

Braaaains Episode 046 TRANSCRIPT - Vision Loss and Blindness on Sight Unseen

01:00:09:03 - 01:00:10:03

Sarah

Welcome to Braaaains, a podcast exploring the inner workings of our brain, mental health and disabilities, and how film and television portray them. Hosted by me, film and television editor Sarah Taylor –

01:00:18:05 - 01:00:36:02

Heather

And by me, writer-director Heather Taylor. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge that the lands for which we recorded this podcast and from where you were listening are part of territories that have long served as a gathering place for diverse indigenous peoples. And we are thankful as guests on this land to be able to live, work, and gather here together. We continue to learn about the history that came before us and encourage you to do the same.

01:00:40:11 - 01:01:04:01

Sarah

Today we get to talk to fellow sister pair, Kat and Niko Troubetzkoy, who are the co-creators of the new CW and CTV show Sight Unseen. The series is about a homicide detective who rapidly loses her vision and has to quit the homicide force. When she leaves, she's haunted by the cases she's left behind and is determined to solve them with the help of her visual guide via a visual assistance app.

01:01:04:03 - 01:01:16:07

Heather

In this episode of Braaaains, we discuss sight loss, the representation of vision, loss and blindness on sight unseen, and what considerations had to be made when creating a television show for viewers across the entire vision spectrum.

01:01:16:09 - 01:01:33:00

Sarah

A quick reminder to our listeners that this interview should not be taken as medical advice, and it is for informational purposes only because everyone's brain is different. Please consult your health care professional if you have any questions.

01:01:33:02 - 01:01:37:04

Heather

Thank you so much, Niko, Kat, for coming and joining us today on Braaaains.

01:01:37:09 - 01:01:39:00

Niko

We're really happy to be here. It's a.

01:01:39:00 - 01:01:47:01

Sarah

Pleasure. Your sisters, I want to say that off the hook, which I'm very excited about talking to another pair of sisters. This is great. So, yeah, tell us a little bit about yourself.

01:01:47:02 - 01:02:31:12

Niko

We're actually half sisters, so we have the same dad and different moms, and we grew up separately just kind of seeing each other on family vacation. So I think that's probably the key to us being able to work together and not kill each other, at least so far. Kat started off in the industry as a writer producer working with the networks, and I'm a little bit younger and I've always written and I was a poet, and then she, at one point in my career as I was trying desperately to get poems published for like \$50, she and her partner Derek, had a show going and they were like, Hey, do you want to come be

01:02:31:12 - 01:02:54:10

Niko

a script coordinator? And you can see other people and actually make money. And I did that for a season. And it was it was wonderful. Like the making money was good, but the part that really got me into the industry was being able to write and being able to also talk to other human beings at the same time.

01:02:54:13 - 01:03:16:14

Niko

I think being by myself alone in a room was maybe not mentally the healthiest place for me to be. And so, yeah, she suckered me into this industry. And after that I went to film school and started working as a writer, sort of independently of her. What shows? When we crossed over on Kat, we worked together on a couple of shows.

01:03:16:16 - 01:03:41:09

Kat

The weird thing is we both worked on this sci fi show Orphan Black, which is quite well known, but we worked on it in separate seasons. It was just a coincidence. I did all the sci fi phenomena, Killjoys on sci fi, that love Killjoy. that's so good. So yeah, I think it's now built a following. But, you know, sometimes it's like someone drops a rock in a pond and the ripples aren't heard for a long time.

01:03:41:09 - 01:04:02:06

Kat

But it's a great little show. And I did all 50 episodes, executive produced them, and the creator, Michelle of Reddit, invited Niko on to be in the writers room for the last 30 episodes. And that is

the first time we've really worked together where she was writing. I was executive producing and it was a big team, but we got along fine through it.

01:04:02:08 - 01:04:35:17

Kat

So then we started developing a few things together as an experiment and we are very different. It's like the Venn diagram everyone's very into right now. We have a little overlap in our personal experiences, but we are super opposites on a bunch of creative levels and together creating a story or creating a pilot. We have a really good push and pull and we actually fight, which is good and argue, but also admire the other part that the sister brings like because it's so different.

01:04:35:18 - 01:04:38:11

Kat

And so that's how we started a few projects together.

01:04:38:16 - 01:05:05:18

Niko

One of the ground rules that we laid down was that we could only work on projects together if we were both equally passionate about them, because otherwise we felt like it would negatively impact our relationship with each other. And yeah, we did a few things and then sight unseen. We're just lucky enough that it was the right project at the right time and got snatched up by Bell and then sold it to CW.

01:05:05:18 - 01:05:15:02

Niko

And it was really, really good experience working together through it. As Kat said, we both brought very different strengths to the project, which I think was really helpful.

01:05:15:06 - 01:05:26:16

Heather

Can you tell us about Sight Unseen and maybe the genesis of the idea? And then kind of how did you get it now to screens just to be able to CW like, how is it on our televisions today?

01:05:26:16 - 01:05:53:16

Kat

In a nutshell, sight unseen is about a homicide detective who rapidly loses her vision, and she has something called Elrond L Lever's hereditary neuropathy, so she very rapidly loses her vision and has to quit the homicide force. She loses her vision during a case. She has open cases, and when she leaves, she's haunted by the cases she's left behind.

01:05:53:16 - 01:06:29:02

Kat

And is determined not to leave them abandoned but solve them. And in particular in the pilot, there's a seminal moment where it is her fault. She should have come clean. She didn't. And a suspect gets away. So that haunts her. She doesn't want to face her sight loss head on. She finds a workaround very common. There are apps for people who are blind or sight impaired that allow them to connect to someone who sees for them, whether it's through their cell phone and they just use a phone camera very commonly.

01:06:29:02 - 01:06:56:02

Kat

Or if you're a blind professional, you just get a camera and clip it and an ear piece and you can walk around as though you were sighted with someone informing you of everything that's happening and when and guiding you. That is the whole series. So it's about the tech dev who continues solving crime and the woman who guides her in her ear, who has her own issues, and a hidden agenda of her own and all that together makes it a bit of a detective thriller.

01:06:56:02 - 01:07:19:01

Kat

There's a little bit of a psychological element to it because we're never quite sure if we can trust the guide completely. But we love her. She's lovable. So it's like that complicated emotion you get when you just love a character. And she's lovable, but she's got agoraphobia. She never leaves her house, and she is using the detective as a way to get out as an avatar.

01:07:19:01 - 01:07:21:11

Kat

So she's getting out in the world and more.

01:07:21:11 - 01:07:25:12

Sarah

What was the passion that you both shared that made this be the one that you wanted to do together?

01:07:25:17 - 01:08:12:19

Niko

Sight loss is something that is in our family and something Kat has experienced, so that area is something that has always been on both of our minds. And so we were both at home and we're each listening to a podcast where we heard about an app called Ira. And IRA is one of these apps that people who have sight loss used to as a guiding app, It's a professional app that is paid for and we it was a podcast about somebody who was blind and described themselves as blind, showing us as we listen to how she uses this app.

01:08:12:19 - 01:08:47:07

Niko

So as you're listening, you hear her getting ready to go to this podcast. So she is she gets

stressed. You hear the guides guiding her in terms of what she's wearing. You hear the guide guiding her out of her apartment down the stairs into the front of her house, getting into an Uber, and then you hear the guiding experience as she gets out at the building where the studio is and gets into an elevator to go up to the podcast studio.

01:08:47:09 - 01:09:13:19

Niko

And there was this moment in the elevator where the woman with sight loss looks in a mirror, and all of a sudden the guidance like, my God, I see you. Like she had this moment where she saw her in that moment. It was just like such an interesting, unique relationship. You were like hearing the two voices talking to each other.

01:09:13:19 - 01:09:53:06

Niko

And then, you know, the woman with slight loss talked about her experience and how she used the app and stuff. And and Kat and I started texting each other almost instantaneously at the same time with the my God, isn't this the ultimate detective show, you know, to have somebody solving crime with another person in their ear who has a different opinion, who is guiding them around, who is bringing a totally different, unique, unprofessional in a way, but also like a completely new perspective to solving crime.

01:09:53:06 - 01:09:58:22

Niko

And it just it seems like the perfect idea for a detective show.

01:09:58:22 - 01:10:27:15

Kat

And the mirror moment was very meta because it reminded us we were listening, right? We weren't seeing it. So when she talked about seeing her client in the mirror, we realized it really hit home that the guide is looking out. The guide is the eyes. So this person in their home, wherever they may be remotely, are only seeing the perspective of the sight impaired person.

01:10:27:17 - 01:10:54:13

Kat

They're not seeing that person. And so that moment was very kind of meta and drew us in and made us realize that this is two different perspectives visually, not just two different concepts of the world, but two different visual perspectives in a very literal sense, which is fascinating. And then the other element is that I'm one who has suffered from periodic sight loss and and profound sight loss, but only short times.

01:10:54:13 - 01:11:17:02

Kat

And I can explain that this this started in a very with a very sudden event in my early twenties.

And I was out partying, slam dancing and drinking and maybe doing some drugs. That was way back. And I woke up the next morning and half my vision was just black and I could still see out of a part of my eyes.

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Kat

And I really thought it was an epic hangover of some kind that I hadn't experienced before. When I called someone and they said, You need to just go to an eye doctor in case like I'm sure they were thinking brain tumor or something. And so I went immediately to an eye doctor, and the eye doctor said, Don't move.

01:11:35:11 - 01:11:52:01

Kat

I'm calling the hospital, which for a very hung over 20 something is like, what? I just have a problem with my eye. Why tell me not to move? But it was like and he had opened his office for me and stuff, so I was all alone. He's telling me to sit in the chair and don't move. He came back and said, You're not taking this very seriously.

01:11:52:02 - 01:12:12:21

Kat

Stop moving. I didn't know about retinal detachments. I didn't understand. He said he had called emergency and they were standing by and that I was going to need an operation. And he didn't know this at the time, but when I got to emergency they had a trolley out in the emergency entryway and they'd literally lay me back on it.

01:12:12:23 - 01:12:33:10

Kat

On what felt like an operating table. I was just like, What the hell is going on? My family. What, what, what? A doctor came to my eyes and he says, You need an operation on both your eyes right away, your retinas. It's not just one. Both of them are detached, and so they whisked me and they did a big surgery, and I woke up unable to see completely covered.

01:12:33:12 - 01:12:58:09

Kat

And then one very important thing that we say about sight unseen and about sight impairment is most people can see something I can see now, but most people see who or even identify as blind. But retinal detachment is blackness. But they did manage to put both back. I have a silicone band around one eye, which is called a scleral buckle, and I had cryotherapy in the other, which is quite up.

01:12:58:11 - 01:13:22:14

Kat

Like my face was swollen up like Rocky Balboa after the biggest fight. And I couldn't see, I

guess, severe sight impairment. And some people would call blindness for like weeks, but it slowly came back. They repaired me so I can see. But that's always haunted me. The fears I had at that time were like fears of a young 20 something year old not be able to see the face of my loved ones.

01:13:22:14 - 01:13:47:08

Kat

And significantly for me, which I tried hard to get us to put in the pilot, I also was horrified to never be able to see my own face again, and the doctors were not able to tell me it would be successful, but it was. And so since then I've had countless laser surgeries. They always manage to staple the retinas back, and I had a more invasive surgery to get a new lens in my left eye.

01:13:47:08 - 01:14:11:07

Kat

And then during the shoot of sight unseen, this is again, not weird, but everyone thought it was coincidence. I started not being able to see and one of our consultants on set I was just not being able to see is a a myriad of things. Right? So people really think this is a binary thing? No, it's like one eye was clouded, the other one had some sort of opaqueness over it.

01:14:11:09 - 01:14:31:00

Kat

I still like was like, I can see I'm just having trouble seeing my scripts, but I just get closer. I just magnify them. It was thing after thing tripping around. Amy, one of our on set consultants who uses a cane, is saying to me, But it's okay, you probably have scar tissue, you know, that builds up after that much laser surgery.

01:14:31:00 - 01:14:49:13

Kat

And I was in denial, but I went to see a doctor, a short story. Yes. She went around like like some sort of Star Trek person with lasers and laser to all that scar tissue. And then I could see and now I'm overdue for another a new lens in my right eye. And that's the whole sight loss story for me.

01:14:49:15 - 01:14:55:14

Kat

And like many people, periods of not seeing well, period, mostly being able to see very well.

01:14:55:17 - 01:15:14:01

Sarah

So I was born with congenital cataracts. And watching the show is like I never really thought about how much like fear I losing my vision. I might not know why I'm laughing, but like I had to have my left eye cataract removed of new lens put in and then had to go back and get the laser

exactly how you described.

01:15:14:01 - 01:15:28:20

Sarah

But I was like, No, I'm fine. I can still see it's fine. And it took me. And then finally the eye doctor was like, Holy crap, there's a lot of scar tissue back there. You need to go get the surgery. I was like, What are you talking about? I'm fine. I'm fine. Everything's fine. So I can really relate to your journey.

01:15:28:20 - 01:15:32:05

Sarah

And also, yes, anyway, the fear of like, not being able to see for.

01:15:32:05 - 01:15:45:19

Kat

Everyone listening because they may think they'll never have this. But as you get older, these things happen. This laser surgery where they're going around like some sci fi show zapping the lasers and following the frickin broken asteroid.

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Sarah

Catching it. Yeah, totally.

01:15:47:22 - 01:16:04:23

Kat

It's nothing. My assistant went and it was a teaching hospital. They let her look through the other one and she's like, my God. my God. It's like. It's like a video game. But for the person experiencing it, it's literally not that big a deal. No. And you can see at least it wasn't for me. I shouldn't speak for you.

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Sarah

No, it wasn't.

01:16:05:17 - 01:16:10:10

Kat

But you can see quite soon after it's like.

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Sarah

yeah, I didn't realize how bad. Like, my vision's not great in that I anyway, but I didn't realize how bad having that scar tissue was making it even harder. And like, why? I was like, my eyes are sore. Anyway, it was a whole thing, but you don't know until it's gone. And you're like, wow.

01:16:24:23 - 01:16:52:14

Niko

What's fascinating is that what you're telling us as we have talked about the show, where if cast and crew and pitching it to people as we were hiring people through the production process, that story is something that we heard from so many different people like it. It's so much more common than what we normally think of as blindness.

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Niko

You know, from a traditional TV media sort of perspective as a complete loss of sight. But this spectrum that we all seem to exist on was something that we heard like from a lot of different people over the process of making sight unseen.

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Sarah

Yeah, yeah. This is why it's important to make shows like this. So thank you.

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Kat

But even talking to you about your eyesight loss issues, I've never talked to anyone who had the laser for the scar tissue. You are the first person I've talked to who's had that experience, so that is not common.

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Sarah

So I had my cataracts removed a little less than 20 years ago. So it was a long time ago. And then I had the surgery about three years ago with the laser. The ophthalmologist that did this or the eye surgeon was like, I normally don't see my patients twice. I don't have to do this surgery on typical cataract patients because you get your cataract removed when you're in your late seventies and then you don't have to come back to get the scar tissue, which is really morbid, but like, my gosh.

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Sarah

But it's just fascinating that we've had that experience.

01:17:58:18 - 01:18:07:12

Heather

Why was it important for you to have a character on screen who clinically blind and you know, what did you do differently with this portrayal from what you've maybe seen on screen before?

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Niko

I mean, the story was organically about somebody with sight loss, and we were really fascinated by it because we really wanted to portray what a spectrum vision lies across and how, you know, even with people who can see, quote unquote, normally it's still it still exists on a spectrum and with sight loss. Very much so. And there are so many different ways of seeing and how seeing really, especially from the law and order perspective, how you see and what you see really influences how you perceive other people, how you judge other people, the way you solve crime.

01:18:59:23 - 01:19:32:12

Niko

So one of the things that we were really fascinated with in terms of having a story about a detective who became clinically blind was how that would change her perspective on her job and the way she did her job and the way she approached suspects and victims and crime solving and how much sight actually influences that. Your impression of a person, your impression of a crime scene.

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Niko

So that was a really fascinating aspect of the story to us. And we we've obviously watched a lot of shows and movies about sight loss. It is a little disappointing to me that sight loss is usually portrayed as a black and white thing. I think most of the characters that we see in the media who experience sight loss, it's like you can see or you're blind and there's not really we don't show that spectrum that exists on and almost never.

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Niko

I mean, at least I can't think of an example where we're seeing what the person with sight impairment is seeing. So, you're know, never taking the audience into that perspective.

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Kat

No. And so therefore, you're watching someone perform blindness. And in a black box way, like you don't see what they're experiencing, You just see how they move. Yes, that's very distancing. I don't like the word othering, but you certainly see them as other when you never experience what they're experiencing. And they do portrayals by actors who don't have any sight impairment or sight loss story or familiarity with family.

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Kat

They do kind of mine sight loss in a larger way. I think sometimes it's tempting. And one of the biggest differences that we found with all of the sight impaired people and people who identify as blind is even people with almost a blackout, total blindness, they they look at you. They they

they can look you in the eye.

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Kat

They don't particularly appear blind. They're not staring off like especially and this is what we are portraying someone who has grown up with sight and then lost it. Right. So if you're an adult with sight loss, you generally look like you do not have sight loss. And that's controversial to this, to the sighted public. You know, we've heard stories about people who use a cane who actually, if they reach for something and get it or see a car in front of them, it's like people are like, why are you using a cane?

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Kat

Why are you faking it? Like they get stigmatized?

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Sarah

Yeah.

01:21:55:20 - 01:22:03:19

Kat

For not being blind enough for the able bodied people of the world. Yeah. So that's all interesting.

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Niko

Dolly Lewis, who plays Tess our lead, has a different experience with sight loss than the character has. But it was really important to us that we cast somebody who did have experience with sight loss so that they could bring that to it. She is performing because Tess's site is different than her site, but she is also bringing her own experience with sight loss to the role.

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Niko

And I think that makes a really big difference in how that is performed.

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Kat

A lot of people who were had sight loss from birth were also auditioning. And it's it's just very different. Our character had to have that deep seated knowledge of crime solving. She had to be the top of her field or this would be far fetched. And then the other thing about site and crime solving that people who were like, this is far fetched.

01:23:01:23 - 01:23:23:01

Kat

Don't think of if you can walk into a crime scene and solve it with your eyes. And that is true. In fact, probably of the majority of crimes, it's generally just one of those crimes of passion where, you know, someone shot someone that bodies lying there, there's footsteps. Like, if you can solve it with your eyes, it's not a big case.

01:23:23:03 - 01:23:49:03

Kat

Yeah. So, yeah, it's actually about digging under, finding the motivations, finding why and who and who might have hidden something. The first thing a criminal does or a murderer does, depending on the crime, is hide the visual evidence. Yes. So the eyes are not really relevant in this world of science and forensic science. It's she's a puzzle master, and that's you don't need your eyes to be a puzzle master.

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Kat

You need forensic backing and understanding people and motives.

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Sarah

I'm curious, how did you come up with the the visual representation of Tess's vision?

01:23:58:09 - 01:24:33:18

Niko

Tess's blind P.O.V. was something that we worked on with our producing director, John Fawcett, and our cinematographer, Michael Marshall. And it was we really wanted to do something in camera so that it would feel immediate and visceral to the audience rather than something in post. And we also wanted it to be beautiful as well, you know, like we wanted it to be both beautiful and thrilling and terrifying at moments.

01:24:33:18 - 01:25:07:14

Niko

And so we looked at different conditions that are out there in terms of what people see, what people don't see. And then we looked at a variety of in-camera effects and kind of it's a bit of a mishmash, like it doesn't totally mimic what somebody with Leber hereditary optic neuropathy would experience. But we wanted to give the sighted audience the feeling of what it would be like to be on the visual spectrum of sight loss.

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Niko

So I think it probably technically mirrors what Kat experiences a little bit more, which is retinal detachment.

01:25:16:14 - 01:25:42:00

Kat

Well, yes, but actually just to be specific, retinal tugs that cause that visual, it tends to be a jagged light. But you've had floaters that are bright and light shining and all that. So it's a little bit drawn from that. And I think what people don't understand too, with different kinds of sight eye conditions is you can have several things going on at once.

01:25:42:00 - 01:25:55:06

Kat

Yeah, like a lot of floaters, I've had my vitreous fluid taken out, replaced it like so floaters sort of like, what's that beautiful, strangest things when they have all those floating things, it's

01:25:55:12 - 01:25:57:09

Sarah

Yeah, yeah. In the upside down world.

01:25:57:15 - 01:26:03:15

Kat

Yeah, the upside down world. We talked about that for a while, but then we thought, yeah, that's going to be really distracting for the audience.

01:26:03:18 - 01:26:12:16

Heather

I just love that you're doing it in camera as well, because you're right, like, it does make it feel more real and less like just put on. So just yeah, I think of that for doing that.

01:26:12:18 - 01:26:27:12

Sarah

And I want to know, like, did you show Dolly the look of it before she started? Like that was like part of the process. Yeah, she's very subtle. You can kind of see her touch the wall, but you, you wouldn't know unless you're looking for the cues that she is not sighted. So it's great.

01:26:27:14 - 01:26:50:23

Kat

And a spoiler alert of sorts is that in its present of the show, but very subtly we are having her sight loss, progress and change a little bit. So it does get a little bit worse and it can change in different ways. But also because and I love that you like that's an in-camera effect. We tried not to use visual effects, but I wasn't sure anyone would appreciate that.

01:26:50:23 - 01:26:52:21

Kat

So I'm like, delighted.

01:26:52:23 - 01:26:54:18

Sarah

totally. It's amazing.

01:26:54:20 - 01:26:55:21

Heather

It's my heart. It's my heart.

01:26:56:00 - 01:27:17:16

Kat

What's interesting, though, because it's an in-camera effect, different light totally effects it differently. And I wonder if audiences are going to go. We haven't heard any comments like this yet, but how come provision's not exactly the same? Well, in bright light, it kind of dazzles up and in low light it seems more like, you know, a veil. It it changes in different lights, which is true of slight impairment.

01:27:17:20 - 01:27:35:18

Heather

On the flip side of sunny. So we see how she sees things, too, because she is coming in as a camera essentially and seeing kind of what tests can see, but in a different way. How did you come up with that perspective? And also, you know, you have a character who has agoraphobia, which is interesting for us. Our mom has agoraphobia.

01:27:35:20 - 01:27:36:17

Sarah

So it's like.

01:27:36:17 - 01:27:39:07

Heather

Really? So is like, thanks for making.

01:27:39:07 - 01:27:39:17

Sarah

The show for.

01:27:39:17 - 01:27:45:00

Niko

Us. She does not like leaving the house because she likes to control her environment.

01:27:45:02 - 01:27:49:15

Heather

That's yeah, that's kind of that's the ticket agoraphobia.

01:27:49:17 - 01:28:13:09

Kat

This sort of came up for two reasons. One is this is a little dark and triggering, but I have had violent experience home invasion. It did create I guess now in retrospect and not completely ever over deep seated PTSD, which made me not able to sleep at night and barricading. And I would barricade and then barricade in a barricade.

01:28:13:09 - 01:28:37:13

Kat

And this is not something I've talked about to people. So anyone listening who knows me, some people know about this and the very bad times. I would use ropes to tie doors shut, travel with stuff to block hotel rooms, that something is really alive mentally for me. And the new part that you've just added is and Niko I guess new because she said it is it's about control.

01:28:37:15 - 01:29:03:02

Kat

So that's fascinating. And I should look into that because yeah, I am really frickin controlling and that is what is a challenge probably for Niko working with me. But practically speaking, this person we knew would be a guide and could do it from anywhere. And so practically speaking, we were fascinated at someone who could live all these lives vicariously.

01:29:03:04 - 01:29:22:12

Kat

And our big central question for Sonny was why does she do this for a living? Yeah. Why does it matter when she runs into Tess that this is the person she glommed onto? She's working for a company doing this for a living, So she finds out Tess is a homicide detective. She's kind of in like Flynn.

01:29:22:12 - 01:29:43:07

Kat

Like. Hi, it's me again. Oops. I called your landline or I called your home phone. What is it? Something had to have happened in her past, and whatever that is, it makes sense logically that it would be violent and that it would be what drove her inside and what made her want to do a job where she could get out vicariously.

01:29:43:09 - 01:29:46:09

Kat

So those are the reasons it fits the job.

01:29:46:09 - 01:30:12:17

Niko

We're also developing at right after the pandemic. And I think everybody really universally had this experience where we were all kind of confronting, whether we like being in our homes,

whether we don't like being in our homes, whether we like seeing other people, we don't like it was something that I think was a really universal experience for everybody coming out of those times.

01:30:12:19 - 01:30:29:14

Sarah

I think there's a lot of elements like because we grew up with someone who lives with agoraphobia, our mom was very successful and made sure that she had like she could do all the things that we needed, like she ran a business in our house and like, which is similar to like, get in a job where you can stay at home and do those things.

01:30:29:16 - 01:30:59:00

Sarah

And like Sunny going through and living through what you seen in her job, you know, like watching travel documentaries and like things about the world. And my mom would travel the world by watching TV. And so it's not farfetched what you've made like what you the the character you've created. Like these are things that I've seen our mom do to feel like she is getting to see the world, to be part of the world without leaving her safety parameters that she's created to, you know, the control she's created.

01:30:59:00 - 01:31:01:22

Sarah

But that's just to feel safe. That's what. Yeah.

01:31:02:00 - 01:31:19:06

Heather

Yeah. The idea that the spaces become smaller because when you go to, let's say, the bank and you have a panic attack, you're like, Well, if I don't go to the bank, I won't have a panic attack again, so I won't go to the bank anymore. And so it's slowly your world becomes smaller or like, I'm going to be the movie theater, but I have to only sit on the aisle just in case something happens.

01:31:19:06 - 01:31:37:12

Heather

So it's like you can have agoraphobia and leave the house, but it depends on your trigger, right, to make you stay home. Yes. And so it's like I think a lot of times that isn't as explored as much because not as many people know someone that's agoraphobia, but the feelings of it for sure. I think there is that experience.

01:31:37:15 - 01:31:55:17

Heather

So I think that's what's really interesting about Sonny being in the world and being in the world of tests. And I know it's a detective thriller. There is obviously another meaning for it, but it's

lovely to see like, yeah, that, that is something that people have craved and do crave in their life about being with other people but not being with other people.

01:31:55:19 - 01:32:00:19

Kat

Yeah, I would say that Nikole and I are most fascinated by Sonny.

01:32:00:19 - 01:32:01:12

Niko

Definitely.

01:32:01:15 - 01:32:27:07

Kat

But and just being really honest, we didn't, we didn't do a ton of research on agoraphobia. And one of the reasons was I felt like she was marginal, like me. It's just like people don't go, I have it. Although she does because we had to she had to explain herself to test who got angry. But it is always like I'm fine, just like the sight impairment.

01:32:27:07 - 01:33:11:16

Kat

I'm fine. And yet both these women need each other. Yeah, yeah. And that's beautiful. Like, the networks were very into that beautiful empowerment, but we were very into And both these women are using each other. Yeah, yeah. And that's the flip side, which is also fascinating and old and just like pure practicality. I just like to say this because it's prosaic and it's not any brainiac thing, but it was important that whoever was getting vested in solving these homicides and caring about test genuinely and didn't just get on a plane and go, go help her because we knew we were going to get tests into some really dangerous places and some longer term danger places

01:33:11:21 - 01:33:42:18

Kat

where the logical thing would be this woman can't see and we can't connect. Whatever it is, it would be that the woman would get on the plane and fly to her. So that was also fun. And then you asked a question about Sonny's point of view through the camera. Yeah, yeah. And this was just so much fun, although very hard to do because you have a tight budget, but we wanted to throw the viewer complete Lee in which we don't always do.

01:33:42:20 - 01:34:05:02

Kat

So it's full screen immersion. And there was something about that that was a little effed up because it's kind of like a video game and the perspective in video games is called sorry, but first person shooter, that is what they call it. But it is it's immersive live and it's terrifying. And what's amazing about it is what's so scary.

01:34:05:02 - 01:34:30:20

Kat

And what we tried to do with the pilot on the rooftop is Sunny sees for her but just like this, she can't see what's right there. She can't see that mess over there. But there can be a gun. A guy with a gun not making any noise. Right there. Yeah. And Sonny can't necessarily see it. So it's really about perspective in a kind of box and terrifying way.

01:34:30:23 - 01:35:01:07

Niko

Yeah, in a way. Sonny's seeing four taps and seeing the the terror of those moments through Sonny as she is watching, I think because as viewers, you know, we watched so much TV and we are thrown into so many different scary situations that in a way we have become kind of numb to it, like something has to be really spectacular on screen.

01:35:01:09 - 01:35:25:02

Niko

Get that sort of, my God, But watching somebody else's terror as they guide somebody through an unknown situation that they don't have a full viewpoint of is more thrilling for an audience than feels. Yeah. For an audience. Then the the first person view of what's happening.

01:35:25:04 - 01:35:51:18

Kat

For us, it's about in a way, voyeurism, but in a way, the shot which I am going to replicate now that is our favorite shot test can't see. She's not necessarily reacting to these situations, but it's basically sunny like the just on her bed curled up going, my God, because she's there and trying to save her friend and yet she's in bed and she spilled her popcorn and it's it's the point of view of the viewer.

01:35:51:18 - 01:35:58:10

Kat

But yeah, frickin someone's life is on the line. And if your hands go, well.

01:35:58:12 - 01:36:00:18

Niko

It's also economical too.

01:36:00:20 - 01:36:01:15

Sarah

Yeah. You know, so.

01:36:01:19 - 01:36:05:21

Niko

It allows us to do more than we can afford to do on screen.

01:36:05:21 - 01:36:33:08

Kat

Otherwise, that's what we thought when we sold it and told the producers it would be easy. But then you really realize the implications of having a show starring two people who are never in the same room or in the same space together. And it starts to add up because double shooting and then our insistence on showing the point of view of each of those people literally throwing the viewers into the point of view of our protagonist and what she can and can't see.

01:36:33:10 - 01:36:42:06

Kat

And also the camera that our co-lead uses. So all of that made triple shooting. Triple shooting.

01:36:42:08 - 01:36:43:12

Sarah

yes. Yeah.

01:36:43:17 - 01:37:01:11

Kat

And what goes first? What do you get cut when your day is going long? You got to cut something. You can't cut story because it's a mystery. That camera setup has gone, gone, gone, gone. There is a couple of spots we had to use, I think twice in the show. We had to use visual effects for Tess's P.O.V., cobbled out of Sonny's camera.

01:37:01:11 - 01:37:10:12

Kat

We tried to make just a couple of times and that was just necessary and Nick was giving me a dirty look. But it was only twice in ten episodes.

01:37:10:14 - 01:37:11:21

Sarah

That's why that that's not fair.

01:37:12:01 - 01:37:16:00

Kat

That's our dirty secret. That happened twice. Yeah.

01:37:16:01 - 01:37:17:12

Heather

It's okay, Niko. It's okay.

01:37:17:13 - 01:37:21:20

Niko

It's. There is not our crowning moments of glory, that's for sure.

01:37:21:20 - 01:37:43:12

Kat

Yeah, Yeah. One of our writers said in screen direction. Tess is running through all these narrow corridors with things falling and the screen directions read as Sonny tries to guide. It's like trying to guide a racehorse split through a straw. Like, basically, Sonny is seeing this little thing and trying to guide Tess, who's going so fast.

01:37:43:14 - 01:37:44:00

Sarah

That's like a.

01:37:44:00 - 01:37:58:17

Heather

Really good just I like that. Yeah. So I just want to go a little too like the idea of the stigmas of vision, loss and sight loss. Sarah pulled this out. There's a scene in episode four where Tess gets to come back to the police force but is told should be segregated like this stem from a lived experience.

01:37:58:17 - 01:38:02:12

Heather

Sarah felt really enraged, so we wanted to call that out. But like.

01:38:02:16 - 01:38:05:18

Sarah

Like she can't go to the basement. This is ridiculous.

01:38:05:20 - 01:38:10:23

Heather

So what are some of these stigmas and how are you challenging them in your show?

01:38:11:00 - 01:38:54:18

Niko

We worked with like a number of different consultants who had sight loss and we had writers in our room who had sight loss as well. And one thing that they talked about a lot was especially like 10 to 20 years ago, the kind of training and the kind of assistance that would be available for people who have sight loss, how limiting it would be and how it kind of just tries slot you into what sighted people think is an appropriate job for a blind person.

01:38:55:00 - 01:39:34:12

Niko

Yeah, you know, and how even now one of the writers in the room, Ryan Knighton, describes himself as blind and is a bit older, lost his sight when he was a teenager. And so he had experiences of going through some of those training programs and being advised on career choices and it all being very stigmatizing and stereotypical. And then another one of our writers, Graham Isidore, is at the is much younger and at the very beginning of his experience with sight loss.

01:39:34:12 - 01:40:12:00

Niko

So he has slight, some slight, but it's gradually degenerating and he had different but also interesting experiences of working in corporations. And he has written about this in an article in the Toronto Life and having corporations say that they would make accessibility an option so that he could do his job and then not having that be even be workable at all like the the provisions put in place for him.

01:40:12:02 - 01:40:24:01

Niko

Not adequate. Yeah. At all to allow him to continue to work normally. So hearing both of those experiences really informs that moment for us.

01:40:24:04 - 01:40:57:12

Kat

Also really on point and only discovered partway through our writing, we had a consultant who cannot be named from the police force who introduced Dolly to an investigator who lost his vision and in fact has had to fight, has been able to retain his job in a different investigative department. So he's still an investigator of something different. I don't think he's segregated in a department.

01:40:57:14 - 01:41:10:23

Kat

That's right. And when we said separated, we just meant like they would want her to in the section with the ramps and the tools. And then she makes her impassioned speech and and who knows what will happen. She might have the best of both worlds.

01:41:11:01 - 01:41:24:03

Sarah

And does. You touched on how you didn't really see many other good representations of visual loss in film and television, but what would you like to see represented more like you're doing stuff, but what else would you like to see out there?

01:41:24:07 - 01:41:49:20

Kat

Well, something we weren't able to do in the first season. We would love to see some people

with lifelong vision loss in jobs in the show living their best life. And and we're touching on this with the character of Mia, who is blind, played by someone who is severely sight impaired with ocular albinism. She's from England, Northern England.

01:41:49:20 - 01:42:01:19

Kat

Amazing advocate. Her name is Alice Christina Corrigan. Fascinating human being, stunningly beautiful, incredibly nerdy. She's going places.

01:42:01:19 - 01:42:12:22

Niko

She auditioned for Tess originally and then she she was not right for the role of Tess, but we were like, my God, We have to find a way to cast this woman. She's fantastic, but.

01:42:12:22 - 01:42:40:17

Kat

She works in our show as a disability advocate and peer mentor. But we we want to see someone who just has, you know, a Joe job or whatever, who eyesight impairment, another disabilities, you know, that's what we'd love to see more of. And England does it, the UK does it very well. You at UK shows they have physical diversity everywhere and the shows are more interesting for it.

01:42:40:22 - 01:42:42:00

Sarah

Yeah, I agree.

01:42:42:02 - 01:43:09:00

Niko

Yeah. And I think there's more and more of disability in general on screen in North America as well that feel like the disability isn't the main point of the role, but just a feature of the character's life. I haven't so much seen that with sight yet, but I'm sure it'll happen because it's happening everywhere, Everywhere else on the spectrum of disability.

01:43:09:05 - 01:43:41:19

Heather

I feel heartened. Is that right? I feel just, yeah, I'm happy that we are seeing more representation, identify some with disability and being able to see more exploration of that, characters coming from it, from different perspectives. And I think it's really so yes, I agree. Like I think it's it's getting there and it just needs to continue. And I love that you not only had people coming in to consult, but were writers and also the actors and like you really took were mindful of that, which I think is important and is, I think, necessary.

01:43:41:19 - 01:43:48:23

Heather

I think we the whole phrase not not about us without us is very important. And so I'm really glad that you took that to heart.

01:43:49:01 - 01:43:50:08

Kat

Yeah, well, thank you.

01:43:50:11 - 01:43:51:12

Niko

Thank you.

01:43:51:14 - 01:44:05:16

Heather

What resources do you recommend for listeners if they want to know more about vision loss? Like what are the things that you use to research? What are some things that you looked at maybe when you were looking at your own vision loss? Like, what are some things that maybe people can take a look at?

01:44:05:18 - 01:44:26:22

Kat

I would just say our first and primary resource was people with vision, loss, different kinds, because their experiences are so different. And if you look at any kind of textbook or online help, it's going to kind of have to be open to a lot of experiences, whereas we're creating an individual characters.

01:44:26:22 - 01:44:58:00

Niko

I agree. I mean, I think you can just use Google and find all kinds of technical information about all the different conditions and forms of sight loss that are out there. But the thing that was most informative was hearing other people's experiences and the impact that it has on their lives. So another thing that really I think inspired us and informed us was one of the writers in our room.

01:44:58:00 - 01:45:24:20

Niko

Ryan Knighton is also a novelist as well as a very accomplished screenwriter, and his first book, Cockeyed, is just a fabulous read, and it takes you through his experiences of sight loss from which happened when he was a teenager and growing up in DC and starting to lose his sight and all the way up until meeting his wife.

01:45:24:20 - 01:45:37:06

Niko

And you're just with him as he. It's just it's funny. It's a really raw tale of what it's like to live that

experience. Everyone should read it.

01:45:37:09 - 01:45:45:21

Kat

It's like a little bit like J.D. Salinger meets, you know, he's on This American Life lots of times. He's a great speaker.

01:45:45:23 - 01:45:52:12

Niko

He did a podcast on This American Life about getting lost in his own hotel room, which is.

01:45:52:12 - 01:45:53:23

Sarah

Just really good. Yeah, So.

01:45:53:23 - 01:46:03:13

Niko

Good. It's so good. And he's working. I mean, he's worked on like billions and a ton of other big American shows.

01:46:03:18 - 01:46:08:16

Kat

He's on a big one right now. You guys are going to love, but it is right up your alley.

01:46:08:18 - 01:46:44:16

Niko

It's called Dr. Wolf. I think it's been announced. It sounds like it's going to be fascinating. And then also, there's just like endless interesting podcasts out there. Like there's another podcast on Invisibilia on NPR that is about this man called Daniel Kish, who is blind from birth and has learned to echo, locate his way around the world. And he has taught a whole bunch of children who have been born with sight loss to navigate their surroundings through echolocation.

01:46:44:16 - 01:47:13:21

Niko

And it gets right into, I guess, like the social ideas that we have about how people with sight left should act and the way that they should find them and find their way around the world and the way that they should behave. And he has like this totally, completely radical, different way of making his way around the world that is incredibly freeing for some people and also incredibly threatening for others.

01:47:13:21 - 01:47:21:07

Niko

Like, it's just fascinating to hear the reaction towards that which they really get into. On

Invisibilia, I.

01:47:21:07 - 01:47:29:23

Sarah

Feel like maybe I've been really interested in this site spectrum for a while because I'm like, I've listened to all these things. You're talking about something I need to investigate.

01:47:29:23 - 01:47:34:05

Kat

You guys haven't asked us what the meaning of sight unseen the title is.

01:47:34:06 - 01:47:36:18

Sarah

yes. Tell us, please.

01:47:36:20 - 01:48:02:12

Kat

It's both obscure, but as so many meanings. First of all, people with diversity, whether it's Neurodiverse like Sonny or people who are sight impaired, do walk among us sight unseen. These are invisible disabilities. So that is one thing. The other thing is Sonny is actually with tests sight unseen and and is along for the ride in solving the crimes.

01:48:02:14 - 01:48:07:01

Kat

I think those are the two main things. Like we're always finding new things that.

01:48:07:06 - 01:48:16:14

Niko

Passes, solving crimes sight unseen, know you know her other senses, which is bringing a whole new element to crime solving for her.

01:48:16:14 - 01:48:18:06

Heather

Yes, all these layers to it.

01:48:18:08 - 01:48:25:18

Sarah

Where can people find you online to follow along with your, you know, TV making filmmaking careers?

01:48:25:19 - 01:48:33:20

Niko

I am on Instagram at nikolijne - it's my name.

01:48:33:22 - 01:48:49:22

Kat

And I'm at Kat dot Troubetzkoy the last name being tr0 you betzk0y and Kat is spelt K - A - T which is my initials. So Kat dot Troubetzkoy

01:48:49:22 - 01:48:52:14

Heather

You have your show obviously sight unseen. Where can people watch it?

01:48:52:19 - 01:49:16:07

Niko

It's being broadcast on CTV in Canada Monday nights at 10 p.m.. We're just coming up on the last episode so you can catch it afterwards on the CTV app, and it'll be broadcast on the CW in the States starting April 3rd at 9 p.m. on Mondays, Fridays and Wednesdays.

01:49:16:09 - 01:49:19:18

Kat

And also streaming in Canada only on Crave.

01:49:19:20 - 01:49:23:01

Sarah

Amazing tastic graduations. Thank you so much.

01:49:23:03 - 01:49:24:13

Niko

Thank you very, very much.

01:49:24:14 - 01:49:25:07

Kat

Thank you. It was.

01:49:25:07 - 01:49:26:20

Niko

Fun. Lovely to talk to you.

01:49:27:00 - 01:49:27:19

Sarah

This has been a blast.

01:49:28:00 - 01:49:34:14

Heather

Thank you so much that was so nice to talk to other sisters who are also in this business. Yeah,

it.

01:49:34:14 - 01:49:56:08

Sarah

Was. Isn't that cool? I was like and they had we had so many things in common was like, what does that mean? It was great. And I realized during that conversation how much I actually, like, really relate took from the show about vision. Like, I think this show like an open thing that I didn't know I was concerned about and this is really cool.

01:49:56:14 - 01:50:14:13

Heather

It was interesting because we toured talk about this many years ago. So when you were in college and you did, I remember having to I was helping you write something and you're writing about your vision and we talked about the irony of you going into something where you're like, I went into a job that I use my vision so much.

01:50:14:13 - 01:50:15:00

Heather

I was.

01:50:15:05 - 01:50:15:20

Sarah

Scared to lose.

01:50:15:20 - 01:50:20:23

Heather

It. We haven't talked with in a very long time, so I wonder if you just kind of like, I'm going to put that aside.

01:50:21:01 - 01:50:40:22

Sarah

But lately, lately I have been thinking about it because I've been developing an idea for a Fantasia documentary. And so I've been thinking about mind's eye blindness, and then I work in a visual career and I rely on my visual, like my actual eyes seeing and then like, what if that goes away? And then I don't have a mind's eye to conjure up things.

01:50:40:22 - 01:50:53:03

Sarah

And so, like, the idea of losing my sight has just been more in the front of my mind than maybe. And that's like, Yeah, I would. I remember talking to you about it back in the back in the day.

01:50:53:05 - 01:50:54:07

Heather

But back in the day.

01:50:54:07 - 01:51:12:02

Sarah

But also what was interesting about this episode was the idea of vision spectrum. I never thought about it like that before either. And so, like, you know, maybe one day I might lose that. I've already had noticed my vision is changing just because as you add, your vision changes and it might not completely be darkness. And I never thought about it that way.

01:51:12:02 - 01:51:18:14

Sarah

I always thought about like, if you're blind, it's darkness. And so that was a really interesting thing to realize.

01:51:18:16 - 01:51:44:14

Heather

Yeah. And to have that conversation. It's really interesting when you have like an a something, a switch in your mind about something that you thought was something else. So love to talk always about therapy. So to my therapist today I said to her, How do you transition out of a transition? So it's already hard. You have to transition time in, especially hard for I think adding ADHD in the mix makes it even more fun, playful challenges.

01:51:44:16 - 01:52:09:20

Heather

And she said, Well, what is the feeling you get right before you start something? And I said, like impatience, like that feeling in your gut where it's like, like I'll jump belly. And then it's like, you know, you have the squiggles and you got to get the squiggles out. She's like, I don't know if that's impatience. Could that be excitement?

01:52:10:02 - 01:52:31:21

Heather

Like she asked. I'm like, my God, that's excitement. And then I'm like, Did and not going to cry again. She's like, Did someone tell you maybe that you were being impatient and to sit still, probably. And so you took that as being instead of excitement, you took that as being impatience and even labeling your excitement as impatience your whole life.

01:52:31:21 - 01:52:38:12

Sarah

Yeah, what a big shift. Hey, like that. And I. I know those feelings in therapy when they're like.

01:52:38:13 - 01:52:39:20

Kat

What are you saying?

01:52:39:23 - 01:52:42:06

Heather

She's like, How are you feeling now? I'm like.

01:52:42:07 - 01:52:45:09

Sarah

my God, I'm frustrated.

01:52:45:11 - 01:53:00:22

Heather

And my God, look, how do I got through life this long and not realize that that feeling is excitement and maybe I can go into stuff now with like, I'm excited about this. Not like I got to get this done. Yeah, because this is a patients.

01:53:01:00 - 01:53:19:11

Sarah

What a shift that's going to make. Like, that's going to feel so good. You're like going into your next even maybe your next podcast recording your next interview or meeting or whatever you're having. And to know that that is a feeling of like that's a positive feeling as opposed to like, I need to fix that. I'm feeling impatience, or I'm just like, Why can't I?

01:53:19:15 - 01:53:28:05

Sarah

But now you're like, my gosh, I'm excited for this opportunity. I'm excited to meet this person. I'm excited for whatever it is that you're doing. Yeah, That'll be such a shift in your mindset. That's amazing.

01:53:28:07 - 01:53:48:18

Heather

Yeah, we were talking about the thing about how emotions frame time and how, like, there's physical things that frame time. So like what she, what I called when we're talking about anchors. So for instance, like I have lunch every day at 12. That's it. It's an anchor point in time. So I understand the passing of time because I have time blindness instead of exercising.

01:53:48:18 - 01:54:07:18

Heather

When you get up exercises at eight, it gives you like and then you can frame time like, this is the passing time, just keep me frame. But you can also use emotion as cues or like a cue to start work could be like, I feel excited when I really want to do this or I'm starting to feel irritable, I missed my snack break.

01:54:07:19 - 01:54:28:09

Heather

And so it can help you. You can use things to help you with with framing time, because to me time is like nonexistent. And I said it's like being on a ship in a rough sea. That's how I feel. Like most of my days to people who may be neurotypical or not have this issue with time, time is like a lineup of dominoes.

01:54:28:11 - 01:54:40:06

Heather

And so you can see the dominoes going into the future. Mine is like the way I see time is like a stack of blocks that go up versus out. And so I see everything at one time.

01:54:40:08 - 01:54:41:12

Sarah

All the things you have to do, which.

01:54:41:12 - 01:54:53:13

Heather

Is why it's yeah, which is why it's overwhelming because it's like everything everywhere all at once, literally. Is there a name for that is true. So we don't see things stretching out. We see things all at one time. It's like a big wall.

01:54:53:13 - 01:55:13:22

Sarah

That totally makes sense. I can even relate to that. And I don't know if it's anxiety like it is anxiety for sure, but like you know, all the things that need to happen. Yeah, it's it's very similar. It's like a wall of the things. And then it's like, then it's like okay, I'm going to do this. I'm like, so excited to do this.

01:55:13:22 - 01:55:30:03

Sarah

What I'm on working on is one film. I'm so excited for this film and I'm like, I've got all these other projects done to get the time to be just on this film. It feels so daunting to get to the one thing that I want to. Yeah, but then the other day I was like, Wait, I can just like take this 3 hours and be excited to work on this film for these 3 hours and then do my other things.

01:55:30:03 - 01:55:42:22

Sarah

And that's okay. But I still get to do the film. So it's again like, yeah, frame frame and trying to be like, I can do it and I can be focused into it for the I don't have to clear everything off my plate to still be excited and be in this movie.

01:55:43:00 - 01:55:44:12

Niko

So I'm.

01:55:44:14 - 01:55:48:08

Sarah

Reframing. That seems to be our theme for today's chat.

01:55:48:10 - 01:55:56:18

Heather

But yeah, understanding what words mean in your body, That's another good theme, another good lesson theme thing.

01:55:56:20 - 01:56:23:18

Sarah

And also therapy. Therapy is great. There's this great company that works out of my office called Timber Benefits, and they've developed this great benefit package for mental health. And so a just and I was chatting with the owner of the company and I was like, they're making it accessible. It's just a really reasonable price. And like if employers get this benefit package and they people can actually utilize therapy for the whole year and like be able to do this like ongoing weekly biweekly therapy sessions.

01:56:23:18 - 01:56:47:11

Sarah

And for me, I know this last year, I like did therapy every weeks. And it really made a huge, huge difference in my life. And it was like I didn't realize how big of an impact having that two week check in made until I like took a moment to, like, stop back and be like, Whoa, look at how far I've come by.

01:56:47:11 - 01:57:19:14

Sarah

Just being able to have somebody to, like, guide me through different ways of communicating, different to thinking different. So like the idea of having mental health resources be accessible to everyone at affordable price. Yep. So important. And it was just so refreshing to hear that this company that's like their mandate and that they've worked out this plan and they're like putting it into action and I'm so proud of them and I'm so excited for the future of hopefully like more and more companies can do this kind of stuff and allow therapy to be something that everybody gets to have.

01:57:19:16 - 01:57:30:20

Sarah

So important. I agree. On that note, thank you for listening to this episode of Friends. Friends is hosted and produced by her and Sarah Taylor, and our theme song is by our little brother Dennis.

01:57:30:22 - 01:57:50:12

Heather

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01:57:50:14 - 01:57:52:22

Heather

Until next time. I'm your host, Heather.

01:57:53:01 - 01:57:55:17

Sarah

And I'm your host, Sara. Bye!