

# Episode 58- A Kids Company About

## **Emily**

Welcome to the Hybrid Pub Scout Podcast with me, Emily Einolander.

## **Corinne**

And me Corinne Kalasky. Hello.

## **Emily**

We're mapping the frontier between traditional and indie publishing, and today's guests are Ari Mathae. And Denise Morales Soto

Ari Mathae is an associate producer at A Kid's Company About where they work on writing, editing, hosting and producing podcasts and audio based projects. They received their MA in book publishing from Portland State University, where they researched the transmedia storytelling relationship between book publishing and podcasts already has a soft spot for dynamic audio storytelling of all kinds, but especially for queer narratives with uncanny and horror vibes. When not immersed in podcasts, editing and audio books, you can find Ari obsessing over d&d, or trying to bake a perfect macaron.

Denise Morales Soto is a story lover from Puerto Rico that somehow made her way to Portland, Oregon. She got her BA in English literature and linguistics at the University of Puerto Rico at K and has an MA in book publishing from Portland State University. She's an editor at a kids book about a children's media company and does freelance work where she continues to indulge her love of storytelling. She's the author of the soon to be released children's book, a little book about culture, and is actively working on her next project. When she's not reading, writing or making books. She's probably playing video games or watching something she's already seen 1000 times. Relatable.

02:00

Welcome Ari and Denise!

## **Corinne**

Welcome.

## **Denise**

Hi. Glad to be here.

02:09

## **Emily**

And what today's guests have in common is that they both work for A Kid's Company About.

**Corinne**

Founded in 2019, Portland, Oregon, A Kid's Company About is built on the belief that kids are ready to have challenging, important and empowering conversations with the grown ups in their lives. The company has published over 50 books ranging from topics like divorce, optimism, voting, cancer, shame, racism, gratitude, empathy, and being non binary. In 2021. They made the leap from telling stories and books to five to nine year olds to telling stories through words, video, audio and beyond for kids of all ages.

**Emily**

They also both went to Portland State University.

02:52

You're outnumbered Corinne there.

**Corinne**

I know. I was like, I did not go there. But many people that I adore did go there. So alright, well, let's jump into this interview. So this is for both of you.

At what point in A Kid's Company About development, did you join the team? Oh, well,

03:13

**Ari**

I, I joined in September of 20. So just before the company turned one year old, which was wild. We were seeing a lot of growth, we were seeing a lot of changes already.

And the world was on fire. Literally, this was when Portland was red and orange.

Was was when I started. It was kind of surreal. But then I got to start at the company. And I got to meet everyone and I got to be a part of the things that we were building. The first day that I started, we was when we announced to the company that we would be on Oprah's Favorite Things list for 2020. So it was just like jumping into the hot water and like Okay, cool feet on the ground, we're doing things. And I started at the company in wholesale, so working with schools and libraries and with bookstores and shops to get the books physically there. And then I was able to transition into podcasts, which is something that I have wanted to do for a long time in May so it's been it's been a wave already and it's just been a year for me.

04:57

**Emily**

So, podcasting a noble profession...or hobby.

That would be just like the best way to lift your mood in the middle of that, that hellscape. That was last September.

**Ari**

Yeah, yeah, it was, it was a beautiful, big change.

**Emily**

So what about you, Denise?

05:22

**Denise**

Um, well, I started at the company in July of 2020. So just a little bit before Ari, and the company wasn't even a year old. And it was so tiny and small. When I joined. It was a team of five people, I think, including me. And we were only making books at that time. And so it was just I was really excited because it was also in this like, Hellfire of a period in 2020, where everything was going wrong. And also like this big transition, because I had just finished getting my like Master's in book publishing, I had nothing lined up, no one was hiring, everything was terrible. And then this opportunity came up. And it was not only like a job, but it was a really exciting one in the field that I wanted to be in that was doing really awesome work. So it was really, really exciting. And I've had the great pleasure of just seeing the company turn into something so much bigger than just books. And it's been really cool. Just to see it from a little baby to like a real thing. It's really cool. We're like two years old this month.

06:29

**Emily**

Happy birthday, happy birthday.

06:33

**Corinne**

Alright, so Denise, could you tell us about some of the books that you have worked on that you particularly enjoyed working on?

**Denise**

Ah, so there's been a lot and a lot of them have been so much fun to work on. So I'm going to try and keep it brief. But I think some of the highlights for me is definitely our kids book about immigration. That one is just such a great book. And Jay was such an amazing person to work with. And I think a lot of the things that we say there and the conversation that we're starting about immigration and immigrants is just really, just really cool. And a conversation I think, is really important. And I think that we approach that topic with empathy first, and just like creating empathy toward immigration, immigrants in general, and MJ just has such an amazing story. And so just that whole journey, that whole experience, for me is like top five easily of I think a close second is our book on The Tulsa Race Massacre. Just because that was a huge book to work on. We had to do so much fact checking and research and we thankfully got to work with like an expert who's dedicated his life to researching the Tulsa Race Massacre. Oh, wow. Yeah, it was and we got to release it on the centennial of the event happening. And we actually got to give away some of our books on the Tulsa Race Massacre for free to the residents of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and giving it to bookstores. So they would be able to sell and just kind of the fact that we wrote like we had such an awesome book, and that we were also getting able to give it away as like a resource because we really wanted to just educate the public on that event, was just a really awesome experience to be a part of. And then

08:24

the gender cool books, we have our gender cool series, which include A Kid's Book About Being Transgender, being non binary and being inclusive. Those books are just awesome in general. But also those authors are just so cool, and so incredible. They're so accomplished, and so young, they were all teenagers, and it's just like, You're officially the coolest people I've ever met. And you are like the future is in excellent hands. So that was definitely also a really awesome, right getting to work with those with those teams.

**Emily**

Glad we all agree that the Youngs are so cool.

09:02

**Corinne**

Man, they're killing it.

**Denise**

Man, I love them.

**Emily**

So your founder said, I think this is from a Forbes article that you don't take pre written submissions. And instead, you focus on getting to know the author and their story. So it made me curious just about how you decide what books to publish. And I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the process of selecting those books and those themes and the people who should tell those stories?

**Denise**

Yeah, um, so I think that the process for deciding what to talk about or what books we end up working on is pretty organic in the sense that we just kind of pay attention to what's happening in the world what conversations are already happening, that kids might have questions about or may not really understand as well. Also just what our readers are saying and what they're telling us that they would like to see and what conversations they would like to have with their

10:00

kits. And also just kind of what do we think is important and empowering and challenging that we want there to be a book about the maybe there's a gap in the market. So that's really kind of where everything starts. And then from there, we either...because sometimes authors come to us, and they're like, Oh, we really want to write a book about this. And we will talk with them and see if we can kind of get on the same page and create something awesome. Sometimes we're like, we need to write a book, a book about this, and then we just find the author for it. And when it comes to selecting who do we feel is the right person is, I think, obviously, we would try to do own voices authors whenever we can just someone with that lived experience, who can talk about it from a first person perspective, or someone who is an expert on the topic, or who has a lot of experience on that topic, especially if it's something a little bit more on like, something like trauma or something like the Tulsa Race Massacre, we want to make sure we're talking to someone who knows about that topic, and can give us like, accurate information about it. And then from there, it's just kind of like, I think a vibe check, like, what do you feel

like do your values align with our values as a company, and then once we kind of reach a good ground, where we feel like, oh, we have something potentially really awesome here, that's when we acquire the author and the topic and the process just kind of starts from there.

11:27

**Emily**

It's amazing that the idea of making sure the person knows what they're talking about is something that you really have to qualify in publishing.

That it sets you apart as a brand that you actually make sure the person is an expert in their topic.

11:56

**Corinne**

Alright, so this one is also for Denise, what sort of editing work were you doing before in your career? And how does it differ from editing you're doing right now?

**Denise**

Ah, um, well, the editing work that I was doing is, was pretty different. I was doing a lot of fiction work beforehand, especially like specific, because that's my love, my heart will always be with speculative fiction. And I was doing nonfiction, but it was mostly Adult Nonfiction in kind of like the memoir, biography kind of realm, or academia, and so pretty different. And so I've been able, like all of those skills apply to children's nonfiction, but it's just so different. Because everything that you do, you would do normally, then you have to do through the lens of a kid. And so I had never really edited a lot of stuff that was for this specific age group of five to nine, five to 10, around there. And so it's been a learning curve of just like, Yes, this is a good sentence. But would a kid enjoy reading that? Does it resonate with them? Would it make them more interested in the topic? Would it make them think that the topic is boring, because we want like, these are pretty hard topics, and it can be quite dense. And we do want them to enjoy the experience of reading the book. So it's been a lot of fun, just kind of toeing that line and figuring out how to say something while still saying it accurately and giving the information that we want to give but also making sure that kids are engaging with the content and learning from it and having fun while reading it, even if it is something that maybe isn't fun to talk about.

13:42

**Corinne**

So do you have like readers in that age group, sort of read the books and tell you like, oh, we like this, or we don't like this? And then you adjust accordingly? Do you do that? Or is it just...?

**Denise**

Yeah, we do. We sometimes send our books, especially if we have books that we think are a little dense, like our kids book about climate change. It was also a really difficult topic to balance, we need to make sure that the information we're presenting is accurate, that we're giving good sources that are factcheck, and that are also easily accessible to like the adults reading the books. But also, we wanted to make sure that a kid can understand what they're saying. And so we did run it past, like we had like a little group of pre readers. And so we had a bunch of adults and their kids read the book and just

answer a bunch of questions like, did you like the story? Did it make sense? What did you not like? And then sometimes we have a whole section where it's just the kid answering questions, and they let us know if they like, that didn't make a lot of sense to me or like that's the problem. So then we would go back in and reword and readjust to try and accommodate that and make sure that it is in fact, a kid's book.

14:58

**Corinne**

Well done.

**Emily**

not an adult book in a kid's cover.

15:05

So, the company started out as a kid's book about and then transferred over kind of expanded into A Kid's Company About. Could you tell us a little about what your experience of that process of rebranding was? I know that you probably came on pretty close to it starting already. But if you noticed, any, anything interesting about that expansion, I would love to hear about it.

**Ari**

We, I believe we started talking about name options around when I started, yes.

15:47

Or around winter of 2020. But this was really around realizing we were growing past, just doing books, we were growing into a media company, we were starting podcasts, we were going to hopefully do more things such as classes. And, we wanted to run and push go as quick as we could, or as, as well as we could. And we realized we needed the name to change as a part of that. So it's, it's been a long process, but also very quick in other ways. Yeah, it's, it's been really exciting, because I got to be a part of, like, helping to make podcasts grow at that time, because we were like, okay, so we have one podcast going right now about the beginning of 2021. And then I joined in May. And we were like, Okay, let's get a whole bunch of other podcasts ready. And so I got to be a part of like, okay, we're gonna get this one on the ground. And we're gonna get this one on the ground. And we get, like, a trailer for this one and a trailer for that one. And, like, I got to be a part of that, like, big rush to get stuff ready and to, to really build the network into something.

17:19

**Emily**

So sounds almost kind of like a snowball or a cadamarteri just kind of growing as it rolls.

**Ari**

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**Emily**

And what about you? What's your experience been? Denise?

17:36

**Denise**

Um, I would say pretty similar to that. I think I did start a little bit earlier. And I never, like if someone would have told me oh, we're gonna do podcasts in three months, I would have been like, yeah, okay, sure.

**Emily**

Everyone's doing a podcast.

**Denise**

And so it was really cool to see, I think it was also just a really natural and almost obvious change. Once we kind of saw the vision once Jelani, our CEO presented the vision to us, I think we were all kind of already starting to talk about how can we keep these important conversations going? How can we reach out to more kids, and really talk to them in the media in the form that they prefer, or that they enjoy the most. And so I think that was all kind of germinating in our heads for a while. And then in winter of 2020. Jelani presented this idea, it's like, I think, you know, we can build a podcast network, and we can create these classes. It's like masterclass for kids, where we talk about these things. And we do this, that and the other and we start reaching different age groups with our books. And we're all like, yeah, that makes so much sense. Like, it's so obvious that this would be like the course that the company gets to. And then we all started talking about like, name changes. And that was really like a fun experiment to go through of just like, what do we think is a good way to encompass all of these all of these different branches that were created?

**Emily**

Oh, so everyone was kind of in on that conversation?

19:13

**Denise**

Like, we were like, we would talk about it. And we would, because I think that's also another really great part about the company is that we are pretty open about everything that's happening. I don't think there's things kept behind closed doors. And so we were kept informed of the conversation. And sometimes they would present options, and we would get to see you like, oh, that I like how that sounds. I think this is pretty cool. And so just feeling like you're also a part of it.

19:36

**Corinne**

So Ari, could you tell us a little bit about the different podcasts that are offered on the Kids Company About network?

19:44

**Ari**

Absolutely. So our flagship show, is, A Kid's Book About the podcast, which is where we go for each episode. On a deeper dive into one of the topics of the books with the author of that book. And we get kid audio and, and questions in about those topics. And we get to kind of explore the feelings that they bring up and kind of explore those stories a little bit more. So that's a really cool way to, I think, build our branding, but also keep up that, that communication with our authors and with our audience. So we started that one in the winter of 2021, or the early winter of 2021. And then, the next one that we launched, which the first one that I got to help launch was camp adventure for the summer. Um, and it is a kid's summer camp podcast, which is supposed to be it is this podcast that is supposed to be accessible for everyone who can listen, read the transcripts, participate in any way it's supposed to be something that people can really interact in and really be a part of, and that reaches anyone who who can engage. That one has been really lovely. I got to do some of the voice for like, the introductions, the transitions, I got to be one of the the camp counselors. So did Denise, um, we got to like, bring a bunch of the people from the staff onto the crew to do segments on it.

**Emily**

And you're all acting.

21:47

**Ari**

I mean, we get to, we get to act, our camp counselor parts, but like we had our designer Duke, he got to tell jokes. And I got to tell like d&d Adventure building, like imagination, games sorts of things. And, and Denise taught us some Spanish and I'm Matthew, our head of podcasts, spouse, got to teach everyone. bird calls, like, we we got, we got everyone involved. And that was so lovely. Um, that was that one was a really special joy to be a part of, and it was special to have that be my first. And then we did Is That True?, which is a kid's podcast about facts. So kids would send us in facts. And we would say, well, let's research that and figure out if that's true. And so like, do snails have 1000? Teeth?

**Emily**

Um...

22:56

**Ari**

Well, we got to talk to a, a specialist about snails, specifically, marine snails, I think that that expert was, yeah, it was such a cool opportunity to like, reach out to experts in so many different fields and be like, Hey, kids want to know, do you want to talk to us about it? So the children want to know and be like, people want to talk about it. So that has been absolutely lovely. All of our hosts are absolutely lovely, and great and fun. And, yeah, we have a couple others that are kind of building we have 1.5 that is building with the authors of our climate change book, a Kid's Book About Climate Change. And I'm really excited for that one to come out. We have so many things that are like, on the burners kind of boiling away, and we're like, when are we gonna? What am I going to get to share this?

**Emily**



So you you've kind of talked about some of the tie ins with the books that the company publishes? Is there a strategy to how you combine those things with the books? Or is it just sort of this like organic bubbling up of enthusiasm, which is also great.

24:19

**Ari**

A little bit of both, um, with a kids book about the podcast, there have been a couple of special book releases that we've done. So we did a special eBook about A Kid's Book About Anti Asian Hate earlier this year, and that was one that we were like, families are having these conversations right now and we need to be able to address it right now. And so we got our ebook. have that ready pretty quickly, and then we had our podcast about it released insync so that people could kind of dive into those conversations either concurrently or in tangent. Same with A Kids Book About Sexual Abuse, and a couple other special releases. We've been able to really support marketing in that way. There's definitely been some strategy in there of like, how can we do the best good with this? But then it's also been like, Okay, well, what's ready right, now? Let's jump on that.

**Corinne**

So Ari, what is your role in the production of these podcasts?

25:44

**Ari**

So my role in the production of these podcasts, somewhat differs from podcast to podcast. But for camp adventure, I got to start off with contributing some writing some of my own audio to those transition bits. And, for the most part, Matthew, our head of podcasts, and, and I, we will work together with the hosts. And we will make sure like, we're all on the same page, we're getting the patterns together, we're figuring out how to do this together. And then once kind of something is launched, it's like, okay, Matthew has to focus on on the next new thing. I'm like, Okay, I'm ready. Let's, let's keep us flying. And then Matthew is still there to help where needed and listens to every episode that we ever launch. But, yeah, I get to kind of take a lead, oftentimes, mid season, I got to for both camp adventure. And is that true? So I have like a really special fondness for those of like, Oh, my babies. Um, so for those, you know, I work pretty closely with the house of helping edit scripts, helping make sure that everything is linked in the files that we send off to our sound production team, helping to make sure that communication goes really smoothly. And that, you know, I'm writing up all the metadata, all the transcripts, all the all the extra things. So it depends on show to show, but oftentimes, I get to, to help make everything float.

**Emily**

So Ari, when do you think it's a good idea for a publishing company to have a podcast? And you know, the shadow side of that, when Shouldn't they?

27:36

**Ari**

Oh, um, I think that's another answer of like, I think it depends on publisher to publisher, um, but I think that one of the strengths in podcasting is being able to connect with your audience in a really close way. There's also a lot of strength and community building. And so there's a lot of opportunities when, you know, can we build this brand? Can we build this identity really strongly? Can we build this community? That then it might be possibly a really strong opportunity? I mean, I am not the the all seeing expert.

**Corinne**

Oh, you are now.

**Ari**

Oh, no, oh, no, too much, too much. Um, but I would, I would say, you know, use your talent wisely. See, who you can activate in the best way to really build community and build connection. And it's, it's got to be authentic. I think that people can sniff inauthenticity really well, especially through an audio medium. And, um, you know, if you can do it authentically, if you can bring truly the core of what either a project is about or what your, your, your entire, like publishing company is about, then you might be able to build something really cool. But no, like, you're getting close with your audience. They're, they're listening.

29:43

**Emily**

I imagine you know, a company with such a cohesive and consistent brand would probably lend itself to the podcast network, under the under the current concedes that you have just brought up so

30:00

**Ari**

I do think we have that strength.

**Corinne**

Okay, so for this is from both of you. So what are some of the things that you like best about working with A Kid's Company About both in terms of the mission, and as well as the work itself?

**Denise**

It's so great, because I feel like it's very, there's a lot of fulfilling work there. And you know that what the work that you're doing and the like, what you're creating matters. And it is, and the authenticity as always firsthand, and making sure that we are doing the best that we can, as always, just at the forefront of everything. And like I mentioned earlier, I love that it's, the environment is very open, and it doesn't feel like you're not going to get caught off guard. Like us we know everything that's going on, even if we aren't directly involved in it, which is really exciting, because then you, as a consumer also get excited about what's going on. And I think one of the best things that I love is how seriously we take our mission of representation and inclusion, and including those voices, authors, like there's not a lot of places where you can go and be part of the conversation.

31:10

When, for example, when we're talking about books, we're looking at our last collection, and we're looking at what's coming ahead. And we'll just be like, you know, there's a lot of men in the last six books that we publish, let's really start making an effort and look into making sure that we're including people of other genders, in our next few books, that they're not feeling excluded, we have to make an adjustment there, we really need to keep working to make sure that we're doing what we said we would do. And I just think that's so great. I don't think there's just anywhere other way of saying it other than that's just so great knowing that that is always a priority. And that when you notice something like this, it's always encouraged for you to talk about it and start figuring out how can we make that adjustment? How can we still be that authentic, inclusive brands that we have built ourselves to be? So that's it, that's it for me.

**Ari**

I gotta say, it is very apparent that we do make a difference in the people who are able to engage with what we make, which is such an honor, we get to hear from kids and families who've picked up our books from teachers who have picked up our books and said, you know, someone really needed this, and I'm so glad that this was here. So, so being able to be a part of that is, is pretty wild. And, and something that I always hoped that I could be a part of. But also the work itself is fun. Getting to help build projects, and having a lot of trust put in every team member, honestly, to help build the projects. But also, I love being a part of workshops, oftentimes, more than just the editorial team gets to be on workshops, and those are really lovely and inspiring to be a part of. And just like seeing something be created before your eyes, we come out of each workshop with a full first draft of each manuscript.

**Emily**

That is so cool.

**Corinne**

That sounds like a lot of fun.

**Denise**

It is.

**Emily**

Wow.

Y'all can't see it. But I've got a big ol smile on my face.

So before we ask about what books we're reading, I would like Denise to tell us about your book.

33:54

**Denise**

My book is called a little book about culture. And it's exactly that it's a board book for ages zero to four. And just kind of talking about culture. And the I got to work with an awesome illustrator. Her name is Andrea campus. And we really just kind of discuss what culture is and what it means. And the focus of that book is really just highlighting that culture is this really beautiful thing and it's different for everyone. And it's not necessarily something that you're born with. It's something that you learn and just kind of

making that like, explaining the difference between heritage and culture and just how culture is passed down and where you can find it and why it's so special. And it was really fun. I really enjoy doing it. Andrea made some awesome illustrations. It's so colorful and so bright and I'm just very, very excited about it.

**Emily**

Now I'm excited too. I feel like I could learn something from it.

**Corinne**

Yeah.

**Emily**

Even though it's a board book.

**Corinne**

That's right. Yeah.

So when does it come out? Is it out yet?

**Denise**

It's not. It's available for pre order now. And yes, it should be coming out January of next year, I believe. Okay, I remember correctly.

35:14

**Emily**

All right. Well, what are we reading?

Let's say, Corine, let's start with you.

**Corinne**

Oh, sure. Yeah. Okay. So I'm reading this book called Buy Yourself the Fucking Lilies, which is like a self help book. I have many in my library. No shame, no embarrassment. I do. But it's just, you know, it's about like how you if you see lilies at the grocery store, instead of being like, Oh, I don't really need those, like, I should buy more avocados or something. Instead, you should buy yourself the lilies, if they're gonna make you happy. They're like, \$10 like, you know, you can probably afford \$10 for like pretty flowers that make you happy.

**Emily**

So and on the flip side, if I just really wanted more avocados, yeah.

**Corinne**

You know, that kind of thing, basically. So not denying yourself like the little things that make you happy.

**Emily**

How about you, Ari?

36:13

**Ari**

Oh, okay. Um, so I just finished and I'm still processing *The City We Became* by NK Jemisin.

**Emily**

Love that book. I love that book.

**Ari**

Yeah, it um, it took a lot of like processing power. But so worth it just this this conversation about like cities and all of the cultures that are part of them and all of the history that's a part of them, and how, like, we can't divorce ourselves from that as we process what they are today. All of that set within like, a sci fi conversation I there's there's a lot more that can be said about it, but

**Emily**

The HP Lovecraft... You know, some tendrils monster racists

**Ari**

Tendrils Monsters, gentrifying tendrils monsters. Yeah, they're bad. They're bad. Very bad. I need to get by.

**Emily**

I mean, if you're going to bring like a love crafts like universe into anything, it should be to tear it apart. Or at least, satirize it in some way.

**Ari**

You have to confront the racism within HP Lovecraft if you're going to do it, because the vibes are interesting. But like also, huh?

**Emily**

Loaded?

**Ari**

Yes, yes.

**Emily**

Well, congratulations on reading that wonderful book.

**Denise**

I know what I'll be picking up next thing.

**Emily**

Ring endorsements all around. What about you, Denise?

**Denise**

Um, well, I just started a book called certain dark things by CVO Moreno Garcia, and I really liking it. So far. It's about empires. And I'm here for it. I'm digging it. It's everything I want vampires to be. So I'm having a great time.

38:26

**Emily**

All right, well, where can we find y'all online and your company?

**Denise**

So I guess you can find me at @dmoralesoto on Twitter. I'm also on Instagram, but I'm not there much. So just just so you know, that's the deal. That's the right amount.

**Corinne**

Yeah.

**Ari**

I think you can find me under @Ari\_Mathae with a on Twitter or Insta, if you really search

**Emily**

not a robust online presence.

**Ari**

You know, I like to lurk.

**Emily**

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