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Jenny Curtis: From CurtCo Media-

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Speaker 2: There's no place like Hollywood.

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Jenny Curtis: Welcome to another special episode of Hollywood Unscripted: Stuck At Home. I'm Jenny Curtis, and today, I have the gift of virtually sitting down with writer and producer Liz Tigelaar, who has a plethora of television work under her belt, including show running the acclaimed Hulu series, Little Fires Everywhere. Liz, thank you so much for joining me today.

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, thank you for having me.

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Jenny Curtis: I want to start with a big congratulations, because Little Fires Everywhere is up for five Emmys. I'm sure that's surreal.

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, I can't believe it. It felt like such a hard category, and I'm so glad we slipped in. The show of course, I loved that nomination because it really represents every single person who worked on it. But, yeah, all of the nominations for individual reasons are all so incredibly meaningful and we're just honored to be included.

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Jenny Curtis: So, right now these series of specials with Hollywood Unscripted we're calling Stuck At Home because of quarantine. So, I want to start off with a little bit of like, how are you doing?

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Liz Tigelaar: I mean, it's been interesting. It's like, really ridden a wave in the last five months. We kind of had our system for a while and then we actually were supposed to go back east to see our families and we were supposed to fly and we got freaked out, and so we just rented a minivan and just took our kid and dog and drove across the country, and never peed in a public restroom. It was an adventure, but it was amazing. And I think it really... I don't know. It just changed my family's whole outlook on everything, really. And so it's been hard obviously, and easier for us I think than a lot of people, but we keep talking about going back to normal and thinking what is normal, and do we

really want to go back to normal? What does it look like now? I guess it's been hard, but illuminating. You know?

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Jenny Curtis: I want to dig into Little Fires in a little bit, but I want to start at the beginning, if that's okay. Your career has spanned some really high profile TV, reaching all the way back to Dawson's Creek, which I can find is your first thing. That is a huge show to start on, and I believe you were an assistant, is that correct?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, I actually started as an intern right out of college. I graduated college and drove out to LA and started interning at Dawson's Creek because the person who hired the interns went to Ithaca, where I went. And she hired me, and really it started my whole career. It was a great place to be at the time and I hadn't really watched the show. It premiered when I was a senior in college basically, and I didn't know anything about it. But I got the VHS tapes and I watched the whole show one weekend in my little crappy apartment, and I loved it. I was like, "Sarah McLaughlin, Edwin McCain, (inaudible) like Joey on the other side of the creek."

I just was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm on the greatest show ever." It was awesome. There were all these writers there at the time, you know? Mike White, and obviously Kevin Williamson and Greg Berlanti was a staff writer, and I mean, it was just this kind of who's who of everyone who would go on to be show runners, and Ruben Fleischer, the director, he was a PA with me. And I mean, it was fun. I kind of worked through all the assistant jobs that you could do. I did some weird stuff, and then eventually co-wrote a freelance episode with my writing partner at the time and then eventually moved on. But some of my very best friends in LA are still a group of women who I met on Dawson's.

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Jenny Curtis: Your writing partner was Holly Henderson, correct?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yep.

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Jenny Curtis: And you did several things together, including novels about Dawson's Creek?

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Liz Tigelaar: Well, that was the weird stuff. So, Paul Stupin wanted to do like... We'd always do a scary episode, like a

Blair Witch episode or some sort of Halloween episode or whatever. It was almost like if you combined Dawson's Creek and Scooby-Doo. It was like mystery series. And so, of course all of the writers were like, "No." And all of the assistants were like, "We'll write them." And so basically, all the assistants on Dawson's at some point were credited with a Dawson's Creek mystery novel, and I think I got the distinct honor of co-writing two.

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Jenny Curtis: That's awesome.

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Liz Tigelaar: But I mean, at the time it was just like, "Oh my gosh, I'll write whatever. Let's write in these characters' voices." And I can remember my car breaking down and sitting at Toyota, plunking out a Dawson's Creek mystery novel, waiting for it to get fixed. It was a time. We did a lot of weird things like that. It was kind of like, say yes to anything that involves getting paid to write, was our motto.

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Jenny Curtis: And so Holly and you worked together on Dawson's Creek, and the novels, and then something called Totally Spies!

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Liz Tigelaar: That was a cartoon.

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Jenny Curtis: I mean, the say yes to anything, that's awesome.

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Liz Tigelaar: Yes.

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Jenny Curtis: Starting your career as a writer as a team, what were the benefits to that? When did you decide it was time to move on? Do you co-write with people anymore? I mean, besides writer's rooms?

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Liz Tigelaar: Not really. I mean, sometimes now in a more supervisory role. I'm doing it again, and I actually really enjoy it. I mean, I love the collaboration of pairing up and at the time, it was such a valuable partnership. I was so lost when I moved out here. I asked my parents if for my birthday, they would let me take a writing class in the Valley, where someone teaches a writing class. And you're

like, " Okay," and you go on Saturdays or whatever, and they would read whatever spec script you were working on, and they didn't have a script to read that week, so they were like, " Hey, do you have any scripts?" And I was like, " Well, I wrote a news radio script in college." They were like, " Let's read it." And I'm like, " Oh my gosh, they must have read it and loved it, and now we're reading my script in front of the class. So, I dragged to the Valley, they read my script. It is so horrible, it's so painful. The script is clearly so bad. I went into the bathroom and just burst into tears. I mean, first I cried in front of everybody. Then I collected myself and appropriately moved to the bathroom, and then I was like, " I'm moving back to Connecticut. I'm going to teach Kindergarten. I don't know, there's another career path for me." And Holly miraculously was like, " We could write together," and I was like, " Yes!" I was like, " I don't know what I'm doing!" And so we did. We wrote so many specs. We wrote together for a long time.

Eventually, she started dating somebody and became writing partners with him. But it was at a time after we had kind of dissolved our partnership, and I think any dissolving of a partnership isn't always an easy thing, but I think for us, it felt like a natural time where we kind of stopped being assistants on the same show together and we were just moving in different directions. I think I had gotten an opportunity on American Dreams to be an assistant, and I had been given the opportunity to write a script there. And I think for me, I didn't know what my voice was alone. I really didn't know what my voice was at all. And so, it was an opportunity to start to find it, and it just proved to be very invaluable. And being on American Dreams especially was really life- changing for me.

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Jenny Curtis: And on American Dreams, you went then from assistant to writer, but then you also were a story editor, and that's kind of a step up in the writer's room?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, so you go the ladder. You start as an assistant, you get a staff writer job and then it's like story editor, executive story editor, co- producer, producer, supervising producer, sometimes consulting producer, co- EP and then executive producer. So, you kind of move your way up the ladder. And so, I got to be an assistant on American Dreams for a year and then two years as a writer. And that was the best, craziest first experience I could have ever had.

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Jenny Curtis: Having it be the first experience, did you see the steps like you just laid out and know that that's what you wanted to take, or did they kind of come at you and you would step up as you moved along?

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Liz Tigelaar: I knew that's what I wanted to do. Like I said, I had been on Dawson's Creek. I was an assistant, we had written an episode but it didn't really lead anywhere. I had been going on meetings forever, and we hadn't really gotten anything as a team and we were just both kind of trying to figure it out at the time and going off on different shows that I think really suited both our personalities. I mean, when I saw Brittany Snow watching American Bandstand, that's how I felt watching American Dreams, and I was like, "I'll do anything on this show. I'll be a PA, I'll work for free. I'll be an intern. I'll do anything." And of course, I knew I wanted to move up the ladder.

But I don't think I had a huge sense of the ladder and of how long it would take, would I ever get there? I mean, I moved out here and I thought, "Some day, if I write an episode of television with my name on it," for all I knew, that could take a whole career. So I was like, "That might be it, you might work 20 years to have one episode of television." I mean, I had no idea. So, I didn't have a great barometer, but I just knew I loved where I was.

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Jenny Curtis: And then climbing up the ladder again, you went from What About Brian, where you had a producing role. And then Brothers & Sisters, you had a season of being a producer and then supervising producer. So you really went from show to show, taking on all of these experiences, and I'd love to hear more about what you learned from them, what you took from each show.

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Liz Tigelaar: So, some of those titles, like you're all sometimes kind of doing the same thing even though your title increases and hopefully your pay. Everything you're doing is still kind of the same until you get to supervising, co-EP level where you might be rewriting scripts or really helping out with something specific or being in post, you're a writer in the room and you're all kind of doing the same thing. You might just have more experience.

So, what happened was I had been on American Dreams, and then it got canceled and I did not get staffed. And of course, I was a wreck. I was like, "What do I do for money?" It was like, I had been story editor and I didn't

know if I could go back to being an assistant, because that's going to look weird, because I'm already a couple rungs up and now I'm jumping back. But I really didn't know what to do. And by some miracle, I ended up selling my first pilot that year. Again, by some other miracle, it ended up shooting in Vancouver. And so, I ended up shooting this pilot. It completely changed my career. Just to have had something shoot, and then Josh Reims, who I had worked with on American Dreams, who was such a guide and mentor to me... I mean, he was so encouraging but he would also pull me aside and told me what annoying things I was doing that I needed to really correct if I wanted to keep moving up. Which is a very hard thing to do, but it's kindness to do that for someone.

And he really did that for me, and then he proceeded to hire me kind of again and again on What About Brian and Brothers & Sisters, and just always... Dirty, Sexy, Money. He just always really supported me and my career. And so hooking up with a person like that and being able to grow with them and really emulate the way that they ran a show and ran a room, and I really did that with Josh.

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Jenny Curtis: And then all of that led to your first show running experience, which was Life Unexpected, which is such a cute show.

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Liz Tigelaar: Oh, thank you. I loved that show. I loved that group. The writers and cast, we're all still such good friends, and we all felt really young, like we were all just doing this thing for the first time. Up in Vancouver, and it was an amazing experience. I remember being in the writer's room and going... looking around and thinking like, "Who's going to tell me what to do?" And I called Josh Reims, and he was like, "Nobody, it's on you. And if anyone helps you, if anyone has one good idea, they're doing you a favor, but it's on you." And I was like, "No, I was terrified." I had a great producing partner, Mary Beth Basile, and we all had the best time doing the show. And it was like American Dreams, kind of the best first experience doing that that I could have hoped for.

And I think unlike Split Decision, my first pilot where I was so like, "I'm so young and I'm so grateful to be there," and I'm like, "Meep," Life Unexpected, I was really able to have more of a voice and I don't mean to say stand up for myself like I had to stand up to anybody, but more like be able to voice what I thought and not feel intimidated and know that my voice was going to be kind of recognized and included and that it mattered, and that just felt so

empowering. It was so nice to have a voice and it kind of made me feel like, "What do people do who don't have a TV show to say all this stuff with every week?" I felt like I just got to pour it all out into the show. What I thought, and yeah. It was one of the best experiences of my career, hands- down.

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Jenny Curtis: And it was on the CW, is that correct?

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Liz Tigelaar: It was. It was on the CW.

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Jenny Curtis: So, you had just come off of Melrose Place, also on the CW. Did that lead to the show, or how did that work out?

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Liz Tigelaar: So, Life Unexpected got picked up but it was starting kind of late, and I was in an overall deal. So, I went to Melrose. I had gotten to be a little bit of a fly on the wall of the pilot of that, and then I came to just write the second episode and moved on to Life Unexpected. But somehow, I don't know. I got credited on all 13 or however many there were. I was like, "Oh, this is great."

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Jenny Curtis: You did so much on this show.

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Liz Tigelaar: I look very busy. But it was really fun, it was a great group. And it was great to be under those guys before I was off to run my own thing, just Todd and Darren were great.

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Jenny Curtis: The idea sprung basically because you are adopted yourself, is that correct?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah.

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Jenny Curtis: How much of yourself did you put in this show?

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Liz Tigelaar: Well, initially, I didn't really think it came from me at all. I was thinking more about like Knocked Up and Gilmore Girls and I don't know, I just kind of came up

with the idea and it wasn't until it was already written and shot and we were staffing the writer's room that Mary Beth, my producing partner, was like, "This is a lot about you." And I was like, "Is it?" And I didn't really set out to do it. It just turned out to be that way, and then of course, I did get to put a lot of myself into it. And all the writers, every time someone new wrote, they got to put themselves into it. So by the end, it really wasn't just me, it was everybody.

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Jenny Curtis: Yeah. So, it's write what you know, even when that's unintentional, is what you-

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, I guess so. Exactly. It's like, turns out I don't know anything else.

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Jenny Curtis: But speaking of working within a network, so then you did a whole string of ABC Shows. You were on Once Upon A Time and Revenge, and Nashville and the Astronaut Wives Club. But it feels like you were kind of sent there to launch the show, because you were in the first season of all of them. Is that kind of what happened?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, so after Life Unexpected, I signed an overall deal at ABC, and when you're on an overall deal, you kind of get assigned to shows basically. And usually what they'll do is they'll assign you to their first season shows because we all know the first season's usually the hardest to get off the ground. So, yeah. I went from first season show to first season show and I don't know. I mean, I hope I was helpful. I have no idea. But I was there, and I got to do a lot and be around a lot of different show runners, again learn what I like, what I didn't like, what I thought was effective, what I thought wasn't. I got to have relationships with a lot of new people and just meet writers that I hadn't known before that I really loved working with, and then sometimes reunite with people who I had known.

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Jenny Curtis: What do you think was the biggest thing that you took away from doing that with all of the show runners?

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Liz Tigelaar: Well, you know what? I think I would say that I realize I need to be with my people. Some shows, well, I'll just say it. Once Upon A Time was a show that I



loved, I love the fairy tale world. I love the themes, but there were elements of it that just weren't in my wheelhouse. They would refer to a portal and I would talk about a hole. Or I'd be like, "She falls down the hole," they'd be like, "It's a portal!" And I'm like, "Oh, a portal."

I'm just not a portal person and so it was pretty obvious quickly I wasn't a portal person to them and to me. So that, though I loved them, that wasn't a natural fit for me and I think that I realized, "Oh, there are just people who like, we're going to speak the same language and I'm going to know it's right because it's going to feel right." I'm not going to feel like I'm swimming upstream. So, I think I became a little more choiceful when I went on shows to really not just try to get the job, but to really investigate what they were looking for so I could discern. I might love the show and I might love the people in that case, but I might not be the best fit. I need to discern that for myself a little bit. So, I don't know. That was something kind of good to learn I think out of the experience of hopping around. And that I just really needed to be in an effective room where people listened to each other. That was another thing. I would go on some shows where it just felt like everyone was talking, but no one was listening.

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Jenny Curtis: Hmm. So then Casual, I read something where Zander Lehmann basically said him and Jason Wrightman and Helen Estabrook all kind of followed your lead because you had the most experience in television. Was that kind of a room where you guys all carried each other's weight and worked together as a team of show runners, kind of?

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Liz Tigelaar: Absolutely. I mean, they hadn't done TV before, and so I kind of got brought in as the experienced show runner. I hadn't done a comedy before, so that part was new to me. But yeah, Helen, Zander and I really ran that show kind of in a three-pronged approach. I ran the room. Zander controlled all the scripts, and Helen really spearheaded set and producing. And so that was a great partnership at the time, and I think that I loved the... I mean, I would say mentorship with Zander, but in a lot of ways, Zander mentored me as much as I did him.

It was really a two-way street because he thought so much outside of the box because he hadn't grown up kind of in that box because he was so young. And he'd barely grown up. But yeah, so I had a lot to learn from Zander too. I really appreciated his approach to storytelling and I really

appreciated his voice, and I think he stretched me to go outside the box a little more, because I had grown up kind of in that network box and structure. But yeah, I loved running that room. I absolutely loved the writers on that show. So many of them I've taken to do so many other projects and that was a great experience. It was a really particularly wonderful room experience.

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Jenny Curtis: And that was your first experience with streaming, right?

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Liz Tigelaar: Yeah.

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Jenny Curtis: So, what did you find the main difference was there in streaming versus network?

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Liz Tigelaar: The biggest difference I think was getting to write almost all the scripts ahead of time, was having like a three-month lead instead of a six-week lead. So you could find the show and if you had an episode where you were struggling, you weren't having the weight of production bearing down on you. You had time to find the show and find the voice and find the rhythm. Sometimes it can take four episodes in, five, six. And so once we found it with Casual, it was just such an easy show to do I thought, because we knew what felt right for that show. We could just feel it when we were in the room.

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Speaker 4: A Moment of Your Time, a new podcast from CurtCo Media.

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Speaker 5: I'm currently 21 years old, and today-

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Speaker 6: I felt like magic extended-

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Speaker 5: ... I'm going to read a poem for you.

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Speaker 6: ... from her fingertips, down to the base of my spine.

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Speaker 7: You have to take care of yourself, because the world needs

you and your voice.

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Speaker 8: Trust me, every do-gooder that asked about me was ready to spit on my dreams.

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Speaker 9: Her fingers were facing me.

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Speaker 10: You feel like your purpose and your worth is really being questioned.

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Speaker 11: You ain't going to stop me from playing the piano.

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Speaker 12: She buys walkie-talkies, wonders to whom she should give the second device.

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Speaker 13: Pets don't love humans. We never did, we never will. We just find ones that are-

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Speaker 14: The beauty of rock climbing is that you can only focus on what's right in front of you.

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Speaker 15: And so, our American life begins.

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Speaker 4: We may need to stay apart, but let's create together. Available on all podcast platforms. Submit your piece at [CurtCo.com/AMomentOfYourTime](http://CurtCo.com/AMomentOfYourTime).

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Jenny Curtis: So, with Little Fires Everywhere, this is such a great show. Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington approached you with the book, is that correct? And then you turned it into the show?

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Liz Tigelaar: Exactly, yeah. I had had a general meeting with Laura Neustadter at Reese's company, because I really wanted to go on Morning show, and we kind of had a general meeting and I did end up going on Morning Show, but in the meantime, this book had become available and they needed a writer, and she sent it to me and was like, "Reese and Kerry are starring in it, do you want to do it?" And I'm

like, "Of course." And then I'm like, "Well, let me read it." But I mean, obviously. And then I read it and I was like, "Oh my god, I love the book so much. Even if Reese and Kerry weren't starring in it, I would want to adapt this book." I just, I loved it.

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Jenny Curtis: The process in adapting the book, did you work with Celeste Ng who's the author of the novel? How did you find the show from what the book gave you?

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Liz Tigelaar: Well, I read the book and I kind of instinctively knew some areas that I might want to mine, some questions I had, some places where I thought we could maybe mine the story for even more story, and I knew I wanted to maybe connect some story points a little more. So, I just had a lot of ideas reading the book. When you read something and it sparks all this other stuff, that's obviously a good sign. So, it sparked a lot in me and so I kind of pitched out to Celeste how I saw doing it and maybe where I saw adjusting or tweaking or doing this or adding this element, and obviously, a huge element that was added to the story was Mia being black.

Because in the book, her race wasn't referenced and the assumption was kind of that she was white. So, all of those things kind of contributed to the adaptation and I really ran everything by Celeste and pitched it out to sell it. And then it was breaking the pilot, which I did first. And I put all the story deets from the book up on the board, like Beautiful Mind. Note cards everywhere. It looked like crazy, but I just wanted to lay everything out so I could see it really clearly, and then start to think, "How can things connect even more? How can we take something in the book that was maybe a little bit more insulated and make it the catalyst for something else? How do we weave it all together and how do we tap into this great backstory in the book with all these characters?" And just starting to think about how best to approach it. I mean, that's the type of stuff I love. It's like putting a puzzle together.

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Jenny Curtis: And you can feel that, because you tackle so many scenes. You've got race and motherhood and ambition and identity, and just all of these really rich themes the actors and I'm sure writers want to sink their teeth into. Besides Beautiful Mind—ing on the wall, how did you apply that to the script and make sure everything linked together?

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Liz Tigelaar: The biggest thing was deciding where the pilot ended and what needed to launch us into the series. So, Mia doesn't start working in the Richardson house until much deeper into the book, but that was something we felt like we really needed to pull up sooner to understand this dynamic and how this was going to propel us into the story. And so, he almost divided the season into three acts like a movie, and then thought, "Okay, what's act one of the movie and how is that propelling us and launching us into act two, and then what's the twist halfway through act two?" I mean, we really almost approached it like breaking a movie script but then doing it over eight episodes.

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Jenny Curtis: Now, you said at the beginning that you were still finding your voice, or you didn't know what your voice was as a kid, as a young woman who-

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Liz Tigelaar: I mean, I was a kid.

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Jenny Curtis: But this show feels really different from your body of work. So, is this kind of finding a new aspect of your voice in the creation of it?

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Liz Tigelaar: Definitely. I mean, it's almost like my voice has gotten to grow up with me, which obviously makes sense. It's my voice. So, I started as a kid, or writing about kids and as I've gotten older, I've been able to write what's important to me, and I think that this was really the culmination of that. Life Unexpected was at a certain time of my life and that was my voice at that time. That was a time of being in your early 30s and grappling with, "Are you going to get married? Are you going to have a kid?" All that stuff.

This is a time in my life, of my mid-40s that's much more about motherhood and world view and yes, of course examining things like race and class and identity, all of those things. So, I think my voice has luckily grown up with me, and I think sometimes, you can get kind of pigeon-holed in stuff or just you gravitate towards kind of staying in that younger time. But for me, I think having the opportunity to write a story about all different types of mothers in particular, I felt very fortunate. It was incredibly meaningful, especially at this time.

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Jenny Curtis: Yeah. So, I'm probably going to dig into

spoilers, so anybody listening to this show who doesn't want spoilers, probably skip forward to the end.

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Liz Tigelaar: The house burns down.

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Jenny Curtis: The house burns down.

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Liz Tigelaar: There is a fire.

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Jenny Curtis: So, it starts with a fire, and I actually went back and re-watched the first episode yesterday, and I didn't realize the first time I watched it, of course. It just goes right past you because you haven't seen the show yet, but the kids basically say Elena's going to throw her youngest kid Izzy under the bus, because of course she is. And then at the end, she doesn't. She takes the blame on herself. So, from the first minute of your show, you're setting up exactly what's going to happen. Was that in the book? Is that just how skilled you are as a writer? How did you find the arc that way?

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Liz Tigelaar: In the book, Izzy burns the house down and you know it on the first page. So, basically when they're sitting in the car saying, "It's Izzy." They know it's Izzy. The twist that we wanted to do in the show is that if you've read the book, you think that it's Izzy. And you'll probably think it's Izzy all the way through and then we wanted to kind of twist it and say, "Well, yeah. It was Izzy starting something, but they're really the ones who finished it." And when you really look at it globally, you could argue that Elena burned the house.

It's kind of how you define burning the house down. Izzy wanted to burn the house down, or at least the stuff in their room. The kids burned the house down, and Elena metaphorically burned the house down. And I think that those were the type of layers I think we wanted to add to it because we didn't want the ending to be exactly the same and I didn't want it to just be like, "Oh, the person who you think burned the house down burned the house down." And it was very hard to earn it, but it was... The journey to earning it was really fulfilling.

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Jenny Curtis: So, Reese Witherspoon's character, Elena, she is the epitome of privilege, of white suburban mother who is

incredibly racist but doesn't realize it. We love to hate her because she's awful. But also, Reese is so good at what she does that you find so much empathy in that character. I'm really wondering, do you consider Elena the antagonist, or is she something else?

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Liz Tigelaar: That's a good question. It's interesting because we really tried to approach it the way that Celeste approached the novel of no one's the hero and no one's the villain. I think it is easy to look at Elena and look at her as villainous, and it's easy to look at her especially now through a lens and say she's incredibly racist. But I think Elena herself doesn't feel that way at all, and I think a lot of people who are a lot like Elena don't feel that way about themselves. It was interesting, when we talked to Celeste, she was saying, "Everybody knows an Elena, but nobody thinks they are an Elena." And I think a lot of us are Elenas, you know? A lot of us are well-meaning white people who really think we are allies, or who really think we've done the work.

And this was something we were talking about in the writer's room two years ago. How do we explore not KKK members or people marching in Charlottesville. How do we explore white liberal, progressive women who really don't believe they have a racist bone in their body, yet are doing all of these things constantly that show something and reveal something different? And so that was exploration and I think that what Reese did was such a brave performance.

Because I think she used a level of familiarity to invite you into this character that you think you know. Oh, it's Reese being a perfect mother, being this type A woman, but where she went with it to me was something I've never seen her or anyone else go to that place in that way before. I mean, where she gets in the finale is so ugly but also raw, and really honest. And I think there's something about honesty that's in a lot of ways, so much better because it's clear. You know?

00:28:10

Jenny Curtis: And with her and Kerry having brought this story to you, because Kerry did such a phenomenal job with Mia, holy crap. I know it's a collaboration no matter what, but how much did you guide them in their characters? How much did they bring you the characters?

00:28:25

Liz Tigelaar: It was both. We kind of initially met and talked about the characters, and I had ideas in my head from them and then I really went off and went into the writer's

room and we all did the work together, me and the writers. And they read scripts and weighed in, but they were doing American Sun and Big Little Lies and Morning Show. They were doing other things, and then once their other things ended, the writer's room wrapped. Then we were able to collectively say, "Okay, here are all eight episodes. Let's really look at them."

And it was really rolling up our sleeves and doing a lot of work. We examined Elena, we examined Mia. We kind of worked everything we would want to work out in a more macro sense, and then once we were shooting, we were able to really go in a much more micro way into each scene, and whether it was Reese talking about just how teenagers in a house behave. Because she has teenagers in her house, or it was Kerry with specific ideas about Mia's dynamic with Bebe, or Pearl. We were able to incorporate their own personal experiences kind of into these characters. And a big thing from Kerry was Mia being non-apologetic and not trying to make people okay.

Because I think as women, we try to smooth it out and make it okay and oh, it's uncomfortable and we're like, "It's okay, let's just get through it." And to see such a strong woman, not to mention a strong black woman who's like, "My job's not to make it okay for you. If you dig yourself in this hole, I'm not going to kick you down in it further, but I'm not going to give you a hand and pull you out either, because this isn't my hole." And I think that that was incredibly powerful.

00:30:00

Jenny Curtis: Yeah, it was really interesting to watch, because you start out and you don't know the characters very well. And yeah, Mia's kind of unpleasant and you're like, "Why is she so rude?" And then as it goes on, you're like, "Oh, no. That's everything I want to be," because she just says what she says.

00:30:17

Liz Tigelaar: Well, and you realize how offensive Elena is being without realizing it and how much Mia is... It is, it seems like, paper cuts or microaggressions or however you want to look at it. I mean, they're not even micro. They're macro. And I loved the audience kind of feeling one way and thinking they knew one thing about a character, even to say, "Why is Mia so mean?" And then to be like, "Oh, Mia's not mean, Elena is deeply, deeply offensive, and if I didn't notice that, maybe I'm deeply, deeply offensive." And same with Moody. There was so many characters that we tried to do that with. Moody deserves Pearl, and he's the good guy and suddenly, then being like, "Does it matter what Pearl wants?"



Do we care or is this just such a TV trope that the nice guy finishes first or should, that we get sucked into that?" You know? So, anyway, those are the fun stories to just explore.

00:31:11

Jenny Curtis: The young Mia and young Elena was played by AnnaSophia Robb and Tiffany Boon who were so well cast. Oh my god, so well cast. Tiffany especially, her mannerisms, her facial expressions. She was the same Mia that Kerry was. Did they work together on that? Or did she come to the audition with that already prepped, or how did that work?

00:31:33

Liz Tigelaar: Both AnnaSophia and Tiffany came to set and really did a lot of observing, and they each had different ways that they did it. Reese would even read the lines, record them for AnnaSophia, so she could get her inflection, things like that. And then Tiffany just embodied Kerry in every way. I mean, her mouth. It was eerie. I mean, you kind of couldn't even believe it. I honestly wish we could do a whole season with those two as those characters, because they just encapsulated them so perfectly. You really believed it, and I loved seeing who these characters were before we met them in the pilot. You know? This idea of the women that they were and how they became the women that we knew.

00:32:18

Jenny Curtis: I do have a question about the photo.

00:32:20

Liz Tigelaar: Oh, the photo. Oh, no. I know.

00:32:23

Jenny Curtis: But it's such a stunning photo. So, your whole story revolves around this piece of art, that can sell for a quarter of a million dollars, and it is young Mia. But it's not young Mia. So, how did that happen?

00:32:35

Liz Tigelaar: Well, okay. I mean, the email chains, the discussions. So you see the photo before you ever see Tiffany, and when you see the photo, you have to know that it's Mia for the story to make sense, because she's looking at this woman pregnant, and crying. If you had put Tiffany Boon in the picture, you would have been like, "Who's this girl that Mia's crying about?"

And then in two episodes, you would find out, "Oh, that's young Mia." It felt like the audience could more easily

suspend their disbelief of understanding that Tiffany, yes, is a different actress playing young Mia versus the confusion of a picture of Tiffany Boon, when it's important for the audience to know this is Mia. So, what we prioritized was story clarity knowing that the puzzle pieces of this were going to be slightly confusing. Also, we had to shoot the picture well before Tiffany was cast.

00:33:32

Jenny Curtis: Ah.

00:33:33

Liz Tigelaar: So we didn't even have a young Mia when we had to shoot the photo. But yeah, I know. A lot of discussions.

00:33:38

Jenny Curtis: That was just one little thing I wanted to bring up. But the photo itself though is stunning. So, what was the process in finding and art directing and making sure you had a photo that could believably sell for so much money, not just because it was a famous artist, but because it's a gorgeous work of art? How did you get there?

00:33:58

Liz Tigelaar: It was incredible. Our production designer Jess Kender, it was working with artists. We had so many test photo shoots, belly photo shoots, how should it be? And we were just so thrilled with the finished product. I mean, the photo for sure, but all of the art in the series done by Connie Martin Trevino was so beautiful and just so stunning and if it wasn't weird, I would just have it on the wall of my home. But-

00:34:26

Jenny Curtis: Why don't you?

00:34:28

Liz Tigelaar: I know, there's a pill bottle that says Valium for Elena, and it has little tabs on it that say, "Return Blockbuster. Give Blood," and then something else funny, and I'm like, "I kind of do want to bring that one for my wall." But I mean, yeah. Just all of it. The art was so stunning. That photo was incredible.

We had different photographers come in, but Connie, our main photographer and artist, not just photographer. But yeah, the art was so important and it was so important that it feel elevated and real and like something that would sell. And yeah, we had different artists. That was Pauline's photo of Mia, so that was a different artist than what Mia's... So, there was a lot of thought into who were the artists, not

using the same artist when it was supposed to be two different artists, like the lens and the eye had to be different.

00:35:30

Speaker 16: Hi, I'm Robert Ross, host of Cars That Matter. You might be wondering what makes a car matter, and I have a feeling you already know the answer. Some cars have changed history. Some you can hear a mile away. Some have lines that make your heart skip a beat. If a car has ever made you look twice, then I think you know the ones that matter. Join me as I speak with designers, collectors, and market experts about the passions of drivers and the passions we drive. Cars That Matter, wherever you get your podcasts.

00:36:05

Jenny Curtis: There's a storyline in the show, a major storyline obviously about adoption and you've said that you've drawn from your own experience and applied it to the story, but I'm curious to hear what your thoughts are on what the right ruling would have been in court.

00:36:20

Liz Tigelaar: Oh, I mean, I don't know. I honestly don't know the answer. I feel like in some ways, there was no right ruling and no wrong ruling because look, I'll be honest, I came into it as an adopted kid being like, "That baby is Linda McCullough's, she's been there for 10 months, she's the mother she knows," and in my mind, I was saying, "It's not about her nice house and all the things she can afford her, it's just that that baby is attached to her. That is a long time for a child to be with a mother figure and then to be taken away."

And I still feel that way. At the same time, I feel incredibly protective of Bebe's character and Bebe's journey, because one of the things we wanted to add to the book was that Bebe was in the country illegally, because we felt like it made it even more justifiable why she couldn't just go to the fire station and say, "We need help," because if she exposed herself, she might be deported, her baby would still be here, and she might never get back to see her again.

So, that was an element we wanted to add to it, but I think just to really explore what it must feel like to be in a country with no safety net, with no support, with nobody you can turn to, not knowing the language well, not having a credit card that you can just put formula on. All of those things. I mean, to really understand what no safety net looks like, because I think a lot of people might not have much, but to have nothing else aside from what she had, that's different. And so, I think there was no happy

ending because either way, they both were deserving mothers, both doing the best in their circumstances.

00:38:03

Jenny Curtis: In the same vein, but different, all the way back to episode one, Pearl's Poem states, "Can something be stolen if it was always meant for you?" Which obviously sets up the whole series. I'd love to hear more about what the discussion was on right or wrong in Pearl's sense with Mia.

00:38:20

Liz Tigelaar: Well, that was another thing. I feel like people could so harshly judge Bebe but nobody was judging Mia in that same way because you fall in love with Mia and you understand. I mean, you look at Pearl and you say, "Well, of course Pearl is Mia's baby," and yes, Mia did something that I guess technically wasn't right, but how is it not right to be with your own baby? And that's what we talked about. May Ling will be a Pearl in 15 years, and why would we not feel that same way? And what really became an interesting discussion was talking about how much good motherhood is tied to being able to afford it. And I think that was something in the room, and we also talked about... One of the writers, Shannon Houston, brought up a really good point.

She said, "If Linda McCullough had a baby, two babies of her own, biological babies, would we be so convinced that she somehow deserves Bebe's baby?" And I think the answer would be no. But somehow, she deserved it. It's like, yes, she deserves a baby, but why does she deserve Bebe's baby, and why doesn't Bebe deserve her baby? So those were all the discussions that we had and definitely modeling Bebe and May Ling after Mia and Pearl. And I think what made it so amazing is that there was no right answer. I mean, I don't think you could say that Mirabelle wasn't Linda's baby. Of course she was.

00:39:43

Jenny Curtis: Do you have a moment of Little Fires Everywhere that you're proudest of?

00:39:48

Liz Tigelaar: Oh, that's a good question. Gosh, there was a scene between Mia and Izzy in episode seven, that really, really touched me. Izzy was finding out that Mia had been with a woman, and Mia was saying to Izzy, "You won't swim forever." That was a moment I just like, every time I saw it, when I was there for filming, when I saw it in post, every cut, it just guts me. And watching Megan, watching her eyes just well up with tears, that was a moment that I

felt... Maybe it's not that I felt so proud. I just felt so moved by that moment, and I think that the bravery of the kids was something that I felt really proud of for them, Lexi Underwood, Jade Pettyjohn and that scene with Mia where she kind of really tells it like it is.

Gavin, like so many... SteVonte's break up. I can just think of moment after moment where I just had so... I felt like a maternal pride, I think for the kids. And just how brave they were, working with these big movie stars and how they held their own and did the work and pulled these performances out of themselves, and being so young. So, I think I had a lot of pride in that, and I think really behind the scenes, I had a lot of pride of all the women working on the show and all the people who were allowed to be mothers while they were working. And that we got to work very hard, and we also got to say like, "Hey, I've got your back. Go home. Go get to your kid." You know? I think those moments felt really profound.

00:41:21

Jenny Curtis: So, if you could relive one day on set, over and over and over again besides the Izzy scene, what day would you choose to relive Groundhog- style wise?

00:41:31

Liz Tigelaar: I think in the finale, the Mia/ Elena scene. It's their final showdown where Elena comes to the door to tell Mia she's out and Mia's like, "Yeah, you think?" That dynamic, it was so... Any time Reese and Kerry were together, it was so palpable. They both had it. They really didn't need anything from anybody. They just were ready to go toe to toe. And they were giving each other all they needed. And so I think we were just able to sit back in video village and just be like, "Oh my gosh!"

Like Kerry would say something that surprise Reese, and Reese would do something and you just... I mean, I could've watched that forever, and I think we were all just like, "Oh, man. That was good. That was good." And so much of it honored the book, which I loved. It was hard sometimes to get dialogue from the book into the dialogue of the show because the book was so beautifully written, and you write a different way than you speak. So sometimes, putting in dialogue could sound a little false. But that was a moment where I felt like we really could use the dialogue from the book and that it could feel natural enough that people could be speaking it. And so, I loved that too. There were a lot of days I would love to relive. I mean, sometimes when Funnel Cake showed up, I'd be like, "Oh yeah!" Behind the scenes. We had a hawk once. I mean, there were random things.

00:42:49

Jenny Curtis: Why did you have a hawk?

00:42:51

Liz Tigelaar: Well, because we shot in Pasadena, and there are crazy, wild parrots in Pasadena that just chirp all night. And so whenever we'd shoot at night, we'd have to get the set hawk to come in and basically scare out all the parakeets. So it was very exciting. I'm like, "A set hawk? This is new."

00:43:06

Jenny Curtis: That is awesome.

00:43:09

Liz Tigelaar: Yeah, anytime we did big rain and big effects, there would be an energy where you'd just be like, "Oh, what's going to happen?" I mean, I loved those moments where they were about to shut us down in two minutes, we had to get the shot. We're like, "Are we going to get it?" And you're just running on adrenaline, totally stressed, but you're like, "We got it, we got it." I liked those moments.

00:43:27

Jenny Curtis: So, this has become one of my favorite questions and it's kind of piggybacking off what you just said, but what does it mean to you to have created a life in storytelling?

00:43:37

Liz Tigelaar: I mean, it's incredible to get to dive into these characters. I mean, this was a good example of diving into the topics of this show gave me the gift of exploring myself. It challenges me with my own gut reactions and my own biases and my own belief system and why I have the belief system I have and it reveals you, you know? And I think not only the subject matter of the show, but being a show runner and running a show and being in charge of people and having to manage people and their feelings and their work, all of those things challenge you as an individual and you have to learn how to rise to the occasion, and it reveals where you need to be better.

It reveals what you're good at. It reveals a lot, and so I think that's just such a gift, and I honestly don't know what I would do if I couldn't tell stories for a living. I really have no idea. So I'm glad it's slightly working out.

00:44:32

Jenny Curtis: Yeah, slightly.

00:44:34

Liz Tigelaar: (crosstalk) I'll be like, " Portal, hole, portal, hole!"

00:44:41

Jenny Curtis: Oh, Liz, it has been an absolute joy talking to you. You're such a delight. I can't thank you enough for joining me today.

00:44:48

Liz Tigelaar: Oh my gosh, thank you, Jenny. Thanks for having me.

00:44:51

Jenny Curtis: Anyone who hasn't watched Little Fires Everywhere, it's on Hulu. I'm sorry I spoiled most of it for you, but you should go and check it out. And good luck in the Emmy season!

00:44:59

Liz Tigelaar: Thank you! Thank you so much!

00:45:00

Jenny Curtis: Okay, thank you. Hollywood Unscripted was created by CurtCo Media. This special episode of the Stuck At Home series was hosted and produced by me, Jenny Curtis, co-produced and edited by Jay Whiting. The executive producer of Hollywood Unscripted is Stuart Halperin.

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00:45:45

Speaker 16: CurtCo Media, media for your mind.