

# Transcript for Episode 127: Interview with Elizabeth Agyemang

**Episode Duration:** 38:16

**JENNIFER BAKER:** 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, where there's also a pinned tweet that includes the newsletter, as well as any place you listen to podcasts including Apple podcasts, Google Play, iHeartRadio, TuneIn, and Spotify. This is an ongoing summer of interviews for me, and I'm so happy to welcome another editor of color. We love that. Yay, Elizabeth Agyemang is here. And Elizabeth is an illustrator, printmaker, storyteller, and editor full time as mentioned, so she is a busy person creator slash, well, I won't say gatekeeper because I know a lot of people have feelings, I have feelings about that term, but you're doing a lot, Elizabeth, and your book *Fibbed* — f, i, b, b, e, d — came out earlier this summer, and it's just an adorable graphic novel. So congratulations.

**ELIZABETH AGYEMANG:** Thanks so much, Jenn. Thank you so much for having me on this program. I am very excited to be here.

**JENN:** So we're also, we were talking a lot before I pressed record about that dual creator/full-time publishing personal life. So I do want to talk to you as both because I don't know how you feel if sometimes you're like, I'm one or the other, or you're both at all times.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, I feel like it's definitely wearing many hats. And like, I think every part of my brain when it comes to like, whether I'm like creating something for myself, or working with authors to like, bring their stories to life, it's kind of like different pieces of the creative side. So I think it's hard. It's, it's not hard to separate them, because it's like when I'm giving feedback on a project or helping shape a manuscript that's a different brain than when I'm like thinking of ideas or like drawing something. But I think it's allowed me to like, have a kind of full circle view of the process of bookmaking in a really nice way where it's like, I'm able to really appreciate the art and kind of appreciate all the work that I know that comes with both sides of both being a creator, an author, and also working with my team to help bring a book to life.

**JENN:** That makes sense. And like you were saying, before I hit record, there's that insider info that can be super helpful in terms of, I don't know if it's fair to say, paring down expectations. Okay, I understand how this works.

**ELIZABETH:** I think it's like patience, because I know publishing, people always say publishing is such a slow industry, because so many things happen behind the scenes, and you don't know what's going on. And I think as an author, it's been super helpful to know how the industry works. Because it's like, I understand that even if I'm not actively seeing something that if I like email my editor asking about, like, marketing plans, or whatever, I know, they're having meetings to discuss, like the book, how are they going to present my book? How are they going to pitch it? I think it's always great to communicate and ask questions, because it's like, they don't know you have these questions unless you communicate it. You know, just because I have that background, every house works differently. So even if you have experience, every publisher does it differently. So it's definitely a learning experience. But also, it's just been helpful to like set expectations, and just be a little bit less stressed out. I think, if I didn't have this background, I think it would, I just have so many questions. I'm just someone who always has questions. And like, the thing I feel like I can control is having information and having information is just what calms me down. So just knowing that, okay, things are being done. There's different stages into like when a book is launched, and like when the publicity team is able to discuss the book and like, make their plans and all that, those pieces. It's just nice knowing that there's a process that is in place. And just because there's silence doesn't mean things aren't happening.

**JENN:** Say that again for the people in the back. Because I feel like that's an author's worst nightmare, right, is they're not telling me anything, nothing's happening. And maybe that is true, I don't know. I know, I'm always working. I don't know what to tell you.

**ELIZABETH:** I feel like as long as you just ask the questions, because I think some things authors don't think about and you kind of don't think of it as a creator, because you're like, your product is so important to you, so like that is fully the center of what you're doing. But I know publishing teams work on so many products that are also super important to them. And like every book that's acquired, obviously, they were acquiring it because they care about the author, they care about the book, and they care about making it do well. It's just like having that in the back of your head. Like it's like my editor is leading I don't know how many other manuscripts at the same time and different stages with every author that she's working with. So just being calm about that and being a little bit understanding and just being able to be a little bit less stressed out knowing that I think has been really helpful.

**JENN:** Yeah, I agree. And it's something I try to explain to authors I work with and so I think it really helps as an editor, to also be able to say that to authors and kind of emphasize your book is important to me — I will not be looking at it for a month because of XYZ. Like, I literally tell authors that. Okay, so I'm usually not months late with edits, I really try not to, I am a few weeks late, later than I like with edits for one author, but I usually am very transparent of “I have to prepare for launch now,” you will not hear from me for two weeks. Unless it is an

emergency, or unless it is in regards to launch. And I had to tell an author that today who missed the meeting, like I was late to the meeting, admittedly, but we had half an hour set aside, and he was like, halfway through, he's like, I gotta go. I was like, what? So again, I was late. Even his agent was like, "What the hell?" Now he's all, "Well, can we have...Can we meet this week?" And I said, No. When you come back from vacation, let's talk. No.

**ELIZABETH:** It's just everyone just needs to value each other's time. And it's like, sometimes things happen, because meetings get scheduled on top of other meetings.

**JENN:** Absolutely.

**ELIZABETH:** So it's like, oh, I have to be here, something that is urgent comes. So it's like being understanding but also just knowing, like, I think people feel like unless like, I have a meeting with like my full, you know, marketing team, like they're not doing anything. And that's not true. It's like, sometimes it's more helpful to just like, have a good email, and have that information. And everyone can be doing what they need to do. And it's just good to have that kind of understanding when it comes to making a book. And yeah, I think that's been helpful.

**JENN:** I totally agree. Is that a T-shirt? This could have been an email.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, and it's, I feel like, it's hard to like, I think what's been helpful as an editor too, is just being communicative where I can be and just being like, "Hey, this is my timeline, it might change" just like being able to be open about that. One of the most stressful things is, you know, when you send an email, there's two things, there are people who sometimes it's like, I send an email to my editor, and I'm like, "Oh, I would want a response now because I'm thinking about it now." But it's like, you know, email is made so that you don't have to respond immediately. And I think that's one thing that's changed a little bit it's that people expect responses immediately instead of just like you know, it'll take me two to three days or even doing something like confirming receipt can help make sure people understand like, hey, you know, I saw this but you know, I can't give you all the information now because I have to reach out to six different these people before I can have the information you need.

**JENN:** God, yes. "What's the status?" "Uhhh?" "If it ain't edits, I don't know." To me, as I've said, there's a new assistant on our team who started this week, and I just said to her, you will find that I am very, very transparent about everything.

**ELIZABETH:** That is so great.

**JENN:** And that's how I am. If you have questions, ask me. I don't love to repeat myself. But I will repeat myself. I don't like things done fast. I like them done well. Here's my cell phone

number. I said probably eight times, contact me anytime. Do not hesitate. Do not be nervous. Do it. "You have a concern? Contact me." Because sometimes people just need to hear it more than once. Yeah, they're like, "Oh, you're being nice," like no, no, no, seriously.

**ELIZABETH:** Exactly.

**JENN:** Do it. And I just hammer that home, perhaps way too much. I don't know. I just feel like there's no reason not to communicate. And as we talked about pre-record, the lack of communication just can produce so much. It can create miscommunication, non-communication, it creates so much more work, frustrations, and just all these other things and anxiety.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah. And I also wonder, because even when I was writing my book, part of the story is that like, the main character, Nana, she uses storytelling to help save the magic and a village forest. Part of it is that there's this group of like contractors, this corporation that's trying to like siphon the magic from the village and sell it for profit. Lack of information and hiding and like disinformation. And also, just like lack of awareness is, I think, something a tool that's been used, whether it's like colonization, imperialism, by making sure communities don't understand what is happening behind the scenes, you know, you're able to exploit them. And so like for Nana, she has to, like, tell the story of what's going on and find a way to communicate that with people who don't realize that our resources are being exploited. They're like, they said, they're going to help build a new school, when actually they're just like stealing the magic here and trying to sell it. And I feel like there's so many different ways that kind of mindset has been put in different institutions. So really dismantling that by just sending something that clarifying and just like helping people understand processes is just a great way to not do that and not have all of these other issues come up.

[9:48]

**JENN:** Right. So speaking of that, being kind of a through line or plotline of *Fibbed*. It is about a young girl, Nana, who is kind of accused of telling stories a bit too much. A *Boy Who Cried Wolf* situation, sometimes it sounds like. At least that's how it's perceived, especially in the first pages when she's like telling the story and everyone's like, "Well, why don't you just mind your business?"

**ELIZABETH:** That was definitely like her Black parents, because it's like, she tells a principal, she doesn't leave it. But her parents, like, oh, we know you're telling the truth. But sometimes you don't. And that's like two things. It's like, sometimes you tell the truth. And people know what you're saying is true. But they're like, we can't talk about this, this is the thing that we should, you know, not highlight because it's putting you in a horrible situation. So that was kind

of like the two pieces of, like, what Nana was going through. It's like, in one space, I'm not heard another space, in another space it's like I am heard, but I'm not validated in that way. So, that's another part of communication that's just like so many different pieces of like, making sure people feel heard and understood and stuff like that.

**JENN:** So was that kind of the kernel of what created *Fibbed*? Or was it really, you saw Nana first, and wanted to make a story around this character, that fit this character and a journey that you were putting her on? Or was it kind of multitudes, as you said, where you wanted to explore these aspects of themes that never really go away, as you said, so I feel like that's the thing with children's lit is I think people really think these themes that are spoken to a children's lit are only for children. I feel like they're processed in a way for a younger reader, but that anyone can gain insight from them or just be entertained.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, I think it was definitely like multitudes. It was definitely wanting to talk about those experiences. Part of it was kind of being inspired by the first time I visited my family in Ghana. I wanted to write a story about a girl who gets to know her, like, extended family, gets to know her culture in a different way than I had experienced earlier because I only was able to visit my family in Ghana for the first time in high school. And it was such a wonderful experience. It was like meeting people who randomly knew stuff about you. And you were like, how do you know this, and it's like, oh, you're like my grandpa or whatever and my grandma. Getting to see Ghana and like where I came from, it's such a different environment. And it was such like a fulfilling and wonderful environment. So I wanted to really capture that. And then the other part was definitely thinking about the idea of speaking the truth, but not being heard and not being believed. I feel like that's something Black people go through so much, whether it's talking about social justice. I still remember when I was I think, was I in college? Or, you know, with Trayvon Martin being like, can nobody see what's going on here? And just like being told, "oh, well, he shouldn't have done this, or he should have done that." And it's like, you live in this bubble of what is actually being experienced and the world around you is trying to like, pretend it's not happening. So I kind of wanted to touch on both things and I kind of used Nana's journey to like, you know, explore her character and how she would go through those experiences, but also, you know, talk about storytelling and different ways that people communicate and understand each other through storytelling and using like Ghanian folklore to do that. And then also, you know, showcase Ghana in this way that is filled with like, really a lot of love and just like joy.

**JENN:** So how is the process for *Fibbed* because this is a graphic novel, and that is a different kind of project to query and get out in the world. So how did you get to book deal and publication? Because you're the author and illustrator, both.

**ELIZABETH:** I know.

**JENN:** Yeah, you get all the money, but also you do all the work.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, that was,- it was really hard. I had like grown-up making comics and stuff like that. But I kind of shelved making comics in that way, when I got older, I was like, okay, I'm gonna just do prose writing, because I was really inspired for like, manga and like comics in that way, but I was just like, I'm not really sure how to express the stories I want to write in a comic format right now. But I do understand prose, so let me go back to the prose and just like focus on that. And so for a while, I had been just focusing on prose projects, I had actually sent my agent, Suzie Townsend, historical fantasy. It was like a time-traveling book. And she was reading that and then DVpit happened. And like, right before the report, I was also thinking of returning to comics, because it's such a space that I've always like, loved and I wanted to just be like, "Okay, if I could do a graphic novel of anything, what story would I want to tell? Like, what would it be like?"

So I kind of created that proposal and like DVpit was my marker. I'm someone who works very well, when it's like when I have, I guess a deadline. It really kind of invigorates me in terms of working on stuff. So I put together the proposal and then I sent it, I got some like, likes on DVpit and then I was sharing with those agents. And then I like followed up with Suzy and was like, "Hey, actually got an offer for *Fibbed*." And then I shared with Suzy is like, "Oh, I know you're reading my novel. But I also am working on a graphic novel. I got an offer for it. Would you want to take a look at that?"

So she took a look at it. And she really loved the idea. And so from there because I really loved the vision she had for both my writing and for my art, I ended up going with her and New Leaf. And then from there, we kind of worked to reshape the proposal and then we put it on sub and I think the interesting thing about being an illustrator on sub, it's like the art has changed so much from when I proposed it to like the final piece. And it's like I think everyone has whenever you look back at your work, you're just like, "Oh, I'm, like, so much better now." And being in a querying stage where you're an artist and like the progress of your art style is literally changing as the book is being seen and read by other people. It's like, "Oh, no, like, I should have spent more time showcasing this in the art."

And then so my editor, Ruta Rimas, she ended up really loving the project, but she had some like questions in terms of developing the story. So we had a meeting, and she loved the art, she loved the concept, and like working with her has been so great because it helped me build out more of what my vision was. It's like even the story of Nana and her relationship with her grandmother. That's something that wasn't in the original proposal. It was just like this adventure story about Nana who always tells the truth, but never is believed. And then she goes to Ghana, and then this corporation is stealing magic from the forest. She meets Anansi

who is this character in Ghanaian and African folklore, who is basically, he's a trickster spider, and he always kind of outwits other people. And he's kind of an anti-hero. So she meets Anansi, she has to team up with him to save the forest. And then when I was talking to my editor, she was like, you know, Nana's grandma is so important to like being the only person who fully is trying to understand her stories and things like that, would you be interested in like pulling that out more.

So that was something that was, that really came during the publication process that wasn't there in the proposal. So it's been really nice seeing how the story has developed from the beginning to the end. And as an artist, I'm just like, there's like one page, that's still the same from when it was like initial. Like, I think like 2019 there's like one spread, it's when Nana meets Anansi in the forest for the first time is still the same. But I even had made a different version of that in the proposal, and like my pride and joy, just looking at the comparison be like, look how much my art has improved. And that spread. It was a really intensive, but like really labor of love kind of project.

And then I think like the other piece was the lettering and like the bubbling, which is something when it comes to comics, there can be different teams to do that. Or it can just be one person. So I kind of did literally every stage. I sketched all the pages, I did all the inking, I did all the lettering and bubbling as my first graphic novel, even now I'm just like, okay, this is how I do it differently. But I think I'm really happy with how it turned out. It's been really great seeing other people's reception to it. Because it's like, no, I wanted to just write, obviously, I wanted to write about these deeper themes, but at the end of the day, I wanted to write a story about family and like, feeling the love of your community. And I think that there are so many readers who've been like really feeling that they were happy and got those good emotions from reading the story. That was a lot.

**JENN:** It's a lot of good stuff. How long have you been editing?

**ELIZABETH:** As an editor or the book? So even before I started this book, my first job in publishing was in 2017. And I started working on this in 2019. So, I like started as an assistant. Now I'm an associate editor at a big five.

**JENN:** Were you ever planning to do the formal query thing? Or you're just like DVpit? Why not?

**ELIZABETH:** I had been doing the querying since high school. So it's something, it was like, when I found out how books were made. I was like, oh, I'm a creative...even before like, when I was younger, I didn't know that people wrote books. I didn't know that they were like teams who made books. I just thought the bookseller or librarian was like, hmm, what story do people

want to hear today? And then they just use a spell. And then this is the book, I didn't even know there were authors. I still remember the first time I figured out that authors existed. I like finished a book, And for some reason, I don't know why I never did this, but I would never look at the flap, I would just finish the book. And then I'm like, I'm done. But I like looked at the back flap. And I saw an image was like, "Who is this?" And then I'm like, "This person wrote this?" It was like, so shocking to me. But it was also inspiring, like, oh, people actually write these stories. "Maybe I can do that." Because I was always making comics with my siblings and stuff like that. So I was like, "Oh, well, maybe the stories I can write can also be books too."

**JENN:** Would you recommend Dvpit? I mean it seemed to work out.

**ELIZABETH:** You know what, it's so funny because Susie and I started working together because, you know, I had cold-queried her. And then I sent her my graphic novel, and I thought DVPit was really incredible because, you know, you create such an incredible community from even participating in it. And then you get to meet so many authors. This was for different books that I had pitched because I queried for the first DVPit. And it was, I forgot what the book was. It's been a hot minute, it was like a fantasy. And during that process, I got to connect with an author who helped me with like my DVPit pitch. So just the experience of being a part of DVpit was so incredible. And it also helped me you know, as a creator, in terms of like, how do I pitch my book? How do I find community? So I definitely would recommend it. I think it's such a great community. It's such a great event that Beth Phailin created and there are so many people working with it, definitely something I would recommend.

**JENN:** Do you go on it as an editor?

[19:36]

**ELIZABETH:** I...Okay. Here's the thing: because it's removed, it's like because I know editors do participate, but it's the most immediate thing is agents that work with the authors, and then from there. I have actually participated as an editor, but I don't think I've seen any projects from it because I'm kind of newer, so I don't know if I'm on people's sub list. But I have participated in it. And I've seen and definitely people in house who participate in it. The reason why I'm like having an online persona, when you do both you work in an industry and also create, I think like it's kind of a little bit jarring. Sometimes I'm like, I feel like I have to keep it separate in a way because I love shouting out about all the books, I love reading all the great writer friends I have on like my personal page. And then I'm like, I also want to shout all the books of the authors I've worked with. That is still something I'm still trying to figure out in terms of how active am I on my editor platform versus my author platform. I even created, like, a new Twitter for it. That's why I'm not as online as an editor, because I'm just like, it might just be easier to keep it a little bit separate. Sometimes I'm like, it might be harder to just bring both of them

online, because it's sometimes a lot of the context is missing if you don't know the experience of like working on a book versus if you don't know the creative side of reading a book too. So that makes it always harder and engaging with people. That's another thing. It's like something I didn't know, before I joined the industry was just like, when do editors read? I just thought editors read books. I'm like, Yeah, I like this. We're making it. But there's meetings and there's launches. And there's just so much and then the kind of new expectation of editors being online and always being online, always engaging, always doing the work outside of work hours in that way. That's kind of where I'm just, hmm, it's a lot

**JENN:** It is, it is. Sometimes it's kind of that situation of "I don't want to talk about my job right now. I want to engage with anybody about my job." How have you, now that you're a published author, how has that been in terms of even engaging with people outside of work? Because I feel like I mean, you and I are not being published by our respective house where we work. Whether that was purposeful or not, I don't know. Going back to my question, how has that been as "now I'm creator, I have to go back to work and be editor but still may have some creative stuff that I need to do.

**ELIZABETH:** I also like, because like I was saying before, keeping things separate in my head has always been helpful to me. And like, I love the team I work with, and they're so incredible. So it's like, if I didn't want things to be separate, I would love to work with that team. But I know some other people do. I know there's some authors who publish from the author editors who publish from their same house, Personally, to me, I just always need something separate in my head, I just need things in different cups. So just like I'm working nine to five, I clock out and then I can do my creative stuff, instead of always feeling kind of like overlapping. So to me, it's been a good experience, especially because in terms of when you work multiple jobs, and you create too, it's always we all have the same 24 hours in a day, but you have to carve out different times in your day, whether it's to like financially support yourself, whether it's just to like do something for fun, or, and also have a personal life. And I think carving out that time, I used to like commute. And the commute would be the buffer or like, to me the weekends is when I do most of my creative work. Or it's like after work hours, that's when I'm doing creative stuff. But also it's okay, I finish work, I eat lunch, I relax a little bit, and then eight to 10. I'm working on like book projects.

So that's definitely a hustle. Because I've always had many interests, so I'm just like, I would love to just not have to hustle. But also it's like, you know, you need to support yourself. And also you actually really love doing these projects. So it's been a balance, but it's been good. I think during the pandemic, when everyone was shut down, and all those changing environments, it's been hard. But also like, sometimes I'm just like, as someone who, as a Black person, there's always something going on. In terms of our community. I think that was to me, like the biggest shift is just the summer of 2020, when everyone was finally talking

about the issue of Black Lives Matter, and just like the social and racial injustice happening, and it's like, "Oh, you guys are finally understanding what it means to have to compartmentalize your life." So I think it's kind of a relief to feel like you can be your authentic self, because sometimes you don't get that opportunity. And I've been lucky enough to always have been having that opportunity. I'm someone like I'd rather not be in a space if I know that I can't be my full self then have to like pretend. So that's always been something I've been like really active about. And I've been lucky to be able to always be myself in those spaces, but everyone brings a different piece of themselves to what they do in every field. And so just kind of navigating that has been harder.

I feel like to me, the hardest part isn't necessarily doing the work. It's just being an author and then being like, "Okay, well, I put my book out. But there's a whole history of how people talk about my people and my culture that I have to work against and re-educate, break down those barriers in a way." And it's like, you find it in different experiences and different pieces of that. It's like, as I'm doing my art, what type of feedback am I getting? Are they able to bring a richness to the feedback in the art or do I have to like educate in this way? So I think the hardest part is just contending with all of those pieces because sometimes I'm just like, what is it like being a creator and just like not feeling that way. But I really appreciate being who I am and having all the experiences I had, because I think it has defined me in a way that I just feel really happy about, I think they have helped, you know, make me who I am. And I think I wouldn't have it any other way.

**JENN:** I also really respect your time management.

**ELIZABETH:** It's a lot of Google Tasks. Like I have whole Google Tasks sheets, it's like every page I have to draw is its own Google Task. And it's put on my calendar at different times. So I get the validation of clicking, I did this, but it takes a long time to organize it.

**JENN:** Whoa, that's also very impressive.

**ELIZABETH:** It's not like that for novels.

**JENN:** I could only imagine. I had to whittle my stuff down smaller in my life to be manageable.

**ELIZABETH:** No, It's actually very true, I think, because I went to art school. And we had this assignment once where the teacher gave us a pen. And she said, the assignment is to use all the ink in the pen. That's the only thing you'll be graded on. She gave us like three months to do it. And I was like, Oh, we have three months, I'm chill. And the first day I like drew, and then I just never touched it again, before the day, this time it was due. And I was like, "Oh my god, I have to use all this ink before like three hours before this class happens." And I think that's,

that was a lesson I learned. Even if you do one line a day, that is going to build to the final piece, so you don't have to feel that rushed feeling. So like even the fact that you edit for like 20 minutes a day or do something, it does add up. And that's like, it's relieving to know that because if you don't want to, you don't have to put so much pressure on spending all these hours on it. But sometimes things get moved. Or sometimes it's just like, I don't have the energy for this. So those are also part of it.

**JENN:** Yes, so true. That's such a great example, too, because I remember, in my late 20s, early 30s, spending a full day, sometimes not even getting out of my pajamas, writing, and just doing that thing where you like get up get snacks all the time, but you're not really eating a meal. And I'm just like, I can't do that anymore. And maybe it's pandemic/being an acquisitions editor, where you're just like, in meetings so much as you know, especially these meetings are on Zoom, not necessarily going from a room to a room to a room. Need to go out, just etc, etc. Just low energy is like the idea of sitting for hours writing is not appealing to me.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah.

**JENN:** At a computer, it's fine on my couch, though. Like when I have the really cushiony laptop thing for my, the holder for my laptop, I can do that on my couch. But just something now that I have an office in my apartment is like, "No, I'll won't go into the office. That's work." And I have to edit my podcast in here because this is where like the big computer is. And so it says, like, "No, that's the work desk." No, I'll just take my laptop to my reading chair and be like, I can do this. And then I do the Pomodoro thing now where I set an alarm for an hour and a half. And I just know, okay, in 90 minutes, this will tell me and then I take a half hour break and then come back for 90 minutes. And that's how I finished massive revisions on my book, I was doing that on weekends. But something about coming to work desk, I think something in my mind recognize that during the pandemic and in my new apartment was you need an office and then you when you write you need to go to your reading chair or your couch because you can't disassociate anymore, you have an office in your home now, gotta not do that. The lines are blurred now to the point where you do need to make these I think as for us as creators.

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, I totally agree. And even it just brings like being in a different space, like you were saying, right? It's a different mindset to it. And it's also a different type of physicality, because that's something I kind of, like as a writer, when we're writing prose our risk is that we're kind of like in our back, right. When I'm illustrating it is also very physical, too, in a different way. So finding a comfortable space, sometimes like the idea of drawing for like eight hours that takes a physical toll on your body, too if you're doing that every weekend. So even just breaking up smaller can just help you in terms of keeping yourself healthy so that you can keep creating and don't overload yourself.

**JENN:** Yeah. And so you're doing more books. Are you doing more graphic novels? I know. One is a YA novel, is it not?

**ELIZABETH:** Yeah, so I have another graphic novel coming from Razorbill that hasn't been announced. And the other book is a YA graphic novel that's been announced. It's coming from Delacorte, it's about three girls who are excited about their senior trip, because you know, they're gonna spend it with their friends and their boyfriend. But then they find out that they're all dating the same guy. And during their senior trip, he goes missing and then they are accused of being responsible. So they kind of have to figure out the mystery of what happened to him. So that's the second book project that's in the works.

**JENN:** With Delacorte? It's *Heart-Shaped Lies*.

**ELIZABETH:** It's yeah. Yes, yeah. I should mention the title. Thank you for that.

[29:53]

**JENN:** Oh, no worries. *Heart-Shaped Lies*, everybody. And I can only imagine again, being the author and illustrator how much that is, like getting final art is no small feat. So, congratulations because it's a very beautiful, it's a very vibrant book. I love how they included patterns in the cloth, not just the spine, but in my kind of endpapers and stuff like that. So, you know, and I'm just really into graphic novels because I think it's been harder for me to read in the print pandemics, especially with Elizabeth like, I have a graphic novel and I was like, send it.

**ELIZABETH:** It makes, it makes you happy. But it's also like, because you also know this, it's 2019 to 2022. And then you're like, I read this in like, two hours.

**JENN:** You know how much time, my hands hurt.

**ELIZABETH:** I felt every brush of hair, it's great, yeah, it's fine.

**JENN:** I always talk about Jacqueline Woodson's quote when she was at an event. And she said, people come up to her and say, I read *Brown Girl Dreaming* in like, an hour. And she's like, "Go back and read it again. It took me five years to write." And I'm like, yep, yeah, that's, yeah, that's real. And it's a compliment, someone ingested your work so quickly, but you're like, good God, savor it.

**ELIZABETH:** And that's also kind of why I don't really consider *Fibbed* a crash, because I've been working on it since 2019. So like, to me, I've had the time to sit with it. But then at the end, it's like the last final run was a marathon. So that's like the part that was supposed to

crash, I was lucky to have editorial staff like my editor, and like the team were able to like, give me new deadlines. And I'm like, hey, these take a lot of pieces. In the comics industry, they have different people lighting and lettering and all that stuff. And I think that's something in publishing, I incorporate more because graphic novels are so intensive as someone who does both does prose and as someone who illustrates, drawing a scene with words is not the same labor as painting out each leaf, you can say there's 10 leaves in like prose. And then you have to physically do the act of putting all those details on the 10 leaves. So the book is seven pages, panels per page and some scenes. So it's like every panel is an art piece, right? So it's like doing that for 250 pages. It's really intensive labor. And then doing the lettering on top of that, all that stuff.

**JENN:** Oh my god. You're not compensated enough. I'm not saying I know how much people are getting paid. But just for what you told me, I'm like, it's not enough.

**ELIZABETH:** I mean, sometimes you can even see like, you don't need to like publishing paid me did such a great job talking about how creators from marginalized backgrounds and identities aren't getting compensated for their work in comparison to kind of the white counterparts. And I think that there definitely needs to be more conversations as like the publishing industry is trying to do more graphic novels and bring in more authors from different identities. Okay, you have a team that this author is also doing kind of the history work of like talking to your copy editors and them about like, "Okay, you don't have someone to copy edit this history of this culture, I'll do that extra research." It's like, are you compensating them for all that extra work? Whereas, you know, white authors don't have to do that. I mean, you would hope that they put in that research too, but it's like, it's different questions. It's like, it's not necessarily an author's expertise to know what is the grammatical spelling of this really specific word in a different language? That's something you would say like, oh, the copyeditor will look into like the dictionary and like, find all that information, bring that set that like experience to how they make the book and you aren't having that at every level for when books by authors of color, books by authors of different backgrounds are publishing their stories, and you're also not compensating them. So it's like so many layers that I don't think are being considered enough.

**JENN:** No, not at all. I do straight prose. I had to spend like over \$2,000 on readers for my book because I have different identities and experiences that I wanted to really be conscious of the fact that I am not. And that was my money. I remember they're like, we have a modest budget for that. And I'm like, you have a modest budget. Okay. You guys have a modest budget. Okay, well, and I hired five different people and that was over \$2,000. But I can write off my taxes, obviously. But whoo, boy.

**ELIZABETH:** Wow. Yeah, it's like.

**JENN:** I don't know how many people are doing that. I think a lot of people even though this is a big conversation that's been happening for years and I've been hired as a reader also for quote, unquote, the Black experience or the Black American experience, which is not monolithic, but that's another episode. The pay is crap for that. And I didn't want to pay people crap, I wanted to pay what they felt they deserve for what they were providing.

**ELIZABETH:** And they give, they give budgets for like getting permissions and like all of those stuff and those are inherent in contracts. So it's I think publishing needs to really move forward in terms of, if you're asking an author and the great thing about my experience as an editor is the houses I've worked for have done that they've had had budgets, but that's also that was a conversation that happened in multiple levels before that happened and I think the conversation still needs to be happening so that those changes are kind of embedded in how folks are being paid.

**JENN:** Slow and steady.

**ELIZABETH:** Yes. Very slow, though, very slow

**JENN:** You said it ,I thought it you said it. Elizabeth, congrats so much on *Fibbed*. It really is a beautiful vibrant sweet book a lot and she put so much work into it, y'all. So definitely get this for your libraries, your shelves, all that good stuff. So how can people kind of learn more about your work, your current book, your upcoming books? Are you on the socials?

**ELIZABETH:** I am I'm just gonna give my website. So my website is ElizabethAgyemang.com. And like that has all my links to like my social media. I'm on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok all that @onceaddai. O, N C, E A, D, D, A, I. But yeah, you can find me on my website and you can find me on those platforms. And I like to do art videos and talk about the shows and books I'm reading and watching and stuff like that.

**JENN:** Elizabeth Agyemang. E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H A-G-Y-E-M-A-N-G.

**ELIZABETH:** Thanks, Jen. My first name and my last name are always so long. So like, whenever I would have to do the SATs, one letter was going to be missing.

**JENN:** Really? They didn't have any space?

**ELIZABETH:** They never have any space. So I'm just like, always like, yeah, there's a lot of letters here.

**JENN:** They would have shortened your name.

**ELIZABETH:** I do go by Liz. But like, it's just another boxing things. When I hear Elizabeth, I'm getting in trouble. It's usually my parents. So I'm like, okay, I have to be pristine. So when people call me Elizabeth, I'm like, I'm being professional now. But just call me Liz.

**JENN:** Okay, cool. Yeah, I go by Jennifer at work. I mean you could call me either. My website's my full name. Yeah, it's not Jenn Baker. These are the things you have to think about like, are you Jenn or Jennifer? Are you Elizabeth, are you Liz? What do you go by? What do we call you? Thank you again, Elizabeth Agyemang for being on please get *Fibbed* this wonderful graphic novel that is out now and appreciate Elizabeth's hard work because she finished this in February.

**ELIZABETH:** Thanks so much, Jenn, thanks so much for having me.

**JENN:** Of course. And thank you all for listening. Once again, this is the Minorities in Publishing podcast, which you can find on Tumblr and Twitter and wherever you listen to podcasts, including Google Play, Apple podcast, Spotify, TuneIn and iHeartRadio. Take care and be safe, everybody.

[38:16]