask a little bit, you are a parent, too, right? And coming in with that experience and writing for young people and tapping into recognizing both perspectives, because you write the parents with a lot of consideration too, where they're realizing oh, maybe I've messed up and, and I wanted to be better, or I want something for myself. And because I was never happy, I can never be a good parent to you.

MATT: Oh absolutely and I want to write parents as three-dimensional as I could possibly make them because, first just in YA lit I want young people when they're reading them to kind of see the adults as imperfect as they feel about themselves. I want them to see them as like, oh, parents and adults are going through it too. And not necessarily just to have empathy for adults in their parents. But which, of course, I want them to have that. But also to know that this is a lifelong thing. People are always coming of age. To me, that's just a thing that I've learned growing up is that no matter what age I'm at, I'm always coming to a different point in life where

I'm going into some unknown thing. I'm always learning, I'm always becoming something else, which is how I felt as an adolescent. I'm becoming I'm going through puberty, my body's changing, I'm doing this, but my body is always changing. It's always becoming something different. It's always doing something new, I'm always becoming a different person that's never ever going to stop that uncertainty is never going away. So I want the adult characters, I want the parents to have that same uncertainty in the novels to always be uncertain. And for young readers to read about the adults in those private moments. So when parents are talking to them, or you know, you see adults always in these positions where they feel really certain or act with certitude, in the books, I want them to be vulnerable, to be uncertain to have these moments when they don't know what's going on. And I know myself as a parent, I share those moments pretty openly with my kids that hey, I don't have all the answers here. I apologize pretty frequently to them. When I make mistakes, I'm like, well, here was a mistake here. I was probably too hard on you here. We're making a decision. What do *you* think we should do? I try to get input and try to let them know that I'm just a person and that we're all kind of going through this thing together. Because I think that's pretty important to do. And we'll see whether or not that base dividends down the road. I don't know because I don't know. And I'm pretty certain that nobody knows what the hell's going on.

[19:59]

JENN: I can say I confidently agree. And we all, it's like a very good kind of act. Oh, I know what's going on because you don't want to appear in a certain way. When I say you, I mean like this, this royal we kind of thing of like one does not want to appear in any specific way. So going back to all of that with the parents, right, you want to protect your kid in the best way possible, and kind of goes back to what you said about especially fathers and sons, but also mothers and sons, I feel like JD and his mom have a kind of tight, yet, it's a little bit of friction there because they see each other in one another as well.

MATT: For sure.

JENN: Then there's the extension of their friendship, and then the mentorship that happens too, so there's like a lot of adults still in their lives. And they're still on this kind of cusp of teenagedom. I think they both have this realization of, like you said, when you graduate high school, it doesn't become like you've evolved, but for JD, it's in the Air Force. And for Danny, it's in school and community college. Neither of them seem to be taking it well. I feel like JD though is taking things a little bit better in the Air Force, because he kind of recognizes the seriousness of that situation.

MATT: Oh because it's thrust like right in his face every day. So like JD has zero choice. He's kind of on an island where he's at, and he's kind of forced to, in a way, grow up. And there's not a lot of choice that JD has, as far as adapting. He has to kind of quickly adapt to this new reality that he set himself. And then I think that's just kind of what JD has to do in order just to survive, I feel like JD is in this survival mode in the beginning of the novel, and where he was kind of at the end of *Barely Missing Everything*, where he's forced to just turn on his lizard brain and just

kind of survive. And I think there's a healing that kind of happens as *The Broke Hearts* progresses, where he's kind of reconnecting, he goes back home, he has this kind of blow up with his mother. He reconnects with Danny, and he begins to kind of talk with his younger brother, and he has this kind of a panic attack. And he begins to get himself on the road to becoming a whole person again. I think him meeting Isabel in the bookstore, where he starts to feel a little bit like his old self where he begins to make connections in a way that he hasn't been doing for the past six months. Because really, the novel is only it's a year from the death of Juan and only six months after they've graduated high school. So there's really not a lot of time that's passed since all this change has happened both for JD and Danny. So there's still a lot of just emotional rawness and trauma that both boys are going through, but especially JD, so to me, he's in this really stunted kind of a space.

JENN: And you are also a military veteran?

MATT: That's true yes, so not that I experienced the trauma that JD had. But I joined the military right out of high school as well. So I was in a very similar position where immediately after high school, I left for basic training. And then six months later, I was deployed.

JENN: Oh, wow.

MATT: So from experience, I kind of understand that kind of rush, oh, this is really real, right away, where your friends are, are like, some of them are going to college, some of them are getting a jobs, a lot of them still live at home, and you're living this completely different kind of life that just feels so separate from anything, any kind of reality that you share with them. And you feel like this disconnect from them that feels really severe. And it's hard to relate to them. And that really comes internally. They're not they're not like standoffish with you, but you feel like this schism is there because their life is so so recognizable to you, anyway, to their old life, where it's like, well, you're still living at home, you're still getting to go to school, you still get together all the time. And then you just feel like you're just disconnected from it in this way that makes you feel jealous. And JD feels that way. Where he just feels like he keeps losing things. He feels like he doesn't have a home anymore, his mom has moved in with his grandma, his old house that he used to live in is not there anymore. His parents are divorced. He just feels completely isolated in the in *The Broke Hearts*. And that's kind of where JD is operating now. And he just he's having a complete kind of breakdown at the beginning of the novel.

JENN: How much did you want to convey of that kind of experience? Because I'm not going to spoil it obviously. But you said JD gets into the thick of it to an extent right? It doesn't go slow. Every day, in terms of like understanding what he is responsible for, what the chain of command the importance of following the rules, what can happen when one doesn't do what they're supposed to be doing? For sure. How much did you really actually want to convey especially when writing something for younger readers?

MATT: I wanted to be pretty honest with what that could be because a lot of young readers are going to be in that exact same boat, especially for the audience that I'm writing towards, which is

I've been, I want to write for a wide young readership. But really, I'm pointing towards readers like myself who didn't have books like this growing up. And if there's a young Mexican American boy who picks this book up, who's actually thinking about joining the military, that change comes at you fast. And that life can come at you quick. And that's not a decision to make as lightly as JD makes it in the book, or as quickly as he makes it. And then his life is now completely different. You know, those recruiters are in the high schools, looking for young brown and black boys to come join young, poor people to join. And I'm not saying that I'm unhappy with the decision. I'm currently in the military, now. It's worked for me. But I mean, that's still not something that everybody should do. Or if you're going to do you need to think about it carefully. It's not something to be done lightly. It's certainly not for everyone.

JENN: I remember a lot of folks in my high school went and mostly the Latinx boys.

MATT: We make up a significant portion of the military. I mean, it's mostly, you know, lower income people end up joining the military. And I think for JD, in the book, he makes that decision to join, and then that he's wondering if he hasn't made the biggest mistake of his life. I think that's a line in the book. He's wondering that pretty quickly into it. And then you know, the Sarge, Danny's dad also went and did that route. I know, my dad was in the army, I was in the Air Force. There's tons of people in my family who have military backgrounds. And that's not an unusual thing. So I wanted to write to that experience, and then have it be as realistic as I could make it and not have it just be something that's just this one sided, patriotic type thing. I wanted it to be a realistic experience.

JENN: Right? Because he is hands on, but it's a very different reality for him once he sees the effect of what his work do. And that was a very, to me, poignant moment of oh, wow. Like, this is what all this comes to this is the culmination of all those drills have all this, you know, waking up early, and all this, you know, checklist and all this stuff.

MATT: For sure, Yeah, I wanted him to be cognizant of what he what he was doing, what the trainings for, and the totality of what he's a part of the whole thing.

JENN: Right, and it's cool, because it's also in the reflection of it I think there's no judgment, which I think was very tactfully done. Because I think some folks could put where that realization becomes something that maybe radicalizes someone in a specific kind of way, but it really was like, he owns what he does, that's the decision he makes, he wonders, like you say, but he owns it.

MATT: Yeah, I think he comes to an understanding of what he's doing, which I think is, which I think is like a mature thing for JD to do. To understand what he's doing to understand what the people around him are doing. And for him to make sense of his place in the machine, the organization he's in, in a way that maybe other members aren't. And to understand how people may understand the work he's doing, what they may think of him maybe like, well, that's okay, this is what this means to me, this is what it could mean to other people. And for him to begin to

make sense of all those different things for himself, and then to work all those different ideas out in his head and to see if he's okay with himself and what he's doing.

JENN: So, there's like all these topics that we've discussed, and how is it to not just write about them in a book, but to also then have go out and talk about them especially to or for younger audiences, maybe with teachers, librarians, parents, fellow parents, who are also closely associated with teen audiences who, who may really connect with this book in so many ways and have so much enlightened to them. In terms of like, I never thought of these things this way, or I can totally relate to the issues with between fathers and sons, mothers and sons. Expectation of reality, all that stuff? Like how's that been for you, especially going from, you know, you had the *Twitching Heart*, which was 2012 and then *Barely Missing Everything* was 2019, right? And then 2023 *The Broke Hearts* comes out. So you have some years between each of those books to hopefully rest and you know, enjoy creating, of course, but hopefully rest because the hustle, don't stop.

MATT: That's true.

JENN: But how does that kind of change in terms of like how you're engaging with folks for between these books?

[29:44]

MATT: Well, I mean, luckily I give myself such a, there's so much stuff that I pack in the books, I give myself just a lot of different places to go as far as conversations go, which is great. You get to kind of talk about all sorts of different things – you get to talk about fathers and sons, you get to talk about the military, if that's what people want to talk about, in *Barely Missing Everything*, I used to have wonderful conversations, not wonderful because the topics are not wonderful, but about you know, death row and capital punishment because that novel begins with a man on death row who sends Fabi, who is Juan's mother a letter. And it was this this it was again, it's about fathers and sons were one who was the main character was looking for his father and looking for his identity. So getting to talk about that was just a kind of an interesting conversation, and then I talked about choices. And then parental choices, which we were talking a little bit earlier, and how parental choices affect children. And Bobby's choice to never reveal her father's identity leads Juan on this quest to try to find his father and, and to me, I, to me these worlds and this universe that I like to write about just weaves this really rich kind of tapestry to kind of talk into and talk to teachers and to librarians, and to students about all sorts of these kinds of topics that really, really interests me. And that's before we even get that thought to get into talking about, you know, the border, our culture, Mexican American culture, and things that are also pretty close to my heart that I love to talk about and travel and get to see kids that don't really get to see themselves in literature, which is what I really love to do is bring this book to communities that are underserved and you know really get to see themselves in books and really bring this book to those to my community and share it with them.

JENN: It's so interesting, have you gotten to talk to a lot of teens, specifically? I'm starting to talk more to teens, and I'm like, oh, wow, this is a whole different trajectory.

MATT: I have, I certainly want to talk to more teens. So unfortunately, in 2019, I was doing a whole bunch of it. And then when the paperback came out in 2020, everything shut down. And things are barely beginning to clear back up for school visits and everything. So I've done some stuff over zoom, which isn't as fun, but festivals are back open now. And school visits are beginning to ramp back up. So getting in front of getting back in classrooms is slowly coming back online. And when I'm beginning to go back out and do that, which is fun, like bookstore, bookstore appearances are fun and festival panels is fun, too. But getting back in classrooms is really to me the best part and getting to talk to teens, is the best part. And getting into high schools and doing library visits and talking to teens is always, to me, the funnest part.

JENN: I know, I feel like there'll be so many great discussions, additional discussions that are to come obviously, with your book, and also, you know, just like thinking more about what comes after and where, where people feel like they might think they're being pushed towards versus what they really want to do. And also the kind of, I guess, bigger question of is it even fair to put this on anybody at any, especially at 18? You know, like, what do you want to do? Where are you gonna go next?

MATT: Decide now what you're gonna do with the rest of your life.

JENN: Buy things. Incur debt.

MATT: know. Commit hundreds of thousands of dollars to study one thing,

JENN: Right, that you may totally change your mind on. How many lawyers become writers?

MATT: It's nuts. I mean, I I'm a big believer and you know, taking your time and making mistakes and figuring out what life's gonna be. I mean, life is long, hopefully, for most people, and you're gonna have time to figure that out. I'm a sloppy, messy person. So, to me, my advice to people is like, hey, take your time, make mistakes, try things fail. To me, I learn from failure. I'm a slow writer, probably to my publisher's irritation, yeah. When it takes me a long time to write a book, club,

JENN: Join the club, Matt, we're in a very similar club.

MATT: It takes me awhile to put things together and to kind of especially the way I structure books, which is a little unusual. I like to have different ways to put a book together. I like telling stories in idiosyncratic ways. To me, that's just the way my brain works. It's the way I like to hear stories, and that's the way I put them together. And, to me, I like to live my life the same way I like, by little odd and little goofy at times and my life just moves in different ways. And my suggestion to young people is to, you know, do what feels kind of comfortable. And to me the

idea of picking a path at 18 that's going to set in stone what your future is going to be is, I don't know, that seems kind of ludicrous that we would hold people to that then decide right now is what your future is going to be, decide now and then live 60, 70 years with that one decision. That's crazy to me.

JENN: And it's so inherited at the same time. My grandparents and my parents is like, we did this. And we retired and got our pension. That's what we did and you're like, okay, okay. Yeah, I mean, I kind of I've always it's weird. I'm not in publishing as much in terms of a career as and I get a paycheck every two weeks. And so I've kind of stuck with what I did. So I guess I'm kind of in that group of, and I'm fine with that. But I think it's but and you can still understand it's an unrealistic expectation for people.

MATT: Oh I've stuck with the same career too. But that's more out of like, necessity, I need insurance. My kids need glasses and insurance and things to pay for. But you know, I write, because that's what I really want to do. But I'm not going to write full time. Although I feel like I write full time, I do it all the time. But I'm not going to have that be my sole source of income until I'm able to do that, where I'm making enough money to do that without having another job. That's just like a practical thing that I'm going to do. So I'm going to be dual jobbing it until I can afford to retire from the other job. I definitely wouldn't give people that advice of have two jobs the whole time. But that's just the road I'm on.

JENN: Same, Same. So how are you feeling publishing a third book?

MATT: I feel pretty good about it.

JENN: It's a big feat. You know finishing one book is a big, big feat. Do three that's a good job Matt. Good job, Matt, if no one's told you.

MATT: Thank you. Yeah, I'm excited. Um, as far as the book goes, this is probably the best thing I've written. So I'm like, super excited with the book. Normally, when a book comes out, I can read it or go back when I'm doing readings or reading passage of it. I'm like, oh, this could be cleaner. I think this could be tighter. And I have like, all those kind of editor notes. And I'm reading things. And I feel like, I don't want to read this anymore. It's like hearing yourself, like watching yourself on TV, where you, at least for me, where I don't want to see myself. But when I go back and read this and do some, like press for it. I'm excited by the book. I've never really got tired of it. So I'm really excited for this book. I really, I think it's the best thing I've done so far. I'm really excited by it.

JENN: That's like just so joyous is really kind of coming through the Zoom of this, like Oh, and it really it's such a wonderful book, you can see the care that went into the structure of it and how it all works together and whatnot. It's wonderful to be introduced to your work with something you're saying is like, this is the best thing I've written just so you know.

MATT: Let me know. I'm working on getting better with each one. But today, I think this is the thing.

JENN: That's so wonderful. And so what's next? If that's a fair question, I understand if it's not a fair question.

MATT: Oh sure, so I'm working on I'm working on a third novel. This will be my first one hopefully in the draft, it's in the draft base. So you know how things always change with drafts. It's my first one that doesn't take place in El Paso. I live in Tucson now. So this one will take this one, takes place in Arizona.

JENN: Is it YA as well?,

MATT: Yes, it will be YA. And then I'm also writing a screenplay. Which is completely different than, it has nothing to do with the books I'm working on. It's a completely different thing, which is testing some different writing muscles, which I'm super excited about.

JENN: Were you always intrigued to write a screenplay or did kind of tapping into who JD was incite that?

MATT: A little of both. So like JD I wanted to be a filmmaker when I was younger. So I've always loved like TV and film. And so this getting to write *The Broke Hearts*, where's there a lot of screenplay in, in the book itself kind of got those creative juices going again. So I'm taking my stab at writing a screenplay and we'll see where that where that ends up.

JENN: I really, I gravitate to writing dialogue. So some of my early drafts tend to be very dialogue heavy. And so when I took screenwriting in college, I really liked it because it leaned into what I already liked and playwriting I really liked that because I was just like that wow, dialogue.

MATT: I do like writing dialogue to me it's it's one of like the like the fun part of especially in revision where you get to tighten up the dialogue and you get like some really fun back and forth the repartee is always the funnest part about the dialogue is getting like some good zings back and forth.

JENN: I do love that part about it. I really do. I just love sometimes you're just like, Damn, that was like, you know, like, sometimes you'll just watch a movie and you're like, Damn, that was really good.

[40:00]

MATT: Sometimes I get carried away and my editor will be like, alright, this is enough of this, we kind of get the point where my characters can kind of get mean to each other. It's just it's just me zinging myself back and forth.

JENN: You're just on fire that day.

MATT: Yep, that's it, laying waste to myself.

JENN: Yeah, cuz JD and Danny don't kind of, like they do zing each other. But they don't seem mean about it.

MATT: No, there were some meaner jokes in there that were removed.

JENN: That could go in a potential another companion baby. Because I've, you know, I feel like this one felt like it ended in a very solid place. I won't say good. If that's fair, but it feels like it felt it like a solid place where you're like, oh, okay, I kind of know where these guys are going. From here on now.

MATT: I will be open to it. Because you never know, there's always a character that kind of, or the university creating kind of will stay with you. And for me, it began with just little notes. And the character I was like, doing I would kind of write notes. And to me, it's just a world that or a character that you know, was just unfamiliar for me, I wasn't the kid who had the future kind of set up for himself, I kind of had to carve my own way. But I was so interested in Danny in this because I'm doing that as a parent. now, for my daughters. I'm the one saving for their college. I'm the one setting a path for them. Like, hey, I've done this for you. But they're not asking. Just like Danny isn't asking the Sarge to do all this for them. He wasn't asking for the college. He wasn't asking for the future to be set for him. He wants to create his own path. So a lot of that, um, I was asking myself those questions, because for my two daughters, I'm saving for the college, helping them with their schoolwork, but I'm kind of guiding them so they won't have to do the things I did to get to school. So as I'm writing, I'm asking myself, like, am I this Sarge? Am I doing these things? What the Sarge did to Danny? Am I doing that to my two daughters? And so these are kind of the back and forth. And we talked we touched on a little bit earlier. Well, you know, writing parents and trying to make them human. These are the kinds of questions I was asking myself as a parent I'm like am I doing what the Sarge did to Danny to my own children? Because I'm interested in that story. Because I'm in the Sarge's kind of position now, am I doing those things? Am I making sure am I being careful to allow my children to make their own choices, even though I'm the one financially setting them up to have that future am I going to be holding on tight to their choices because I work so hard to provide this path for them. And if they start to deviate, or make mistakes, and do all the things I want other kids to do, am I going to hold on tight till they don't, you know, "mess up,": but put that in quotes, and, you know, somehow squander this, this opportunity I've given them which is, you know, nonsense, but I think that tendency for parents who've worked hard to provide that is there like, I like you know, guard against doing that myself.

JENN: It's heavy. I don't know how your parents do it.

MATT: We write books about it.

JENN: Literally like manuals, novels, we got everything.

MATT: We just spent four years writing a book, but it's no big deal.

JENN: You get all that out your system. Oh, man, this was such a pleasure talking to you. I feel like we got to dig deep into like, the books. I love when that happens.

MATT: Yeah, me too. Yeah, this has been great.

JENN: Oh, yay.

JENN: Yay. I mean, we could talk forever but I also want to actually get this episode out. It's only fair you people need to know what's going on in *The Broke Hearts* and, and I heartily heartily encourage folks to pick it up, pick up *Barely Missing Everything* pick up everything that Matt's written because I mean, if we're going get to the best thing he's ever done, let's let's see what else is out there. See what else is out there and prepare for what's coming.

MATT: Standards. Yeah, exactly.

JENN: I mean, you may have set yourself up there, Matt.

MATT: Challenge accepted

JENN: Buy the books now. And so you are on the socials, so folks can find out what's going on with you. I believe the paperback is going to come out right of *The Broke Hearts* in 2024?

MATT: That's right, yeah.

JENN: So, you know, if you haven't gotten a chance to jump on the hardcover train, but you still can obviously, we love our local libraries, so please support them, please, please, please. But there might be a paperback coming out also later this year. And in which case, we might hear even more from you in terms of any additional events and all that good stuff.

MATT: That's right.

JENN: Cool. And so what's your handles on socials? You have a beautiful website?.Let me just I've been complimenting author's websites, because I think you deserve it. Especially when you have websites. It is a very organized website. Can I just

MATT: Oh, thank you.

JENN: It's very organized. Everything's very easy to find. The color scheme matches the two books because there's that purple kind of magenta and orange. And so you have some like, you know, synchronicity there. So just what I just say. Very nice.

MATT: I appreciate that. Very pretty. I like it.

JENN: And that's <https://www.mattmendez.com/>.

MATT: That's correct. And then I'm on Instagram @MattGMendez. And then threads and then I'm on X, but hardly, but the same Matt G. Mendez, @MattGMendez.

JENN: Okay. All right. Not to push you on that. But if for anyone who's still there, I'm still there. minoritiesinpub is still there. Jen J. Baker, I'm still there, until it shuts down or it gets real sketch, or sketchier than normal.

MATT: If the algorithm let's you find me there. I'm there.

JENN: Let me not even say until it gets really it's sketch. Let's sugarcoat it. Well, congratulations on *The Broke Hearts*. It's again, this beautiful book, so layered, so much in there to discuss and I can't wait to hear more of the discussions you have around this book. But also, the books in tandem. You know what I mean? Like, I feel like I gotta have to bring you back on and we'll have to do a book club for both books.

MATT: Oh for sure, we can totally do that. Yeah, yeah. We'll get you to write a companion book. And then we'll go into work.

JENN: Oh, my gosh, I'm kind of just done with this world. Because I did also do a two book. And that's what everyone asked. They're like, are you going to as a no. We're done here. Anybody else was You're welcome. I'm done. Done. Done.

MATT: The other one took me, *Barely Missing Everything* took me 10 years.

JENN: 10. Wow. And then *Broke Hearts*?

MATT: About Four?

JENN: Four? That's getting better.

MATT: Yeah, a little faster.

JENN: I shouldn't say better. Yeah. A little faster. Because I'm similarly it takes me years.

MATT: Hurray for slow writers. Yeah.

JENN: We're just contemplating. We're very meticulous.

MATT: That's right.

JENN: We know ourselves. The more we talk, Matt and I are just realizing we're like separated at birth, apparently.

MATT: We're gonna be besties Jenn,

JENN: We are, from here on out, we're just like, how are you on this? Ten to three years, Jen. Year five, let's go.

MATT: That's how it's gonna be, tortoises win the race.

JENN: We do. We do. But again, just complimented and congrats again on this. Great, thank

MATT: you so much. He's so gracious of you. Thank you.

JENN: Thank you, thank you for your time, and just spending time with me, and be able to talk about it. And thank you all for listening to this wonderful episode of the new year 2024 with author Matt Mendez. And once again, the book is *The Broke Hearts*, and also get *Barely Missing Everything* as well. They're both available now for you to buy for you to request us your points on Audible, Spotify, whatever. Like these books are out there. And I just want to emphasize that especially as we're seeing so many book bans, and the increasing number of them and it's just crucial for these stories and these really wonderful and tender, tenderly written stories to be reached out. So again, I'm just so happy to have you on but also to be the first episode on the 10th anniversary year. It's really an honor.

MATT: It's my pleasure, thank you so much.

JENN: Thank you. I know we'll be keeping in touch.

MATT: Absolutely, for sure.

JENN: Thank you for listening. Thank you.

JENN (outro): Thanks again for listening to the Minorities in Publishing podcast. As a reminder, you can find the podcast on Tumblr at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com or on Instagram and Twitter @minoritiesinpub and you can sign up for the monthly newsletter. Also feel free to rate the podcast on your listening platform, take care.