

Article 19 Presents: Tamman Lunch and Learn Book Talk #1: Outside Myself

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Expression is one of the most powerful tools we have. A voice, a pen, a keyboard. The real change which must give to people throughout the world, their human rights, must come about in the hearts of people. We must want our fellow human beings to have rights and freedoms which give them dignity. Article 19 in the voice in the room.

Marty: Hello, and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Molloy. I am the host of Article 19, and I am so excited to bring to you today our first in a series of monthly book talks that we're able to share here on the podcast. Our monthly book talk series is a chance to bring all of the folks at Tamman together to share in a gift of reading. Those books that we've chosen for this year will all be focused on disability literature; that is, either the author has a disability or the subject matter is around disability advocacy or something that will shape our understanding of disabilities, as well as books that are on general inclusivity, so this could be social identities books, this could be universal design, et cetera. So we have a great slate of books selected for the year. This is our first in this series, and I'm so glad that we get to share it with all of you on Article 19 as well. Now this book and this talk was exceptionally special because we were able to have the author herself join us, Kristen Witucki. She wrote *Outside Myself*. Now, those of you who are longtime listeners will know that Kristen is a regular on the podcast. She is a part of our Tamman family, so we felt a little bit lucky to be able to start this way. We're not always gonna have the author themselves on the pod, but wow, what a way to start. I highly, highly recommend folks check out *Outside Myself* by Kristen Witucki. I happened to listen to it on Audible, and it was a wonderful, wonderful listen. The narrators were fantastic, but you can get *Outside Myself* anywhere where you get quality books. So, enjoy *Outside Myself*, Kristen Witucki. She's being interviewed by our very own Nimit Kaur, who originally introduced us to Kristen. It's a family affair here on Article 19, so enjoy, and we'll talk with you soon.

Nimit: Welcome, everyone. Thanks for joining us today. I am really excited to do this book talk and author interview because we have the author right here, which is pretty cool. So *Outside Myself* is the book. Just to get like a context for the meeting today, how many people has either read this book or started reading this book, if you could put it in the chat?

Marty: Nimit, it is filing up quickly in the chat. We have a lot of folks who have started and not finished, a few folks that have finished. But I would say the majority of the people here today are in the just getting started phase of *Outside Myself*.

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Nimit: This is good to know so I don't spoil the ending for everyone, which is great because we picked good passages to have Kristen read through her own natural voice as an author, so I'm gonna just give a very brief summary-ish, but I'm also going to have Kristen add to it as she likes. So, as we know, *Outside Myself* is a fictional book that really beautifully captures the

experience of two blind individuals across different generations, so pre-ADA and after ADA, and also IDEA, the educational law. Tallie, after ADA, the girl who is a young blind girl who begins with questioning her blind identity due to her interactions with her family dynamics and peer circle. So her family dynamics basically included her protective yet openminded mother who always emphasized her independence, but then on the other hand she had an overprotective father, who wanted her to get an operation, and a stepmother, and then a step-baby brother. So it's just like you can imagine going through these different parental dynamics, and also middle school is tough, so going through that, being the only blind student in a school, experiencing all the peer dynamics, she was very questioning. So, on the other hand, we had Benjamin, who is an older man who grew up almost without validation of his blindness up until his adult life when he started training, so they both meet through phone calls when Tallie and Benjamin connect and learn and also accept their self and familiar identities. I don't want to give too much away, but it's a great read that draws readers to everyday familiar and peer interactions, as well as also an exploration of self-identities growing up. Kristen, do you want to add anything to that summary?

Kristen: Thank you so much for having me. It's an honor to be here, and I've been here in the book talk before as facilitator, so it's very personally meaningful to be back as an author, and I do not have anything to add. I think that summary is great, and I think if I add any more it will ruin the book.

Nimit: That's cool. Kristen, would you like to read us some of the passages just to get us started, to give some context to the book?

Kristen: So, this is a section from Benjamin called The Fall. It takes place in September, 1953, when he was a child.

Nimit: Basically, in this—I'll just give brief background. When this passage began, basically Benjamin was bike riding, and he didn't see the tree on his way because of his blindness, so he kind of fell and almost got hurt, so he met his mom, and then his mom, you know, took him home, and that's where their dialog starts. This really shows how unvalidated his feelings of blindness or just understanding of blindness was during his childhood.

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Kristen: "When I was younger, I did have some vision, but it was just enough that I didn't really fit into the sighted world, and I didn't fit into the visually impaired world either because I was out there on my own trying to have more sight than I did. Everyone was in denial about the vision problem, even me. I could see things if they were big or right in front of me. I could focus on one object at a time, one print word at a time. I could see just well enough to fake it—or try to. One day, during the summer before I started school, my dad got me a used bicycle and painted it up so that it shone like it was brand new. I'd never felt so happy. I'd often sit outside watching the bigger kids speed down Heck [ph] Avenue on their bikes right on the street with the cars. I set up the bike in front of my house and started to practice on it. The afternoon was

broiling and humid. At first, I found myself falling over and over again onto the pavement, and in no time I was dirty and sweaty and scraped up, but I had pretty good balance, and soon enough I got the feel of the bike. At the end of the afternoon, I walked the bicycle to the corner, determined to ride straight to where my family lived at the other end of the block. I sat down on the seat, flung my leg over, and peddled away. Toward the end of the block, I became braver and thought I'd try riding on the street the rest of the way to my house like the bigger kids I had seen. I made a sharp left turn, expecting to coast over the line of grass, which separated the sidewalk from the street. I felt the impact of the tree, which I hadn't realized was blocking my path. It was a massive oak, which had survived numerous thunderstorms with just a few scars. A little guy on a bike was no match for that tree. For a few minutes, I just sat there on that bike, hunched over, my breath coming quickly and sharply like sobs. Maybe I even saw stars for a minute. I felt a weird stinging sensation on my chin that I didn't understand at first, and liquid poured from my nose in a way that made me wonder for a second whether I was crying. I knew by then that only babies cried, but then I understood that the liquid was not tears. It was too warm and sticky. It was blood. The bike didn't even suffer. 'Benny, what happened?' I looked up to find my mother standing over me. She asked me if I could stand up, then grabbed the bike in one hand, my shoulder with the other, hustling me along as though I were a bike, as though I couldn't walk without her support. She only let me go once we'd gotten inside our house. Dad arrived home hot and tired after having helped to put up beams for a new store building downtown, and my mother regaled him with the story. 'Are you sure Benny can see well enough to ride that bike?' 'He can see,' dad said. 'He just doesn't look sometimes.' Then he turned to me. 'It was just a mistake, wasn't it?' 'Yeah,' I answered. I figured Dad must be right. At the same time though, the incident puzzled me. That tree had come at me out of nowhere. I had been watching where I was going. I hadn't seen a tree. Would I have seen it if I had been more careful? I couldn't help wondering how other people managed to turn quickly and not slam into things." It goes on and on, but that's kind of the heart of the passage, I think, and in a way, where I'd wanted that whole story to start.

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Nimit: Now I heard you read this, and this is not a question that I originally came up with, but the way you read it sounds very familiar to how the narrator reads it, with that same tone, and I'm just curious, did you get to appoint your own narrators, or is it like they just tell you who gets to narrate the book?

Kristen: Yeah, no, I did. I mean, I think we had to find narrators that would like take very little money was part one. And then—because this book was published by a very small press also, so neither of us had that much. I remember the narrator for Benjamin was Royal Joiner on the Audible book, and the narrator for Tallie was Stephanie Keefer. They both did excellent work, and I remember we did get to listen to a few voices. I think we found the Benjamin narrator pretty quickly, and the Tallie narrator took a couple of tries before we found somebody. But it was fun. That was probably one of the most fun parts of post-publication was listening to the narrators.

Nimit: Does anyone have any comment or questions after that passage?

Jeff: I have a comment. This is Jeff Weesner [ph]. I love how it kind of helps explain and put us into like his journey of—and his family, like how they grapple with like his disability and this denial or this journey or discovery of what's going on, and I also love how you capture his like trying to figure out, what's this liquid that I feel? So I thought that that was really cool. It just kind of like really puts you into his situation of, OK, I'm just trying to figure out what's going on here, and there's just like a lot that you're kind of balancing simultaneously, and I just thought it was handled really well.

Kristen: Thank you.

Emma: This is Emma. Something that was kind of a little bit of maybe not the main focus of this passage but that really struck me was right at the beginning when he was saying I could see things if I like focused really hard on them or if a single print word, and it was a really nice setup for a part that I think is only a couple chapters later, so I don't think I'm spoiling anything big, but where he talked about when he started learning braille and could like actually enjoy books, and there was a phrase in that later part that really stuck with me that was something about he had been working so hard on trying to read from print materials, focusing on each word that he wasn't able to read kind of the ideas or the thoughts or the feelings, and I feel like that just like was a little piece that until you went back and read this passage, I hadn't realized how well that had been placed right up at the front to call back later when he starts being able to actually explore and kind of enjoy reading.

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Kristen: Thank you. Yeah. I work with a few students now, and one of my kids, they're very much like word by word by word people, and they're gaining skills, but sometimes they're working so hard on just decoding that the meaning is lost and like the feelings of reading a book are lost, so it can be difficult.

Nimit: I do remember this part, and I think it's great that you made that connection because it didn't occur to me when I read this, but that makes a lot of sense. Does anything have anything else they want to add? So, I think that now we can move on to another passage. I think leading from this discussion, just it would be really good to also read a passage that kind of compares Tallie's reactions to her blindness and also just like learning about it since it really connects their childhoods together through the comparative writing style that you do, so I think it would be great if you could read us The Phone Call chapter or passage.

Kristen: The Phone Call. So, one thing to kind of explain about this is that when I was a kid growing up, obviously I couldn't go to my regular library, so libraries are supposed to be places where everyone goes to get books. It's the place where you can get them at no cost, so it's supposed to be a great equalizer in society, but in reality for someone like me, it's just like going to a room full of books that I can't read. So the way that people access the library if

you're blind at the time when I was a kid, the way to do that was to call, and we would talk to the librarian, and sometimes the librarian would be kind enough to give you descriptions of the books so you could sort of pick based on the book jacket information, but the browsing experience is very different, and you know, like you have library day at school, and I just kind of walked around the school library going la, la, la, and I remember when I was little it didn't really bother me, but when I was bigger I kind of like pretended to go look for books and just would go pick a book because whatever, I didn't want to be weird. I'll check out this book, I have no idea what it is. So, there were problems with that method, of course. But anyway, so this is Tallie calling this library. She had called earlier in the book the children's librarian, and then she thought that the children's librarian was nice but couldn't handle her question, so she's calling the adult library. "I just had to find out for sure about my eye condition, about whether doctor's could fix it. I still felt like a child, but I knew I was researching a medical adult topic, so calling the children's librarian didn't make sense this time. After all, when I asked for a book about Switzerland, the librarian mailed me a story—Heidi—not a book of facts. I didn't want to risk the librarians getting it wrong again, so when I got home I took a deep breath, picked up the phone, and dialed the number for adult reader services. I was at dad's house again. As I dialed, I could hear Miles banging a toy loudly on the kitchen floor. But the library would close soon. The librarian would just have to hear the background noise. 'This is Benjamin,' a man's voice said. He sounded bored and tired but nice enough. 'How many I help you?' 'I'm trying to do research about a cure for Leber's congenital amaurosis,' I said, almost tripping over the word amaurosis, trying to sound older, more professional, since I was talking to an adult librarian. There was a long pause. I hoped he wouldn't realize I was a kid and transfer me back into kid world. 'You're doing research about what now?' he asked finally, slowing down his words as if he had just started to pay attention? 'Leber's congenital amaurosis.' 'What's that?' 'It's my eye condition,' I explained, careful to use the adult words. 'I'm looking for a cure. My dad told me there is a cure.' 'You won't find that here. You're blind. You'll live.' I was ready to hang up. I decided in that moment that I hated him. 'But I don't want to be blind anymore,' I said, biting against the tightness in my throat. 'I'd rather be dead.' He was quiet for a moment. 'I don't know everything about your eye condition,' he said, 'but you'd have a better chance of killing yourself than coming up with a cure. If you want to die, there's nothing I can do to help with that either.' Is he really telling me to die? I wondered, hating him even more, but I felt intrigued. None of my teachers would have ever told me to go ahead and kill myself. Every time I told them I wanted to be dead, they scribbled nervously, told me to be grateful for life, for all the kindness I received. Now, here was some guy who didn't even know me, who would never know if I killed myself or not, and I suddenly knew that I wanted to live. 'OK,' I said after a long silence. 'I don't want to kill myself.' 'That's more like it,' he said. Would he have felt guilty if I had hung up and done it? 'But I still want a cure. I wasn't kidding when I said it would be easier to die. I don't think dying is a great idea, but there's no cure for you except to accept what being blind means.' He paused. 'I'm not always sure what it means, except that you can't see. I'm blind,' he said, 'so I know what I'm talking about. I even thought about the death idea a few times.' 'You're blind?' and I thought, he doesn't sound blind. He sounds like he knows what he's doing. I'd never, ever met a blind person. 'I wouldn't make that up,' he answered, 'and being blind is a lot better than being dead.' 'So what does being blind mean?' I wanted to know. 'It means you'll never be able to see.' Well, duh. But also, I didn't want him to say that. He made it sound

so simple. Had he ever felt frustrated about not understanding movies? Had he ever caught his father seeming sad that he was born or his mother seeming preoccupied and worried? Why do people have kids anyway? But I also had to admit to myself that it felt different to hear that from another blind person than to hear from my sighted mother, my sighted braille teacher. He knew what it meant. He was a blind person in the world. I respected the answer. My respect made me angry with him. 'I'm not stupid. What else does it mean?' I snapped. I'd never been rude to a stranger in my entire life. It felt good. If he told me not to talk that way, all I had to do was hang up. I didn't need to call the adult library anymore, not for another few years anyway. There was a long silence. Then he said in a voice slightly above a whisper, 'I don't know.' Then he spoke in his normal voice. 'So you've been asking all the questions. Now I have a question. What things would you want to see if you woke up one day and could suddenly see?' Dumb, I thought. You can't pick specific things to see. 'Everything,' I said. 'People who can see can see everything.' 'But there must be specific things, or maybe people you think about seeing when you wish you could,' he insisted. So I thought about that. 'Mountains,' I said eventually, 'and the tires on the playground, and whatever will make the kids like me.' 'Mm-hmm, if you want the kids to like you, you may need to see dang near everything, and that's including what they're thinking. Seriously, the only way they'll like you eventually is if you are yourself. If I can save you a few decades of figuring that out, my work here is done.' I didn't know what to say. 'I've been totally blind for over 15 years,' he said, 'but the only thing I wish I could see is the moon because I remember how that looked, and it gave me a lot of peace. I know that I should also want to see my daughter and granddaughter, but faces never meant that much to me. I used to worry about facial expressions I was missing, but I don't think much about that anymore. But you're right, you can't pick things to see. Your eyes decide what you'll see, and that's it. But,' he continued, 'though I can't see the moon, I still hear the crickets outside. They make the night real for me.' Then it just keeps going and going, but that's some of The Phone Call.

20:14

Nimit: Yeah, this chapter was one of my favorites. Does anyone have any comments or questions before we move on?

It's not a question. It is a comment, and it's just basically how I felt when she was reading it, and I thought the librarian was so insensitive, the guy that she was talking to, when he was talking about, you know, kill yourself and all this other stuff. I was like, this is ridiculous, and then to hear that he's actually blind, that was the twist. That was like the unusual suspects kind of thing. It was like the twist that you didn't see coming. I thought that was really good. It intrigued me. It drew me in even more.

Nimit: I agree.

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Jeff: This is Jeff Weesner again. So yeah, I thought that call was shocking at first, like why is this guy telling—even if he doesn't realize that she's a child. He's not like saying go kill yourself, but he was just saying like—just kind of painting a pretty bleak picture, and he was just so like believable, and her like, what have I done? I've called this adult phone number and pretended to be an adult, and this is what happened when I did that. But also, what was equally shocking I think was just her realization of I'm talking to another person who's blind, and that she'd never done that before and that she's just like, here's my chance, let me ask these questions that I would want to ask somebody, and just that whole exchange and her thought process was just like—went from like shocking to just like really powerful, and I just thought it was crafted really, really nicely.

Wally: I'll chime in. My name is Wally Zelensky [ph]. Similarly, of course the phone call, the content of it was so shocking, but what I found the most I guess compelling about the book overall was these conversations between these two people. That was what kept me reading, like their stories individually helped to support those interactions, but it felt like we kept sort of going in and out between these two different lives that would intersect every now and then, and it was this really like beautiful coalescence of their two different experiences and two different points in their lives, and I don't know, it just made me want to keep reading more every time they would talk. I'm like, yes, keep talking. I want to know what it is that you guys are learning from each other.

Kristen: Yeah, thank you. One thing I really wish that was possible in the audiobook was that the way it was broken up was that each narrator read each person's sections, but I really wish that—I guess if there were two things, which both probably require a lot more production time and financing, was one was that some of the music from the book could be incorporated into it, and the other was that the phone calls could really be more back and forth, sounding like phone calls. But you got to start somewhere, but I feel like that's true, the phone calls are kind of the heart of the story. It really puts the story into a very specific pre-internet context. That's pretty funny.

Marty: Nimit, before I hand it back to you—this is Marty again—I do have one question about the phone calls in particular, and this one very much. And that is, Kristen, Tallie talks about how paraprofessionals and professionals in her life were essentially just not giving her the truth, and then here's Benjamin giving her the truth. Is there a parallel? And I know that this isn't autobiographical, but is there a parallel in your own life where you had an adult finally speak in a way that felt shocking and as other people who have been others have said, maybe even rude, but that you appreciated the truth about being blind?

Kristen: That's a great question. No, not really. I think that some of the circumstances that led to that were pretty unique to Tallie, like her parental dynamic and the way her teachers were kind of scared to approach that dynamic, and I didn't experience that as a kid, so—I do remember meeting blind people for the first time, and I was pretty—I mean, I met blind kids when I was little, but I didn't meet blind adults until I was like a young teenager, I guess, and meeting them as adults working and contributing to society was very powerful for me, and

reading an autobiography of a blind author who acknowledged all of the teasing that took place in her childhood around the same time that I was growing up and reading this book was also very powerful for me, but no, I didn't have this kind of experience. I thought phone calls were a pretty profound way to connect with people. It's kind of evaporated now, but as far as the one truth teller, no, it wasn't quite that clear.

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Nimit: This is definitely, as I said, one of my overall favorite chapters, and I definitely agree with what everyone has said here. So there are so many passages I wanted to cover, but we are kind of running out of time, and I really want to get to the questions part, but I think that this is a great book, and I highly recommend everyone for reading it. Another chapter, The Fall Festival, is a chapter where that sense of independence that she felt, that new determination, and almost like an acceptance through her interaction with one of her friends, so I really highly recommend everyone to go ahead and read it your leisure time. I think it's a good way to get out of the daily routine. So now I have some questions for Kristen, and if you guys have questions in general you really wanted to ask today, feel free to put them in the chat too. I know the characters are fictional, and I know in the story behind the story you said Benjamin's story is an attempt of your husband's—James—experiences. Was there every like an instance or a particular story that made you want to capture his experiences?

Kristen: Yeah. I think we read it today where when I met James, he was very quiet about his life, and so I found that to be pretty interesting and I was sort of determined that he wouldn't be, and so when we finally talked about it, when he told me about his dad saying you can see, you just aren't looking, I thought that was really compelling because here is a person who is not well connected with resources, and I think his family truly meant the very best for him and just didn't know what to do, and I wanted to try to figure out how to write about that, because I think even now still that connection to the commission or to services unfortunately somewhat has to do with how good your connection is can somewhat depend on how well you can advocate. If your family thinks that you really need this, then you get more attention because the load of cases is just so overwhelming for the whole system that people who don't advocate or maybe don't realize what's happening can easily get shoved aside.

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Nimit: That's interesting. That's kind of personal to me because I also came from a background where before I moved to the United States I experienced similarly where I wasn't invalidated for sure as much, but—maybe not—maybe that's the wrong word.

Kristen: I think it's a pretty good word actually.

Nimit: So, basically like the resources were definitely lacking, so it was just like squished into—with other children with—so that really drew to my own childhood as well. The next question I have, and I know this we kind of talked about it, but I know Tallie is fictional as well, but was

there ever someone who inspired you to capture Tallie? I know you kind of answered but, did you have any similar experiences growing up?

Kristen: Yeah, no, so Tallie was kind of based on a student that I worked with when I was in high school, but at the same time the characters were from my imagination too, and I guess the closest things to my experience were probably the Christian youth group and some of the fall festival stuff probably, and playing in the band and not getting approved for a solo, but those kinds of little things, but the larger picture, the family was pretty different from mine.

Nimit: I didn't know you played in a band. That's pretty cool.

Kristen: Yeah.

Nimit: This is a burning question that I wanted to know, and I kind of stick toward my original questions, but the ending, when Benjamin left suddenly to Carolina, that was kind of total shock to me. It was—I got the same emotions as Tallie when it was just like all of a sudden—how did you decide to separate them? Did you ever make a different draft?

Kristen: I don't know. No, I didn't. I think I want to keep that answer short because I don't want to ruin anything. I think it just made a more compelling ending probably, the ultimate decision, kind of an ending that would enable them to both continue on in their own lives what was next for them without being too dependent on each other.

Nimit: I was expecting where they would meet. I wasn't expecting them to be like dependent on one another, but I was expecting it where they would almost have a [inaudible sounds like: family 00:29:30] reunion.

Kristen: Yeah, I know. Truth is stranger than fiction, so no.

Nimit: I know. Cool. Another thing I was wondering was his daughter's MS disease. And we kind of thought he was kind of left out, like we never really found out what happened to her except that she started working when they all moved, so was that like intentional?

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Kristen: Yeah, I think so. Probably part of it was just my lack of ability to draw any conclusions about MS. When I researched it, it is a disease, but it has a wide variety of paths for people depending on so many factors, and I think I want to say leaving it open was either intentional because I wasn't really sure and I didn't want to get it wrong, or maybe just oversight on my part.

Nimit: It definitely wasn't oversight. I think this disease is so broad, it's kind of hard—and it's unique to each individual, so it's hard to paint one picture.

Kristen: Yeah, when you read about the different prognoses for people with MS, it sounds so different that it almost sounds like it should be broken apart and named in more different ways, but that's coming from somebody who doesn't have it, so I don't know.

Nimit: I was more thinking about did she get treated or not.

Kristen: Yeah.

Nimit: So, you did a really great job writing about different generations. At first when I started reading the book I was kind of confused with the years, but when the book explained about laws in place, like the ADA and the IDEA versus no laws in place, I understood better, so what drew you to this style of comparative writing?

Kristen: I think it's really interesting that now at least the system is still overburdened, of course, but there is a requirement now that people need to be identified and that school personnel have a job to identify them as needing services as well as families, and so it's less likely that a student who has low vision especially would be so profoundly behind as Benjamin was to just sort of like literally coast through his entire school life and maybe one teacher sort of notices, but since his parents don't act on it there's not much anyone can do, and I don't think that would be totally possible anymore. Now it's more of a scenario of people just not quite getting enough services, but I think it was interesting. And then also, the racial dynamics, which probably pre-ADA there were, of course, blind people who were succeeded against the odds and doing really great things, and without the laws to protect them, so those people were really commendable, but also a lot of them were not minorities or living in minority—dealing with that intersection of race and disability, or class and disability. Some of them were. Some of them were even more extraordinary, I think, but I think that the whole racial dynamic in this country definitely influences the services you get, and still does, but pre-ADA it was probably even more profound.

Nimit: That's definite—the way you described it, I meant, was awesome. Does anyone have any other questions they want to ask before I continue? I don't want to be the only one talking, so feel free to hop on anytime. Does anyone have any questions?

00:33:09

Emma: I have one, which is really more about the experience of writing the book. I know that it's a fictional story, it's not an autobiography, but obviously still very connected to you and your life and your experience, and I'd love to hear what that kind of emotional journey was for you. Was it hard? Was it fun? Was it cathartic? Was it all of the above? I'd just love to hear you speak to that a little.

Kristen: Yeah. All of the above. What I remember the most is that I began with Tallie's cure story, and then I kind of wanted to know more about the other character, and the book I think originally, it took a few different forms. For a while it was like letters back and forth. At one

point it was kind of mainly from Tallie's point of view and very compressed. In an early draft of the book, it was like the opposite. It was uncompressed, like it went through her whole high school and college journey, but I took all that out, so a lot of it was like ripping it up and moving it around and things like that. I think her journey was a lot harder to compress into an arc that felt like a story, whereas Benjamin's was harder because I didn't live that experience in a lot of different ways, and I had to imagine it and ask James and imagine some more, but it felt better to compress the whole arc of his life into this book, whereas with Tallie it was more like a year to a year and a half.

Nimit: Is there a section or like a passage that you wrote but you didn't include in the book? I know we don't have enough time to read it, but is there?

Kristen: Like the extras?

Nimit: Yes.

Kristen: Yeah. I—like I said, an early draft of Tallie was going on into college and this, that, and the other thing. It didn't fit into the book, but I wrote about that. Then I was like, why am I writing about this? And took that all out. And I think that's basically the easiest thing I can think of. With computers—I guess with paper too, because you can throw it away—but when you revise something it's just revised, which is pretty interesting. So I have a few drafts, but I don't have all the drafts. I think this book took me, I don't know, literally like 14 years—I mean, I didn't write on it the entire time, but off and on.

Marty: Hey, Kristen. This is Marty again. I recall a conversation that you and I had, and you just sparked that memory from the book as well when you talk about revision. There is a painful moment for Tallie when she's revising. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because I think, and if I remember incorrectly I apologize, but I think you said that that was something that you had experienced on the typewriter as opposed to the computer previously as well, right?

00:35:50

Kristen: Gosh, yeah, I experienced that. There's a moment in the book when she's done all her assignments on a typewriter, and then she happened to hand them to her mom to look at them, and her mom said like, oh, the ribbon ran out in the middle of the first one, so you have to do all this again, and I remember that very clearly from my own childhood, like I remember my mom telling me I had to do it all over again, and she wasn't going to help me get out of it, even though it wasn't my fault exactly because I couldn't see the ink running out, but she didn't want me to be different from my classmates and have like this excuse that no one else was going to have, and I guess I don't know if she thought the teacher wouldn't understand or if she just thought this is one of those life lessons, you just have to suck it up and do it again, but anyway, it's something that thankfully people don't really have that experience anymore, but it is very painful to write like five pages and then in the middle of page one have it go out on you and not know.

Nimit: I've never used—

Kristen: I guess it can happen if you don't hit save on Word docs. Google Docs don't do that.

Marty: Or if you print, you don't know that the printer has run out of ink, and you hand something in [crosstalk 00:37:05] told you ahead of time. We haven't completely gotten away from it technologically, but it's certainly a lot easier to go back and just reprint, but nevertheless I was feeling for Tallie in that moment for sure, especially as she was making a very good case that she needs sleep as well.

Kristen: Right.

Marty: Mom was not bending. I want to step in here now. We've only got another minute or two. Nimit, thank you for leading this discussion today. I really, really appreciate it, but it wouldn't have been made possible without you, Kristen, sharing your art with us. We are so appreciative to have both of you in our community, and what a privilege to have both of you kick us off for 2023 with a book lunch and learn that really dives into identity and generations and just all over the place. For those of you who have started the book, I highly recommend that you finish. For those of you who haven't started the book, my own recommendation is to get it on Audible and listen because I do think that the narrators, they may have been cheap, Kristen, but they were awesome, and it's just a great experience.

Kristen: Yeah, they were great narrators. I'm really happy for them.

Marty: They really were.

Kristen: If you have a choice and you get anything out of audio, please go for the audio, I think.

Marty: Yeah, for sure. Thank you to both of you. For everyone who's on the call today, and for future listeners, if you're listening to this on Article 19, we will be doing a monthly book club this year. Kristen is helping to curate that book club along with a few others. And all of our books will be focused on areas of inclusion or disability right or disability literature, so lots more to come, lots more to read, and lots more to hear from opinions and things that people like and books that—we're going to read some stuff I know that we challenge and that challenge us and that we don't like too, and that'll be great. For everyone on book club lunch and learn today, thank you for spending an hour with us, and we will see you very, very soon. Thanks, everyone.

00:39:08

Thanks, Nimit. Thanks, Kristen.

Kristen: Thank you.

Nimit: Thank you.

Kristen: Thank you all.

Thanks, everybody.

Nimit: This discussion has been really—going really great, and now that we are almost to the end when I wanted to ask you some very general questions about the book, so what audience did you intend to target through writing this book when you began writing it in very initial stages?

Kristen: I think initially, like many probably overidealistic authors, I thought, a book is for everybody, and there's no audience for a book, and then everybody should know about this, and then as I got further into it, I kind of thought, maybe this is more of a YA or young adult type of book, but I think audiences are somewhat manufactured by what target group people will think a book works for the best, but a lot of books can really appeal to a very wide range of people, and they can get something out of it, but I'd say in general it's probably an adult book.

Nimit: In that, what advice would you give to new young aspiring writers who are just getting started with creative writing and fictional writing?

Kristen: There's so much good advice for writers that I'm not sure that my experience can add to in terms of a writing journey, but I think just showing up for the story as openly and honestly and vulnerably as possible is really important and can be easy at some times and hard at other times, and try to show up for the work when you can, don't beat yourself up when you can't, and it's always going to take a lot longer than you expect, I think.

Nimit: That's definitely true in the young stages of life and you're already going through so much in the life phase, like school, education, work, so I think the advice that you really give is show up to it when you can but don't beat yourself up. That really stuck out to me. And also, what is one message—doesn't have to be one message—or something you would want to get across through this book to all the listeners today?

00:41:34

Kristen: I'm just thinking about the different characters of school personnel, and I think about my own life and limitations as an educator, and I think that for teachers and other caregivers and just adults in general, the best thing that you can do for children is to show up for them and just be a human being, and there are many reasons why that can be difficult or impossible in certain capacities, but I think that is ultimately the most effective life teaching. And I guess for kids, growing up can be extremely complex and painful and transformative, and you've got to find your people all along the way if you can, so those are just a couple of messages I can think of.

Nimit: Thank you. It was great having you today, and thank you so much for your great insight and knowledge, and I look forward to interviewing you for your next book one day.

Kristen: Thank you, Nimit. It's really good to be here and to talk to you as someone else who's lived through some of these experiences, and it's a really profound pleasure for me, so thank you.

Marty: Teacher and student, student is now the teacher. I love it.

Nimit: I don't know about that.

Kristen: I pass the baton.

Marty: Nimit, we'll be expecting your book anytime now, so just whenever you're ready, we'll be happy to read yours and have you on.

Nimit: My book?

Marty: Isn't it near? Anyway, this is the first in our official monthly book talks. I'm not sure if all of them are going to become podcasts or not, but certainly the ones that we feel like are interesting to listen to, we will be turning them into podcasts, and to have the author with us for the first one in Kristen Witucki of Outside Myself, it couldn't have been better. I'm absolutely thrilled, and I think it's really important that companies when they're thinking about the climate and culture really invest in reading, invest in listening, and coming together as groups like this. I'm lucky that Tamman does that. And I hope you enjoyed this talk. You like what you heard today on the book talk, please leave us a five-star review and a rating. We really appreciate it. Even more, tell a friend or a colleague about the podcast. All of that really helps grow our listenership, and it makes a big difference. If you disagreed with something that you heard, you can also let us know. Feel free to contact us on social media. You can find us across all the platforms at Tamman Inc. or right off of our website, which is TammanInc.com. That's T-A-M-M-A-N-I-N-C dot com, and while you're there, don't forget to sign up for our newsletter so you never miss a beat with us. Thank you so much for joining us. I hope you enjoyed it, and we look forward to keeping the conversation going next time.

00:44:30