

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said/She Said podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here, we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots, including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years, I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories.

Here, you'll find their actionable advice and lessons, as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it. Hey, friend, welcome to She Said/She Said podcast. Earlier this week, we reached a bit of a milestone, 70,000 downloads. We've actually surpassed that number at this point.

But 70,000 downloads of She Said/She Said podcast, and I could not be more excited. As I was thinking about this little milestone, I was thinking about how incredibly grateful that I am for each, and every one of you who tune in each week for the incredible feedback, and the reviews that folks send about both what is working and what resonates. And frankly, what isn't.

And I'm also incredibly grateful for all of the guests who come on each week, who pay it forward by sharing their advice and perspective. I also have to say, I am really gratified that you seem to love the empowered, positive content these stories of a really diverse group of women, how they are tackling life, and the actionable advice that they share with all of us.

I think that as I always set out with each and every episode, my goal is to make sure that it's something worth your time. And this is some validation that you see this investment of your time is worthwhile. And that my friend is incredibly gratifying. So, a great big thank you to all of you who have been with me, and are sticking with me, and listen every week. I really, really am grateful.

Now, if you're new to this podcast, welcome. We are so happy that you are here. And I think you'll find something that is very unique in these conversations. Today's guest is no exception. Her name is Jennifer Blecher. She is a friend of mine. She is a lawyer and former assistant district attorney turned children's book author. Her latest book, her second, which is published under the HarperCollins imprint is called Stick With Me.

It came out on the heels of her first HarperCollins published book, which was called Out of Place. Both of these books are fabulous selections for middle grade readers. And Jen will talk about what that means. Jennifer is the mom of three girls. And those three girls, and their friends provide an endless source of inspiration for Jen's books.

One of the things that I think is so interesting about this conversation is Jennifer's pivot from lawyer to full-time writer, and also how her definition of success ultimately changed as well. I find this to be so true, and something that I think oftentimes we don't always prepare ourselves for. It is something that really is inevitable as we change, and grow as people, as we incorporate other people into our lives, as we change, and grow, and evolve, and learn, our definition of what success means will also change and evolve as well.

I think this conversation is a great example of that as frankly, are many of our conversations, but this one in particular. I talked to Jen about how she made the decision to pivot in her career, and why that was important to her, how she reached that conclusion, the journey of becoming a full-time writer, and what was involved with that. The idea of your children as inspiration, and how to balance that with their privacy.

So much wrapped into this conversation, as so many of us are engaged on social media, which frankly as you all know, if you follow this podcast, I think is a great tool. There're certainly downsides,

but it's a great tool for those of us who are trying to get messages out to an audience. But when we are communicating in a way that is authentic, and sharing, or trying to share our whole lives, and if we are parents or moms who have children at home, we do have to be considerate of their privacy, and what they're comfortable with.

And especially, as they become teenagers, that gets even trickier. So, Jen and I talked about that as well. I think it's a very, very thoughtful conversation that we have on that topic. So, I'm very interested to get your feedback and your thoughts on what resonated with you in this conversation, and any of the challenges that you are struggling with, as you face an evolving definition of success, or as you look at evolving your career or profession. So, with that, here is my conversation with children's author, Jennifer Blecher. Jen, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Jennifer Blecher:

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here, Laura.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm delighted to have you. We've been talking about doing this for a good long while. So, I'm really excited that we've made this happen today. Let's jump in. I'd love for you to tell our listeners a little bit about yourself.

Jennifer Blecher:

Sure. So, my name is Jennifer Blecher. I am the author of two middle-grade novels, *Out of Place* and *Stick With Me*. I am also a mother to three daughters and a former lawyer.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You got a lot on your plate. Your genre is middle-grade reader. Did you set out specifically to write for this audience, or what was it about the middle-grade reader that really resonated with you?

Jennifer Blecher:

So, for people that aren't familiar with the terminology, middle-grade readers are ages eight to 12, is what it will say on the back of my books. So, it's the readers that come after chapter books, but before young adult novels. So, it's those third, fourth, fifth-grade groups. And I never set out intentionally to write for this age group. But I am so fascinated by girls this age in particular.

And when I started writing my first novel, *Out of Place*, the whole novel started with a character. And the character that came to me was 12 years old, and she was dealing with a friendship problem. And I think that writers can write lots of different genres. But where my voice falls right now, and where my passion falls is definitely in this middle-age age group, particularly focused on the stories of girls.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. Obviously, you have a lot of material under your roof to work with. And as you know, I have one of your biggest fans, a groupie who lives under my roof, who you know well. The themes really are ones that resonate so well with young girls. So, I'm interested, and I know that our listeners are interested in how you got to this point.

I know you said this genre or this first character came to you, but maybe talk about how you got to the point of full-time authorship. You were a lawyer, you were an assistant district attorney, talk about making that career pivot. What happened with you that you decided this is what I want to do?

Jennifer Blecher:

Sure. So, what happened with me was I made a lot of really important decisions really young. So, I went straight from college at the University of Pennsylvania, which is a very... at least when I was there, a very hard charging, career driven, academically focused school. So, being an academically motivated student who loved to read and write, I decided I was going to go straight to law school.

And I got to law school, and I was young, and I wanted to be on my feet. And I set my sights on working at the district attorney's office as a prosecutor, particularly focusing on domestic violence prosecution. And I loved it. I was on my feet. It was intense. It was exciting. In the meantime, the other big decision that I made when I was very young was I met and fell in love with this wonderful man who thankfully, I'm still in love with today, and is now my husband.

And in meeting so young, and then deciding to be together so young, I really in many ways, hitched my wagon to him, and not in a bad way, but in a way that meant we moved around a lot for his career. And I was the one that was in the position of following his career. And for better or for worse, that led me to leaving my job at the district attorney's office, and having to take another bar exam in another state, and face starting over again, which I decided to do.

And eventually, I also got pregnant with my first daughter at a fairly young age, at least it sounds young. Now, I think compared to many people that I meet, I had my first daughter when I was 28 years old.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It is young. Yeah.

Jennifer Blecher:

It is. It is. I think, for some parts of the country, it might not be as young, but for me, I was the first of all my friends to get married, get pregnant, and I was the woman who was up in the middle of the night breastfeeding, while her friends were having these epic love affairs with men from Paris named Pierre. It was new, that situation, giving love advice in the middle of the night, while trying to breastfeed a cranky baby.

So, all of that to say is that I was faced with a decision, and the decision that I made was to step back from a legal career. And I don't know for sure, but I think part of the reason why I was able to make that decision confidently is because I probably knew in my heart that it wasn't the right career path for me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. Had you maintained your writing? Have you been writing short stories, and writing as a kid forever? Was something that you did as a hobby, or did you literally just pick up a pen one day and decide, "Okay, I'm going to write novels?" Walk me through what role writing had played in your life up to this point.

Jennifer Blecher:

So, it's a little bit of both. So, I've always been an avid reader. I love books. When I'm reading a good book, I'm just such a happier person. So, when I left my job at the DA's office, and moved around with my husband, I was studying for the bar exam, it was back in the age of chick lit, which is not really a term that we use anymore. We now call it women's fiction.

But it was back in the heyday of Bridget Jones, Jane Green, Jennifer Weiner, all these wonderful novelists. And I was sitting there reading these stories and thinking to myself, as I was also studying for contracts, and securities, and all this super, super dry stuff for the Massachusetts State Bar Exam, I was thinking, "I don't want to be learning about contracts, I want to be writing these stories."

And so, I would study for the bar exam in the morning. And then, in the afternoons, I would write a novel. And I ended up writing a whole women's fiction chick lit novel that never got published, it's still in my basement today. It will never be published, but it lit this fire inside of me. And at that point, from that on, I never stopped writing.

I transitioned from writing that novel, to once my daughter was born, I wrote for a lot of mom blogs, I wrote for a lot of local newspapers, a lot of local magazines. And I've really slowly started building up my career from there, and it took quite a while to get to where I am now.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Was it hard to ultimately make the decision not to go back into law? Or was it just your lifestyle, and the circumstances had changed so dramatically, that maybe in some ways, it made it easier to make that decision?

Jennifer Blecher:

Yeah. In some ways, I wish I could say that it was a heart-wrenching decision. But I was a public interest lawyer. And those hours are brutal. The pay is low. And I had little kids. And I wanted to be the mom that was at home with my daughters. I feel so conflicted about this. I know that this is so much of what your podcast is about.

I love diving into this because I so wanted to be the mom that was home with my daughters. And yet, I so desperately wanted to have a career. I was absolutely determined to try, and figure out a way to have both. And where I was in my legal career, that wasn't an option for me. It felt like an either-or decision, but writing felt like a way that I could have both.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. When did the shift happen where you're right what was basically a writing hobby, you were writing blogs? I don't know if you were getting paid for them at that point. So, it was really a hobby, you were doing it because you loved it. You were doing it because maybe in the back of your head, you thought this could be a full-time job for me? At what point did you realize this is all going to come together?

Jennifer Blecher:

I didn't realize that it was ever going to work out, and come together for about 10 years. Writing, it's a privilege, it's an absolute honor to be able to write the novels that I write now. It is very hard to get your foot in the door. So, I transitioned from writing for free, like you said, for a few blogs, also getting paid a little bit to write for newspapers and magazines.

And my next step in my career was I self-published a chapter book series called Star Sisters, which is sadly no longer available. But I was so adamant that I was going to keep going in this quest to be a published author. At that point, I had three daughters under the age of five.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oh, my gosh.

Jennifer Blecher:

I know, oh dear.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Just having the space to be able to focus when you have small children or children of any age, frankly, but small children. I want you to talk about that... I didn't mean to interrupt you. But I want you to talk about that piece too, because I find that a little stunning.

Jennifer Blecher:

I know, I know. So, we had these three beautiful daughters under the age of five. And it was so busy. And yet, I had this just burning desire to be a writer. And at that point, I knew very little about the publishing world. I didn't know about all the things I know now about agents, and editors, and pitching, and query letters. And I can walk your listeners through that if it's of interest later.

But all I knew was that I wanted to tell stories, and all I was capable of at that point was these lovely, adorable, cute, illustrated chapter books. And I decided to self-publish them for a few reasons. One was I didn't really know any better. I didn't know how to get them published conventionally. And the other was, I needed a project, I needed an outlet, I needed it to be under my control, creative and manageable.

And I was very proud of what I accomplished when I set out to do that. But I would wake up early in the morning, and write the books, and I hired an illustrator. And my husband helped me with all the layout technical side. So, it was a fun journey, but yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. So, in making the decision to do that, it obviously gives you a really helpful credential once you get to the point, which you obviously have of having your next two books published by a major publisher. But talk about maybe the role that having that series under your belt, having accomplished that even though you self-published, did it make a difference in getting a publishing deal ultimately?

Jennifer Blecher:

Ultimately, I don't think it made a difference in getting a publishing deal with a major publisher. Where I think it made a difference was I got to see my books on the shelves of bookstores. And I got to watch them sell online. And I got to communicate with readers who loved them. And I got to talk to other parents who are reading them before bed with their kids.

And every one of those conversations just lit a fire in me, and it just really gave me encouragement to keep going. But as far as getting an agent, and getting my foot in the door at HarperCollins, where I eventually was lucky enough to wind up, I don't think it mattered as much, except to show that I was motivated and committed.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. But it had an impact on your own confidence.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And it probably also built your ultimate readers, or the readership that you have today. I would assume some of those initial readers of the Star Sisters series ultimately translated into readers of your next two books.

Jennifer Blecher:

Absolutely, the age, and the timing was perfect. The Star Sisters chapter books was more of the kindergarten first-grade, second-grade readers. And then, Out of Place, which came out about two to three years later was my fifth or sixth-grade readers. So, it did help really builds my brand, which is another interesting concept in publishing whether or not your personal brand matters and how you build that. But I do think it all... the dots can of connect to where I am now, and then hopefully, fingers crossed, where I hope to be in the future.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. We do talk about career pivots with some frequency on this podcast. It's one of my favorite topics, both because I've done a pretty big career pivot. And I'm always fascinated by what motivates someone to make a pivot, how they get to that point, and also how they learn to use all of the experiences that they've had before in ways that maybe they didn't anticipate or don't necessarily seem obvious, but that they all fit together.

Maybe talk a little bit about how your legal training benefits you as it relates to writing these books. Maybe it doesn't, but my guess is, everything you do has a build and an impact, but maybe in the way that you construct your stories, or how you think about them. Talk about what impact having that legal background has had on this particular career juncture.

Jennifer Blecher:

So, my legal background helped a lot with my writing. When I was in law school, I taught writing to first year students. And so, the precision, and the accuracy of legal writing really helped me on a sentence level, I think. And then, the other big way that my legal career helped me is that I was really accustomed to getting beat up. As a prosecutor, I was in the courtroom getting yelled at by everybody.

Everybody would yell at me. And so, then when I tried to enter the publishing world, which no matter who you are, involves a ton of rejection, I was already pretty accustomed to being rejected. And I was also accustomed to getting back up on my feet the next day, and walking back into a courtroom no matter what had happened the day before. So, I think in those ways, it definitely helped.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's really fascinating. Was there some kind of tool, or practice, or something that you would do to keep from getting discouraged in those moments in which someone was yelling at you, where you

were getting "feedback" that was constructive, i.e., negative, or just mean? Was there some way that you processed it so that you didn't internalize it, and take it too personally?

Jennifer Blecher:

So, the difference between my feedback as a lawyer and my feedback as a writer is that as a lawyer, you're surrounded by colleagues. So, you've got people that you went through your training class together, you've got people that are in the courtroom with you that are also getting beat up every day. When you're a writer, one of the biggest challenges is the rejection is coming just for you.

It's only your name on that rejection letter, and there's no other fingers. You can't point your finger at anybody else other than yourself. So, that was a big thing that I had to learn how to handle, and a huge difference between, I think, a lot of other careers.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

How do you deal with that? Or how do you deal with getting, although, I don't think you get many bad reviews, but if you were to get a bad review, where somebody writes something that is disparaging, how do you deal with that now?

Jennifer Blecher:

I deal with it by knowing that I've poured my heart into these books. Once when I told someone that I write children's novels, they looked at me and they said, "Oh, that's so cute. That is so cute that you write children's novels." And of course, at the time, I smiled and nodded like we all do. Because we're trying to be women, and polite, and make people happy.

But when I walked away from that conversation, I was just so furious. Because to your point, I can deal with criticism. But also, it's because I know how hard I work on these books, and how authentic I am to my characters, and how deeply I care about the stories that I'm putting out in the world. So, if other people don't like them, I'm now at the point where I can say, "Okay, that's fine. You don't have to like them, but I am so deeply proud of them."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Beautifully said. Bullying, which feels like a nice segue here is a theme in your books. And I know you had a personal experience with bullying, maybe talk about why it was important to talk about bullying.

Jennifer Blecher:

Sure. So, as I mentioned before, I am deep in the trenches of parenting. I am living with three girls who are the ages of the characters that I write about. I experienced bullying when I was in fifth grade. It was very intense. I grew up, and I say that I got past it. But then when I started writing this story featuring a 12-year-old girl without even planning it, or intending it, the exact story of what happened to me in school when I was in fifth grade ended up on the page.

And I think it's so important to me because girls right now, and probably more so than when you and I were growing up, are getting so many messages about being strong, being smart, powering through, girl power is everywhere. It's on every t-shirt in every mall. But yeah, when you're bullied at school, or you're made fun of the feelings, and the depth of the hurt that that causes, that hasn't changed.

That's biological. That's wired in us. And I really wanted to just have a book about bullying and kindness. And I wanted to put it out there so that anyone that read it, who had experienced something similar, would feel seen, they would feel understood, and they will see their experience reflected on the page. And yeah, it's funny, these things had happened to us when we're 12, and we're 13. They're still with us. And that's why I just love writing about characters these ages. I think it is important.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Do you think the experience that you had, and do you want to talk about the experience with a little more specificity so that... because I know the story already, but I'd love for my listeners to know it, too. Because I think it certainly informs your journey. But I'm curious, well, let me let you tell the story. And then, I'll ask a couple questions.

Jennifer Blecher:

Sure. So, my claim to this. So, my story is, when I was in fifth grade, my family moved to a new... we moved to a new city, I started a new school. And the girl, the popular girl is a year older than me, decided that I looked like a dog. And when I would walk down the hallway at this school, they would start barking at me, and calling me rover, as if I was a dog, and they were trying to get my attention.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Awful.

Jennifer Blecher:

I know. And I never told anybody, I never told my mom, I never told the teacher. I don't know where the teachers were, but no one knew about it. And I didn't tell my mom until 20 years later. And I just find that interesting. And yet I remember it so clearly. I will never say the girls' names, but I know them right off the top of my head. And I'm sure they're all wonderful people now, we all make mistakes. But yeah, it impacted me, that impacted my writing.

And I think it allows me to really dig deep, and show just how hard it can be, and how sad these characters can get. I've seen it with my own kids. When you pick your daughter up from school or your son, and you see that they're holding their face super tight, and the minute they open that car door, or that door to home, they just stop. They just collapse into peers because they've been holding it together. And it's intense. And it's allowed to be intense, it's a hard thing to go through.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

The reality is as much as we have evolved to understand the impact of bullying on kids and to eliminate it, we will never eliminate all bullying with children or with adults. That is an unfortunate reality of the world. But maybe talk about the messages that you're trying to reinforce in your books about how to deal with it, or fight back, or respond in some way. What are the messages you're trying to get across?

Jennifer Blecher:

I was thinking about this a little while ago, but what I've come to realize about myself is that every book I write is something that I'm trying to teach my own daughters about actually having to sit them down where they don't-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Do you think they're on to you at this point?

Jennifer Blecher:

I'm so nervous. I feel like they're going to be 40, and look back, and be like, "Was mom up to something?" So, my books are not didactic. They're not preachy. They're not morally based, but I'm trying to show the universality of this problem. I'm trying to show why some characters might bully other characters. I'm trying to show that everybody in my books makes mistakes.

My parents make mistakes in my books. I personally as a parent, make a million mistakes. My main characters who are the heroes of our stories, they make lots of mistakes, and sometimes they're upfront about their mistakes, sometimes they hide their mistakes because they're embarrassed. All of my characters in all of my books are struggling with just getting through there every day.

I don't write high-concept fantasy. I don't write science fiction. I'm really pretty rooted in reality, and just what it's like to be a girl today getting through life, and making your way through the school day, which can sometimes be drama enough for a whole novel.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I'm curious as to whether you feel like the experience that you had with bullying toughened you up?

Jennifer Blecher:

For sure.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's never justified. But I think the question is, sometimes, if we over protect kids, and don't let them struggle some, and be forced to work things out for themselves, if we're constantly fixing their problems, and not just guiding them, that we miss an opportunity to really allow them to teach themselves, how to deal with really difficult stuff.

So, I'm curious as to how you think about this today, even though I'm sure the experience was horrible when you were in the midst of it in the fifth grade. But as you think back on it, how did it prepare you for the challenges that you faced in your legal career, and the challenges that you face today with people that might be mean to you?

Jennifer Blecher:

Yeah, for sure. I'm a very independent person. I'm very self-reliant. I think it gave me a lot of inner strength to get through that, and just to carry on. I think it's Kelly Corrigan, but it may not be so, I'm going to apologize to her if it's not. But she has this wonderful saying about how, when your children are upset, the best thing you can say is, tell me more. I'm pretty sure it's her.

But I love that idea of sometimes, we're not there to fix things. When our kids are so upset and so distraught, they're not always asking for us to leap in, and call the school, and call the other parents, and try and make everything better. Sometimes, they just want to offload their pain. And sometimes our job is just to sit there and listen. I think one of the hardest things for me as a parent, and I don't know if you feel the same, is figuring out where that line is.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

For sure.

Jennifer Blecher:

Where's that line of listening, and telling them it's going to be okay, and where's that line of just like, "Oh, no, this is up to the adults now to step in. This is above your paygrade as a 10-year-old?" I struggle with that all the time.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, no, it's an incredibly difficult thing. And knowing when to insert your pep talk, or your advice, or your suggestions, because there's a time and a place. But you're exactly right, if we don't give them the opportunity to sort it out for themselves to some degree with some guidance here and there, we're missing an opportunity, truly. So, another big topic in your books is this idea of fitting in.

And that was a big topic in *Out of Place*, if I'm not mistaken. I'm talking a little bit about that particular topic, and why you thought that was important for these middle grade girls. Again, the books are not specifically for girls, even though I think it's a great target audience, but they're great books for boys as well.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yes, there are some awesome strong boy characters in all of my books. I think my heart though, will always lay in having these strong female main characters, and that's who I live with. That's who I'm so interested in. That's who my heart goes out to. And that's where my experience lies. Fitting in is everything when you're 10, 11, and 12. And it's so different for us as adults.

We want to tell our kids, "No, you don't have to fit in, you don't want to fit in, you want to be yourself, you want to be strong, you want to be independent." And yet, we send them off to school, and all they want to do is have friends and be accepted. So, I think along with friendship, fitting in is something that I will always write about my next book, which is coming out next summer.

I am over the moon excited about it. It's about a girl named [Abby 00:34:00], who winds up at sleepover camp with the most famous kids in the world. It's called Camp Famous. She hooked up with rock stars, and princesses, and all these famous kids, and she has to decide what she's going to do. Is she going to lie? Is she going to stay true to herself? How is she going to make friends with these kids?

And it's taking this exact concept of the desire to fit in, and what you will sacrifice in changing yourself to make other people happy. And I'm really excited about that book. And it's another one of those issues, where as parents, it's so easy for us to tell these kids what we think they should do, because we know, we know that we change our personalities to make other people happy.

But they're not going to listen. And I think as authors, who write for kids these ages, we need to respect the fact that kids really, really want to fit in. And also, let them make mistakes in the process of trying to do so. There's a lot of mistakes made in my books.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love it, I love it. Because there's a reality and a realism to it. And for my middle grade reader, she likes real story. She's not really interested in dystopian types of things. She really likes real stories about real people, real girls in particular, and the experiences that they have, including ones that are sad and/or difficult, which I think those are powerful messages.

You also have some mentor characters, if you will, in your books that are not necessarily family members. And some are non-traditional. I love that because it sends a really powerful message to girls that your mentors or your advisors don't have to be just like you. They can be boys, or men, or they

could be people that think differently, or come from different places, different races, different religions, all those sorts of things.

I don't know if that was your intention in thinking about it that way. Maybe talk about why you have these characters that are mentors or advisors that are very different from your girl characters.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yeah, you hit the nail on the head. That's exactly why I think that a lot of times, family is a little bit loaded. I think there's a lot tied up with wanting to make our parents proud of us, wanting to show them how hard we're working. And it's not sometimes even though I hope, my deepest hope is that I am that person for my daughters that they'll come to whenever they have a problem.

That's not always the case. And sometimes it's easier to turn to somebody who's a little further removed. And those people can be anyone. They can be coaches. In *Out of Place*, my first novel, my main character Cove, she finds that woman at a retirement community center during a community service project. And this woman, Anna ends up being this enormous mentor to her, and really having a huge impact on her life.

And I think in other cases, it's an older sibling, it may be an older brother, an older sister. And I want people to always look out, help can come in so many different ways. And you don't always know it, but it's just to be on the lookout for people that have your back, and are protecting your best interest is an important thing for kids to remember, as they go through these complicated days.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. And really, building a diversified tribe, if you will, of people that you can go to for advice on different topics. That's something you need, no matter what age you are. And to think about that concept broadly, and begin to think about it as a young child can be incredibly beneficial. So, I love that. I love that part of it. As a parent, and we touched on this a little bit a moment ago, maybe talk about how your writing helps you sort through some of your own parenting dilemmas or challenges.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yeah. Writing has always been therapeutic for me. One thing that I struggle with, in terms of being a writer, and a parent of three daughters, who are the ages of all my characters, is I'm very much inspired by my daughters. I write for them. I hear their voices in my head when I'm writing. I drive carpool, I hear their friend's voices, your daughter's voice is constantly playing every day, [crosstalk 00:38:41].

And I think that gives me a huge advantage. I think that's one of my strengths as a writer is that I'm deep in this world. I'm also at the same time, very aware that my daughter's stories are their own, and they're not living their lives for their mom to exploit them writing about them. I'm so fascinated by this world of mommy blogging. I just can't get enough of it. And I read a lot of it.

And I see it through the eyes of these children whose stories are being shared by their mothers. And I'm very sensitive to what the ramifications of that might be later on. It's hard though, something happened to one of my daughters recently, and it was very upsetting, and there was nothing I could do to make it better. I couldn't go back in time. I couldn't make it not happen, but I can write about it.

And I can fictionalize it, and I can make a character who's dealing with something similar, and I can try and figure it out that way. Is that the right thing to do as a mother? I have no idea. I don't know. It may be the absolutely wrong thing to do. But at the same time, my daughter wants to read every single chapter I write that was inspired by the story, that was inspired by something that she experienced.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Interesting.

Jennifer Blecher:

Will that story ever see the light of day? I don't know. And if it does see the light of day, it'll go through so many other people's hands, and be so wonderfully edited, and it will bear very little resemblance to what actually happened. But I'm conflicted about that part of what I do to be quite honest with you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Do you talk to the girls about that conflict that you feel, and talk to them about their level of comfort, even though again, recognizing that their children, so you don't want to put too much pressure on them to make a decision that they're not really prepared to make? But how do you talk to them about this particular aspect of what you do?

Jennifer Blecher:

So, this situation, we talk about it all the time. It's almost for my daughter and I, this project that I'm working on is therapy for both of us. And I'm very open with her about does she think this is right? Does she think that is right? How does this make her feel? They read all my rough drafts. They have so many opinions about everything I write. And honestly, the emotions are very much inspired by my daughter's, but none of the plots are.

So, none of the exact circumstances are anywhere taken from their lives. There are occasional jokes in my book that are ripped straight from our family dinners. But I think that that is relatively safe territory to tread on right now. And they really do get a kick out of that. So, the good thing about them being old enough is they do read everything I write, and including my rough drafts.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. My guess is your 13-year-old is probably more sensitive to all of this at this point than maybe your younger girls are. Just a guess, at least if the situation at my house is anywhere similar to your house, there's just a lot more desire for privacy by my teenager than there is my 11-year-old.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yes, for sure. And goodness gracious, what if I ever write about teen romance? I don't know. I don't know if I can ever do it. I love with this middle-grade space, this eight- to 12-year-old space. But there's a whole world of YA out there that, I don't know, things can get pretty steamy in those books. So, I have to see if I mortify my children.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So, I think a couple final questions. I'd love for you to share advice for authors, maybe would be authors, like you were, maybe folks that are on a similar path, or maybe a completely different one. They're thinking about embracing full-time authorship, or maybe something else that represents a big departure. What would you tell them that you wish you had known when you started this journey?

Jennifer Blecher:

I would tell them to be patient, which is very different than giving up. It takes a long time. So, with writing, there's so many hoops that you have to jump for before you wind up with this finished novel that it ends up taking, when everything goes well, it still takes years. So, my advice would be to keep plugging away. But just give yourself a really long runway to make that happen.

And don't feel discouraged if it takes a long time. Getting an agent alone can take years, and lots, and lots of rejection. And then, you have to get into the editors, and the publishing houses, and all of that. But if it's something that you're passionate about, and that you want to make happen, you can start making all these little small steps that eventually can add up.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. One final question. I would love if you could reflect for a moment on the impact that you hope your books will have.

Jennifer Blecher:

I hope that my books will inspire children, young girls in particular, to fall in love with reading. I hope that they will read my books, and see parts of themselves on the page. And that forevermore, for the rest of their life, they'll know that feeling of being seen and having their stories reflected because it's an amazing feeling.

I know as an adult when I read a book, and I can feel it on the page, it fills your heart. So, my hope is that my books... I hope they help spread a little bit of kindness and joy. And I really hope they help spread a love of reading because that has been such an important part of my life. And I wish that for everybody.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, we can't wait for your third book, we will devour. We hope to be an early reader.

Jennifer Blecher:

Yes, for sure. [crosstalk 00:45:31].

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Jen, I'm grateful. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Jennifer Blecher:

Thanks for having me. It was so fun.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend, thanks so much for joining us this week. To learn a bit more about author, Jennifer Blecher, check out the show notes for this episode, Episode 154. I'd love to know what resonated with you? What are some of the challenges that you may be facing? If you're going through a career pivot or maybe contemplating one, I'd love to hear from you.

As I said in the beginning, we all define success a bit differently. And it's a very personal thing. And oftentimes, that definition can change and evolve as our lives change and evolve, and as other people enter our lives. It's all the more reason why it's so important to learn to embrace change, to not fear it, but instead almost anticipate and plan for it.

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We're going to talk more about this topic, comes up a lot in many of our episodes. So, I urge you to stick with us at She Said/She Said podcast. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast if you haven't had a chance. And if you get a minute, I would love to have a nice review from you, a few words about what resonates with you.

It's a huge, huge help not only for me, as we're thinking about content, and continuing to fine tune and hopefully, get better with each and every episode. But also, it helps others who are looking for content like this to find it. I am so grateful to have you here. And I hope that you found this little investment of your time well worth it. I'll see you again next week. Take care.