

Audio Title: Kristen McGuiness

Audio Duration: 0:38:32

Number of Speakers: 3

Transcript

Rebekah Borucki: Hey, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot and I'm here to help you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's where you will find the stoop.

Our host Amanda Lytle will be there to welcome you to the conversation. *The Book Stoop* is the place for the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, our favorite kinds of people.

I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is season two of our podcast. Thank you for listening.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

Amanda Lytle: Thanks Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second to welcome you to our spot, *The Book Stoop*. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful to have you here.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with Kristen McGuiness. Kristen is the Vice President of Row House. She's also the founder of Storyboxing, providing content, coaching and courses for people looking to sell their book, launch their brand or grow their non-profit. She's also the best-selling author of *51/50: The Magical Adventures of a Single Life* and has recently finished her debut novel *Live Through This*. She has over 20 years' experience in book development, writing and editorial work.

In the conversation today, you will hear about so many different things including the backstory to how a love of reading turned into a love of writing. This turned into editorial work and eventually into mentorship and coaching in the book world.

Kristen tells us about how she hit her rock bottom and worked through some of life's biggest challenges while navigating her career. She shares her experience working on other stories while sitting on the biggest story yet, her dad's story, and also the visions behind Row House.

Before we jump in, I want to invite you to share *The Book Stoop* with your community. If you're loving this episode, grab a screenshot and tag us on Instagram, @rowhousepub. Every share, five-star rating and written review helps us find more listeners and climb the charts. So we're super grateful for your help.

We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question, “So what are you reading these days?”

Kristen McGuinness: So I am – like a lot of editors, I’m usually reading something I’m working on. So I am currently reading one Row House book that I’m editing. Actually I’m reading two Row House books, one that I am editing and one that I am book coaching because I also act as a book coach and then – but I always say for me, because my job involves reading so much for work, I’m not allowed to buy books anymore. The only thing that I buy is books of poetry. So I’m always consistently reading poetry. But I am not allowed to purchase long-form books because they just collect dust. There’s a book pile that collected ...

Amanda Lytle: OK. You’ve got me interested in poetry. Is there something about poetry that just feels super nourishing or is it just because they are typically shorter and faster to read?

Kristen McGuinness: Yeah, I’m not particularly good at meditation. So I look at poems as my meditation. I mean that’s like if I want to just like have that kind of quiet stillness that I can drop into something that feels bigger than me, I feel like a poem is just like a fast track to that space. I mean I have the poets that I read pretty consistently but I always – that’s the one thing. Like I love picking up new poets and I love – I mean I love buying poetry. I could just – there’s nothing like walking into a bookstore with an amazing poetry section. I get very excited.

Amanda Lytle: Oh, beautiful!

Kristen McGuinness: Yeah, no, I’m a big fan. I’m a big fan of reading poetry and I’m a big fan of writing poetry just for fun. As a writer myself, it’s kind of like a safe space where I don’t – like I don’t plan to be a published poet anytime soon. So I don’t ever have to worry if it’s good or not. It’s just a way to like get it out without having to like think like, “Oh, is this going to be a book someday?” and then it comes at a whole other level of judgment and commerce versus just like I’m just writing to write. So ...

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. OK. So now your writing journey, tell me a bit of the backstory to your writing journey and how you got into writing and then into editing because there’s a whole story here. I can feel it.

Kristen McGuinness: Yeah. Yeah. So I mean I think I met a lot of book nerds where you either are born with it or you aren’t. Like I mean I see it. I have a daughter who does not like to read and it’s so funny because I mean even as a young kid, like she was never a child that wanted me to read like six books before she went to bed. Like I was an insatiable reader even before I could read.

Like my mom would say like I just – she could just continue reading books all night and I never would have been done and then once I could start reading, like I was a very advanced reader from a young age and so I think like that was just my – like I wasn’t good at sports. I’m not good at playing an instrument. I don’t have a particularly good singing voice. But I was really good at reading. I also – you know, I’ve had my own childhood trauma and I think that it was definitely

an escape for me a lot too. I liked entering other worlds because I didn't – I kind of had a sad childhood and it was a place for me to go. I was an only child and my dad was out of the picture and my mom worked and I was raised by a slightly to fairly resentful grandma.

So it was just like me and her in a small condominium and I shared a bedroom with my mom and it was just kind of like – it was a weird little place to live, you know, a weird little place to grow up but books were my way out and all I had to do was open one of them and I was in some far-off land or – and my grandmother was part of me reading though. She was also a voracious reader and she gave me books that like most kids should not be reading because she didn't know what else to do.

But like I was reading like Danielle Steel romance novels by like third grade and like I think I was like nine when she gave me *Catcher in the Rye* and like she gave me all JD – like I was reading JD Salinger in like fourth grade and so – and like really random like – you know, not really suitable for children books. But I just like I could rip through a novel in a day and so I think that's really what books did and if you were that kind of reader, it's hard not to want to then write them yourself, right?

I mean you love stories so much and I was telling someone today, I mean you know, however I'm introed here but I am part of the – of Row House Publishing, which is obviously connected into *Book Stoop* and I was telling someone today about working in a publisher and obviously there are personalities and all these hard choices and egos and hurt feelings and – you know, because it's a business. But to me, it's a business based on books and like it's the spirit of the book that's the most important thing to me and I just – I have that kind of love for a book that it's not just binding with paper inside.

Like it's its own entity. It has its own journey. It has its own being and I do know that like no matter what I've done as a job in life, like when I am a part of creating a book, that's like that's my happy place. You know, I mean I just – I love that. So yeah, so I mean that quite naturally obviously made me want to be a writer. I mean I don't think most kids are like, "I want to be a book editor when I grow up," you know. You don't really know what that means.

So I definitely wanted to be a writer and, you know, I wrote a lot. You know, on and off. I think that was my kind of – I'm a terrible student. So I like will get really into it. I'm like I'm a straight-A student for the first month and then I pretty much drop off at that point.

So I was the same way kind of as a writer. I would get really into the practice of writing and then I would be like, "Nah," and I move on. But basically, I got into book publishing because I was in college and I was actually meeting with a recruiter for Condé Nast. I wanted to work at Vanity Fair. That was my dream. It is still my dream to be published in Vanity Fair. I'm working very steadily on that right now.

But I was – I wanted to be – I wanted to work for Vanity Fair and I met with somebody and they had like an internship available at like Self or like Shape Magazine and I was like, "I don't work out. I have nothing to do with fitness." It's like I had no interest in that job.

I was like, “What? Like I don’t understand the gym. Like that is not for me.” So I told her where I really wanted to work and she said, “Well, you should try book publishing because a lot of times those magazines will actually hire ed assistants out of book publishing.”

So I went and applied instead to book publishing and I got my first job working as a publicity assistant at St. Martin’s Press and I was there for about a year and then I got a job working as an assistant editor at Simon and Schuster and that’s really then when my editorial career took off and I began – I worked for an editor who had been editing a very long time and he was at the place in his career where he was tired of editing books himself and so he would usually have – the associate editor who had been in the job before him, who have been doing most of the editing, he had me edit a book before I even got the job. That’s how I got it was based on my edits on that book.

I never edited a book before so I really didn’t know what I was doing. But I think I had read enough to understand and so I got the job and that really took me on. Like I very quickly learned how to become a book editor. So I edit around 20 to 24 books a year for him including some of the biggest names in self-help.

He actually did a lot of Black fiction, Black female fiction and so I did a lot of fiction as well at that time. So yeah, we just – I learned how to become a professional editor and I was there for almost three years and then 9/11 happened in New York City and like a lot of people who went through that day. It just was really hard for me.

So I decided to move out to LA. I am now in recovery but I was also – I partied a lot. I drank and I did a lot of drugs while editing those books. I famously edited Dr. Phil very high and – but I edited the books “Self Matters” in one night thanks to prescription stimulants.

I got – I moved to LA for a change of pace on many levels and I ended up working in film development. That did not help the drug addiction I will say and I ended up – I actually ended up working for a film development company as their book scout. So my job was to like read books basically nonstop and so I did that for about a year and a half and then I hit bottom because I would come to work loaded all the time.

So then I went home to get sober and I really started to focus on my own writing. So I will say – and this is where as a book editor I think I still struggle. I’m probably not the only one. I’ve always wanted – it’s a little hard to always be the bridesmaid when you want to be the bride and that’s a little bit of the book editor’s role. I mean you’re really there to hold the author’s hand. You’re there to ensure that everything goes right. You’re there to like – you know, I mean you’re also sort of the wedding planner at the same time, right?

Rebekah knows I really love metaphors. So I will take metaphors as long as I can. But – so you know, I was tired. It was similar. My work in film had been similar to – and I was writing screenplays at the time. But my work in film had been similar to my work in books, that I was really there to support the screenwriter and I worked with a lot of great screenwriters. I worked

on *Blood Diamond* which ended up starting Leonardo DiCaprio and I worked on *Rumor Has It*, which was with Jennifer Aniston and on *Monster-in-Law* with Jennifer Lopez and Jane Fonda.

It was great but again I was like – my job was like working with the screenwriters of those films and really supporting them and their process and doing notes and I just realized like yet again, I'm not the writer.

So I moved home to Dallas to get sober but I also – my uncle let me live in his house for free so I could write. So I got a job working as a receptionist at Arthur Murray Dance Studio where I had to answer the phone even at night. “It’s a great day at Arthur Murray!” and then I got a weird job at Mary Kay where I would wear pantyhose every day, which was very strange.

You know, and I had had kind of like a cool Hollywood life. Like as of the year before, I’ve been at like the Beverly Hills Hotel. Like having martinis with film producers and then there I was like driving my little Honda Civic to Mary Kay wearing my pantyhose and being like, “What the fuck just happened?”

So I was – a friend of mine later became my literary agent. He was a lit agent at the time. Started working for a very famous book publisher named Judith Regan and they needed – they were looking for an associate editor. But in that moment, Judith’s assistant had just quit. Judith at one point had been profiled by the Wall Street Journal as one of the most horrible bosses in the world.

In fact the movie *Horrible Bosses* came out of this Wall Street Journal article that they changed it a lot, that it wasn’t like these people. But it was Harvey Weinstein, Judith Regan and Scott Rudin. I don’t know if you know anything about that. Obviously, everybody knows everything about Harvey Weinstein now. But Scott Rudin is also a very famously abusive film producer and in Hollywood was always known as like the worst person to work for and Judith was on that list with the three of them. So I went and became Judith’s assistant. I was her second longest running assistant and I was only there for six months.

Amanda Lytle: Wow.

Kristen McGuinness: The only person who had lasted longer than me had been an assistant who had lasted two years and I don’t know. Like the woman I think had had to go into like massive therapy or just something. It was a very tragic ending for her. So it was a horrific job but it was also a phenomenal experience in book publishing and even to this day, I would not have given it up for the world.

I learned so much. I mean Dominic was phenomenal in teaching me how to be a book editor. But a lot of that was throwing me into the water and just kind of making sure I didn’t drown. Judith wasn’t that way. She’s still a book publisher to this day and I really got to experience and learn so much in that six month that I think that’s what has given me the ability to come in and help others to do it because I mean I don’t think there would have been a master’s in book publishing that would have taught me more.

She was so involved in book production that is not – is not normal for any publisher. I mean her level of micromanagement was deeply unhealthy. But I got to see everything from soup to nuts in a way that you just don't get that experience at a normal publisher and I will say though she was not treated as a true book publisher in a lot of ways because she published – so her first big break was publishing Howard Stern and that book was phenomenally huge.

Then she did *The Dirt* by Mötley Crüe. I mean she – you know, Jenna Jameson's bio, these are all books of like the '90s and 2000s. So they're not particularly famous anymore. But in their day, they were huge and what she was able to do was she would take a topic that felt tabloid and she would put it through like a literary perspective.

So she would have this book that landed at this really crazy intersection of literary and tabloid that no one had ever done before. I just loved it and I still to this day. It really showed me what it does when you mix genre and how it creates such a huge audience and not just for sales but in terms of who's talking about this, right?

So, you know, you have people on the street talking about it. You have people that might not have even read a book before, right? You're introducing books to a Howard Stern audience. They don't buy books. But now they're reading a book and they're having the same conversation that someone who's an editor of *The New Yorker* is having and to me, that was just the coolest impact that I feel like a book can have.

So I love when a book can really just spread itself off of – over like an X-Y diagram of humanity and create almost a simultaneous impact. That's what she did. She did it over and over and over again and I saw how she did it and I just – I can't say enough on what I learned in those six months. I also learned how to like dodge people throwing shit at your head.

So it gave me the real [0:16:22] [*Indiscernible*] and one day my grandmother was like, "You know, she cannot kill you," and I was like, "I think that's debatable. I would not say my life is not on the line here. I think that would be naïve to say that. I could be killed actually in this job."

So I left because it got too much and I was trying to maintain a very – at that point a very thin sobriety and I promptly relapsed and I promptly got sober again and I've been sober to this day. So it becomes less of my story and, you know, it didn't really shift many decisions but it did shift the decision that I decided to get out of books and film because I had had a number of abusive bosses already in film. Then I had this other abusive boss. I just knew I couldn't continue to be in abusive work situations, which is why – I mean I'm very sensitive if people ever accused me or any place I work with of doing that because I've been in – I know what that looks like.

I would never want to foster an environment where that's the case. So I think that – it just isn't the way to do business and it doesn't make any sense. It just doesn't. You don't have to hurt people's feelings in order to get things done. You don't have to hurt people's feelings in order to make money.

You don't have to hurt people's feelings in order to create a quality product and though what Judith was doing was so astronomically brilliant and exciting and at its time ground-breaking, there is no reason for people to hate themselves at the end of the day in order to do that.

So I went to nonprofits and I got a very safe and lovely job and I worked for a very kind woman who loved me back to life and I wrote my first book and I finally got to write a book and in 2010, I published my memoir called "51/50" which was about my first year of dating. I got in the year sober and in 12-step recovery they suggest not to date in the first year.

But I had already been like sober twice. I basically have not dated in like three years and I really didn't even date – you know, I was somebody who like when I drink and use, I would just basically sleep with somebody and they wouldn't leave and then that meant they were my boyfriend. So it wasn't like – I've never like been out for coffee and gotten to know someone.

So I wrote a book about it and that's my book "51/50". I went on 51 dates in 50 weeks and not all of them though were dates with guys. I actually started seeing like a shamanic therapist that year and I started doing energy work and this was like really pre the – like when people started doing – like I was doing sweat lodge and then people were like – like five years later, I was doing sweat lodges. Like that is so creepy. Like what is going on? So the book is really about that. I mean it was about the search for love but it was also about this search for healing.

Amanda Lytle: Hey friend. We are coming straight back to *The Book Stoop* after a quick break.

Kristen McGuiness: And yeah, I mean a big part of my story and I will sort of say this is what I'm now starting to work on. My father was a drug smuggler, which is why he wasn't around. He was in prison for most of my life and so the book was also about coming to terms with that.

His last year of life, he actually was free from prison for the first time in about 28 years and I got to see him in like real life and not in prison. So that whole relationship was part of that book too. So it was really about like, you know, healing the father wound and healing the wound from – you know, kind of the sad childhood where all I did was read books and tried to find love in that process.

So my husband always described it as a memoir disguised as a dating book and I agree. It is, you know. It was not a typical memoir and that book came out in 2010 and I quit my fulltime job at the nonprofit because I thought I'm going to be a bestselling author and like I thought that you get paid lots of money. I now laugh.

For anybody listening who thinks you're going to be able to – make a lot of money, that is a lie. That does not – so even when you become a bestselling author, which I did, the money part is really tricky and you have to figure out other ways to make money. So what I've discovered is that books can offer you those opportunities. But the opportunity doesn't necessarily come from the book itself and that's not to say – I mean there are people who sell like an enormous amount of books and actually still receive royalties from them.

But going back to Row House, that is one of the things that we – when we were building Row House, that we wanted to create a different system because I think so many authors, they're unable to make any money from the books that they do and even when they do sell relatively well, the percentage that they see in return is so small that it's nothing they're going to live off of. So it really is about what do you do next. So my next step was to become a ghostwriter.

Amanda Lytle: So interesting. What was that experience like?

Kristen McGuiness: Financially – and I will say it. I mean I'm somebody who I don't come from a lot of money. I have to pay bills and I have an awesome husband. But, you know, I was always going to be the – not always. My husband just opened up a pizza shop this week. So we're really hoping that we see a shift in our financial powers in the household.

But I was for the most part the primary breadwinner from the minute that we got together and I recognize that was probably going to be the state of our relationship. If I wanted the relationship to move forward, I had to be OK with that but I also had to figure out a way to do it.

The ghostwriting gig came and it felt like a good fit. I mean I'm very lucky. My first ghostwriting gig could not have been with a better person as a woman Tennie McCarthy. I got to be paid very well. The book was actually with a very large publisher. So it felt very much in alignment with where I would have wanted my writing career to go and I was getting the experience of practicing that writing.

My hope was that I would continue to write for magazines and I would build up my journalism creds while doing ghostwriting and I will say I think that's where I like personally failed because I just – I never got into the pitch cycle. So I'm actually down the road right now with a magazine to do a very large feature article on my dad because I will say for many years, I've written books for other people who come to me thinking they have very interesting stories.

But the whole time I knew I was sort of sitting on the most interesting story because my father's story actually is like really the story of the secret history of the drug trade, so to speak, which is the art *of [0:22:45] [Indiscernible]* I'm currently writing for a major mag and I've been – I'm like working with the DEA agent on the case and the FBI agent on the case and I've gotten like incredible resources.

Like one of the guys who ran a Colombian smuggling is one of my sources and like – so it's this really big piece and so for years, you know, I will say as a writer, you know, there was financial pressure on the outside externally and my husband even said it. You know, he's opening up a restaurant and he said it to me yesterday, "Look, you know, no doubt you sacrificed your dreams because of where we were at financially. Like you could have been writing your own stuff that entire decade and you didn't. You were writing other people's things," you know, and I agree.

I wrote one book in 2010. I have yet to write a book that has my name on it. I did write a novel that's out to publishers right now and I actually have a call with my agent tomorrow to figure out like what the heck is going on with it and do how we get this thing sold because it's kind of

crazy. Like it's an amazing novel and I'm like, "Why isn't it selling?" I mean I edit for a living. I write stuff all the time. Like that's a piece of shit. Like I'm a pretty good judge of my own writing.

I don't – I'm like no, this is like an incredible novel and it's about a woman who loses her husband in a mass shooting and becomes an accidental advocate and basically a fire brand. It's set in 2016 and I wrote it in 2016 and I had no idea what was going to happen that year.

I was writing the night of the election thinking that like Hillary was about to be elected and so the character was going through a similar process that everybody went through in 2016. Basically she goes from not wanting to take on this public mantle because she feels like she would be profiting off the death of her husband into being radicalized into action where she realizes that if she doesn't stand up against what's about to come in America, then what are we doing, right?

We go and like turn our loss into advocacy. Then what was the loss for? And so even if that means she's going to ultimately get the life she sort of always wanted professionally and that's where she struggles because like her dreams will come true but it's at the price of losing a husband that she was in a complicated marriage to and then that's the other piece of it is like how do we navigate grief when it's not so easy, when it's not – when you can't say, oh, he was the love of my life and I don't know what I'm going to do without him. When it was already a hard marriage that didn't know how long it was going to last and now he's gone and now you're supposed to be out there fighting for gun advocacy because you lost someone you love so much, right?

How do you navigate that stream? Yeah. So it's called "Live Through This" and like I say, it's like it feels so right and it's a book about like love and marriage and loss and also political activism. So yeah, so I – you know, I wrote that. I got back into ghostwriting books and in 2020, that little thing called a pandemic rolled into town.

Amanda Lytle: Oh god, yeah.

Kristen McGuinness: So – and Rebekah Borucki who in 2018, she hired me to be her private like book coach and editor on managing the motherload and, you know, we connected. We didn't know each other personally but we just stayed in touch and I told her in 2020, I was like, "So my life is not working."

I was back to – I was working in a nonprofit during the day as I told you off-camera and I was writing, ghostwriting books at night and it was very lucrative and I wanted to buy a home, which would become a – as I was telling someone earlier today, we were given a 60-day notice to leave a house when we were six months pregnant with our first child.

We [0:26:28] [*Indiscernible*] to leave the house when we had a six-week-old baby because in both cases, the market had spiked and the homeowners wanted to sell. So after that, we were like we are not renting. We just can't continue to do this. So we moved out of LA because there was

no way we could afford to buy in that town and we found a town where we could afford to buy one day and we rented a house and I worked my ass off in 2018 and 2019 to be able to buy a home.

We ended up buying the home that we were renting that I'm now sitting in right now, which is amazing and we love it and it like brings tears to my eyes all the time that like ghostwriting bought this, you know.

So we closed on our house on March 12th, 2020, the day before lockdown. The next day, we came into our house and closed the door and like everybody else in the world was like, "What the fuck just happened?"

Like a lot of other people in the world, I had the space to actually take a look at what I was doing and say, "Is this even what I want to do?" and it wasn't. I was just doing it to buy a house. I mean that was really it and the house is bought and I had freedom.

I talked to Rebekah Borucki and I said, "This isn't working," and she put me in touch with an amazing book coach named Trudi Lebron. Trudy helped me to build my own story coaching business called Storyboxing where I would take everything I learned as a ghostwriter, as a book editor and as a book coach and I would put it on to a company and I would start to scale back on the book, the ghostwriting business because I didn't want to do that anymore and instead, I would offer coaching to people and I would help them to write book proposals.

So I created Storyboxing. I was still working in my fulltime job. So I basically was building it and I launched it in the fall of 2020 and September of 2020 was my last day at my day job and I launched Storyboxing and Rebekah – at that point, Trudi actually had become a client of mine because she was working on a book proposal. So she was my business coach. I became her book coach. You know, we're working on that and then Rebekah Borucki had a very public – I'm going to say falling out. I mean I think that what she did was actually a public act of activism. That's what it was.

The falling out would appear that there was actually a personal dilemma there. It wasn't. It was a moral choice to no longer do business with a company that she did not feel was ethically serving her community and in order to stand up for that community, she walked away from money on the table and I will – no matter what, I have an enormous amount of respect for Rebekah for that and it is probably – even though as she well knows, I was finally not going to be a bridesmaid. I was going to be a bride and I had my own company and I had been servicing a lot of other people's companies for a long time and I was very excited to do that and I was preparing to then open up a small – I had no intentions to open up a big publishing house.

I just wanted to have my own like kind of boutique literary and print out of that and to bring the knowledge that I learned from Judith into my publishing practice and then to be able to focus on my own writing, which is really the goal. I won't be writing other people's books anymore and I will get to write my own. I did that and that was like September 4th I remember because it was the day before my birthday and about a month later, everything happens with Hay House and I

texted her on a Sunday night. I think it was October 4th, like exactly a month later and I said I guess it's time to start your own publisher and here we are, Amanda.

Amanda Lytle: Yes. I know she was telling me about the text that you two were sending back and forth and how it kind of started as a joke and then it was like, wait, this is real.

Kristen McGuinness: Yes.

Amanda Lytle: Let's do this, yeah.

Kristen McGuinness: Yeah. I was definitely like – I mean you can do that. That's a good idea for you. I was like that was not an idea I intended to be a part of. I was very much like, no, I'm OK. I mean this is fall of 2020. I am a white woman. I am somebody who has always been politically progressive. But I mean I think it's someone who personally experienced a horrific injustice.

My father spent nearly 30 years in prison for smuggling marijuana. I cannot act like I don't understand personally what it means to experience injustice in this world and it was a brutal sentence and he served most of it and that was because he also didn't toe the line in prison and he was an activist himself and I've always been a political.

Just as I – I mean you're either born with politics just like you're born with books. I was born political. I just always had a strong sense of political activism and when I was in college, I studied abroad in South Africa which really is what lit the – when I say there's that moment in everybody's life where they become radicalized, I had probably long been on that road but I lived in South Africa for six months in 1998, four years after the fall of Apartheid and Mandela was president and I smoked a lot of weed. It was me and two other women and we all smoked pot.

So we found the Rastas and we also happen to be the three girls that didn't live with White families. We lived with Black families in Downtown Durban. Our experience there was completely different. I lived with a Black family. I was part of that. I am still part of that family. They're still super close to me. I love them. I will love them forever and I lived with them and I experienced living in South Africa from a very different perspective.

I get teary-eyed. It was definitely – I almost didn't leave. I didn't want to leave. But I knew that my mom was the first person in my family to ever go to college and I know her family would be heartbroken if I didn't complete it and so I came back.

My friends were all Zulu and Xhosa and I'm still good friends with one of those. One of my friends to this day. We went there. My husband and I went there the year after we were married because he's Greek and he has a lot of family in South Africa and we went and stayed with my friend *Manla [0:32:07] [Phonetic]* and we promised that our firstborn children would be married to each other and he has got a son Dolly and I've got a daughter Ella, who I do feel have a good shot.

You know, we have arranged the marriage and all because he's still a Rasta. So that has not changed. His smoking has not decreased. I do not smoke anymore but I always say if I manage to go to Durban, South Africa, and hang out with *Manla* and not smoke a blunt, I know I can stay sober for the rest of my life.

So yeah, no, I just – my life has forever changed and so when I was presented with Row House, what I realized was if I truly believe in the political activism that I have been spouting and reading and believing it for years and I'm not willing to set aside my own personal dreams for something that is far bigger than me and it is far bigger than Rebekah, it's actually building an entity that really does do business differently.

So that's what we've done and it has been incredible and so – but simultaneously, I continue to run Storyboxing. I do coaching and courses and I began to – I ran group workshops last year. So I do two workshops every – I do them multiple times a year but I have two types of workshops.

I do one that's called "Five Months to Memoir" and people can write the first draft of their memoir in five months and we work together. For a lot of it, it's first-time writers. So it's people who don't actually know how to write a book.

So it's a lot about leading them through the process of how to write a book but specifically a memoir and then the other proposal is "Five Weeks to Book Proposal".

So I take people through the book proposal writing process which similarly there's a lot of folks who have never written a book proposal before and it's also really helping them to develop their book and that's – I mean that's what I love to do.

I love getting together with somebody and really helping them to bake their book and figure out what the ingredients are and figure out the structure and the story and how all the pieces fit together and that's – you know, it goes back to that Judith Regan period. It's just what I see is ultimately the impact of a book is born and how you create it and the choices that you make at the very beginning.

So in order to make choices that can have the widest impact, it's really about guiding that author to the story that they most want to tell and I'm a firm believer in that. I want the author to lead content but I also recognize where I can come and support them in terms of developing the best structure and really helping them to distill and find their voice and their message, you know.

That is how I guide people and how we write amazing books or try to. So we can find that weird intersection. I mean for Rebekah and I, our intersection is firmly social justice and wellness and I love that. I mean it's not necessarily – those two things don't always intersect and so what happens every time we bring wellness into social justice but what happens every time we bring social justice into wellness and how big does the impact grow when those two things are married, you know. So yeah.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah, this is great. Thank you so much for offering that up to *The Book Stoop*. I have one more question for you.

Kristen McGuinness: Sure.

Amanda Lytle: And that is a shoutout. So if you had an account, a person, an organization, disruptor, activist or change agent that listeners should go and check out, who would it be?

Kristen McGuinness: OK. So it's Land Back Baddie. You will find them on Instagram and they're an indigenous two-spirit artist and what I love about them is that they do the news. I want to say it's once a week and when I think of like where – and it's honestly where I'm consuming my news nowadays. I can't even read New York Times headlines anymore.

Like I can obviously watch any of the three networks. I mean – and for a long time, I followed the Young Turks and I'm a big fan of like Pacifica and KPDK and Democracy Now, like the old school heads.

But I think that they've – my husband is a huge – they don't have it in Canada. But here in America, he's a huge fan of Pacifica and it's a really amazing radio station. They take no corporate dollars. They're extremely progressive and it's like the land of Ralph Nader and I appreciate that – I just don't think it has really been brought into the modern century and I love when people are actually getting the news through a progressive lens to truly understand what is going on from an anti-capitalist perspective.

So I think Land Back Baddie is awesome because they're not only working from an anti-capitalist perspective but they're working from a two-spirit indigenous perspective. It's just they do really cool stuff. So – and I think we need to amplify more news sources like them. I know that – I think Land Back Baddie actually does it a little tongue in cheek. But I think that that's where – like if I had all the money in the world – and this is where I'm going to get myself into trouble. I've already told Rebekah. It's like I say that Row House is like the mob. Like I keep trying but I can't get myself out.

But, you know, if I was going to say to push us in the direction of Row House Media, I do think it's about beginning to create content both in traditional – like I don't deny traditional – like we turn that big-ass *phenom [0:37:22] [Phonetic]* every night in my house. I would love to see something different than what my options are right now on it, you know, and like I stream a lot too.

I have like diversity of content in terms of where I'm getting it from. So I think that it is important that we continue to try to put anti-capitalist, anti-racist voices in a place where more people can hear them because it really is about amplifying impact. So if we were going to create Row House Media, I would try to create a news program showing Land Back Baddie and I would amplify them everywhere and I would ...

Amanda Lytle: That's amazing.

Kristen McGuinness: ... offer more progressive lenses to how we understand what is happening in our world. So ...

Amanda Lytle: Amazing. Kristen, thank you so much for hanging out. That was great.

Kristen McGuinness: Thanks for having me.

Amanda Lytle: Thank you so much for being with us. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you're able. Written reviews help us reach more listeners too. Be sure to check out the show notes for all the links and share *The Book Stoop* with your community. Talk soon.

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