

Transcript for Episode 102: Interview with Fin Leary Lavoie

Episode Duration: 50:08

Jenn: Hello, and welcome to the latest episode of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. For new and returning listeners, you may know this is Jennifer, and you can find the podcast on Tumblr at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com or on Twitter @minoritiesinpub. And 2020 has become the year of return guests. It's kind of like a reunion of sorts. First, it was Connor Goldsmith, then it was Renée Watson, and now it is Alaina Leary. So welcome back, Alaina.

Fin: I'm so glad to be back and with a whole new last name this time.

Jenn: Yay! Alaina is married now.

Jenn: Oh, man, and it's been a whirlwind of a year so far. I mean, we're recording in April. This is earlier in time from when this will air so I hope we'll see more positivity by the time this airs. But who would have thunk it, Alaina? We would be in quarantine.

Fin: It feels like I, I feel very grateful. But at the beginning of the year, I insisted that we not get rid of one of our desks to make room for another bookshelf in our apartment because, in my defense, quote, what if you work from home more often, to my wife who normally does not work from home and lo and behold, she's here all the time now.

Jenn: Are y'all in it for another month or so? Because New York City, ours has been extended to at least May 15.

Fin: Yeah, we're currently at May 4, but I expect it to be extended as well. And it certainly, regardless of what the governor does, it certainly will be something that my wife Macy and I are following. She's home TBD and her workplace is taking it very seriously. She works at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, so they're really taking it seriously. And I think that regardless of what our state does on a legislative, you know, front, we will definitely both be working from home and taking all the precautions that we should be taking either way.

Jenn: Quarantine aside, there have been changes since we last spoke, at least on the podcast, in your life. Like you said, you got married, you are officially the communications manager for We Need Diverse Books. And you have been rocking it since the very beginning with them especially, and so you're still enmeshed in the publishing cycle. You're a writer, obviously, you continue to pump out articles and whatnot. And one of your most recent pieces that went live was discussing the ableism, ever-present ableism in the industry. But one that became even more transparent that I think, surprisingly or not, people were or weren't aware of, in terms of the

remote working conditions, because like we said, we're quarantined, and I'm working remotely now for my job, and I used to go in every day. And you wrote very eloquently about how the industry suddenly is making room for that.

Fin: Absolutely. It's certainly been a source of conversation and sometimes frustration, I think, among disabled and chronically ill people who work in or hoped to work in publishing. And really a lot of folks that I am friends with, that I follow on social media, who simply couldn't afford to move to New York City or would prefer to stay in their hometowns for whatever reasons for cultural or racial diversity reasons, they want to stay in their communities and don't want to move to New York. And a lot of people simply want the freedom to be able to work from home, whether it's a couple days a week, most of the time, all of the time, even just a couple times a month for some folks, but that flexibility wasn't always available to people. And I think that now that it has become available, a lot of people who were kept out of the industry as a result of that policy are now frustrated that it turns out it could have been possible the entire time.

Jenn: Yeah, I mean, the whole industry—I mean, our government too we're seeing, I mean—we've always known, right. And especially you have known because I have learned from the community, and you've been such a fervent part of that community that I admire and appreciate so much that it has helped us become more aware of what we're not aware of and also our own privilege and also how we need to acknowledge it and push back on it in a lot of ways. And I wonder about the industry because the industry is so in flux right now, if they're recognizing this part of the conversation. Oh, yeah, we could do that. Will we do that? Who knows?

Fin: Right. I like to hope that it will create some real change. And I think that everybody who is aware of the issue has done their best to try and raise it. I mean, another writer who I admire very much, Keah Brown wrote an article for a Fast Company which was more about the remote work not just in the publishing industry but in general, and she wrote a wonderful article about how many people are kept out of various jobs because of the remote work requirement and how many people are forced to choose to become freelancers because it's the only option that they can find that is allowing them to have that flexibility to work from home. And I think that it's an issue that affects a lot of people. It certainly affects people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, but it affects parents, it affects caregivers of anyone, if you're a primary caregiver or a main caregiver for someone in your life or simply just need to stay in the community that you're in and need that flexibility for any reason. I'm really hoping that the industry takes note of all these people who are speaking out about it. It's not just me and my article, there are a lot of advocates who would like for this to be a lesson to a lot of different industries. And I hope that publishing is listening to these conversations and taking them seriously.

Jenn: And it was also something you brought up when we spoke a few years ago, looking at what is needed in the job requirement itself. And what I've noticed is people with seniority tend to get flexibility and you get more leverage the longer you've been there, but you have to get in there, and you have to showcase yourself. And for many that means bending over backwards, quite literally, in some cases of I will work 12 hours a day, I will do these events nonstop, I will do this, and then eventually you'll get that leniency of, okay, well, *now* you can work from home

or yeah, you can work from another state. But even when I see people who are able to do that, it has come from a place of, well, I had to show you everything I got in order to have you at least believe that I can do this. And that is another issue. The ability to work remotely is not great for everybody, but it is not one in which I think no work has been done. I think for some people based on the technology and what's available, but it definitely seems like something that people just didn't want to think about in large quantities until they had to, which is kind of standard for America I'd say.

Fin: Absolutely. I think that what you just described, that having to work twice as hard, three times as hard to prove yourself is extremely true for all marginalized people. And I know the most about the publishing industry, but I think in every industry if you're a person of color, if you're openly LGBTQ, if you're a racial or ethnic or cultural minority or religious minority, if you're disabled or chronically ill, have a mental illness, you're gonna have to work even harder than your colleagues to get the job, to get the internship before you get the job to get the job to succeed in that interview. And to really show yourself at work. I think anything that you have to do to quote-unquote prove yourself is going to be harder and I absolutely think that we should be giving people the space to be human and to be themselves at work from the very beginning. But it does seem like it's more easily afforded to people who have been there a long time or people who have the privilege of being in the majority and the way they dress, their name, their pronouns, the way they style their hair, their clothing, their accent, their income background, are all what we expect and so they're not looked upon as harshly. Whereas someone who is outside of that box who is seen as somebody who is different or requires different accommodations or speaks differently or expresses themselves differently, uses pronouns that are not he or she, is going to be treated with a harsher lens.

[09:54]

Fin: They're going to be seen through that lens and it makes it difficult at the entry level as you said, once somebody is in a senior position and they've proven themselves, it's a lot easier for them to advocate, well, I've worked here for 15 years and now I am going through cancer treatment and could you please accommodate that and they absolutely should be accommodated. But so should an entry level applicant who is dealing with a cancer diagnosis as well. And that's what I think right now the industry is facing is everybody is in crisis to various degrees. We are certainly at different levels of privilege. But everybody is in some kind of crisis, whether it's a loss of income, someone they know is sick, they themselves are in a high-risk group, someone they live with or love as an essential worker, and now we're suddenly realizing, 'Oh, well, we need to accommodate people who need to raise their children while they're working from home.' Now we need to accommodate someone taking a mental health day because their grandparent just passed away from COVID-19. And truly those kinds of accommodations, protections, and basic care for employees should always be there.

Jenn: Yeah, it's very weird when you sit and think about the whole of it of, 'well, yeah, why not.' And of course, this is also dependent on one's manager. But I do want to also put that out there because at my previous job, even though I was very unhappy at my previous job, that flexibility was absolutely there for people who needed it. But again, if you have the wrong manager, it

wasn't. And these are kind of like those checks and balances we need in the industry too because if Manager A is totally fine with doing these things and have a good digital workflow, and Manager B is just like, 'No, I need you to be on the premises at all times,' that kind of checks and balances has to be there because the default always becomes: 'Well, it's at the discretion of your manager.' You know, what I mean? Like you hear that all the time, it's at the discretion of your manager and I was like, well, this doesn't help me if I'm marginalized and being subjugated to prejudices. That's kind of the smokescreen that people hide themselves behind. It's like, well, you know, if your manager says you can't take the day off, if your manager says you can't da da da da. That's where we are. So, I think this becomes an HR thing, and then HR—I have feelings on HR, I won't get into it. One of these days I am going to have an HR person on if they will talk to me on record. 'Cause I'm like, listen, we need to talk, but it's just so many levels of it. And I don't think people realize that, on the outside, right, is you have to get in the door, you have to do this, and then once you're in the door and you have a manager who's just very insulting and offensive, then your life is just hell from the get-go.

Fin: I couldn't agree more. I think that who you're working with and who your manager is, who your team is, matters immensely. I mean, for me, I feel extremely lucky to be supported at We Need Diverse Books. We have an amazing team and mental health days, physical health days, everything is encouraged. People are supposed to take care of themselves. And when that's not happening, we look out for each other. We support each other. And previous to this role as communications manager, my primary job was working for a small publisher remotely. And I was lucky there too. Our editor in chief was amazing. And she always told us, you know, to do whatever we needed. It was another work from home fulltime job and she encouraged people to leave to go to PT, to take a walk. I once had the opportunity to hear Michelle Obama speak and I was allowed to come in later in the day at 2pm so that I could go hear her speak in the morning and I knew from talking to my coworkers that our previous editor-in-chief before her that I never got to meet was strict and she was strict in a work from home job. She was strict about everyone being at their desks at their computers from nine-to-five with only a lunch break. So, it really absolutely depends on who you're working with. And even if you're freelancing, if you are disabled and you have a disabled editor, if you're queer and you have a queer editor working on your story or your book, it matters so much. It makes a huge difference. And I think that it shouldn't be that way. Like you said, it should absolutely be a built-in policy, whether it's a working from home policy, a flexible schedule, sick days, what's the policy on mental health days? These things should be widespread, but often they depend upon someone being compassionate and understanding.

Jenn: Yeah, and I'm really glad you had both of those experiences. Could you talk about going from the publisher to We Need Diverse Books?

Fin: Yeah, I can definitely talk about that transition. The independent publisher that I was working for unfortunately folded. And so we were all let go as a result.

Jenn: Oh, I'm sorry.

Fin: And very fortunately, we were given a lot of time, we were given a significant amount of time to figure out our next steps to apply for other jobs. We were all given the ability to continue working for almost six months after we had the news that we were laid off, which is absolutely unheard of.

Jenn: Wow. That is.

Fin: And I was very happy about that. I think it helped all of us, for sure. I know several of my colleagues got jobs before the time ended and others might have taken a couple months after the end of that job to find their jobs, but it really gave us all time to prepare and really get our next steps figured out. And for me, I had a couple of different part-time and freelance jobs that I was juggling in between before the communications manager role opened up at We Need Diverse Books. And it was definitely a terrifying moment for me when that job opened up. I was like, wow, this is my dream job. I had been volunteering for WNDB since 2015 and actually started volunteering for them because I tweeted saying that they were one of my dream jobs and I wanted to know how to get involved. It was a part of a journalism activity where I was tweeting about all of my dream jobs and basically tweeting at role models and organizations and publishers I might want to work for someday and WNDB was among the top of that list. So, when the opportunity actually came up, I was so terrified. I mean, I've never put so much effort into an application before and to be completely honest, I didn't tell anybody about it. I didn't tell anybody that I was applying for it except for my friend, now co-worker who also works at WNDB. She was the only person I really told about it. And I just didn't want to get my hopes up until I actually received the email that let me know that I got it while I was on vacation in Aruba last year. And so, I came home to an email sitting in my inbox that essentially was like, 'hey, we definitely want you. When can you talk to finalize that?' And I kept it super under wraps. I didn't even tell my wife until I had the official offer letter.

Jenn: Oh, wow. Yay! I feel like that's also a slam dunk. In a lot of ways. I'm like, *duh*, of course Alaina. I don't know who else. I'm also glad it became a role, like an actual position. Because everyone's volunteered so much time. And I know you know because you were there near the beginning also, is that you know burnout is real. It's, it's so much, so I'm just so glad that that opened up. And that worked out. And that's been working out and everything. And I know there's the new ED, Nicole, who seems amazing.

Fin: Yeah, she is.

Jenn: I hope to meet her one day when we are out of quarantine. It seems so far away, but it will happen. I know it will happen. [Laughs] So you're now in a role where you get to, I mean, you said it's your dream job. So, can you talk a little bit about that? Because, you know, when we spoke again before, you talked about all these areas that you were cobbling together via your studies, via your freelance, and then at the time of your full-time job, because it really did seem like being kind of outward facing was a big interest of yours as well, because you were in marketing before. Am I correct?

Fin: Yes, marketing and publicity.

Jenn: And that's an area we talk about in publishing, but I don't think we talk about it as much compared to editorial, which happens all the time. But you know, these are all these skills that mold into something that's also part of activism, and you're still part of the industry. You know what I mean? And I think it's very different too, for people to realize that, I mean, you were actually at a book publisher, and now you're part of the activism of pushing publishers to be better, at aiding publishers to be better. And those are two different roles. It's very different. I don't think people realize how hard it is to also be in the industry and actually keep the industry accountable while trying to keep your job,

Fin: Right.

Jenn: Like we said, you're just the best candidate for this position, obviously. So what kind of led you on that path?

[19:52]

Fin: Well, I appreciate you saying that. It definitely feels like a privilege to be in this position. And for me really marketing and publicity and all of the freelancing I've done and the volunteering came together pretty naturally because for this communications manager role, I'm really wearing a couple of different hats. I do a lot of media outreach, which I was prepared for as somebody who's done a lot of book publicity. And those skills directly helped me land this job. The fact that I have set up author interviews with traditional and online media, I've done book events, and small book tours and set up authors to be on podcasts like this one, it absolutely led into those same skills. And another part of my job is, you know, like the marketing side of communications, our blog, and our newsletter and collaborating with our social media manager. And those are all things that I did as a volunteer but also that I've had a chance to do in other editorial roles and freelance roles, where I've been an editor on pieces, or I've written pieces about book publishing and the industry and activism more generally and broadly. You know, activism, especially as it relates to disability rights and LGBTQ rights because I truly believe that journalism shines best when it comes from somebody who's within that community and who understands the community, and its strengths and what it's facing as a challenge. So for me, all of those skills came together and really allowed me to be able to bring them together in this communications role nicely. It's definitely very different because when you're working in marketing and publicity at a book publisher, or working on my marketing and publicity independently, which I've done for authors and for book publishers who were just hiring out for one particular project. All of that is fairly straightforward. If you're working for a publisher, you might have an opportunity to speak up about books that you think deserve to be recognized. And hopefully, if you're lucky, you work at a publisher that supports diversity, and is already publishing titles by marginalized authors and already wants to market those. But I think that a lot of publicists and marketers are in the position where they're trying to advocate for the titles that they want to push, and they might not be able to really have any say. You're in a pretty straightforward role where you're usually given specific titles that you're working on. And it all depends on the size of the publisher, of course, but typically speaking, if you're working at a

publisher that has at least a department of a few people who are working on the same marketing and publicity side you have a specific role that's assigned to you. You have these books that are on our list for this season and you're going to work on their, setting up their tours, setting up their bookstore events, setting up author interviews, pitching them to the media, writing and editing the press releases. But you might not have any say on what's being acquired, what kind of authors are, whose work is being acquired, which ones are being publicized most heavily. And so, what's really been wonderful about working for WNDB in that capacity is that all of our programs are advocating for that change. So every time I have the ability to write a press release, I know that I'm writing a press release for a program that's going to change something. It's going to change someone's life, whether it's through mentorships or internship grants, or expansion of our program or our emergency grants that we're giving out for diverse creatives because of the pandemic. All of these things are going to push the industry forward in some way. And I really get to talk to a lot of different marginalized authors for the blog and feature their work and do Q and A's with them, publish their guest posts, publish freelance writers who are marginalized who are writing about books that touch them personally, that they have lived experience with in common with the authors. And it really is, it's a different kind of work because you have the ability to, in a lot of ways, shape that. In a lot of ways, I still do have specific assignments and specific programs that I'm working on. We have the programs we have and I'm publicizing them. But when it comes to the blog, I have the freedom to take a look at the blog and say it's been a few weeks since we've talked to a Muslim author or it seems like we don't have many Jewish folks of color. What can we do about that? What am I able to do in my position to make sure that that's not the case? And that part of it is really exciting because it feels more similar to what editors and folks who are in acquisitions get to do at publishers is look at that list and figure out what they want to do to forward the industry. And even though the blog is different from publishing a book, it's great to be able to highlight those marginalized authors and to be able to support them celebrate their work, and really be a part of changing the industry in that way.

Jenn: And that is such a great distinction too because right now, it'll be a bit late by the time this airs, WNDB has an emergency grant going. And I know there was but-so-many spots for it. But the amount of emergency grants that have been coming up is so important because artists do need relief and the government ain't given it to us. So I was glad to see WNDB also had a relief grant. So many places are coming up with it even though it'll probably never be enough, but that's a contribution to an issue that you all see. And it's great to see WNDB evolve even more in that way. This is happening and this is who we're focusing on and this is who we're trying to help and these are tangible, actuals, rather than we did buy a book, like you said, but it's not been given a marketing budget at all. So we hope it does well. We'll be surprised if it does. It'd be nice. But who knows? And being in those meetings, it's interesting. It's just interesting to see the intent that doesn't always match the action.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: It's publishing. So, is there anything you can tell us to look out for on the horizon?

Fin: I definitely am excited about the fact that we're adding a few grants for internships in adult trade publishing starting next summer, and...

Jenn: Yes!

Fin: ...public news, so I'm definitely allowed to talk about it. Celeste Ng is a big part of that and someone I just admire greatly. And I was so excited when I heard the news because I'm the communications manager. The way things typically go is the programming folks, in conjunction with our executive director Nicole will figure out the details and logistics of a program that is going to be introduced. They'll figure out the scope and the cost and all of that, and then it comes to me and it comes to me with, okay, we figured out the details we need, and now we're getting ready to announce it. And so it's always like this big exciting surprise, which I may or may not have known was in the works and I get to be like, wow, cool. We're doing something to further, you know, this this aspect of publishing and so for me, it was really cool to find out about the adult grants and I think that WNDB is constantly trying to do things like that and be innovative and figure out where our programming can help people the most. And so, it was really gratifying to be a part of the emergency fund because it's a real problem that we're seeing firsthand and being able to do something to alleviate that. But I'm very excited about the grants expanding and I'm just excited about all of our programs and, and honestly just really excited that we'll—knock on wood—be able to host an in person Walter Awards in 2021 because this was going to be my first Walter Awards now that I'm staff and not a volunteer and I was super excited. Fifth Annual Walter Awards, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop was going to be there. I was so excited to honor the authors honored.

Jenn: I know, yeah.

Fin: And I'm really looking forward to hopefully being able to do something like that next year and be a part of that, you know, on the ground with everybody else, and there are still a couple of newer members of our team who I haven't met in-person. And I was looking forward to it being a homecoming of sorts, since we all work remotely distributed in different locations, primarily New York and the Washington DC metro area and then there's me in Boston. So it'll be really cool to actually be able to do that in-person next year.

Jenn: Yeah, we're all looking real forward to 2021 right now. Remember in December when everyone was “2019 can go to Hell, I'm ready for 2020!” And now we're like, please God 2021 needs to happen right now.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: Immediately. We have so many plans.

Fin: So many. So many in-person plans.

Jenn: Oh, man. know, it was interesting. It's funny because I worked with WNDB for like three years, but I didn't realize the internships were solely for children's lit because I also remember meeting several of the agency interns and they're— You know, agents can go cross genre.

[30:08]

Allaina: Right.

Jenn: I remember meeting the agency interns, and they all weren't distinctly for kid lit specifically, though several of them actually went to become full-time workers in kid lit.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: Like, yeah, and they're still in there. Yay, Jessica Harold, yay! Was one of them. So I didn't realize it was really kid lit specific, and I just think it was because of the people I was talking to in terms of some of the groups that I had met. So I'm glad for that too, it's a systemic problem, as we often say. It's not just kid lit and I work in kid lit primarily now, academic publishing, trade adult, trade children, small press, big press. It's just a mess. It's a mess. Thank you, Celeste Ng for like...

Fin: Right?

Jenn: ...paying for that, and hopefully and we'll have internships. I would love to be able to say something on that, I have no info. I don't know that y'all's got any either. I know at my publisher they were about to do interviews, and then we went on quarantine. So...

Fin: That's definitely been a challenge for our internship grant committee as well, you know, figuring out, we extended that deadline to the end of May when it's normally the end of March and removed the in person requirements of having to work in person, at least some of the time, since the internship grants are really intended to help with the cost of living in different areas. And so now we're able to support remote interns this summer, which is pretty exciting. And I think that all of these things I'm hoping will also encourage publishers to take a look at their internship hiring. It's hard because people are having to make all of these difficult financial decisions around whether they can hire paid interns or not, but I do hope that it makes publishers look at their requirements and really focus that when they can have interns they pay their interns and they support their interns and, and give their interns more flexibility on location as well.

Jenn: And we have the means to do the remote. We know it now.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: I mean, at least mine does. It's clunky, but we can do it. So I know for PRH, this was public. They were going to do housing for group.

Fin: Oh, wow.

Jenn: Yeah, they were going to offer housing. So they had, with the help of Annysa who does a lot of the DEI—diversity, equity, and inclusion—work in PRH [Penguin Random House] and HR. She had done so much wonderful work with teams and all that to also provide housing. Not for every intern, but for I think a dozen, 10 or a dozen, and that was going to be a big thing. And now we don't know if that's gonna happen because we don't know, you know what I mean? Like, we could be in quarantine till June and how much of a chunk is that from the internship experience, which I think is June, July, August? It's been a long time since I've been in college. So I don't but it does seem like June, July, August. You know, they're like usually three months or so. I just don't know, I wasn't part of the committees. I did know people who are going to be on the committees. And yeah, so much is in flux. I do hope that continues and I hope a remote option for interns is something that's provided too. Yeah, I just hope that they're able to provide that and make it happen still. But I also worry because of a money crunch, that people might say, well we're just not going to do interns. That's a way to save money, so I can keep staff.

Fin: Exactly.

Jenn: And it makes me worried for the 2020 graduates who were so excited.

Fin: I know.

Jenn: Yeah, so I'm just like, oh my God, I feel horrible. Anyone trying to come into a career right now.

Fin: I do too. Oh, it's awful. I, it was one of the first things I thought about to be completely honest is I'm only five years out of college and I remember it well and just thinking about all those people, it's gonna hurt the marginalized folks the most. And, you know, Lee & Low's publishing in diversity baseline survey shows that right now interns are the most diverse group of anyone in publishing, they're the most diverse group. My heart goes out to everyone who is graduating right now, and especially to anybody who is marginalized and is going to have a harder time finding a job. I really advocate for them. I have always loved our internship grant program. I think it's wonderful. It's the kind of thing that I would have loved when I was graduating, and I'm so glad that it exists. And I really hope that publishers, if they're able to genuinely do it, that they still continue with those kinds of programs, that they still pay their interns and actively seek diverse interns because it's real meaningful change to have people in the industry and to be able to support them in that way, like financial support is a big barrier for people not being able to do unpaid internships and not being able to make it into the industry as a result. So I really am a huge advocate of anything we can all do to make sure that those continue to happen even if it's a little weird this summer but comes back with the same bang next summer. You know, that's, my fingers are crossed.

Jenn: Yeah. So are mine. And thank you for bringing that up because I almost forgot that. The survey did say that the most, I think it was like POC specifically, right, that those were, we were all like, oh, great. Are you hiring the intern? Like what's happening after this. Come on. And I

did notice that my publisher, that a lot of the assistants were POC. I can't speak after that. I did meet a lot of assistants who were POC. So it did at least seem as though on that front people were cognizant of the fact that's like, I need to hire someone, but also I need to nurture them.

Fin: Right, exactly.

Jenn: What happens after that I can't speak to, um, but yeah, yeah. I did notice that, that when I met a lot of people's assistants and stuff like that, I was like, 'oh, okay, this is where all the POCs are. Okay.' Here in design and production. Cool, cool. That works. And then we still got to work on the middle management and up.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: We'll get there eventually. We'll get there. What have you seen that's changed in the past few years? And maybe that's a too-big question. Because I think like what you were saying with the diversity base baseline survey, that I think people really expected there to be this kind of massive change.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: And I think it'd been two or three years, right? Or something like that. It was several years between the first baseline survey and the one that came out in January. And I was kind of surprised that people expected, you know, like this huge jump there, like, see nothing's changed, or see the changes are minimal, or see, that da da da da da, and the industry needs to work hard. And I was like, well, how do you expect that to happen? You know, it was kind of like one of those big questions to like, well, how do you expect this big change to happen? I didn't expect it. You know what I mean? I was like, alright, sounds about right. I'm like, awareness doesn't necessarily mean change.

Fin: Right.

Jenn: So I'm curious, what have you noticed? Especially since you're in a different role now than you were before, but you're still seeing it and you're still very much part of it. So what's your opinion? I don't want to put you on the spot and be like, have you seen change? What's been reported?

Fin: I definitely do think there has been change. And I agree that it hasn't been as momentous as I think people hope for. And I think a lot of marginalized people know that. I mean, we know it intrinsically. Like you said, you're not surprised. I wasn't surprised. I think a lot of marginalized people were not surprised that it hasn't been like a significant jump. You know, I think people who are not marginalized see a little bit of change and they think like, well, yeah, of course, it's changed. There are just as many POC in my department as white people. There are just as many LGBTQ people in my department as straight, cis people. And I mean, I don't think that it's been that fast and that explosive of a change, but it certainly has been and I think I've absolutely seen

more titles by marginalized authors coming out. And something that I've really noticed is that marginalized authors are finally getting to write their own stories. And we're starting to get to the point where they are multiple books by someone have a specific experience. You know, I think, historically, people at publishing houses would be like, well, we have a book by an Asian author about Asian characters, like that's the one we need, you know, we have that one. And now I do feel like the needle is moving a bit to where we're finally seeing a lot more books by marginalized authors, and they're not all trauma and pain and tragedy. They're not all stories about what it's like, the difficulty of the Black experience, the difficulty of the trans experience, how hard it is to come out, how hard it is to be disabled, how inspiring it is to overcome a chronic illness or what have you.

[40:02]

Fin: I think we're finally getting to see stories of adventure and joy. And we're finally getting to see characters and authors at the intersections of multiple identities. That's what's exciting to me to be able to see that. I mean, I think of work by authors like Kacen Callender, Victoria Lee, Anna-Marie McLemore, you know, these are authors who are writing and living at the intersection of different marginalized experiences, Own Voices authors being able to really have their work published and, and read and I've read *Felix Ever After*. I've read *Cemetery Boys*, I've been able to read books that actually showcase people who are living at the intersection of different experiences and I think in that area we have grown. I think that if you were to look at lists from five or 10 years ago, it would be, you would see some POC authors, POC books, you would see some LGBTQ, you know. You might see really like all the disabled and chronically ill books were by authors who didn't have lived experiences. And that has been still kind of slow, unfortunately. But you just wouldn't see books by multiple marginalized authors as much or about characters who are living at several intersections. And really, it's wonderful to see that. I love being able to see that. I love being able to read those stories. I'm somebody who lives at the intersection of a few identities. I'm disabled and queer, but also privileged in that I'm white and thin and I think that it's been wonderful for me to see that we're having those kinds of stories, to finally be able to see characters who are both Black and trans, who are both disabled and queer, who are both bi and Latinx. It's been wonderful and I love being able to see that and Malinda Lo's research that she does independently on LGBTQ young adult books, which I know is only one subsection of kid lit, but it's shown that these have increased and they're starting to increase and there's a lot of work to be done still. I completely feel that way. And hope to continue to advocate for that as long as possible. But I am glad to see those strides are being made.

Jenn: Yeah, it's definitely great to see the variety on shelves and to see what's to come and what's being sold and bought all those things. So we have to definitely make sure to keep buying them and this will all keep, We Need Diverse Books in business. [Laughs] The lack of change isn't hurting the activism end because you're still going to be here. Y'all are still gonna keep fighting and doing what you need to do.

Aliana: Exactly. That's the idea. It's been wonderful to see that. And, you know, like you said, I do hope that the change we've seen in interns and other areas of the industry, which the most diverse parts of the industry do tend to be interns and book reviewers and folks who are working

kind of on a self-employed or freelance basis, and I hope that the industry takes that and looks at it and says, okay, well, what can we do to hire these interns? What can we do to hire people who maybe don't have a traditional path to this career, people who don't have a college degree or more than a college degree, people who don't have internships at all Big 5 publishers under their belts. How can we nurture these people, hire them, and make sure we're promoting them to leadership and that's what I think we're at the beginning of trying to figure that out. And I hope that publishers continue in that regard.

Jenn: I'm really hoping so too and I'm hoping we all stay safe and that you and Macy stay very, very safe where you are.

Fin: You as well. And my heart really goes out to everybody in New York City right now. I mean, I think about it all the time. I hope that you stay safe and everyone I know in New York, stay safe. It's definitely a lot right now. And I hope that everybody comes out of this feeling okay.

Jenn: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. And that we still have a love of books and I think that's been helpful, so, is that people are reading. I haven't been reading as much. People are reading, so that makes me feel like oh, better because we need the paycheck.

Fin: True. It's all we can do to support independent bookstores and marginalized authors when we can. I'm like always trying to spend some of my money towards that. Where can I preorder a book from that will support an indie bookstore and whose book am I buying? You know, I think those choices do say something to publishers and they say something to the bottom line for publishers and bookstores. So I, personally, don't ever shop on Amazon for books unless I have no choice whatsoever. So.

Jenn: *Woo* likewise. Boo, Amazon!

Fin: Boo, Amazon.

Jenn: But I understand people in economic restraint, you know, constraints, can't always do that. Totally understand. But no, boo.

Fin: Exactly. And I've heard a lot that people can do when they can't buy from indie bookstores. I grew up not being able to buy a lot of books, very small book budget, super low income, and I was a huge library user. There's no way I would have been able to read like I did without my public library, but people who can't buy books new or from indie bookstores can shout them out and talk about them and hype them up to their friends and tell everybody they know about them. And that makes a huge difference too. Word of mouth is still a big way people get book recommendations, whether it's word of mouth from somebody asking to another person or whether it's word of mouth on social media. It certainly has driven a lot of my book purchases.

Jenn: Oh, definitely. Yeah, I just, I do indie. And I have an indie in walking distance from me. I think they're still doing curbside pickup, I think. Wow. Kew & Willow Books. Yeah, it's very

much a huge, huge privilege and just so nice and dangerous at the same time. If I go one way, I can get to the bookstore. If I go the other way, the library's there. So I'm literally bookended by a bookstore and a library and both are closed technically, but I'm like you, I always went to the library. And when I got money, I spent it on books. So it just makes sense that I work in this industry and I know that the industry will survive. I know that. It will go through another hit just like in 2008, just like in 2001, just like in the '90s and therefore and therefore, but we'll get through this, but it's, it's scary. It's a scary time. And like we said, I feel for graduates right now. I really feel for them. I feel for everyone. Like everyone, but I really feel for graduates. I'm like this is not what I want for y'all at all. I really don't want y'all to be going back home when you probably were going to do an internship.

Fin: Exactly. Yes. It's painful to see. I hope, we hope for the best for them. It's everything I can possibly do to advocate for them right now.

Jenn: Yeah. We'll get there. We'll get there. Every day, I'm A, I don't know what day it is when I wake up, and B, I hope again, like, it'll get better. So thank you so much, Alaina, for coming back, for talking with me, for everything you're doing with WNDB and team WNDB.

Fin: Thank you for having me, Jenn. I love your podcast and I think you're doing great work in general. I mean, you were honored by *PW* for reasons. So I'm honored to be a guest again.

Jenn: Oh, shucks, thanks. I appreciate it. So thank y'all for listening. Once again, this is Minorities in Publishing, which you can find on Tumblr at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com. And you can find it also on Twitter @minoritiesinpub and wherever you listen to podcasts, including iHeartRadio, Spotify, TuneIn, Google Play, and Apple Podcasts. And Alaina, how can people keep in touch with you, follow what you're doing, because you are working with WNDB but they can follow you too, because you write great posts and I linked to it already. But I will re-link when this episode airs and beforehand to your *Publishers Weekly* article.

Fin: Thank you. Yes, people can find me, my website is actually [Alainaleary, L-E-A-R-Y, .com](http://Alainaleary.com) because that's my journalism byline. And so you can follow me @Alainaskeys, A-L-A-I-N-A-S-K-E-Y-S on Instagram and Twitter. Simply searching for my name will usually bring that up. And yeah, I love to be on social media in ways that feel positive and constructive. So I think that that's what I try to do. And I try to follow people who are also on there for the same reasons and I'm looking forward to seeing all of you there.

Jenn: I can attest that her account is very, very positive. So definitely we need the positivity so please follow. And cat memes. We need positivity and cat memes. It's all great.

[50:08]