Community, Culture, Books and Black Motherhood with Alliah Agostini | Dem Black Mamas Podcast

[00:00:00] **Alliah Agostini:** How much of our history is at the bottom of, of the Atlantic, but how much we are able to, to still share despite it, you know, that there's still points of connectivity through oral tradition, et cetera. I mean, man, imagine if we had been allowed, not punished to be able to read and, and write, uh, how much more could be shared.

[00:00:18] **Alliah Agostini:** So I think that that's even more empowering to realize, help people understand that history is happening every single day. So even though it's current right now, it'll be history in the future. So make sure that you are still sharing your story and make sure that you, you realize how relevant they are.

[00:00:42] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Hey, hey everybody. Welcome back to the ride. You're inside, you're, you are. Where are you? Listen,

[00:00:50] **NeKisha Killings:** today's

[00:00:51] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** episode, we have a great guest. I am fresh off travel, so you know, um, you gonna get it How you get it? That's it. You get it, how you get it. But this is a [00:01:00] great episode. We have a great guest, um, Aaliyah Augustina.

[00:01:03] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** She wrote a book, Augustini. She wrote a book, uh, called The Juneteenth Story. Yay. And we like this book, book one of 10 that she's publish, publish this journey, uh, celebrating the End of Slavery in the United States. And we like this book because it has the word slavery in the title Lets you know what it is, so you know what it is.

[00:01:21] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** It's very dim. Black Mama ish. We like that. And she's very much a black mama. She's very much a black mama. Very much a black mama. Welcome back to the Ride. You are on the mothership inside the Black Mama crew. Buckle up with the greatest podcast on Earth. She's not here gpo.

[00:01:44] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Thea is not with us today, so I'll just fill in that you are on the mothership inside the black rubber bedroom with the greatest podcast on Earth cheapo. Mm-hmm. I am one of your co-host Crystal Il Irby, mother of four, and I do believe that Harriet Tubman was a real [00:02:00] person. I'm not even gonna, I am.

[00:02:05] **NeKisha Killings:** You are not about to get my blood pressure up. Well, it's today people that

[00:02:09] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** don't believe that Harriet Tubman was the real person. So,

[00:02:11] **NeKisha Killings:** and clearly we left some children behind. We Okay.

[00:02:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** You played George Queer. That was good. Isha. That was good. I am. That was good

[00:02:21] **NeKisha Killings:** right there. Mm-hmm. That was good. I'm Nikisha Killing's, mother of four and

[00:02:25] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Nikisha.

[00:02:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Do you believe that Harry Tubman was a real person?

[00:02:29] **NeKisha Killings:** Yes. And I know the Underground Railroad wasn't really underground. Look

[00:02:35] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** at us

[00:02:35] **NeKisha Killings:** now that, now that we putting shit out there, just

[00:02:39] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** GenXers slick at us, look at us, prove that our education means something. Um. But as I said before, we have a wonderful guest we're very, very, uh, excited to speak to.

[00:02:50] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I should have refreshed my lipstick. You're fine, you're fine. Mm. I don't wanna, I'll refresh it. When Nisha's doing her announcements, Thea is not with us today. She's [00:03:00] traveling, um,

today. So it's just me, Nikisha. And we'll have our guest. Yes, ma'am. And, uh, I guess we can just like, jump right into it. We have a regular episode today.

[00:03:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** We're gonna start out with our, uh, response to reading. Mm. From the Black Magic Rock. I think we do need Thea here, girl. No, because Thea will be struggling too. Thea and I both was struggling. Sophia Thea had the right idea. Thea was like, yeah, I'm not available today. I'll be traveling. But, um, from the Black Mama Magic card deck, which you can purchase on our website, I'll have the link for that.

[00:03:36] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yes. In our show notes. So we'll do our responsive reading and then we'll move into our church announcements, praise reports, and prayerless requests. Then we'll move into our mac and cheese with our guests and we'll close out with Black Mama, which we're doing a little something different this time. So, Nikisha, you wanted me to pull card?

[00:03:53] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** 19. 19. Let's do it. Um, one plus nine is 10. [00:04:00] This is not here. So we don't know what number means Go down to one. It goes down to one. It goes down to one. Mm-hmm. And one is. Because I, here, we dunno what that means. So if you're listening, one is important. If you're listening and you know what, what means? Just, um, if you're listening and you're watching on YouTube or you're listening on Spotify, just put it in the comments what the number, uh, one means and or if you're just listening and you, there's no comment section for what you're listening.

[00:04:27] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Hit us up on Instagram. Put it in the comments. They just wanna let y'all know one means dah, dah, dah, dah. Do that on the Instagram post about this episode. She's not gonna let

[00:04:35] **NeKisha Killings:** us do this without her ever again. 'cause we're not. We're not. Well,

[00:04:38] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I mean, it is what it is. It is what it is. Okay. Card number 19.

[00:04:43] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Oh is good. Good court. What's 19 talking about? It's a good court. I honor my child. I honor my child's divine path. That's a good card. Mm-hmm. Okay, dear Mama, your children are divine beings who came earth [00:05:00] side with a divine purpose. Who wrote this card? This is good. Probably me. Your job is to nurture them in that purpose.

[00:05:06] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Release the ego that encourag you, that encourages you to chisel them into reflections of you. Ooh, when you feel uncomfortable, afraid, and, oh, did that hurt? Did that hurt? Did I step on some toes? I make you curl your toes back. I'm gonna say the about that on, because I wouldn't

[00:05:23] **NeKisha Killings:** write nothing that hurt me like that.

[00:05:27] **NeKisha Killings:** Theo wrote that. Okay, go ahead.

[00:05:29] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Your job is to nurture them in that purpose. Release the ego that encourages you to chisel them into reflections of you. Mm, that's good writing. Chisel. When you feel uncomfortable, afraid and lack answers, resist the urge to instantly respond in old patterns and behaviors.

[00:05:48] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** This card is doing some work. This card is doing some work. Take it as an opportunity to dig deeper into the roots of those emotions so you can [00:06:00] go higher with your children and guide them on their path. This card is working. Mamas, that's a word. This card is working. This card, 19 for my Black Woman Magic card deck.

[00:06:11] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Now you should get the card deck just for that alone, for that reminder alone.

[00:06:14] **NeKisha Killings:** I bet I won't answer Car 19 no more. I appreciate that.

[00:06:20] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I thought we were, we all wanted to grow. I thought we all wanted to grow. We all wanted to heal. Not that,

[00:06:25] **NeKisha Killings:** not that fast. It's too bad. Foot on the gas that was not ready.

[00:06:29] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Okay, so our ancestor quote word from the ancestors for this episode is Revolution is not a one-time event. And that's from Audrey Lorde.

[00:06:38] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And I'll have the link for, uh, the essay that that's pulled from in our show syllabus. So we have a show syllabus for every single episode. And the reason we have a show syllabus is number one, uh, the intention of our show is expansion and healing and creativity and liberation.

And in order for that, [00:07:00] um, we feel like to happen, we wanna give you resources and concrete.

[00:07:04] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Tools. Absolutely. Um, that can help you through that process. The other reason is to combat misinformation and disinformation. Mm-hmm. And we want you to know, we just not like talking out of our ass. Like we're not, we have some actual references for you, so please check out our show syllabus. Shout out to Melissa Harris Perry.

[00:07:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Who had a show on MSN BBC every, uh, Saturday, and she used to have a show syllabus. And so for each episode we have a show syllabus with, uh, articles, videos, books, receipts, uh, receipts. That's what it is. Um, interviews, all of those kinds of things. It's really, I'm, I'm, I'm really proud of and really quiet and fres with it, as you should be.

[00:07:47] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Um, so please make sure you're checking out, um, our show syllabus because it, it'll, it'll be great for you. It'll be great for you. And it gives more context to what we're talking about here. Mm-hmm. So that'll be in our show syllabus.[00:08:00]

[00:08:04] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So. We're gonna jump into our church announcements. Do you wanna go first, Nikisha, or do you want me to go first?

[00:08:11] **NeKisha Killings:** Um, I don't have much to announce. I'm enjoying the downtime and I'll, I'll hit y'all back when it becomes national breastfeeding month in August and all the things are happening, but I'm enjoying the downtime right now.

[00:08:22] **NeKisha Killings:** I hope I said like breastfeeding week or national breastfeeding month. I hope I said that. I, I may mix those up, but yes, all that happens in August. It's all

[00:08:29] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** in August. Um, I'll be, there is a child in my video. Hello? My child.

[00:08:35] **NeKisha Killings:** It's not the first time that blanketed child has walked back. How? I was just gonna act like I didn't see it.

[00:08:41] **NeKisha Killings:** What is it

[00:08:42] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** you need,

[00:08:42] **NeKisha Killings:** babe?

[00:08:43] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Xavier picked me up. So can go to the y Can I do what? Xavier up so I can go to the y uh, Xavier's, a teenager driving. Uh, he's good. We have to talk about that. You gotta wait till I get off. How many times does this child walk by? Nikki? Keisha, [00:09:00] you didn't say anything.

[00:09:01] **NeKisha Killings:** It's happened.

[00:09:02] **NeKisha Killings:** It's happened. And that is black mama life right there. That's it. Nutshell. Mm-hmm. I don't know where he think he going with Xavier though.

[00:09:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Not a teenage driver or girl? Girl. And then having

[00:09:13] **NeKisha Killings:** her say, well, where's dad

[00:09:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** girl,

[00:09:15] **NeKisha Killings:** it is

[00:09:16] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** like,

[00:09:16] **NeKisha Killings:** let me ask him.

[00:09:17] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** He's a safe driver, he's licensed.

[00:09:21] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Girl, girl. Okay, so let's get back to it. We're also gonna have a collection plate clause. And the collection plate clause is, uh, creator, well, which is my nonprofit organization. Yes. For black girls ages 12 to 21. Living in South Carolina. Interested in writing and performance will be asking for donations for that.

[00:09:40] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** My goal, um, is to raise $5,000. So, um, if you know somebody, know somebody that know somebody that know about something. Let's get it. And you know, somebody who can match that, somebody who can give that, um, or give what you can to help us, uh, reach our [00:10:00] goal. We're also looking for reoccurring donor donors.

[00:10:03] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Our long-term goal is 100 reoccurring monthly donors that can give at least $25 a month. You can give more than that, but at least $25 a month. And what that can help us do is basically keep the basics of the organization, um, running. So those are all the announcements that I have. If you're watching us on YouTube, click, you know what to do.

[00:10:31] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** The link. Not click the link, subscribe and like, that's what I meant to say. Subscribe and like, don't just look at us, subscribe and like, and talk back to us. We've gotten a couple of comments on our last episode. Um, so please, uh, talk back to us. We love, uh, when y'all talk back to us, because this is not a presentation, this is a conversation.

[00:10:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So we invite you all to talk back to us and share this episode with at least one person who you feel can benefit from it. Because sharing is not only caring. [00:11:00] Sharing is how we build community. That's my little motto for that. That's all I have for that. Anything else? Keh? That's it. That's it's it. Okay, so now we're gonna roll into the mac and cheese.

[00:11:19] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Okay everybody. We're gonna jump into our mac and cheese segment and today we're joined by children's book Art author Aaliyah Augustini, right? Augustini? Yes. Yes, yes, yes. I'm getting better than Keisha. I'm getting better you. I getting that. You did that. Good job. Good job. Everybody knows name pronunciations me is a thing, so I'm getting better.

[00:11:43] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Okay, so we're going to start off like, we always like to start off, um, we like to read the bios of the black women that are on the podcast because sometimes you don't realize like how much you've done. So, you know, it's like, yeah girl, that's you, you've been doing all that. 'cause we just keep our head down.

[00:11:58] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Mm-hmm. And we just keep working. Um, [00:12:00] oh, and I said it, uh, in our intro, but we're gonna talk about, uh, Aaliyah's two books. She has the Juneteenth cooking book. You we're not good at. There we go. Look at that. So beautiful. And she has the Juneteenth story, Juneteenth story, celebrating the End of Slavery in the United States.

[00:12:21] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** We're gonna talk about that title a little bit. So if you're on YouTube, you can see the beautiful illustrations in the book. And we'll have the links for the book, um, in our show syllabus. Okay, so here we go. Buffalo, New York native Aaliyah Augustini has marketed everything from

iconic brands to scrappy startups, but motherhood helped her return to her first love children's literature.

[00:12:46] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** She writes to spread joy, truth, and to help more children see themselves reflected on the page. Aaliyah is the author of Many Picture Books and Easy Readers for Children, including Junior Library Guild Selection, big tune, [00:13:00] rise of Dance of the Dance Hall, prints starred reviews from Kikis and Publishers Weekly, New York Public Library and Chicago Public Library.

[00:13:08] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Best picture books of 2023, black Kid Lit Award-winning the Juneteenth story, celebrating the End of Slavery in the United States. Oprah Winfrey. A little golden book biography, the Juneteenth Cookbook. Great idea, Malia, which is one of my faves. I love great idea, Malia. I just heard good news about it today too.

[00:13:27] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Oh, okay. Yes. Well, if you can share Girl, we want the tea. You know, I love, I love, um, the great idea. Malia Lexie play scare sighted on the first day of school. No cat like tack arts, art, and more. She and her work have been featured on Oprah daily essence.com. Today with Hoda and Jenna. Morning in America.

[00:13:47] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Good housekeeping. CNN and NPR. Aaliyah resides in New Jersey with her husband and two children. She has an ab, an MBA from Harvard. I had never heard of an AB until I read your bio. I was like,

[00:13:59] **Alliah Agostini:** yes. It's [00:14:00] our fancy way of saying ba, Harvard just has to be different. Oh,

[00:14:03] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** it's Harvard. You know, it's Got it, got it, got it, got it.

[00:14:07] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** We just got what we do. We just got, we just got BAS from Florida State. That's all we got.

[00:14:11] **Alliah Agostini:** No, it's like different

[00:14:12] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** just from the state school. Swap

[00:14:14] **NeKisha Killings:** it around. Shut out to Harvard for holding it down and showing what you know. Mm. Stand in all business. Looks like I'm trying to, trying, trying to in mm-hmm. In

[00:14:25] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** this

[00:14:25] **NeKisha Killings:** administration.

[00:14:25] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm. Yes.

[00:14:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Um, but welcome. We're very excited to have you. So grateful. Um, thank you so much for having me here. So we're gonna start out with a question that we ask all of our guests, and I'm interested to hear this 'cause you're pretty prolific, like all those books in what it seems like, 'cause I, you know, we've known you for a while, but mm-hmm.

[00:14:44] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** It seems like, like a short amount of time. Mm-hmm. It was Where were, yeah. Where were you 10 years ago. And did you think you'd be where you are right now?

[00:14:54] **Alliah Agostini:** Oh, child. So 10 years ago, 10 years ago, we

[00:14:57] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** were, what's this year? 20. 5 [00:15:00] 25. So Barack Obama was still president. Yes. Just a little context. So all the

[00:15:04] **Alliah Agostini:** context.

[00:15:04] **Alliah Agostini:** So Barack Obama was the, the president. I was a, a, a newish mom. My daughter was about to turn on her way to turning one. Mm-hmm. I had actually left corporate and stayed home with her. And I was, at this point I was itching to do something else and I'd started doing some marketing consulting with small, early stage businesses.

[00:15:26] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, 'cause I always knew I wanted to do something like a little bit more out there, even though I've got these, you know, this MBA from Harvard and, you know, the corporate expectation was there. I always knew that I was a little bit more like tambourine and, you know, you know, I wanted to do something a little bit more off the beaten path.

[00:15:41] **Alliah Agostini:** I wanted to do something more creative. So I was like, I'm gonna work with smaller businesses, um, and I'm gonna, you know, try to figure out how to do something to help them with their marketing. And I

work with a lot of, um. Bootstrap businesses that were founded by black women entrepreneurs, which is really, really pretty cool.

[00:15:58] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, but one thing I realized [00:16:00] I tried to do with almost every single project I was working on was some element of writing. And I actually started mm-hmm. A blog that was focused more so on, on marketing, you know, from the, you know, multicultural standpoint and just from my general observations. And I just realized how much, um, that writing piece, you know, brought me joy.

[00:16:18] **Alliah Agostini:** But I thought of myself as a math person as more of a business person. I always knew I was, you know, creative too, but I never thought that I needed it to be core to my existence. A lot wound up happening during that time. And so, me being a writer now, it, it makes sense when I look at my trajectory over time.

[00:16:38] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, but it's not something that I ever would've predicted, um, for myself. You know, I, I. Loved going to story time so much with my daughter when, um, she was little. The library is actually right around the corner from us, so it was great. So it's funny because a lot of the librarians, they remember me from when I would go to story times Mm.

[00:16:59] **Alliah Agostini:** I went honestly, [00:17:00] somewhat for the stories and somewhat for socialization. I mean, I know you guys know what it was like to have that first and you're just like, oh, story time is popping. But it's also like, I just need to get outta my house at the end to, you know, you know, figure out what's, what's, what's going on with, like, being a mom and, and figuring that all out.

[00:17:15] **Alliah Agostini:** But there were more stories I realized, um, that featured families of color than there were when I was a kid. I'm sure you know, when you guys were a kid. Mm-hmm. But then I realized, started realizing that those people on the flaps, even if they didn't show them their picture, I was like, wait a minute. You mean the lady that wrote Lola is not even black.

[00:17:35] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, so many of these people were Yeah, yeah. There, there, there were some, but you know, there weren't quite as many. And there were some books that I'd find that were self-published that did actually feature authors and illustrators of color, um, which was good. But I just realized that there were other stories that, um, I really wanted to see.

[00:17:52] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah.

[00:17:52] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** When you said that you didn't know that writing was gonna be core to your existence, when did you figure that out? When [00:18:00] did that light bulb go off? Like this is,

[00:18:02] **Alliah Agostini:** yeah, that's a great question. It was really around, or was it like

[00:18:06] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** a gradual?

[00:18:07] **Alliah Agostini:** It was gradual because I, I first started out with doing, um.

[00:18:12] **Alliah Agostini:** Like a, you know, a blog occasionally about marketing. When I was doing more marketing consulting and then I was thinking about like, you know, do I wanna pivot into another business of my own? And so then I started like a platform that was more so for like cental women, like ourselves, um, called esque. And I was writing just essays there that were kind of about just like being, you know, a woman of like a certain age, you know?

[00:18:36] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. At this point. Mm-hmm. And it was just fun for me. It was, you know, writing things that were reflections on like life and motherhood, um, and sometimes these little quips and things like that too. Because a lot of people would say, you know, I see your posts on social and I like your voice. Like you, you write well.

[00:18:50] **Alliah Agostini:** And I was like, oh, thanks. I just do it. You know? I don't really think of it as a thing. And that's the thing about things that are your natural gifts, you don't really think about them. 'cause some, sometimes they come, obviously they need to be [00:19:00] honed. I've always had like little ideas here and there for.

[00:19:04] **Alliah Agostini:** Picture books. Um, and I started putting them in my notes app on my phone. Mm-hmm. I think as early as maybe when Daphne, that's my oldest, was about a year or so old. So I started putting my notes app in my phone, and then I had Evernote too. So I just started a notebook and Evernote and I'd put kids' stories.

[00:19:22] **Alliah Agostini:** Sometimes I'd audio record myself. Wow. Sometimes I'd just jot down little nuggets of things here and there. And then eventually, uh, around 2019, I was thinking about the fact that I know we were

talking about my name and then the pronunciation of it. Yeah. Um, I just remembered how the first day of school was so.

[00:19:44] **Alliah Agostini:** I guess in, in some ways agonizing, because my both, my first and my last name start with A, so regardless if they're going by first name or last name, I knew there was gonna be some serious tripping up of the name. It was just, it was just, you know, it comes with the territory. So [00:20:00] Aaliyah or Agai, one of the two is gonna be tripped up.

[00:20:03] **Alliah Agostini:** So I just wait for that pause for the teacher and then I'd correct them. And it was a thing. And normally they would learn my name, but I was like, you know, I feel like there are first day of school books that are about. Children that are from outside the United States, a lot of, you know, Asian kids and, and their names and, you know, et cetera.

[00:20:23] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm.

[00:20:24] **Alliah Agostini:** But I didn't know how many that there actually were for, for like, for black children. Mm-hmm. You know? And, um, I, I started drafting a story about that and I was like, oh, I really think that this needs to be a thing because I would love for it to be a resource for kids like myself. Actually, I remember I was at the Y waiting for like an exercise class once, and I heard these two girls talking about like, substitute teacher day and how they hated when they had substitute teacher day because they, that their meant their name was gonna be butchered yet again, and they had to teach it to some day yet again.

[00:20:53] **Alliah Agostini:** And I was like, this is, this still goes on. And, you know, and it continues to go on all throughout our life, you know, as we're introducing ourselves. Yep. Um, so [00:21:00] then I, I came up with this idea for a book called Aaliyah for Long, Aaliyah for short. It was fictional, but kind of inspired by my own, my own experience about a little girl understanding the meaning of her name.

[00:21:10] **Alliah Agostini:** And, uh, I, it was 2019 and I was kind of at this, this juncture where, um. In our family, we had had a lot of, a lot of loss, a couple of losses at the same time. I had been working with this one startup, um, a little bit more. It was consulting, but it just was not, it was not a good match for me at that point.

[00:21:33] **Alliah Agostini:** And I was just thinking and reflective of what I wanna do and what I want my, my impact on the world to be. Mm-hmm. For

something just kept on tugging at me, like, try to figure out how to make this writing thing a real thing. Um, and so at that point I started just, I would just talk to people and say, Hey, I'm interested in writing kids books, but mm-hmm.

[00:21:54] **Alliah Agostini:** I don't know where to start. I don't know what to do. And that would lead me to one person that said, [00:22:00] Hey, I have this one friend that self-published a book. Then you can talk to them. And then another person that said, Hey, I have another friend who's trying to figure out this path. You. To traditional publishing.

[00:22:11] **Alliah Agostini:** So I'd had conversations with people that were also along the path and people that were willing to talk to me. And then, you know, I was directed to some resources that were wound up kind of helping me along the way. And, um, it's really, you know, I asked some of the like, wrong questions to the right people.

[00:22:29] **Alliah Agostini:** It's, it's a lot of trial and error. Yeah. And eventually, uh, wound up to this path. So the funny thing is, my first book was actually the Juneteenth story. It was not a book about. A little girl in her name and a book. Yeah. Which is amazing. Your name is a song Wound Up coming out probably about a year later, and I know the author Jamil now goes into, oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:22:51] **Alliah Agostini:** This is a beautiful book. I was like, oh, I'm so glad they have a book.

[00:22:55] **NeKisha Killings:** That's so funny.

[00:22:57] **Alliah Agostini:** But ironically, the My 10th book just came [00:23:00] out of a few days ago called In. Yeah, no, that's. Which is wild, just to even be able to say that. Mm-hmm. What it's called scare sighted on the first day of school. And it's a book about I love that.

[00:23:10] **Alliah Agostini:** Thank you. Thank you. It's a book of Port Monaus about social emotional learning. But there, the, the, the thing that is really the linchpin for her is the fact that she has a, a lesser practice or more uncommon name and that the teacher mispronounces. Mm. So I was able to kind of weave that bit of my experience into the book, but it's still about broader socio emotional learning.

[00:23:31] **Alliah Agostini:** So it's just funny that the, the, the topic that was the catalyst for me actually ultimately wound up coming into play about Tim Books

down the line. Mm. But publishing has weird order of how things happen anyway. Yeah, it does. Yeah.

[00:23:45] **NeKisha Killings:** Can we shift a bit to the, the Juneteenth book? Let's talk about that.

[00:23:48] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah.

[00:23:48] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** We can

[00:23:48] **Alliah Agostini:** shift

[00:23:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** to the Juneteenth. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure. Uh, so there are a lot

[00:23:51] **NeKisha Killings:** of different ways you could have gone with that title. Yes. A lot of ways. Yeah. What made you choose celebrating the end of slavery? Like using that word, putting [00:24:00] it out there?

[00:24:01] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, it's so funny, and I wish I could take full credit for it, but actually it was through collaboration with my publisher.

[00:24:07] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm.

[00:24:08] **NeKisha Killings:** Um,

[00:24:08] **Alliah Agostini:** initially the story was called, uh, the Juneteenth story by itself. Um, but then they added celebrating the end of slavery in the United States because at that point, most people didn't know what Juneteenth was. I mean, we were just at the juncture where Juneteenth was finally being put on the map and they were like, we're gonna put it out there.

[00:24:28] **Alliah Agostini:** And at that time, I think some editorial sensibilities have changed with the political climate too, to be honest with you. Yeah. But, uh, that was a really. Positive and collaborative editorial experience. I actually wound up going through a couple of editors, but they weren't afraid to really push on the topic and to share, share the real at that time, which I appreciated.

[00:24:49] **Alliah Agostini:** So where some people might potentially couch it, I think oftentimes when you see Juneteenth books, it'll just say Juneteenth or it might say something about freedom. Um, but there, put it [00:25:00] out there

like the end of slavery. They're like, we're not gonna just say freedom, you know, more broadly we're gonna say say what it is.

[00:25:07] **Alliah Agostini:** Uh, and so I I, I didn't even really reflect on, on the fact that it was different in that way until we were talking a little bit earlier and I was like, yeah, I guess that was in, in a, in a bit, a way, a bit gutsier, um, to actually be able to, to say that and to call it out what it is. Because for the, for talking about Juneteenth, it is talking about both the bitter and the sweet.

[00:25:29] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, yeah, absolutely.

[00:25:31] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And people, I mean. If you look up the book, like let's say you're on Amazon or whatever site, you know, other books will be recommended and yeah, they do not have slavery in the title. I think yours is the only children's book that probably has slavery in the title. 'cause people don't like to talk about enslavement.

[00:25:51] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** They don't, no, white people don't like to talk about it. And to be honest, you know, a lot of us black people don't, don't either. You know, we often hear like, [00:26:00] I don't wanna hear, you know, another, I don't wanna see another movie about enslavement. I'm like, there there's a million, there's a million enslavement stories.

[00:26:09] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** You know what I'm saying? Mm-hmm. That can. Come from many different angles. Um, and so it's just uncomfortable for us. So I just like Nikisha, I was like, Hmm, this is a title. Okay.

[00:26:20] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Yeah,

[00:26:21] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** yeah, yeah. No, no.

[00:26:23] **Alliah Agostini:** And even in the book itself, I talk about the fact that all black people didn't wanna talk about Juneteenth either, because I think that that's an important note.

[00:26:31] **Alliah Agostini:** I think people assume that all black people knew about Juneteenth before 2020 and 2021, in which they didn't. I think people like to assume that the path to celebrating Juneteenth into it becoming a holiday was a nice linear, like every, all black folks are aligned path and it's not. Yep. Um, I think it's just important to make sure that people know that there are different, there isn't one black opinion, right?

[00:26:55] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. And for people that were closer to having [00:27:00] lived as an enslaved person or have being a generation removed from an enslaved person, the direct trauma of having lived through that is something that everybody didn't necessarily. To, to celebrate the, the absence of, they just wanted to go about their lives.

[00:27:16] **Alliah Agostini:** And on top of that too, like there's a moment in the book where we talk about the difficulties of, of celebrating Juneteenth, especially in the earlier 19 hundreds. There's, you know, these jingoistic sensibilities in America where, you know, you don't wanna talk about anything bad about America. 'cause World War I is going on, so we're all gonna be, you know, very, uh, rah rah about America.

[00:27:40] **Alliah Agostini:** Everybody else is the enemy. America is great. We're not gonna talk about anything bad that happened. So celebrating Juneteenth, which is the absence of this thing that used to happen, does, should not happen. Mm-hmm. And, and so there's just so many different, um, different angles to it and different reasons why people would prefer to [00:28:00] not talk about it, ban it, challenge it, um, whatever.

[00:28:04] **Alliah Agostini:** But it's, but it's real. So, yeah. Um,

[00:28:07] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** yeah, in the book, I, I thought she did a great job of that, giving a. Diverse picture of, uh, people's opinion on it. And even, um, I was thinking about the federal holiday that, um, Opal Lee, who people call the mother of Juneteenth grandmother Yeah. Uh, grandmother of Juneteenth, um, pushed for, and I was wondering, how do you feel about knowing that this black woman, you know, pushed for this holiday, but there are some black people who feel like it shouldn't be a federal holiday.

[00:28:38] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** What are your thoughts about that?

[00:28:40] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah, I mean, I think that the work that she's done, it's, it's tremendous that she was able to actually see it come to fruition. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Um, nobody would've predicted that it would take a global pandemic and people's lives being lost and magnified at the same time to kind of create this perfect storm of receptivity for the [00:29:00] holiday.

[00:29:00] **Alliah Agostini:** But I'm, I'm, I'm so glad that it's acknowledged, even though it was originally a Texan holiday. It represents so many different emancipation holidays that exist throughout the country and frankly throughout

the world. And I think what it does is it, it doesn't let us forget that this country was built on the backs of enslaved people.

[00:29:22] **Alliah Agostini:** And we need to recognize that, but we also need to recognize that, you know, we're finally, you know, I guess free ish and I, I know that people may not want it to be another holiday, but I think that. What is truly, truly worth celebrating about Juneteenth is the fact that it was, I call it a FUBU holiday in a way, you know?

[00:29:44] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. It's, it's, yeah. You know, it was, it's an American holiday, but Right, right. It was started by us. Mm-hmm. It was our own response to finally getting this delayed news, and there was no core, like I know there's like some Juneteenth core committee, [00:30:00] somewhat some organization, but it doesn't really regulate all the different Juneteenth celebrations that happen across the country.

[00:30:06] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. All these celebrations that happen are pretty much independently started and perpetuated. So like the one that my grandfather helped start back in Buffalo is about to have its 50th celebration next. Wow. That's amazing. Right. And it's one of the largest continuously running celebrations of Juneteenth in the world, which people wouldn't expect from Buffalo.

[00:30:28] **Alliah Agostini:** But it happened because a group of black educators decides to come together and start. A celebration that was culturally relevant to black Americans in Buffalo at the same time that the rest of the world was getting, or the rest of the country was getting ready to celebrate America's 200th anniversary.

[00:30:46] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Right. So it was started by this group of black educators and it's continued to go on because of a group of committed volunteers and people that know that this is something important for our community and they wanna keep it going. So just as it has in the Buffalo community [00:31:00] and other communities across the country, this is something that has really been core, you know, led by us.

[00:31:05] **Alliah Agostini:** So it's just interesting to see now. Of course there are more Juneteenth celebrations. And to see how sometimes it might be like other people involved, it's like, okay, I, we, well, we appreciate allies. Just remember like, this should be led by and focused by, by us. Mm-hmm. So I know some people are like, should it actually be a national holiday?

[00:31:24] **Alliah Agostini:** This is really our holiday. I am like, well, y'all don't have to work to get the day. You know, you, you shouldn't have to take the day off as an extra now. Like this is a, it's a given for you, but for us, um, I'm, I'm so glad that we have this, um, kind of. You know, if you wanna call it the real 4th of July for some of us, um, yeah, it's, yeah.

[00:31:43] **NeKisha Killings:** Yeah. I'm interested in the, the way that it has evolved geographically. Mm-hmm. So, I grew up in Florida. I didn't know anything about a Juneteenth until I married into a family that had ties to Texas. Okay. And so then they introduced me to it, you know, 20 years ago now. Like, what, how did I miss this? My, well, I didn't know that Nikisha, like no idea n

[00:31:59] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** [00:32:00] none.

[00:32:00] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Well, I didn't know that. I didn't know that your partner's family had ties to Texas and that's how you found out about it. I didn't know that, that is how

[00:32:07] **NeKisha Killings:** I found out about it. Okay. So I'm really interested in how, um, your, your grandfather, what was, if you know, the evolution of beginning to him and him, you know, becoming, um mm-hmm.

[00:32:16] **NeKisha Killings:** Such a proponent, an advocate for it. Yeah.

[00:32:19] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. So there are a number of reasons or different ways that Juneteenth itself spread throughout the country because of Texans that obviously. But with the great migration moved throughout the country, you know, to Chicago and to California and to other places and, and, and spread the, you know, this Juneteenth celebration.

[00:32:35] **Alliah Agostini:** But I know, um, my grandfather and so he was part of an organization called Build. And they were an organization of black educators and activists in the Buffalo area who are fighting for equality for black educators and for, for equal opportunity for schooling, for, for the kids there. And they wanted to figure out.

[00:32:53] **Alliah Agostini:** If there is some kind of celebration that already existed that they could adapt and bring to [00:33:00] Buffalo. And so I think everybody did research on things that might exist, like especially emancipation celebrations. And somebody found out about, it might have been a Juneteenth celebration, is I think in, in Detroit, which is maybe about four hours.

[00:33:13] **Alliah Agostini:** And kind of like a cousin to Buffalo in a way. Yeah. And they were, they were like, this actually might be something good that we could bring, um, to our community. And they wound up, uh, getting a permit for $10, like us to have this, to have the celebration. They decided to locate, locate it on Jefferson Avenue, which at the time it, it had once been a, a hub of economic activity, um, in the black community there, but had suffered from some blight.

[00:33:41] **Alliah Agostini:** So they were excited to bring

[00:33:43] **NeKisha Killings:** some,

[00:33:44] **Alliah Agostini:** some energy over to, to Jefferson and they had the first juneteenth. There and it wound up being, you know, such a success from, and, and continuing to grow. And they ultimately had to move it to a much larger park. But because of the continuity of the celebration there and all the [00:34:00] things that they've involved, I had great pictures, a picture of my grandmother on stage with Al Sharpton and Curtis Blow 'cause like in the eighties.

[00:34:06] **Alliah Agostini:** Wow. 'cause they had like a giant Juneteenth concert. Very idiot. This is like what, you know, Reverend Al, you know, in his, in his previous state, you know, with his, with his, with his look and Curtis Blow, my grandmother was mad at Curtis Blow 'cause he was kissing the girl anyway. A,

[00:34:26] **Alliah Agostini:** she was like, he pulled the girl up on stage and he kissed and my grandmother didn't play. But anyways, um.

[00:34:31] **NeKisha Killings:** I love the vintage tea. I love it. Yes.

[00:34:34] **Alliah Agostini:** It's just like, it's a steep, it's like, especially it 40-year-old

[00:34:37] **NeKisha Killings:** tea.

[00:34:38] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. That's kind of like activist tea 'cause it was also going around good. Yeah, yeah. But, um, but you know, it it, the, it took so many different, um, iterations.

[00:34:48] **Alliah Agostini:** So they were actually be, they were actually a resource to other communities that decided they wanted to have Juneteenth celebrations. Oh wow. That's

[00:34:55] **NeKisha Killings:** amazing.

[00:34:55] **Alliah Agostini:** And, and, and, you know, to kind of be a model for it. So, so when I had the [00:35:00] opportunity to, to write this book, I wanted to make sure to bring in a little bit of my personal experience and connection to the holiday and also use it to.

[00:35:10] **Alliah Agostini:** To magnify the work that you know had been done in our community, which, so pe many people, you know, you gonna overlook Buffalo. You're think about Buffalo, you can think about chicken wings, you're gonna think about the bills, you're gonna think about snow. Mm-hmm. But nobody thinks about Buffalo. And Rick James, thank you.

[00:35:23] **Alliah Agostini:** And Rick James. Rick James, of course. My, my uncle was actually a Rick James protege. Get here. Yeah. Girl. Rick James from Buffalo. Yes, he sure is. And girl, everybody in Buffalo, like a parent of a certain age has a Rick James story. Who knew? He has a Rick James story. I'm sure. Even my auntie has a Rick James story.

[00:35:42] **Alliah Agostini:** I'm sure. It was funny. Yes. Yeah, he knocked on the door. He, it was a little confused. He knocked on my grandparents story and the whole thing. Um, so, so Lakeisha's like, yeah, it's like we can go down the bridge rabbit hole. No,

[00:35:54] **NeKisha Killings:** no tea.

[00:35:56] **Alliah Agostini:** I love it. But it's nice to be able to [00:36:00] celebrate the work that was done there.

[00:36:01] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, the timing of when the Juneteenth story itself came out actually wound up, I wouldn't have wanted to predict what happened. So. The Juneteenth story came out May 3rd, 2022.

[00:36:13] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm. On

[00:36:14] **Alliah Agostini:** May 14th, 2022, um, a white supremacist decide to come into a supermarket in Buffalo. Mm-hmm. Basically the only major

supermarket in the east side of Buffalo, which is located on Jefferson Avenue, where the first Juneteenth was held and, and murdered.

[00:36:31] **Alliah Agostini:** People, murdered and seriously wounded people. This just like rocked the community. And I think what it actually did is it showed a lot of people who didn't think much about Buffalo beyond the bills and snow and chicken wings, how big of a black community Buffalo actually had, and how very segregated it is there.

[00:36:52] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Uh, so it was, it was interesting what I wound up illuminating and it was actually also. [00:37:00] About a month before they were about to have the first Juneteenth in person since COVID because they had to go virtual. Wow.

[00:37:06] **NeKisha Killings:** Yeah.

[00:37:07] **Alliah Agostini:** Uh, for the, the previous couple of years, um, because of the pandemic and people were very, some people were very afraid to go to Juneteenth because if somebody was gonna go and target black folks in a supermarket, I mean, if you gonna go, if you wanna find more black folks going to a Juneteenth celebration at Martin Luther Park, you know, that was, that was really something.

[00:37:31] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, but what fortunately we were able to do was to make it more of the celebratory moment. So my grandfather and some of the other Juneteenth leadership was featured on the Today Show, uh, to talk about how long they had been celebrating Juneteenth and what it was like to celebrate in the aftermath of such a tragedy.

[00:37:54] **Alliah Agostini:** And it really showed people. Beyond our community, what the black community of [00:38:00] Buffalo is about. And I'm very much a product of that. Mm-hmm. And that's why I, I have so much pride in my culture and my heritage, um mm-hmm. And am honored to be able to illuminate the work of people who came before me. Um, you know, and through, through my books and, and through my commitment, um, and my focus in, in my work, the timing would, is something that I never, ever would've predicted.

[00:38:22] **Alliah Agostini:** And yeah, I wound up having an event in, um, at, at the, the Merriweather Library, which is diagonal from that very tops, which at that 0.0 wow. Which discovered in flowers. Wow. And it was, it was just, it was just very surreal. Uh, but it was. A good thing at the same time, because it

wound up being a source of pride for our community that Buffalo was being put on the map for something good, for something that we'd been doing for a long, long time.

[00:38:53] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. Um, when, you know, everybody was looking at it as, you know, in the face of tragedy. So it just wound up [00:39:00] having so many unexpected consequences. Mm-hmm. Um, but I'm, I am, I am still processing it, to be honest with you. Yeah. Even three years later.

[00:39:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. I can, yeah. I can only imagine how, so your grandfather was, you know, in the book you mentioned him and he's Mr.

[00:39:19] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Juneteenth. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Um, in your community. And how did he feel about seeing his granddaughter, you know, not only published this book about Juneteenth, but also. You know, you share your story and he's a big part of that story.

[00:39:38] **Alliah Agostini:** So first of all, my grandfather just turned 94 on Tuesday. Mm. Yes. So he is, he is.

[00:39:45] **Alliah Agostini:** He is. So with it, but he couldn't, he couldn't be prouder. He just always tells me, he's like, keep on writing girl. Just keep on writing girl. Keep on writing girl. And he's so proud of the book and I don't know how many copies of the book he has purchased to date. [00:40:00] Every single time there's a new person on the Juneteenth board, he's like, I'm gonna make sure they read your book.

[00:40:05] **Alliah Agostini:** He's gonna make sure they read your book. So I know the publisher loves to see him come when they, and he ordered some books. They're like, Hey, Mr. Price, Hey Mr. Price. You know, if with some help from my aunt, but he makes sure that people on the Juneteenth committee get the book. Other people that he knows from church get the book.

[00:40:22] **Alliah Agostini:** He's a former educator, as I mentioned. He was part of the BUILD organization as well as my grandmother. There both were. And he worked as a guidance counselor at, um, a school called Build Academy. And one thing that I really wanted to do was to get the information about Juneteenth, you know, as something to, to kind of pay it back, um, to Buffalo, to, to kids in the Buffalo Public school system.

[00:40:44] **Alliah Agostini:** And so a friend of mine, um, is an assistant principal at Build Academy and we worked with him and my family was like,

we're gonna make this happen. And so we actually wound up, um, gifting a copy of the Juneteenth story and paperback to every kid at that school. Mm. That's [00:41:00] amazing. Because something that we want them to understand that this is Build Academy, it was started by the build organization that actually made this.

[00:41:10] **Alliah Agostini:** The celebration that is going into with 50th year, and this is all connected to the school that you go to right now. So I, I think my grandfather is, is tremendously proud and also very humble at the same time because I mentioned him, but he was also very mindful to make sure that I didn't just mention him in my, in, in, in my afterward that I also mentioned some of the other leadership too.

[00:41:33] **Alliah Agostini:** And with anything that he's doing, you know, on the, you know, on the Today Show or wherever he is, he is been talking, he wants to make sure that other people are brought in too. Because my family, my family works very hard. They're all very community minded, but they're not ones to bring attention to themselves.

[00:41:49] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. So for me. I'm like, I'm gonna make sure that this, the light shines where it needs to be. I'm so proud to, you know, be from the stack of him and my, my from [00:42:00] all my grandparents, my parents. Yeah. They're all just incredible people and I'm, I'm so very much a product of them. Um, so, and I, I hear that too from people who, who, who know my family.

[00:42:10] **Alliah Agostini:** They're like, yeah, you were definitely your, your parents and your grandparents' child. And um, that's, that's such an honor.

[00:42:18] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I love that. I love that. Um, I love that part of the book too. Like when I got to that part, I was like, oh, she tells her own story too. Yeah. Because I think sometimes we think history is something that's happening outside of us.

[00:42:30] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yes. Or far from us. Um, even if we're living during the time. Yeah. We don't. Often include our story mm-hmm. When we're talking about history, you know? Um, and so I love that, uh, you included that story because I think that shows us like history is local too. It's not just Yes. National. It's not just world.

[00:42:52] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Mm-hmm. History is local too. Like maybe there's not a build in my community, but what are the organization, what are the

local [00:43:00] organizations in my community that, um, have really tried to push things forward? You know, like some, like sometimes, you know, the most people vote, you know, during the presidential election cycle.

[00:43:11] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Mm-hmm. But it's those. Those local elections, those, yeah. School board elections, those, you know, county council elections that really make a difference. And the same goes true with movement. You know, this, like you said, this holiday started because it's for us, by us, and it's started with local people.

[00:43:31] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm. Yes. In

[00:43:32] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** communities and the word spread in different ways too, in different, in, in different ways. So I think it's so important and you know, then at the end, like you ask a question like what is, you know, what is your story? I think it just helps us to be mindful that we have history. It's not, it's not something that's.

[00:43:51] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Happening far away from us, you know? Mm-hmm. So, I I, I really, really love that you included that

[00:43:57] **Alliah Agostini:** part. Yeah, no, no, thank you. And it's funny 'cause I think your [00:44:00] reflections are really important because the more we realize that our stories and our experiences are actually part of history, the more I think people will feel empowered to record that and to share it.

[00:44:11] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Because it makes it feel relevant, right? Because so much of what we experienced we're just like, this is this my experience? I don't think anybody else really cares. This is not part of history. This is not part of the narrative. But it's like, no, it's like be part of controlling the narrative, be part of controlling history because so much has been lost.

[00:44:28] **Alliah Agostini:** I mean, you think about how much of our traditions, of course, you know, was, was, was lost, you know, during. The, the, basically the black Holocaust, you know what I mean? Mm-hmm. Yeah. As you know, as, as people were, were crossing the, the, the ocean in the most horrific ways, you know, how much of our history is at the bottom of, of the Atlantic, but how much we are able to, to still share despite it, you know, there's still points of connectivity through oral tradition, et cetera.

[00:44:55] **Alliah Agostini:** I mean, man, imagine if we had been allowed and not punished to be [00:45:00] able to read and, and write on how much more could be shared. So I think that that's even more empowering to realize, help people understand that history is happening every single day. So even though it's current right now, it'll be history in the future.

[00:45:13] **Alliah Agostini:** So make sure that you are still sharing your story and make sure that you, you realize how relevant they are. And I do a presentation, um, in schools sometimes. Actually, I did one the other day and. It, it, it talks about, you know, like why your story matters. Because for instance, for me, writing the Juneteenth story, Juneteenth was just what we went through.

[00:45:34] **Alliah Agostini:** It was what we did. Mm-hmm. You know, I didn't think twice about it. Especially when you're a kid, you're like, I go to the Juneteenth celebration. Mm-hmm. Sometimes I help. With my, our, our family has a food stand or I help sell snow cones. Or maybe we make little crafts. Or maybe this year we're just more so walking around talking to everybody because everybody knows my auntie and she's like the mayor of Buffalo, so we're gonna stop every two seconds, you know, and say hi to somebody.

[00:45:56] **Alliah Agostini:** And then other people that we see are cousins. 'cause we have bazillion cousins running around [00:46:00] Buffalo, you know? And so I just, you know, think about it that way, but it wasn't for me personally until I, I left Buffalo and tried to find a Juneteenth celebration. So I, I went to, um, you know, and I, and I was like in Boston and I was like, where's Juneteenth?

[00:46:13] **Alliah Agostini:** I was gonna Juneteenth. Yeah. Were you able to find one at Harvard? I mean, no. I mean, think there were black communities in, in the Boston area, but I didn't really see much of the Juneteenth. Mm-hmm. Even when I was living in New York too, I was like, where's Juneteenth? And they're like, oh, we have like Harlem Week.

[00:46:29] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, we've got some other stuff, you know, we've got other African American celebrations, but, but Juneteenth wasn't one of them. And someone was like, oh. I guess Buffalo is special in that way. Yeah. Yeah. It is. It is. And you know, that's when you start realizing in the absence of what you had, that, that, that is actually special.

[00:46:43] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, I love that love. So it's gone. You know, I love that.

[00:46:47] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I love that when the book came out and this really tragic thing happened. Mm-hmm. Right? Like, and then they were, they still move forward with the Juneteenth celebration. You still move forward with your event, but you still [00:47:00] acknowledged, uh, that, you know, tragedy happening and it's something that you're still processing.

[00:47:05] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Like I think, I think you, you mentioning that and talking about still processing it too is like history is not. Just a set of events. Mm-hmm. There's like emotion, emotion around it, you know, like, like when you talk about the Juneteenth celebrations, a lot of joy, you know what I'm saying? Yeah. But also one thing that I, I think you capture in the book is the mo the emotions and the complex feelings, um, around Juneteenth because of, uh, the history that brought it to fruition.

[00:47:37] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I love that you talked about it in that way, like you were trying to hold mm-hmm. Two things like this wonderful mm-hmm. You know, book came about, but also something really tragic happened in our community that's tied to the history, um, of this country. And, and your grandfather didn't run away from that, and you didn't run away from it at the, uh, event either.

[00:47:56] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I think you're, I don't know if this is your intention, but I think [00:48:00] you're just giving a lot of. Information about how to protest and hold history, you know? Yeah. Like, it's not just a set of events, but there's more to it than that. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:48:11] **Alliah Agostini:** No, I, I appreciate that. And it's funny, I don't know if it was my, my, my conscious intention necessarily.

[00:48:17] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. But definitely subconsciously, it's something that I. Stand and, and realize. Yeah. And perhaps, you know, through writing it and providing different perspectives, um, it, it, it accomplishes that, that goal.

[00:48:29] **NeKisha Killings:** I wonder, Aaliyah, our audience, as you know, are black mama creatives. Mm-hmm. Um, and you are certainly the quintessential Yeah.

[00:48:36] **NeKisha Killings:** Black mama creatives, all of us. Uh, I wonder if you can share with them, because many of us, myself included, have some books that are still locked inside Yeah. That have not made it out yet. Um, a bit

about how you got to the place of actually having something to hold Yeah. And share with the world. Yeah.

[00:48:54] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. I'm curious another too, like how were you, like you said you just talked to people, like was there any fear or apprehension [00:49:00] about just like, Hey, I'm trying to publish some book. What, you know, can you gimme something on that? Like, yeah. You know, was there anything around that?

[00:49:06] **Alliah Agostini:** I think e eventually, I kind of just got to this point where I was like.

[00:49:11] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, like mm-hmm. I mouth the word, you know, blanket, you know, I was like, I just wanna kind of, I'm just gonna like stumble around in the dark until I find, get some information. It is sometimes like who, you know. And for advocacy, my husband knew what I was trying to work on, and a friend of his from college was a published middle grade author.

[00:49:28] **Alliah Agostini:** And, um, you know, I know what it is now because, you know, for a lot of people mm-hmm. Like, I'm like the one author they know. And so this was during the pandemic, it was 2020. Um, and he, so funny story. Um, he used to be in this dance group in college. Like, he was like, basically he was like, I would stand in the middle and then the girls would like dance around me and I would just do like a little thing like Yeah.

[00:49:49] **Alliah Agostini:** So, so, yes, exactly. I was like, all right, so you were like the fly boy. I don't, I don't even know what they called. It was like the hip hop dance. Re did you even dance? Exactly. So they had, [00:50:00] um, they were trying to do like a virtual reunion and watch some of the, the dance videos, and they did it on Facebook and they must have tagged a bunch of, I'm

[00:50:07] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** sorry, I'm still stuck.

[00:50:08] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I know

[00:50:10] **Alliah Agostini:** about and

[00:50:11] **NeKisha Killings:** still, you know what she's talking about. You have seen it? Yes.

[00:50:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. Right. But I'm still stuck. Listeners, have y'all moved on? Do you even know what the rest was? Because girl. Okay,

but okay, guess we gotta have you come back because you have tea. You have, you have some. Yes, you do. You have some.

[00:50:35] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I'm you, you have some civil rights tea. You got this nineties Gen X tea. Yes. So, yeah, we gotta have you come back. He's just gonna be girl. I could talk with

[00:50:48] **NeKisha Killings:** sole girl. I can,

[00:50:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I could be a segment.

[00:50:50] **Alliah Agostini:** I could talk all day. What did you think when he said that? Like, okay, did y'all go to co, did y'all go to college together?

[00:50:55] **Alliah Agostini:** No, we didn't. So we didn't meet until, um, I was. I was [00:51:00] living in New York after college. Okay. But, but he went to, he went to Dartmouth and so he was up in the woods. You know, he is a brother for Brooklyn, he's American for Brooklyn. And you know, there were black folks up there too. Um, but you know, everybody that was in the dance troupe wasn't necessarily, but I did know that he could dance.

[00:51:16] **Alliah Agostini:** And it's funny because that actually led into my, the book that got me Agented is about the, is inspired by him and the fact that no, the dance hall book. The

[00:51:24] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** dance hall. The dance hall

[00:51:25] **Alliah Agostini:** book. It's inspired by him. It's girl. I haven't, I haven't read it, but I

[00:51:30] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** love the title Girl. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Inside it's like

[00:51:33] **Alliah Agostini:** this one right here.

[00:51:34] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, girl. Oh my gosh. So anyway, so he was in this dance group and they were trying to have this virtual reunion on Facebook, and he didn't know what he is doing. He just like scrolls, like constantly, and they must have like, added him to something and then he accidentally pressed the button. He was like, oh, wait a minute.

[00:51:48] **Alliah Agostini:** I'm on this, this like meeting with all these people from the dance group, whatever. So he's like, Hey, hey, hey. And then he happened to talk to the one girl who's like a middle grade author and he was like, you know, I know you're, you've been, I've been [00:52:00] working for a while, like maybe for about a year at that point, trying to figure out, you know, what to do and kind of mm-hmm.

[00:52:06] **Alliah Agostini:** Crumbling around in the dark. I'd done some research on like the Society of Children's book Writers and Illustrators. Mm-hmm. Um, which I'd heard about through a friend of a friend who was also trying to pursue publishing. Um, I'd signed up for. The QUALY Conference, which I still haven't gotten to go to in person, I've only gone virtually, which is basically like a, you know, a, a conference for people that are in, uh, publishing for, for children of color especially.

[00:52:31] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Um. So I, I've been trying and learning and kind of stumbling in the dark and doing a little bit of queering to agents and he was like, if you want, maybe I can introduce you to my friend who's a middle grade author. And I was like, no, I'm gonna figure it out myself. 'cause I'm, you know, an independent, what I know exactly.

[00:52:47] **Alliah Agostini:** I mean, we all do

[00:52:48] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** it, right? We, we do it, we all do it, but I just, we do it. Can you, do you know why you have that feeling? Because I don't know why I have that feeling, so I'm trying to like, yeah, I'm, why, why do we do that? Like,

[00:52:57] **Alliah Agostini:** yeah, because I'm like, I'm gonna do it myself. I can do it myself. He is like, okay, [00:53:00] whatever.

[00:53:00] **Alliah Agostini:** And the thing is like, somehow I just wind up being, um, a natural connector of people. I don't know, I just, just plugged into certain networks and just wound up knowing a lot of people. So like, I think one of my gifts is, is connecting people, but it's weird for somebody else to do that for me, which is I'm sure that's, that's something that a lot of people, yeah.

[00:53:17] **Alliah Agostini:** So anyways, eventually I, it was my, my birthday was coming up. I'm in August. Leo, Leo made, wait. Somebody

[00:53:24] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** else. Leo is a Leo, she's not here. She's gonna hate she missed out. Yeah. I knew. I was like, Leo not here. I was like,

[00:53:29] **NeKisha Killings:** I knew one. Yes. I knew one of your husband. Yeah. Second child, husband and, and second child.

[00:53:34] **NeKisha Killings:** I have

[00:53:34] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** one in, I have one in my house. We did all Leo's. Yes.

[00:53:36] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah.

[00:53:37] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** My, uh, middle son and my sister are August Leo's. Yeah.

[00:53:41] **Alliah Agostini:** Okay. So August Leo's. Yeah. Got a lot of love for us. Yeah. Mm-hmm. But you know, you know, I was an August Leo and I was like, okay, for my birthday gifts are not like my love language really, but, you know, meaningful things are.

[00:53:52] **Alliah Agostini:** So I was like, okay, you can introduce me to your friend. And so he sent her an email and she was like, okay. Sure. And I know, you know, a lot of people [00:54:00] were like, I got this one random idea for a book. Yeah. You like write it for it, you know, you get these inquiries all the time. Yes. But I think by the time I actually spoke to her, I had done a lot of research and I'd, I'd written a fair number of things and so she was like, oh, you're actually like more serious than the typical inquiry that I get.

[00:54:16] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. You know, it was during the pandemic where we were all on Zoom. Her name is Tara De and I call her my, my friend tour now, my friend and mentor. And she's like, she was starting a, um, critique group with a few other authors that she knew that were published. And she's like, I'm starting a picture book critique group.

[00:54:33] **Alliah Agostini:** But she's like, or also, you know, we could also just like work one-on-one in a mentorship. And I was like, you know what, like, this is really generous of you. Um, but you know, I, I was like, I'll join in your critique group and we'll see what happens. And so we would meet monthly and we would share each other's work.

[00:54:46] **Alliah Agostini:** It was me and everybody else was a white woman, but they were all, they're all very nice, you know. And, um, every month I would come with a new book and they're like, you know, that's not normal, right? Not in a bad way.

[00:54:59] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I mean, you're, but [00:55:00] they're like, yeah, like, like you've, the amount that you've written in a, like, it's really been a short amount of time.

[00:55:07] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** It's really prolific. It really is.

[00:55:09] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. And I have a spreadsheet with like. Dozens of books and things that I started. Oh, okay. Yeah. So that's not even, that's not even all of 'em, trust me. Ah, yeah, yeah. Um, lot. Okay, we're gonna talk about that too. Let me put that down. Mm-hmm. It's got a lot going on. Write a note

[00:55:23] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** in that, talk about that.

[00:55:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** But, but I

[00:55:26] **Alliah Agostini:** was bringing something new every time and, and they were, they were like, you know, a couple of them were agent and they were like, I can introduce you to my agent, potentially, which was helpful. And of course the first one's agent declined, which was fine. Uh, but you know, I kept on writing and writing and I had this one book that I really loved and they actually loved it too, but it was getting rejected.

[00:55:48] **Alliah Agostini:** It's called The Dancing Lady. And I still love that book. Um, and it's kind of inspired by like a lady in my neighborhood who is. She literally like walked dance, walks through the neighborhood and she's amazing and brought [00:56:00] us so much joy anyways. Um, but somebody was like, what if the kids in the book were a little bit scared to dance?

[00:56:06] **Alliah Agostini:** And that brought me down like another trail altogether. And I thought about these stories that my husband used to talk about when he was a kid growing up in Brooklyn and you know, this big, you know, Jamaican family and his family used to have these big parties. He was kind of shy. He would hang to the back, you know, everybody else was dancing, having a good time, you know, the kids might be upstairs or whatever.

[00:56:25] **Alliah Agostini:** But he would come downstairs and he would clean up the bottles, the cans. Mm-hmm. And he would take them for, uh, for coin collection because we'd do coin return up here and he would be able to collect the money. And he hung back and, and did that. But the funny thing is he's actually the best dancer I know and a lot of his family members didn't even realize he could dance until they came to our wedding.

[00:56:45] **Alliah Agostini:** They were like.

[00:56:49] **Alliah Agostini:** So, so it was, his name is LaVar, but um, his family calls him Shane to have like a house name, you know, I know most motherfuckers do, but it's, it's common in, in different [00:57:00] ways. And so I was thinking about that and I was like, wait a minute, what if I created a story kind of around that? And that's how the story Big Tune was born.

[00:57:08] **Alliah Agostini:** So actually I have it. It's, this is the back cover right here? Yeah. Mm-hmm. Um, so Big Tune rises to the Dance Hall Prince, and it's written in Rhyme and it's about this little boy. His family has these big parties and he's kind of shy and hangs back and he's saving money for a pair of sneakers. And then the.

[00:57:24] **Alliah Agostini:** Party is about to be canceled because the speakers vote and he does it to a big act to save the party. And it talks about the importance of parties, especially in immigrant communities because it's not just about partying, it's about, uh, my favorite refrain in it is, um, is as a line, which is actually on the back of the book, which is.

[00:57:41] **Alliah Agostini:** Brown skin, shine shines with black lights, glow. It's like, you know, when you're in the company of, you know, your people, especially the people that you know are from where you're from, like your accent can be a little bit louder. My dad is also, you know, Caribbean, he's from Guyana. So it's, it is always fun to see him in his element with his, his, his cousins, because he's been [00:58:00] here since he was 13.

[00:58:00] **Alliah Agostini:** But like, when you're with your people, it's like, yeah, your accent, you don't have to hide anymore. Yeah. You don't have to explain anything. And so Shane, the little boy in the book, knows how important this is for his family to have this moment. And so he makes this big sacrifice, but they also realize that this baby shouldn't be making this sacrifice and so they pay it back to him.

[00:58:19] **Alliah Agostini:** So that actually wound up being the book that ultimately got me an agent because although my friend tours. Agent passed. She passed my, my manuscripts along to another agent in the agency who identified with the book, although she's from Wisconsin. Um, this is my former agent actually, but her, her husband was, uh, Caribbean, and she kind of connected with the story and saw it, and she was also an author and worked a lot in rhyme.

[00:58:44] **Alliah Agostini:** So she's able to help me hone it, get it out for submission, and it wound up getting a two book deal. And that was, that was how I ultimately kind of got agent and, and kind of the ball kind of started from there. Go ahead. I have

[00:58:58] **NeKisha Killings:** a, I, I, yeah. Not even a [00:59:00] question. I, I think is a statement, but you'll elaborate.

[00:59:03] **NeKisha Killings:** Um, yeah. Um, for those who are listening, he was like, you know what? I've been meaning to write a book, but I'm gonna switch to children's book now. 'cause that word count is real small. Yeah. I think I'm gonna go with children. I, I bet it is as difficult if not even more, because every word counts so much.

[00:59:22] **Alliah Agostini:** Yes, yes. In children's

[00:59:23] **NeKisha Killings:** book writing. Oh

[00:59:24] **Alliah Agostini:** yes. You know, you know, because children's books are getting shorter and shorter too. Now the Juneteenth story is wordier than your typical picture book. 'cause it's a work of nonfiction and actually it's kind of classified as middle grade, which is more like your nine 12.

[00:59:39] **Alliah Agostini:** Interesting. Which is interesting. People don't realize that. So sometimes people will be like, can, can you come and read the book? I'm like. Warning. Warning, this is, you know, it's a lot more words. So sometimes I have to paraphrase when I'm, I'm reading it. Yeah. But for the other books that I have, especially the ones that are fiction, those typically have to be 500 words or less.

[00:59:58] **Alliah Agostini:** Oh wow. So think about it, you have a [01:00:00] whole story. You would to have to tell a whole story, develop multiple characters, you know, provide a setting and provide a setup for how things are, the, the, the catalyst for a conflict. You know, the three steps of resolution, you know, and a satisfying conclusion all in 500 words.

[01:00:18] **Alliah Agostini:** And I think it was, you know, I know like moms, but Mark Twain that said like, if I had more time, I would've wrote a shorter book. Right. Because it's like you gotta, you know, you have to condense really important information in a really big story into a small amount of time. So sometimes it works, but you talk to people, and even though it might seem like a more simple book, it's like that book might have taken that person that.

[01:00:38] **Alliah Agostini:** Dozens of years to kind of edits to where it is it edits. Because it's not that you're like sitting at your computer being like the, you know, like once a day, but you know, you're coming back to it at different points because you kind of have to let it sit in simmer and figure out how to, to, to position it in the way that, that it really needs to be.

[01:00:57] **Alliah Agostini:** So it's, it's, it's tricky. Um, it's [01:01:00] like people, I guess, like pilots that can like. Fly to Asia versus people that can do shorter distances. You know, there are different skill sets in a sense. Yeah. So, you know, sometimes you'll see novelists that are like, oh yeah, I'm gonna write my first children's book, I'm gonna write my first picture book.

[01:01:14] **Alliah Agostini:** And they're like, oh, wait a minute. This mess is hard. Yeah. That's more, I imagine. So I knew you were gonna say that, that Yeah. But I mean, it goes both ways too. It goes both ways. Yeah. For writing something that's longer.

[01:01:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Something that, uh, I wanted to you to expand on was community. Mm-hmm. So first of all, you have a really, really strong community.

[01:01:33] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I remember when we did an IG Live and I was like, oh, she has community. Because yeah, you can tell the people who have community when they come on the podcast, when we do an IG live because your people show up. You know? Yeah. Like there are people who have an audience and they're people who have a community.

[01:01:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Community. Yeah. And if you have a community, they show up for your audience might be like, I'm gonna catch it. Maybe I will, maybe I won't. But your community shows up and supports you so you have a really strong [01:02:00] community. And you talked about, um, yeah. I know this is something that a lot of we're artists, we're sensitive about our shit.

[01:02:07] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Right, exactly. And so say that. Yeah, say that. So going into a group where you're being critiqued. Mm-hmm. Had you ever been in a group

[01:02:17] **Alliah Agostini:** before? You know, I have to say something. I'm so glad I came to writing at this point of maturity in my life. You needed something under you. You need a little, little, you need to have a little bit, yet your skin has to get thick.

[01:02:32] **Alliah Agostini:** You know what? I had to be through some like corporate trauma, some other stuff, like I'm learning something new. Because a lot of people figure it out. A lot of people handle it won't,

[01:02:40] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** and a lot of people won't even do. Won't even do groups, you know? Yeah, yeah. Because won't do workshop. Mm-hmm. Because of the, you know, the critiquing.

[01:02:52] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Was that, was that your first group, is my question? Yeah. And the other thing is, you said most of them are white. Mm-hmm. So that's different, right? Mm-hmm. Um, I know [01:03:00] I'm, well, no, I've done a, a group where there were white people in it. No, I've done a couple, so let me not say that. But yeah, I'm thinking like, no, I have.

[01:03:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So how do you handle critique? How do you absorb or take critique? Mm-hmm.

[01:03:17] **Alliah Agostini:** A lot of writers I know are in, or have been in critique groups, um, and everybody isn't, you know, necessarily built for. They don't, they don't like to do that. But for me, um, I'm just so glad I had something under me at that point, and I knew that I, you know, I still had a lot to learn.

[01:03:32] **Alliah Agostini:** I, I take critiques and I, I listen to them and I know it's coming from a place of respect. I think I, I have a lot of respect for the women that I, I worked with and they also knew, you know, things that might be cultural and different that they're like, I probably don't have like a real lens on that. So I, you know, I'm not gonna, you know, try to, um, you know.

[01:03:51] **Alliah Agostini:** Change your, your, your judgment or something on that. So they understood like what their limitations were too, which I, I respect. I realized that it's important for growth. And then you [01:04:00] also realize as you become more sure of your abilities, you know, as you're growing as a writer, because eventually it's less so maybe working with your critique group and then eventually working with your editor as you're going back and forth on edits, like the power of, um.

[01:04:15] **Alliah Agostini:** Asserting your point of view and saying stat, like stat is like a term that I, I learned, you know, as we were going through revisions and that's means like you disagree with like a revision or something. And you're gonna say that, what's the word again? I never heard this stat. STET. Okay. Stat. I don't know what it like, what it's sup, where it comes from, whatever.

[01:04:33] **Alliah Agostini:** I just know you put. You put it in there, you like stat, stat I'm that, you know, you can start saying that your kids like, you think you gonna do that? Or step that, bring that the new, like what, what, what even is that? What is that? Whatever. Too funny. It's like sc like, I don't know what it is. Like whatever.

[01:04:51] **Alliah Agostini:** It's fine. I know what it means. Yeah. I know what it mean. Like you, you know what it means, like step that. Mm-hmm. Um, and you know, you start, I [01:05:00] start realizing your power more so, but it can, it's, it's not for the faint of heart. And I, I can tell you like young Aaliyah was not very receptive to criticism.

[01:05:08] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. I mean, obviously like I'm a bit of like, you know, of, of recovering perfectionism. Mm-hmm. In some ways, you know, you have to figure out like what. Critique is good for you. And, and what's just critique for critiques sake too, right? Because there's some people that just wanna be critical because they, they wanna add their 2 cents and there's other people that are really doing it to help you grow.

[01:05:28] **Alliah Agostini:** And, and so there's, there's an element of discernment that comes with, um, that process as well, which, yeah. You know, as aary, I, yeah.

[01:05:35] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. I have found that, um, it, I think that age and maturity does play a big part. Um, I, I know when I've been in groups and I've gotten feedback from like the facilitator of the group, I've had to like, get somebody else to look at their actual critique and be like, am I tripping?

[01:05:55] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Or, you know, because I'm so close to it. Or if I feel like they're [01:06:00] not getting it, I can't. I couldn't really hear what they were trying to tell me. So I would have to give those critiques to somebody else and they would be like, yeah, you tripping. He's, they're actually saying this and they're, this is not like, they're not ripping you to shreds.

[01:06:17] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** This is like some really, really helpful, you know, stuff. And I've had a friend do that to me as well. Like, I've read her critiques from, you know, an editor. I'm like, well actually he's not, you're tripping girl. You know, because I immediately go and say, well, you know, it's a whole bunch of white folks in here and he's white.

[01:06:33] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** They didn't get it. Yeah. And she's like, yeah, nah, it ain't that. You're tripping. So it's, it's tough. So I, I thought it was really

interesting that you were able to jump in, but I do think, like you said, that maturity piece is like, this is not personal.

[01:06:46] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm. Do you know what I'm saying?

[01:06:48] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Mm-hmm. And also having the discernment.

[01:06:50] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So it is like you have to hold two things. You have to hold, like this is not personal, but also having the discernment to know like, yeah, but this person is coming from. [01:07:00] Not a helpful or genuine place mm-hmm. That can actually like, add to my work. So you, you had that part of community. How has community helped you as a black mama creative, um, in other ways?

[01:07:11] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Because you, I mean, you, you really have a community. We, from that, from that Instagram live, like, people started following us. I was like, who are these people?

[01:07:19] **NeKisha Killings:** Oh, good. I'm so glad. That's, that's the goal. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. They started

[01:07:22] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** following us from the Instagram Live and when I would click on who they were, they were black children, authors, black children, authors Uhhuh.

[01:07:28] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And I was like, oh, wow. Like, yeah. Good. We really have a strong community.

[01:07:31] **Alliah Agostini:** Good. Yeah. You know, I, I attribute a lot of it to the fact that I really started, you know, blossoming and, and, and, uh, kid lit during the, the pandemic. Mm-hmm. And it was ironically, even though we were so isolated, you know, physically, people were building bridges and connections over Zoom so much.

[01:07:47] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. And. The work of an author is very, you know, relatively isolating anyways. You're writing at home in your office or maybe a coffee shop if you want a little bit of background noise. And there were different networks that we're [01:08:00] building and an effort to build more community and to build more pipeline for, for black authors and authors of color in particular.

[01:08:08] **Alliah Agostini:** And I, I'm, I'm quick to, to join those too. I was always in know and you're like the black student Association and whatever. Yeah, yeah. You know, and, and in school and, and to be active and a part of it. And obviously community is something that I grew up with and so it's something I'm familiar with and I understand the power of too.

[01:08:22] **Alliah Agostini:** So, you know, part of, you know, black creators, um. Hq, which is an organization for like black authors and illustrators, um, as well as, um, kid lit in color, which is less active now. But it's a, a group of, um, uh, you know, call it bi bipoc creators, you know, a lot of black women in Indian, um, Asian, a group of us together, um, who, you know, help elevate each other's work.

[01:08:46] **Alliah Agostini:** And then also we have, uh, debut groups too. So there are people that know that they're going to be launching their book in the same year and we work together because you realize that publishers, even though it seems, you know, you think about. What a book launch [01:09:00] party looks like from, you know, sex in the City or the old, you know, or the shows from back in the day.

[01:09:04] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. And there's, there's balloons and publicists and T shares or whatever. And that happens from maybe like 1% of authors, but the rest of us are out there, thug it, you know, scrap, you know, you like, I made these cupcakes for you, your book coming out,

[01:09:19] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** girl, when is your book coming out? You wanna do something together?

[01:09:22] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah, exactly. No.

[01:09:24] **Alliah Agostini:** So it's a lot of that. So it's like, you know, we're helping boost each other in our work. Mm-hmm. Because we're using the power of our collective. Followings to make sure that things are are happening. You know, there's some people that you wind up vibing with just organically and then you connect with them and you talk to them and you bitch and moan about, you know, whatever's going on in the industry and also life in general and developed friendships there.

[01:09:44] **Alliah Agostini:** And to talk about your experiences because I think so much of what happened in the past, um, had happened in isolation and we, the power of of community. So I'm just grateful for the people that were like,

Hey, I see you over there, new author, like, you should come over here and join this zoom. Like, we have this one amazing [01:10:00] thing that happens.

[01:10:01] **Alliah Agostini:** Like twice, a twice a year. And I call it like Bookshelf Live. Like I'm on this Zoom, like, I'm like, do I belong here? And it's, you know, lots of names, you know, I see in the corner of the Zoom. I'm just like, but you're like on all the syllabi. Mm. Like, do I, should I be, I guess I'm an author person. It's like, I'm an author, author.

[01:10:17] **Alliah Agostini:** Am I author enough? You know, and, and, and, and it's wonderful. But then you just, you join these networks and you realize that so many of us are. Are dealing with a lot of the same challenges. And so we use it as, um, a way to learn from one another and to grow in our craft and also our savviness and understanding what our, our strength and our power is as creatives and as the industry continues to change, especially in the advent of things that are directly targeting authors of color, like book bands and challenges, as well as the influence of technology too, that wants to basically take what we, we've made and, and, and replace us.

[01:10:55] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, there's just so much that we really need to, to do, to work together too. So [01:11:00] I'm, I'm grateful to have been part of these communities and to continue to be, because it's, it's really like we all, we got. Yes. You really are. You really are.

[01:11:09] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So, um, you talked about community and how important that was to your process, and I wanted to talk to you about idea management.

[01:11:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yes. Because I think that that is something that Black Mama created specifically faced because yeah, we're managing a lot of things. Mm-hmm. Mentally and emotionally. So you have these ideas that are constantly popping into your head. And I often tell young black mama creatives new, new moms who are black mama creatives that, you know, use notes on your phone, use the voice memo on your phone, like you don't have to fully write the idea.

[01:11:44] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Now, you may not even have the nuts and bolts of the idea, you just may have the idea, but I feel like if you. If you do that, you're like sending a message to the universe that like, Hey, this is important. This is something that I wanna keep, this is something that I wanna grow. [01:12:00] You know? And then you are also not putting the pressure on yourself of judging the idea.

[01:12:04] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Like, ah, this is, yeah. Because I feel like if it's in your head too long, you can just be like, ah, this is stupid. Nobody's gonna like it, or, or whatever. You can just begin to have negative thoughts about it. So when you said that you did that, I was like, oh, wow. So what did, what prompted you to do that? Or was it just, was it just, you know, it was

[01:12:21] **Alliah Agostini:** instinct.

[01:12:22] **Alliah Agostini:** It was just instinct really. I mean, I'm trying to remember when I started using Evernote, but like I realized that there was a point when I think my dad and I are similar in a lot of different ways. Like, he used to have these idea notebooks and he'd give me one too. Mm-hmm. Like, he like those old steno pads.

[01:12:36] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. Write down, you know, ideas for just anything, you know. He, he worked for like a, for HSBC, you know, for the bank or whatever. But he is still a creative guy and he, you just like write down ideas here and there. So this is almost like my digital answer to like the, the path of the past. So I'm realizing that as I'm speaking to you, actually, it's not something, a realization I had before.

[01:12:58] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, and you know, it gives you, [01:13:00] Evernote itself gives you the ability to separate things into different notepads or like, or notebooks. Mm-hmm. So I have like one that's like children's book ideas. I have another one that, I mean, I wanna write all the things. My husband, LaVar, he always tells me that I'm basically like, um.

[01:13:16] **Alliah Agostini:** If you remember Brian coming to America, there was the girl when they went on the dates at the, at the club, and there was one that's like, I wanna be a movie producer, and then I wanna be a start of my own videos. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So that's basically my spirit animal. But anyways, but anyways, I would, I would go into, I would note, and I'd put down ideas for, for children's books, and every now and then I'd go back into them and, you know, see where something is.

[01:13:39] **Alliah Agostini:** And sometimes I might, um, if I see some inspiration, maybe I take a picture of it or I just record myself saying it. Um, but I just wanted to make sure that those ideas weren't lost because, you know, I, I hate when you have that idea that's so amazing that you don't write it down and then you're just, you know, just, it's gone, going in your brain and then it's gone.

[01:13:58] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. And it's like, it doesn't have to be [01:14:00] gone. We have so many tools at our disposal, and so those are, those are helpful for me. And sometimes things just can't just. I say they keep on tapping on my brain. Like sometimes people tap on my brain and I'm like, I need to reach out to you and see how you're doing.

[01:14:12] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah, yeah. You know, ideas will do the same thing. Yeah,

[01:14:16] **NeKisha Killings:** yeah. Mm-hmm.

[01:14:17] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. And sometimes you just gotta sit down with it. Right. It's like, I know we're busy and you have the time. There's some people that are like, I'm in the 4:00 AM Writers Club. I get up at four o'clock in the morning and I write however many words until 6:00 AM I'm like, Isha.

[01:14:33] **Alliah Agostini:** Exactly. I'm in Lakeisha's camp. I'm like, bless your horse. That is, that's amazing. I'm like, and I love that for you. Love. I love that for you. But you know what I do, 4:00 AM to 6:00 PM is like the same as my like. 11:38 PM to like sometimes 1:00 AM or one 30, you know, am because I'm more, I become more of a night owl.

[01:14:53] **Alliah Agostini:** And I don't know if it's something that happened in motherhood too, but it's just like that, the silence of the night, I'm like, I'm gonna get ready for bed. [01:15:00] And then something just like strikes me and I'm like, you know, and it, and all of a sudden I need to go upstairs and, and, you know, and go into my office and just like, write something out rough.

[01:15:09] **Alliah Agostini:** Like, that's kind of like what happened with, with, with Big Tune for instance, because it was another idea for a story before, but then something, it was like all the stars aligned and I was, I had this like, I think I clearly know what I want. And of course it did take some, some honing and some editing down down the line too, but.

[01:15:28] **Alliah Agostini:** Sometimes you just gotta sit down and bang it out. Especially when it just keeps on tapping on your brain. You can't ignore it.

[01:15:33] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah, I love that. I love tools for idea management, like we don't have to, um, let them go. So I have two more questions that I wanna ask you. So why children's books?

[01:15:44] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm.

[01:15:44] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Number one, what drew you you to that?

[01:15:47] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And also how did your daughter become a part of your unboxings when you get your Oh, so when she ever, she gets her book, I re, I think, I don't know what book it was, but it came, you [01:16:00] know, like it was like a cover reveal, right? Yeah. So the book came and she opened the box Uhhuh, and you were like. Did you open my butt?

[01:16:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And she was like, yeah, you were like, but it wasn't yours. Did you know? She was like, yeah, I knew it was yours. I knew it was your books. I wanted to see it. You all have turned it into like a ritual now where she's a part of your cover rebuild. So my first question is, why children's books? Because you know, a lot of people are Yes, I'm a right, I want to be a novelist novel, you know?

[01:16:29] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** No shame on that. That's fine. Yeah. Yeah. But, um, you know, why children's books and also how does your daughter become a part of your, uh, your cover reveals?

[01:16:38] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. So why children's books? Well, first off, um, I think a lot of why I do some of the things I do is because, you know, I see a gap that I wanna fill and I, you know, as a mother that's so something that's so core and so part, it's such a strong part of my identity right now and making sure that I have things that my children and, you know, their friends and [01:17:00] our family members, um, could read.

[01:17:03] **Alliah Agostini:** That was, that spoke to them. It was something that was important to me. And I was like, okay, well if I can't find what I want, maybe I need to make it myself, you know, maybe I need to know about it myself. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And, and, um, I just remember how, how much I loved to read and I was a kid. Mm-hmm. I mean, I couldn't wait to go to school because I just went to learn how to read so badly.

[01:17:23] **Alliah Agostini:** And I, I remember, you know, the moments when I could like, you know, go to the, the bookstore across the street from my little music school that I went to. With my mom, mom and I would pick out like a Miy book or like a, um, a little Ms. Little Mr book. And it was like, you know, it was like the, the biggest delight for me, or when I got the, the school order, you know, the scholastic book order forms for the troll book order forms.

[01:17:46] **Alliah Agostini:** Ah, and I would go, yeah. You remember those? Yeah. Yeah. I would, you know, I would order, I'd order joke books actually, because I'm so corny, like, again, like my dad, no, I love, I, I I,

[01:17:58] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I order joke books for my kids. [01:18:00] Ti comedic timing is very important to me. Yeah. We actually went through a phase where, uh, when we, when we have our movie night, we have an intermission and we get up and tell jokes.

[01:18:11] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I love that. Yeah. I love, yeah, that's, I love joke books

[01:18:14] **Alliah Agostini:** because people don't realize how like, smart you have to be to be funny. It's about, mm-hmm. Yeah. Making these unexpected linkages and then that, that, that space where you're making the, the connection, it's that that laughter is that unexpected reaction to it.

[01:18:27] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. They're, they're, they're really important. So That's so true. I joke book and then of course, you know, because there were barely any books with, with black people on the cover. My mother would, you know, go through every single one and she'd find, anytime she could find like a, a black character. It's like mu beautiful daughters or whatever.

[01:18:43] **Alliah Agostini:** She's like, lemme put that on your list, you know? That's it. And I'd get the books and I was like, I ordered the joke books. Where did this book come from? It's like, you're six, you're not paying for this, you're not submitting the order in the envelope. My mother made sure that I had those things. So like, so much of this is because of like the influence of my [01:19:00] mom that was like.

[01:19:01] **Alliah Agostini:** You better make sure that you have some books with some black people. I'm like, I'm gonna make sure you have those. Yeah. And now it's actually a matter of actually of writing those, which is, which is so cool. My children are now eight and 10. And it's, it's interesting because there was a window when they were both kind of within that picture book range, and now they're, they're aging out of it a little bit, but for them to, uh, now like grow up, you know, seeing what it is to be an author, it's, it's a, it's a really cool thing because I didn't really know any authors growing up Yeah.

[01:19:28] **Alliah Agostini:** For them to even know that like, books come out on Tuesdays or, you know, like, oh, mommy knows that author person, you know, when we go into a bookstore and we see somebody book on the shelf, it's

just really, um, it's, it's really special. So what Crystal was talking about with my unboxing, so. Unboxing, they, of course, are very popular on social media and, uh, the one that she's talking about.

[01:19:50] **Alliah Agostini:** Actually, we kind of planned that one a little bit because it went along with the, it was so cute. Yeah, it was so cute. Yeah. It went along with the theme. So that was the, the unboxing for great idea. Malia [01:20:00] Love, love Alia. It's great. It's very much like my Black mama book, right? Because it has some black mama ISS in it.

[01:20:06] **Alliah Agostini:** Um, and so about a little girl and her mom, and her mom's like an executive and she gets a big new job. And this little girl, she's very ambitious herself and she realizes that stuff starts changing. She is like, you know, mom forgets about pajama day and that's like the worst thing in the world. And so the little girl Malia decides that she needs, by the way, her name is Malia Michelle.

[01:20:26] **Alliah Agostini:** Very intentional. Um, her mother was Love it. Yeah. She is like, I'm gonna name you after, you know, the Michelle, the Malia, you know, because that's her mother's bout it. She's got Amanda Morman on the wall, all the things. And so the little girl are very ambitious too. Like, I'm gonna help my mom with her job.

[01:20:44] **Alliah Agostini:** So for the, for the, uh, the unboxing, what we did is we had Daphne wanting to help me with, with my job and to unbox the book before I had an opportunity too. It was really cute. Yeah. So, so, so it was fun. It was fun to do that. But then we also started doing just some [01:21:00] others just because she actually wants to be a part of it now.

[01:21:02] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. Sometimes my son, he, he acts like. I joke sometimes he's a hater, sometimes he's a lover. You never, not the hater. You can never, you can never really tell. I'm like actually a Taurus, but I think he might be more gem sometimes,

[01:21:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** but Oh my gosh, you that might beri, you'd be like his rising. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:21:20] **Alliah Agostini:** Exactly. It's, yeah, and I'm like, you wanna be part of it? I'm like, this is the book about fossils. You love fossils. She's like, yeah, whatever. I'm watching tv. I'm like, you know, whatever. But, but, but, but my daughter's always happy to, to join in. Yeah. So it's fun for them to be part of it

too, because they, you know, they, they saw an action or they, they see me on the computer.

[01:21:39] **Alliah Agostini:** Yes. Yes. It's nice for them to come to life.

[01:21:42] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Thank you so much for joining us. I just wanna say, like, you have written so much in that short, um, mm-hmm. Amount. Does it feel like that, does it feel like it's a lot? Or does it just feel like you're just, you know, in the flow?

[01:21:57] **Alliah Agostini:** It, it, it's, it's, it's [01:22:00] funny because it's like, that's how much I've published, but it's not even how much I've written.

[01:22:03] **Alliah Agostini:** Are you written during that time? Mm-hmm. You know, and there's been even more that's been written. Hopefully. Some, some might see the latter day, some might not. Some are still under contract. Uh, and it, it's just more surreal to me when I go places and I have, you know, I bring some of my books with me and then I have to bring more and more books and I'm like, where did they all come from?

[01:22:22] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. I'm like, I was there writing them. I wrote these books, but all of a sudden they're actually here. And it's, it's just, it's just incredible and honestly very surreal to me. But frankly, it's just like when something is for you or is aligned for you mm-hmm. Like, there's just no stopping it. I was like, there's just no stopping the power

[01:22:40] **NeKisha Killings:** that's real

[01:22:40] **Alliah Agostini:** of, of, of God in us and of us being able to, to like express these different gifts.

[01:22:45] **Alliah Agostini:** And I certainly, again, I, something I never would've anticipated. Uh, but I'm so grateful to be able to. Have the platform mm-hmm. To, to create this body of work. I, I, I've, you know, heard [01:23:00] such wonderful reception from people about some of the books. Yeah. They really do. You know, I just never know what's going to, um, align with somebody and, and where they're gonna have a point of connectivity.

[01:23:08] **Alliah Agostini:** So,

[01:23:09] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** yeah, they're really good. It, it's truly

[01:23:10] **Alliah Agostini:** an honor. No, I appreciate it.

[01:23:12] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So what do you have coming up? Let me know if you can give me the tea on Great idea, Malia, if you can't, I totally understand. But when you can give that tea. Yeah. I, the Black Womans is here to support it. Um, I, because I think it should be a series like, Ooh.

[01:23:28] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. I think it should be.

[01:23:29] **Alliah Agostini:** That's like, that's totally my goal. I mean, I have. I actually have two books already written for Malia to do a series. Yeah. Um, one is basically about her mom goes, is going on a girls trip and she's upset that she can't join. Ooh. So it's very much aligned with them. We need that one.

[01:23:48] **Alliah Agostini:** We need that. Need that one. We need that. Yeah.

[01:23:50] **NeKisha Killings:** You know, she knows that my jellybean is a big fan because we went to a read aloud and Jellybean was very excited. The comments. Okay. Uh, yeah. And Jellybean needs [01:24:00] that. She needs that, uh, that book too. She needs that one. Yeah.

[01:24:03] **Alliah Agostini:** Yes. Yes. Exactly. Exactly. We need that.

[01:24:05] **Alliah Agostini:** We're like, is it gonna be a series? I was like, if only it were up to me. Yes. You know, there's another one about Malia in the book Fair. Um, oh, so, and she does something. So anyways, it's, I have, I have a bunch of ideas for that one. So, um, I just learned that it was named a Best of the Best by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

[01:24:24] **Alliah Agostini:** Congratulations. It's wonderful. Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Congratulations. It's

[01:24:28] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** nothing like being celebrated by your own people. Yes. The other stuff is great, don't get me wrong. New York Times, bestsellers, all that. I'm not, I'm not doubting any of that, you know, but being celebrated by your own people, it is just like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:24:41] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** It's so well deserved. It really means a

[01:24:42] **Alliah Agostini:** lot. It's, they're like, okay, these black librarians were like, oh yeah, she gets it. Yes. Yeah. You know, and that's the first in my

books to receive, to receive that card. Oh, congratulations. So congrats. So, yeah, so I'm really, really glad and I, I mean, I, I see things from Malia.

[01:24:55] **Alliah Agostini:** It's just like, I, I want, I want more people to get to her. And, and it's, it's nice 'cause I, [01:25:00] there are just little nuances in there that. I hope people see their lives then and mm-hmm. Um, I did even Okay, good, good. I remember you were talking about for sure. You're like, this one moment it was like, I need you to help you.

[01:25:13] **Alliah Agostini:** Like, I don't need you to help me, I need you to help people. I'm just like, yes, this is, I'm gonna say

[01:25:17] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** you try to help yourself, honey,

[01:25:20] **Alliah Agostini:** help yourself, help yourself. Help yourself. Yeah. Help yourself. So yeah, so that's what happened with Malia. And then as far as what I have next, so I just released Scare Sighted, um, on the first day of school.

[01:25:31] **Alliah Agostini:** So that is my book of Port Monaus. Mm-hmm. Uh, so it's a book of about this little girl named Afua on her first day of school, and she makes up words to. Express her, her, her mixed and match emotions about all her emotional rollercoaster on the first day of school. And that's collaboration with Lala Watkins, who makes the most adorable illustrations.

[01:25:52] **Alliah Agostini:** They kind of remind me of just like ice cream with sprinkles. Uh, and it's, and it's super cute. And one of the things that, there are a couple of ways that I was [01:26:00] able to, you know, influence some of the art in the book. That was, that was really special and very specific, um, for me. And one thing I actually did is I even included a pronunciation guide for my, my first and last name in the book itself, because I was like, how am I gonna make sure that this little girl is having her name pronounced correctly?

[01:26:16] **Alliah Agostini:** I'm like, let make sure I, I'm helping, helping to guide people too. So there are a few things in there and, but it's just really about this little girl taking up space and, and so. Thinking of space and articulating herself through her creativity, um, and through just her emotions and, and vocalizing them.

[01:26:32] **Alliah Agostini:** So it was really important to me. So, so that is, is fun for, for back to school and it's out now. And then actually in fall I had, um, another collaboration with the Steam publisher, although a different illustrator

from the Juneteenth story. So it's the Kwanza story and it talks about, yes. So it's nonfiction and it talks about the evolution and how Kwanza came about.

[01:26:53] **Alliah Agostini:** How that, that holiday in particular evolved. So it's interesting. Lemme find out we're gonna have

[01:26:58] **NeKisha Killings:** a new Kwanza book in our, uh, [01:27:00] celebration this year. Yes. Yeah. Excited. So

[01:27:02] **Alliah Agostini:** it, it speaks more to, um, you know, kind of the, the genesis of the holiday and it's, it's interesting how the, the edit process went for that because I put a whole lot more stuff and I was like, I'm put this in, let's see what they, we'll see what they keep say.

[01:27:14] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and take out because, um, you know, because it's, it's a little bit different in this environment with books and, you know, and, and trying to get them into schools. But, you know, I still have additional information that I don't mind talking about when it comes to talking about the book too.

[01:27:29] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Um, because, you know, the origins of Kwanza, you know, obviously everything is not quite linear. Um, but it is still something that I think a lot of families are, are coming to as they're realizing that our cultures are being challenged in, in broader environments. They're like, what can I do at home to really make sure that we're centering and celebrating us?

[01:27:49] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. Um, so the story and then in. 20. I mean, it hasn't been announced yet, but you, if you Google my name, you'll see it come up. [01:28:00] Um, I have a book called, um, love that Baby Hair. And it is, yes,

[01:28:09] **Alliah Agostini:** pun intended. That's amazing. Pun intended. Mm-hmm. Called Love that baby Hair. Originally it was baby hair, but then we made it love that baby hair and it's about babies and their funny hair, but of course the pun about, you know, of course, yeah. The baby hair. Baby hair. And it's intended. So it's a fun, bouncy, um, rhythmic book.

[01:28:29] **Alliah Agostini:** So, you know, very different from like, you know, the Kwanza story. It's more for, for, for the little ones, but it's a fun book and, and then some more stuff that'll be coming out. Um,

[01:28:39] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** is it normal for children's books authors to have two books a year? Well, no. I mean, it's

[01:28:45] **Alliah Agostini:** like, I'm realizing this path is not. I can say this is not typical, not typical results in this given year.

[01:28:53] **Alliah Agostini:** I will have five books come out. That is not typical. It's a lot. Wow. It's a lot. Because I'm like, oh, wait a [01:29:00] minute, what should I be talking about at any given title? So my, my brain is just like, you know, constantly changing gears. Ooh. But, um, it's, it's just amazing how it, it laddered up to that. But I guess that's part of the consequences of having the spreadsheet with over 50 books on it.

[01:29:15] **Alliah Agostini:** You're gonna write, you gonna try to get them out. It's gonna, it's gonna come to a head at some point. I know the

[01:29:21] **NeKisha Killings:** formula, you know what the editors need. You can kind of crank them out quicker. Now you get it somewhat. And I don't

[01:29:26] **Alliah Agostini:** quite quite have that pi I think this, this year is definitely more of an anomaly.

[01:29:30] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. So like, don't expect that from, you know, and every other one. But I have, you know, other books, like I have, you know, two coming out in 26 and then a couple that I'm doing, you know, as like with a property that already exists. Yeah. Topher 26, I have. That baby here. Then another book about the blue Dan, like the cookie tins.

[01:29:48] **Alliah Agostini:** Mm-hmm. Um, that never have cookies in them. Yeah, right. Yeah. Yeah. That's the sewing kit team. Is it the Dan Ski

[01:29:55] **NeKisha Killings:** tin? The Dan Ski cookie? Yeah, I think so. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:29:59] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Had the shortbread [01:30:00] cookie in there, which is cookie in there. Yeah. Years ago. Yes.

[01:30:04] **Alliah Agostini:** Yeah. Yeah. But, um, so a lot of stuff and uh, I'm just really.

[01:30:09] **Alliah Agostini:** Grateful to be on this path because I remember when we used to be in, you know, in the group together and I just loved

celebrating books. And I would share ones that I, I knew about that were written by other people. Sure. And I never would've imagined that I'd be the one writing them. I think a lot of us sharing now.

[01:30:23] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. A lot of us in that group, were trying to figure out a lot of things and so it's interesting to see where a lot of us are. Mm-hmm. You know, right now. And we were kind of new momish and so we were, yeah. So yeah. Now I've got all these graduation pictures. I'm like, yeah. Right. It's like, oh my goodness, already.

[01:30:39] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, congratulations. Thank you so much for being here with us. Um, thank you for having me. It's a pleasure. I feel like your books are not only good for children, but I felt like when I read the Juneteenth book, I learned a lot as well. Yeah. So, and I think that's one thing that I really like about your book too.

[01:30:56] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Your books too is like, you know, even in great idea, [01:31:00] men. Malia, I think there was some mom lessons mm-hmm. In there as well. So I love that it's for the kids, but we get a little something sum too. And those, you know, whenever you go to an animated movie, if the parents are laughing, it's like, okay. Yes. You know what I mean?

[01:31:15] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Yeah. I had

[01:31:16] **Alliah Agostini:** this very conversation yesterday, in fact. Yeah.

[01:31:19] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So I really, really appreciate that about your work. Um, and, you know, I hope you are getting some rest as well in the process. Okay. All right. Thank you. Take care of you. I, yes. And we'll have the link, um, for, uh, uh, Aaliyah's website and, uh, for the Juneteenth book.

[01:31:37] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** We didn't talk about the cookbook, but y'all, it's the Real Deal cookbook. It has a recipe for Chacha in there, and yes. Lemme go to, I thought cha, I didn't know people knew what Chacha was. I mean, it's a thing in South Carolina. Um, yes. So I, I, when I saw that recipe, I was like, okay, we're doing a real deal here.

[01:31:55] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Here. Yes. So thank you so much for taking the time. Oh, go ahead, Leah, real

[01:31:58] **Alliah Agostini:** quick. Where do you prefer that [01:32:00] people purchase the bookstore from? Yes, that's a good

[01:32:01] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** question. Yes.

[01:32:02] **Alliah Agostini:** You know, I prefer that you buy them from your independent bookstores, especially if there are any black loans ones in your area. A bookshop.org is a great option too, because it does help benefit, um, locally owned bookstores.

[01:32:13] **Alliah Agostini:** But thank you. My books are available wherever books are sold. I realize that people buy them everywhere, but, but please support independent bookstores because they really need your help. Well, makes That's great. That's,

[01:32:23] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** yeah. Yeah. That's a great question. And libraries too, honestly. Mm-hmm. Yeah. We'll book, we'll use the, uh, bookshop.org, uh, link, uh, in our show syllabus, so.

[01:32:33] **Alliah Agostini:** Okay. Thank you so much.

[01:32:35] **NeKisha Killings:** Thank you both. Thank it was such a pleasure to speak to you. And thank you for having Yes. It was so fun. Keep shining.

[01:32:40] **Alliah Agostini:** Yes.

[01:32:41] **NeKisha Killings:** Okay. Thank you. Thank

[01:32:41] **Alliah Agostini:** you.

[01:32:48] **NeKisha Killings:** All right. All right. All right. It's time for one of our favorite parts of every episode, the portion called Black Mama Say, where we put our own little stink on things. Moms have been saying forever [01:33:00] and ever. Black moms have been saying forever and ever. This time we're doing something a little bit different.

[01:33:04] **NeKisha Killings:** We're asking a question, not just to us, but to you all as well, but we'll answer it here first. Today's Black Mama say, question is what gives you hope, crystal, you wanna go first?

[01:33:17] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** What gives me hope is black creativity. Mm-hmm. I feel like in April and May, black Creativity showed up and showed out in amazing ways.

[01:33:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Number one, we kicked it off with sinners. Woo. Then we followed it up with forever. We got an episode about Forever coming out as well, and I just felt like. Look at us. Look at us, like look at us. You know? So, um, you know, we had Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl performance, you know what I'm saying? So we got the Cowboy Carter tour.

[01:33:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** I just feel like, you know, black creativity has always done its thing. I just felt like what sinners did for us, what Kendrick's performance did for us, what forever did for [01:34:00] us. I can't describe the feeling that it was like everybody was talking about it. Yeah. And everybody was talking about it in a way like that was healing and forward thinking.

[01:34:16] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And even if you saw something different or, or your interpretation was di different, we were still able to have. I felt like conversations around it that were meaningful and impactful. Yep. And eye-opening. And I, I, I just, you know, you know, I'm a firm believer. I mean, that's why we have Black Woman Creative Week is that creativity can creep into the crevices of our culture where a lot of things cannot and shift us in unimaginable ways.

[01:34:53] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** You know, so that's what I felt in April and in February [01:35:00] and, um, in May, you know, seeing all of those things. So I have a lot of hope. I have a lot of hope, um, yeah. Based on that. And I hope that people are seeing those, uh, creative endeavors and, and it's igniting, uh, their innovative spirit, even if they're not quote unquote creatives, but they're seeing.

[01:35:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** They're seeing, um, how they can do things in an innovative way and how they can be creative, um, in their own lane. So I'm really, really inspired right now. Mm-hmm. And, um, yeah, that was a, that was a, so for my soul, those things were a south for my soul.

[01:35:46] **NeKisha Killings:** That was so beautifully said. Yeah. And it, it really is something that gives me hope as well.

[01:35:51] **NeKisha Killings:** And my answer was pretty similar. My answer was, I guess, black community. Mm-hmm. Um, but in very similar ways that you pointed out. [01:36:00] So, you know. Four years ago when we were in the throes and the thick of COVID, and also when so much shit was popping off mm-hmm. Racially with, uh, you know mm-hmm. Police, whatever we said as a people, you know, we are gonna save ourselves.

[01:36:17] **NeKisha Killings:** We're gonna turn inward and take care of ourselves. And that is the thing that we did. We, we so much was birthed out of that time, um, about protecting and holding us. Um, and it continues, but there's been a shift recently in that, um, taking care of us. Kinda wave that it looks like joy and it looks like rest.

[01:36:39] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm. In ways that we haven't seen. And I'm loving that we are finding our spaces of rest and joy and creativity and, um, loving on us, um, as only we can. Mm-hmm. And celebrating us. All of those little things we continue to see bring me joy more and more and more. And hope, and hope for tomorrow that no matter [01:37:00] what's going on, we are gonna still hold onto our joy.

[01:37:02] **NeKisha Killings:** Yeah. We're gonna still dance, we're gonna still laugh deep from the belly. Yeah. We gonna still have cookouts and show outs. Mm-hmm. Like, only we can, you cannot outdo black. Yeah. You what I'm saying. I love that. And

[01:37:13] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** a lot of people are like, you know, they don't like the, well, not a lot of people, but some people may feel like, oh, you know, the world is burning and black people are out here dancing.

[01:37:21] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** But the world has always been on fire for us.

[01:37:23] **NeKisha Killings:** It has. It has. And this is one of the things we've maintained is our journey. It has been able to

[01:37:28] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** dance through it, our joy to it. I mean, we're here. Somebody loves somebody, somebody has some kind of desires that they were fulfill, were fulfilling. I say that we're here, you know, it wasn't, it was pain and it was struggle and it was joy and dance and laughter and food and that's how we created a culture, you know?

[01:37:49] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So when I see that, I'm like, culture is multi dynamic. It's multidimensional. And so the world has always been on fire for [01:38:00] us. We have always smelled the ash. You know, and we have held, and we have held space for our, ourselves, and we, and I, and I love that we're holding even more space for ourselves.

[01:38:10] **NeKisha Killings:** Mm-hmm.

[01:38:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Now. Mm-hmm. And, and, and, and taking the time pauses and, and space that we need. Because honestly, Nikisha, I feel like, you know, if people need to dance, if people need a nap, if people need a break, if people need to just go inward and take care of their families, I want them to do that. Because when you are ready to do some kind of work out in the world, you come rested, you come yes.

[01:38:37] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Have experienced joy so that you are not in a movement space. You are not in an organizing space. You're not trying to contribute to community, and you are, you haven't experienced those things. You could actually do harm. Yeah. Absolutely. And so I think that those things are [01:39:00] important and a lot of times when we haven't done those things and we're trying to work in community and with other people, harm has been caused and things have fallen apart.

[01:39:10] **NeKisha Killings:** I agree.

[01:39:11] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So I agree. I, you know. I like that.

[01:39:14] **NeKisha Killings:** Follow us on Instagram at Den Black Mamas Podcast. And if you don't wanna miss a minute of the magic sign up for our recently revamped newsletter, the mothership, which includes reflections on the conversations we've been having and hearing. And we also share a collection plate cause where you'll, uh, we'll spotlight causes and initiatives that resonate with our community.

[01:39:34] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And this podcast only comes out two times a month. So it's good to sign up our newsletter because you'll find out things probably before the podcast comes out. 'cause it only comes out two times a month. Um, and don't forget to check our website, www.deblackmamasdot.com. Dim Black Mamas is a conversation, so our inbox is always open.

[01:39:52] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** So is our comment section. So talk back to us. Mm-hmm. Send us your thoughts about the show, show us some love and ask some questions at Magic. Hit them black [01:40:00] mamas.com. Be sure to listen and subscribe wherever you're getting your podcast, including YouTube. Hit that like button. Don't just subscribe, rate and review us.

[01:40:10] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** If you're listening on Spotify, you can leave us some comments or just show us some love. If you're watching on YouTube, you can leave us some comments or just show us some love. If you hear

something that you like, put it in quotes in the comments so we can know what resonated. Uh, maybe have some more conversation around that.

[01:40:26] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** And, you know, look us up on Instagram with a post about this episode and you can hit up us up in the comu. We like conversation that's inspiring for us. That gives us good ideas, it gives us time to reflect. Um, and also share this episode with at least one person who you feel like can benefit from the episode.

[01:40:43] **Crystal Tennille Irby:** Because sharing is not only caring, but sharing is also how we build community. Yay. And in closing, maintain abundance. Ooh, what should we have said? Maintain, expect, abundance. There we go. That's we, that's all we got. We, we [01:41:00] ain't got no more. No more. Love y'all. Namaste. Namaste.