## Griffit

becky@proaudiovoices.com



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**0:00:03.4 Becky Parker Geist:** Hi, I'm Becky Parker Geist. I'm the host of the Audiobook Connection podcast Behind the Scenes with the Creative Teams. I'm also President of Bay Area Independent Publishers Association, and the CEO of Pro Audio Voices, providing audio book production distribution, marketing and podcasting services. Now today, I'm with Donna Griffith, author of sticking to my story, the alchemy of storytelling for startups. A world-renowned corporate storyteller and pitch alchemist Donna has roamed the globe over the last 20 years, working with over 1000 startups, Fortune 500 companies and venture capitalist in a wide variety of industries, Donna's consulted and trained clients in over 30 countries, helping them create pitches that sing and to magically spin raw data into compelling stories that have raised over 15 billion. Donna, welcome.

**0:01:07.0 Donna Griffit:** Thank you so much for having me back, and I'll just say this has been an incredible experience working with you all on this audio book, you have been professional beyond belief, I can't believe how fast we got it done, and I'm so grateful that I've found you... I really am.

**0:01:23.4 Becky Parker Geist:** Oh, thanks, I absolutely delight. Absolute delight. Working with you as well. So let's jump into the big... I'd actually love to hear a little bit more about your background, like what were you like as a kid? I mean, did you have... Did you have lines forming for your lemonade stand.

**0:01:44.7 Donna Griffit:** You guys that soaring list for party cloning to the party clones interesting because at the past week, I had my two live launch events here in the Bay Area, when in Palo Alto on the day of the apocalyptic storm which felt very apropos to my love for Shakespeare was a real experience dorm, and then last night in San Francisco and I put together a speech that was a series of serendipitous moments that led to writing the book and also the serendipity of recording the audio book as passive and finding you all. So I took people back to... Before I was an author, before I was a storyteller, I was a early stage entrepreneur, a very, very early stage entrepreneur, and at the age of seven, I identified a problem, a need, just like many entrepreneurs do my sister was turning for, and there were no affordable and fun options for birthday party entertainment, so being the scrappy little thing that I was, I dug through clothes, found parts covered jumpsuit, high 80s, high mom things, throws parts on my cheek and I was heart the clown, and then I got a 50 VC investment after a very successful MVP, that was a lot of money back then.

**0:03:02.9 Donna Griffit:** Went to Sears, got a wig and go make a re-branded as Rainbow, the club marketing budget, I mimeographed buyers, hung them around the schools, and I quickly achieved break even and even our life, but the problem was I didn't have a good attorney and I had no dilution clause in my term sheet, so my vice, my darling mother to this day, leaning the dividends off of that, but I hope that I return the investment in many ways for her as well. So I had early kind of forays into the world of entrepreneurs, but I've never had a job, I've never had a nine to five job, I did a stint when I was in college working for the college to a placement agency to Gordon that after four months that I had to leave it, and I've always been my own business owner or a consultant, and I've gotten to travel the globe doing what I love. I've always loved acting. Theater has had a huge impact on my life and on the book, for those of you that will listen to it now or have listen to it, Theater is a huge part of how I communicate and how I help other people communicate the way plays are structured.

0:04:17.5 Donna Griffit: The drama of it. The story... And having that as part of my life from a

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very young age. And falling in love with New York and Broadway. It took me there to get my Master's degree in Drama Therapy because I wanted something that was as loving and satisfying to me is acting, but could also kind of provide me with a serious job, and then I found that the salary of a drama therapist was basically that of a starving artist. And I did not wanna be waiting tables at the age of 30, I'm like, There's gotta be something else. And one time, one of my... The whole... I got to the master's to create any that I had dreamed about from the age of 16 and made his discovery, and one of my professors happened to say in one lecture that she had a friend who traveled around the world and gave workshops and inspired people and was like one of those Hallelujah Angels singing well, moments. And I was like, Oh my gosh, that's exactly what I wanna do. What is this? A corporate story, it was a corporate ethics... Corporate training at the time, I'm like...

**0:05:20.0 Donna Griffit:** And then luckily at NYU, at the same time, there was a program for training in organizational development for a post-master's degree, and I just signed right up, set my first resume out to the first job with position I saw on Craigslist plan. I met the wonderful, Brad Boyer, who was very, very pivotal in my career, and we had a great interview and he's like, You know, it all looks good on paper, but I need to see you on stage. And I said, Well, just so happens, I'm in an Off Off Broadway show, I was playing an Irish lass called Dierdre in a show called Nara's Bloke. It was a world were to myself and the sisters, so I have that line. So he came to see the opening night and he called me the next day to tell me, tell me that I had been hired, because the stage lit up when I came out, which was like, Wow, someone actually sees you in that way and sees a spark in you... And then I set off on this amazing tour of the world, teaching people how to create stories, how to create messages, chips to tips, to chips, from silicon chips to potato chips, to chocolate chip companies.

**0:06:28.6 Donna Griffit:** We cover the whole gamut. And everywhere from Shanghai, China to Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. And it just was incredible to see how universally stories resonate and people struggle with the same information overload and wanting... How do you tell it in a way that they get it? And you look smart. And always wonderful. Until 2008, that was a rough year, and suddenly everything just shut down and I had all the work on my calendar was gone, and I was like, Oh my gosh, what... Now, do I get a job in the middle of a recession? Like, I've never had a thought. You do that. And serendipity, once again, kind of led me on this path to start up storytelling, I had done some... I studied coaching in NLP, and the man that I studied with had a client that needed help with his speeches, he was a cardiothoracic surgeon, incredible guy, and he is the head of the cardiothoracic and the cardiologist society, who apparently are like the Jets and the Sharks, and I just know that I month working on the heart, but very different approaches. And as I was helping him write his speeches, he had created to medical devices, and they were just extraordinary, and he had been invited to this big angel Conference in New York, and he said, Do you think you could help me with the startup pitches? C.

**0:08:00.9 Donna Griffit:** Angels, singing and cool. I'm like, We... Never worked on a startup before. But hey, stories, the story, I've always been one to say yes and then figure...

0:08:09.3 Becky Parker Geist: And yeah, that's good.

0:08:12.3 Donna Griffit: And so I was like, Okay, and then I do head straight into this whole

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world of go-to market and valuations and business models and all these things, I don't come over finance background or a technical background or a regulatory backed... I had to learn a lot in a lot of time, and then we got to New York. He actually asked me to present on his behalf, I made me a contingent team member, I don't usually do that, but in this case, with someone of his stature, it was acceptable, and I worked so hard on these two five-minute pitches like I practice the heck out of them, and then the other companies that came got up to speak and I was like, What is going on here? Before they even had a chance to open their mouth, the investors, and we're talking like 80-something angel investors sitting in the same room shot them down... Wow. And started, they couldn't even get a sentence out of their mouth, and I'm like, Why wouldn't they work with someone like me, they have this multi-million dollar opportunity, and I'm like, Okay, well, wait a minute. And I started looking and nobody had cornered the market on startup story telling, this was before people or even knew what story telling was, so people...

**0:09:23.2 Donna Griffit:** I would say story-telling to be like... Oh, like a librarian. Exactly. So I said, Okay, this is my niche. I'm gonna work with startups now, between the decision of working with startups and actually having startups pay for it, there's a gap. Right, right. So I established, we call this pass model, this sponsorship is a service, I approached all of the accelerators that were popping up at back then, again, 2009 in the wake of any financial crisis, and I know we're gonna be seeing it now, start-ups pop up like mushrooms after an apocalyptic river at what ANDS, I just started offering my services saying, Listen, let me work on the pitches, you don't have to pay me, but I do ask her to treat me as a sponsor, I put my logo up there and thank me at the event 'cause I wanted my name to start to become synonymous with a startup pitches at first are like, Sorry, he doesn't want money to having called in urgently two days before a conference or at them, or they're like, Can you come help with the pictures? They're not very good. I was like, of course, the pleasure.

**0:10:36.9 Donna Griffit:** And suddenly start-up pitchers started singing, and people were hearing like, Who's this donor person? Who's this done person? And they started finding me, If you build it, they will come. And that has been like the pivotal journey, and I knew I had a book, I knew I had a book to write, but in your write book...

**0:11:00.3 Becky Parker Geist:** It's a whole new set of skills.

**0:11:01.7 Donna Griffit:** A set of skills. And every time I'd write a blog or something about pitching, I'm like, Well, that's a good chapter for the book, oh, that's a good chapter for the book, but then nothing material is... And serendipitous moment. Number three, Vince warning, I interviewed on his podcast. He's this wonderful, wonderful marketing expert from New Zealand, got a podcast called Chasing the insights, and then one of our prep calls, he just happened to mention that he had a publishing company called ATG all the geeks policy. And again, Q-angels, I'm like, coming more, and I love their process, they actually work with people to help empower them to become authors, it's not just like, Okay, write a book well edited and publish it, it's like the thought crosses, the outline... And I told him, this is only gonna work if I have an accountability meeting with you every week. I must have that 'cause I know myself, I'll just sweep it under the rug because I'm too busy with Tommie, got a business and I've got kids and line. And he said, Sure. And every week from May 15, 2022, we had a meeting either that we met here, I used that time to write, and I kind of say sometimes the book Road itself, it was like a muse came through me, the

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flow and the chicken and Holly flow of being in that moment, and in October, I handed in my first draft, and here we are layer from my initial foray into this...

**0:12:38.6 Becky Parker Geist:** Not, that is quite a journey and exciting to hear all the different pieces and as the angel moment now, I love that. He just... Laramie, they're never heard. So yeah, yeah. So you've been out there doing this for a while, you've really... Tell us a little bit about the impact that you are seeing that you're having with the work that you're doing.

**0:13:11.7 Donna Griffit:** You know of somebody who called me the police of diamonds, and I found that so around... So poignant, because I get to work every single day with brilliant companies who are truly changing the world, but they've obscured themselves with a lot of data and facts and figures and numbers in technical Babel, and people aren't seeing their luster. And I get to come along and chip away at those layers of cobwebs and dust and coal and what have you, so the diamond actually shines, and I'm very proud to have over 400 recommendations on my LinkedIn with clients that are so dear to me, and clients that come back either with their next round, but their sales deck or their next company and lasted launch event, one of my clients who I worked with him a few years back and he exited and now he's working on a new company and we worked on his current stack and to me, that's the biggest testament, and with the book, I'm getting emails from all over the world, people saying, Thank you for writing this, Thank You For Rennes. Finally, I know what to do, and that's why I wrote this back on because I can't scale my stuff, there's one of me, I am donat.

**0:14:27.9 Donna Griffit:** I swear that Open AI has somehow found a way to train on my brain, I can't prove it, but I've been doing this for years in taking mounds of data and then spitting out these beautiful stories that just tell it... I get so into it when I'm writing that I like totally living their story, and the book for me, especially in a recession and we are heading into so much uncertainty and everything that's happened with Somali bank and everything in the past few weeks, I want this in the hands of every single startup founder out there, or in the ear buds of them think that's another reason we put the audio book out because people are like, Are you gonna translate it to other languages in... I'm not sure, but at least the audio book will give access to people, and if I can help people get the clarity that they need to write it and to be able to give a successful pitch and someone that came... A founder that I know came to my event on Tuesday, she just posted, she's like, it made me go back to my origin story of why I started my company, and that's exactly what I want, and that's the impact that I want to give the gift of storytelling to these very techy startup business people.

**0:15:44.2 Becky Parker Geist:** Yeah, and then I was like to take it that next level of like, okay, and then what does that... Them having that experience. What does that do for you?

**0:15:56.5 Donna Griffit:** Well, first of all, I'm thrown at... It warms my heart, but it also gives me a lot of validation because when you're writing a book, you're kind of in your own InField and I'm like... Is what I'm writing good, is I like that? And is this gonna impact anyone... I know I've been talking about this for years. I know I've given workshops for years, and once you start getting out of your own circle of people that know you and trust you and start hearing it from outside, then it starts to resonate like, Oh Wow, this works, this... You've done this, and to me that's like, that's everything I want to establish myself as the leader for start-up story telling, if not for business story

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telling, so it's really exciting and it's really moving and emotional, and so many things happening at once, it's just... It's crazy.

**0:16:48.2 Becky Parker Geist:** It's great. It's really great here. Would you say, is there a single message or any one thing that you feel like that you really want your listeners... Your readers to take away from the book.

**0:17:04.1 Donna Griffit:** Yes, there is a story stick, and that's really the reason for the title, and I keep kind of coming back to how true that is. So the stories I tell of the founders that I use is founder stories in the book have stuck with me for years, and one of them, Caroline, who I write about, it's called the Healing story about Ron who started this crazy journey because his father at the age of 56 was diagnosed with diabetes, type 2 diabetes and went from being this vibrant now to being kind of a shadow of himself media every day, and nothing was helping, nine months watching his diet, watching his weight and taking his oral insulin, his glucose as were increasing rather than decreasing and Ron set out on this outset, traveling the world, looking for anything from Serbia to Africa, to India that could help his father, and he created... He found a supplement that actually, we can't say cure diabetes, but I made it manageable and he's helping over hundreds of thousands of people with this, and so the case in point, a few weeks ago, he asked me to work with his VP Sales and Director of Sales us on the sales deck, and I said, Of course, I'd be thrilled to...

**0:18:27.6 Donna Griffit:** And they sent me a deck which look very pretty, and I'm like, Where's Ron and Roche story? And they said, Oh well, you know, we're meeting with companies like Whole Foods, we have such a quick meeting with them, we don't really have time to talk about their story. I'm like, Yes, you do. Yes, you do, because they see companies all the time that have supplements and herbs and all natural and supply chain and blah, blah, blah... They see so many of those. Yeah, but you're the company that was passionate enough to care enough to want to truly change this and that guess what, turns out the both of VP Sales and the Director of Sales had fathers who had been diagnosed with diabetes, midlife...

**0:19:09.9 Becky Parker Geist:** Oh my gosh, I can... Washington jumping up and down, or other of.

**0:19:16.4 Donna Griffit:** What's the story? This is the company I want pictures of you all with your families and the impact you've truly made, because this is a personal thing, and when you have a story like that helping you not tell it, I don't care, let them... They'll extend the meeting to ask about your supply chain and your organic and non-GMO and whatever, that's what they're gonna remember, and that's what they're gonna go back to the board room and say, We met this company today that are truly changing the life of people diagnosed with diabetes, they're truly moving the needle. Oh my gosh, how cool that we have this on our shelf, let's put it from a center... That's a street. It sticks. So never give up the story 'cause you think you don't have enough time, people will make time for the stories because stories resonate. I just had an article come out about me today and I learned something new, apparently there was a study done in California where they took people an actual sample of their blood before a meeting where they heard from a father who was trying to raise funding for his son who had some kind of horrible disease, and then they took the blood afterwards and they found increased levels of both cortisol, the stress hormone, and...

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- **0:20:35.9 Donna Griffit:** Oh my gosh, I'm blanking on the one in oxytocin, just the empathy and sympathy, and it is what you feel when you're an early stage mom and fall in love with your child, so the cortisol, they felt the stress when the father was telling the story and the empathy, and apparently the higher the level, the higher the donations were...
- **0:21:00.6 Becky Parker Geist:** Oh my goodness. Wow, that's incredible. I iterated a thing now.
- **0:21:05.5 Donna Griffit:** So scientifically, we are measuring the impact of story-telling, and if you're out there trying to raise funding, not necessarily philanthropic, but that as well, or sell your product or get people to join your journey or partner with people... Isn't that what you want?
- **0:21:23.1 Becky Parker Geist:** Absolutely, yeah. Yeah. You see AI going forward to what you've been sort of powering through this piece of you of the journey with your book and your audio book, what's your aspiration with it moving forward.
- **0:21:46.3 Donna Griffit:** World dominion, I'm just getting a toy. First of all, when I started writing the book, I was gonna be just about all time of storytelling in general, and I start going through the outline with Vince, he's like, Donna, I'm sorry, unless you wanna write a 500-page book, you've got about three books here, so probably, I'm gonna have to write the book or do I need to kind of rest for a moment with this, but I wanna get out there and speak. I wanna be able to spread the gospel about story-telling and make it accessible, because I had somebody write me the other day, he had an off-site with his team, and he works for a big tech company in Vegas, he bought copies for all of them, he said, I treat them, they work in a big corporation, but I treat them as a startup, so I think this can be helpful for anyone in any constellation and... Yeah, I just wanna really make storytelling give this gift back because in an era of tiktok and Instagram, we've come full circle with our primal brain, which 30000, 40000 years ago started to tell stories with cave paintings and hieroglyphics before we even have a language.
- **0:23:05.7 Donna Griffit:** It's this primal need to tell our story and to have it preserved from generation generation, and now we're back to the visuals, to the short bits of stories, so storytelling is so inherent in our lives, how can we then take and leverage our business lives with it? Yeah.
- **0:23:23.7 Becky Parker Geist:** Great, alright, let's talk a little bit more specifically to jump into the audio book production process and some of that... So you were super clear from the start, and I understand this totally from your background and everything you and I share actually a lot in in terms of our site, these qualities from our background. You were very clear from the start. You wanna denigrate your own audio books, did you need to set up a studio at your own home.
- **0:23:56.7 Donna Griffit:** So yeah, I couldn't think of anybody else telling the story other than me, and I do, among my many travels in life, I have also been a voice-over artist, it's funny with me, I don't let Moscow under my... In anyway, and when I was 19, 20, I was dating someone. And his dad's Ateneo. Now, you have a very Radiophonic voice. I said, Really? You said, yeah. You should be on radio. The next day I had signed up for a voice-over, Borst was everything from news casting, to commercial voice-over to acting voice-over, and my first game was in a mall, and now for the next half hour, we have 50% of a uber 21. Yes, you heard right. 50%. So I got to do a lot of

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practicing with that and then that led to a lot of commercial games, and I did a lot of English as second language units for people, and this was like her the early early days of online learning, now it's just... It's everywhere, but we're talking back in 2000... Gosh, from six, eight, nine really early days, and I continued doing that, so I got very comfortable with reading a lot of rote and long list, and we had this guy there, I used to call him Henry Higgins, he'd come in and listen, he could tell you exactly where you were from, and I'm from Maryland, and I always thought I had a pretty neutral accent, 'cause early has that kind of borderline between the South and the North, and it's not ballymore...

**0:25:35.2 Donna Griffit:** I'm not bolete, swallow it, but he's like, Oh yeah, you're from Maryland, and you've got that. And you probably have someone who grew up in the south too, I'm like, Wait, and you pick up all these little words and we have to re-record them and so I was like, Okay, I think I can handle this technically too, now sending up a studio in my house in... And we discussed this. I just didn't wanna take the chance 'cause I wanted to work with someone professional that could, first of all, as a production company, which is why I wanted to work with pro audio, but then I started checking around for studios and I sent out a bunch of feelers and I found Adam from Reed's recordings, and he was great, super professional, he done some audio books before, even though we made me this music, and what's great about working with an engineer is the... I'm pretty good at catching my errors when I make them and the little that you kinda get in and like, Okay, let's go back and do that, and he could take you right back and then... What's it called? Push and punch-in, punch in a angina and so I didn't know how long this would take.

**0:26:47.1 Donna Griffit:** It's kind of a crap shoot and I wanted to get it done pretty fast, and in eight hours, we recorded it four sessions and then a little pick-up half hour session, so the little corrections that couldn't be edited out, most of it is fun fact, people you may not know this, I don't know, but to... Even if anyone's ever told this the first day after the studio now, I talk a lot with my hands, you might have noticed, and I was... I'm narrating I was talking about, which was a lot of the ARS, like little clicks that happened, like me knocking against the merits, the wire, the end of the first session, suddenly I get the alert from my Fitbit that I've done 10000 steps and I'm like At my hand gestures. We're counting as steps.

0:27:35.7 Becky Parker Geist: Oh, how funny.

**0:27:37.1 Donna Griffit:** I was having an actual workout, but it... Registering aerobic workout. Wealden anyone out there that does want to record their own audio book and doesn't necessarily come from that, I highly suggest adding that in really gives you like that both of energy. So it was fine, it was so much fun to be back behind the Mike, it took me right back. And yeah, it was an exciting and fast and furious and just so professional to have everybody told me this, I need this, I imagine we need that guy is bending the squeeze this interview under the...

**0:28:22.6 Becky Parker Geist:** Whatnot? Pretty amazing. What would... You've talked about a lot of the different pieces. Is there one particular thing? Anything about the process of the audio book production that kind of stands out to you that you wanna highlight? I think the mind shift of somebody that's gonna be listening to it and not reading it.

0:28:52.2 Donna Griffit: Which kind of... Okay, so I sat down with your editors and okay, so how

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do we describe this picture, how do we break it down? And then having that on my website so people can access it, and so that was an interesting got changing everything for in this book to in this audio book. And also as I was recording each chapter, I kind of have like, Okay, so here's tip, practical tips of what you can do, and then I realized these are cataloging and that's determined by over, and I had to add numbers to them and we hadn't added numbers even when we did the editing, 'cause we didn't think about it, and that's something I would... And so I had to go, Okay, one, and then there's a bunch of things that... So I was literally pulling my and coming, so I would remember where it was... A couple times I go, Okay, am, can you take me back? Was that one? Or was that through? And I did have one correction where I said, So have you avoid epic pitfall number? It should have been four in I said three, and that was one of the rerecorded I had to do, so thinking of someone listening to this and making it pleasurable, enjoyable for them, but also, I mean, not losing the train of thought, being able to follow coherently along with it.

0:30:01.7 Donna Griffit: Right.

**0:30:02.4 Becky Parker Geist:** Right. What was the most surprising thing about it? Anything.

**0:30:05.8 Donna Griffit:** I think that IT... Rate amount of thought that goes into, I just thought, Okay, you get there and you read your book right now, so chunking it and making sure that the things that seem obvious when you're reading it or they are when your audio... So that was really surprising to me.

**0:30:28.5 Becky Parker Geist:** Right, great. And how can listeners learn more about you and your writing? Tells your website on.

**0:30:37.8 Donna Griffit:** So donor dot com, that's S-O-T like Melanie without the age at the end, people in homes, a story there. Of course, my father-in-law is an artist and she went to school in Florence at the admin out there, and when he was there, he kind of reinvented his artist name, and the apparently was a boxer whose last name is Griffin now, I don't know if it was great, or if I have to look that up sometime. But he just did it without a... So donor dot com, sticking to my story, dot com, UNIVAC there. When I started with men and I told him, This is the title I've had in mind for many years, I had a workshop called sticking to my story, we looked it up, he's like, You know the dot com is available as... He's like, there's not been a book written called sticking to my server, kidding me.

**0:31:26.1 Becky Parker Geist:** And then I was like, I got the URL, I've got the Eurostat, the book is apparent, and you've got the URL, but it's true.

**0:31:36.4 Donna Griffit:** That was really a moment of clarity of like, Oh wow, this is actually... Happen to have a book, I also knew who I was gonna dedicate it to, very clear to me, and it's very emotional when you have that dedication even before you've written the book, it's like you can see it coming to life. So Jordi, sticking to my story dot com, the book is available on Amazon. Well, it will be available, of course, on Audible, and you can probably tell us what other voice sites...

0:32:09.9 Becky Parker Geist: Yeah, I would actually, in terms of... We've talked a lot about

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impact, having an impact, and one of the places that your audio book is gonna be available probably by the time... Should be by the time this interview is live, will be on Amplify audio books, which is the place to have the biggest impact, and the audio book will also be available on all your favorite audio book retailers and libraries and music channels, but finding... In the Amplify audio book store is gonna have, again, the most impact is excited.

**0:32:49.7 Donna Griffit:** Eating a lot of people who've been writing me Wednesday utensil coming out was the Tableau people today, really have come back to this kind of audio storytelling, because we're doing something while we're doing something else we're working on. We're running, we're driving... My husband listens to podcasts incessantly, and to be able to not have your hands and your eyes Occupy reading, some people love the feel of a book, some people have been like, I need to feel the book and I'm... Great, some people are like.

**0:33:28.1 Becky Parker Geist:** Absolutely. Well, Donna, thank you so much, this has been really, really fun that.

**0:33:34.5 Donna Griffit:** You... And thank your whole team, Erle and Shana and everyone, they just... Seriously, I had no idea up until a month or so was this even existed, a company that produces your art... I didn't know, I didn't think. You think like, Sure, I'll do it, but I wanna say this to all authors out there, it's really... This is your one shot. You wanna make it good is... You've already written the book, you've already gone through this whole thing. You've already published, it's worth the investment to go and work with someone who's truly professional and Becky is not paying me to... This is just too douro Sly. It's such a different experience when you've got this crew behind you and we haven't even started amplifying it or getting it out there, this is like... So I'll feel in such good hands, so thank you for that. I really, really appreciate it. Thank you, I appreciate you.

**0:34:32.8 Becky Parker Geist:** Alright, well, that's gonna be a wrap for this for today. Thank you everyone for joining us.

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