

Episode 12: U-turn on Sesame Street with Dr. Charlene Fletcher

Transcription:

Dr. Fletcher:

Dum dum dum dum dum dum dum bop, bop, bop, bop, bop But. But. Ah. Okay. Sorry.

Easton:

All right. Welcome back, everyone, to another episode of this is problematic. Brought to you by Conner Prairie Museum. I'm Easton.

Hannah:

And I'm Hannah.

Easton:

And we're happy to have y'all back for the season finale. Yay!,

Hannah:

Ah, you just heard our favorite. Wow. Ah, I was right to call your very favorite guest. I mean...

Dr. Fletcher:

I'll take that title.

Easton:

You're world's best boss.

Hannah:

Yeah.

Easton:

Dr. Charlene Fletcher.

Dr. Fletcher:

I'm better than Michael Scott.

Easton:

Back in the studio again with us, and we have you to thank for today's lovely conversation topic.

Dr. Fletcher:

You do.

Hannah:

This episode is rated E for everyone as so many of our episodes have done. This is totally the result of us just talking in the office one day and deciding this needed to be a podcast discussion.

Easton:

When you see beloved childhood icons as robots. It tends to strike up a little bit of a conversation.

Dr. Fletcher:

Oh my goodness

Easton:

I'm still disgusted

Hannah:

Are we keeping them guessing as to what our theme is today? Childhood robots.

Dr. Fletcher:

Well, they weren't robots in my childhood.

Easton and Dr. Fletcher:

and they shouldn't be in and they should be here now.

Dr. Fletcher:

I agree.

Easton:

My children will never see that. Today's episode is revolving around today's episode is tackling the original purpose of Sesame Street and how it has changed over the years because I did not know Sesame Street's original purpose, the core values it held, which are kind of being trampled on today because now it's behind a paywall and people can't get to it.

Dr. Fletcher:

Mhmm

Easton:

So this whole thing started because I decided to share with my, my coworkers that there is a new show called Sesame Street MEChA Builders, where Cookie Monster, Elmo and Abby are all robots, and they're animated and they're running around and solving, you know, not crime. They're not solving crime, solving problems. It ain't gotten that bad yet, but they're solving they're solving problems. And I was like, have you ever seen this? And then Auntie decided to drop some, some knowledge on me about Sesame Street. It's not replacing the original Sesame Street, but the original Sesame Street is actually now even more fascinating.

Hannah:

So could we say that today we're going to try to figure out how we got to Sesame Street and that how we're getting away?

Easton:

Oh, yes.

Hannah:

Shall we dive into the birthplace of Sesame Street?

Easton:

Mm hmm.

Hannah:

Okay. So I'm going to read a little bit from an article to get us going, I think today. Called The Unmistakable Black Roots of Sesame Street by Bryan Green, published in 2019. So he explains how the initial target audience for the show was the, quote, four year old Inner-City Black Youngster, unquote.

It was rooted in African-American culture, specifically in Harlem, in New York, and it came out of a political era of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society agenda, which was signified by programs which aimed to eliminate poverty and racial injustice. Notably, part of this programming was the creation of Headstart in 1965, which started to lead to early preschool education programs.

We can talk in a minute, a bit more about some of the creators and their, their background coming into this work. But it's important to note that in this era when I'm trying to find my reference. Oh, here we go. It's important to note this is actually from how we got to Sesame Street from 2020 in the New Yorker by Jill Lepore that preschools in the sixties and prior were pretty scarce. About half of US school districts didn't even have a kindergarten program. And many of the preschool and early education programs were locally led by a variety of organizations who were passionate about doing this work. In order to serve their local communities.

But there was very little nationally and what individuals in the early education space were starting to look at was the fact that there was universal television that's a quote, universal television. Upwards of 90% of households had TVs and children were spending, on average, 55 hours per week watching television. So the time that they weren't able to spend in a preschool space, they were able to spend in front of the TV. And so that's really where the idea for educational programming started to come from. What do you guys think about that little intro?

Dr. Fletcher:

I just want to point out that even in 2022, preschool and kindergarten are not required in the state of Indiana. I just wanted to share that.

Easton:

And off we go

Dr. Fletcher:

Off we go...

Hannah:

I'm not surprised at preschool, but I'm really surprised Kindergarten isn't.

Dr. Fletcher:

It's not required unless they've changed it this year. When my little person, she's in the sixth grade now, but when she was going into kindergarten, it was made clear this is not required which I always thought was odd. But yeah, there were other programs and we can talk about this later at the time. At the same time that Sesame Street pops up, Captain Kangaroo was one. I remember Captain Kangaroo, but there were others. And the others, of course, are before my time, but they weren't they didn't engage kids the way that Sesame Street did and does, where it's almost like kids are able to have conversations with the Muppets.

They are friends with the Muppets. But early children's programming was often condescending, I guess is the word is the way to put it. Captain Kangaroo was not. I remember him distinctly and I remember the electric company as well. But it was this it was a different it was a different approach, a different vibe that Sesame Street came with at the time and still does because it hasn't changed.

Hannah:

I was really taken aback reading some of this. The scholarship that's been done around, a lot of it is in obviously in the educational and psychological fields as well as the little bit from the history field. But mostly it's educational psych kind of work.

I didn't know much about the creators. They're really interesting individuals. Joan Ganz Cooney in particular had done a documentary on Harlem's preschool program, so that was one of those community programs, and it led to her involvement in the civil rights movement. And she was especially focused on the war on poverty and so I think that's a really cool, cool aspect of this. Was the Harlem program. Do you know much about it? You know if it was quite a foundational set of programming that was going on?

Dr. Fletcher:

I don't know specifically about that particular program. But you see a whole host of programs as coming out of the sixties that are geared towards addressing issues within the community, poverty, food scarcity, access, health care, and you see community organizations that are doing this.

What comes to mind specifically is the Black Panther Party. And in the sixties, you know that in this country, when people learn about the Black Panther Party, we went from Sesame Street to the Black... anyway... So when you're when you learn about the Black Panther Party, it's always this stereotypical narrative of this militant black organization. But when you actually dig into and understand the history of the party, they're actually initiating and implementing programming that addressed the needs of the community. The Black Panther Party had free breakfast programs. They had educational programs when children in various cities did not have equitable access to education or educational materials. The party also had mobile health care units, even even programs, health care programs that addressed sickle cell anemia, which is something that tends to be prevalent among African-Americans. And so when we talk about LBJ or President Johnson with his Great Society and all of the programs that came out of that, one of the

programs that came out of that and still exists today is WIC women, infants and children, which is a form of public assistance, but that initiated as a program started by the Black Panther Party to ensure that children in various communities had access to quality food to, you know, you if you go to school hungry, you're not going to perform very well. And they made sure that those children had what it was that they needed. And so it's interesting that you see that kind of activism and grassroots work influencing what would become the largest children's television show for 53 years now.

So it's it's it's not surprising because if you're in Harlem, if you're in any other community that's that's rife with poverty in in the country now you know that there's no equity in education. You know, I remember when I worked in in New York, in Brooklyn, I had we went into a school one day in the elementary school to help clean up and get ready for the school year to start. And we had to bring all of the books out of these storage closets. And this was 2010. And I remember going into the closet and pulling out science books that I used 30 years before. Surly Sciences changed in 30/40 years.

Easton:

Some citations need to be...

Dr. Fletcher:

Some citations need to be just, you know, you know, just look cosmetic work here and there, but it's obvious that the resources are slim.

Hannah:

It is really, really interesting hearing you talk about that, because that kept popping up in my mind as I was doing this reading that that activism work. It makes total sense, but it's not something that in my head when I thought Sesame Street as a younger human that I would necessarily connect with these forms of activism. It was really interesting reading about and going back to Cooney. I was really struck by how her approach even today would be considered quite progressive and quite forward thinking that instead of assuming she's this educational expert, she's observed these programs, instead of just taking that and running with it and assuming she she knew what she was doing, she actually hired a team of African-American mostly female experts to design a curriculum for them, to design the hidden curriculum, as they called it, to represent a, quote, harmonious community to challenge the marginalization of African-Americans that children traditionally saw reflected in their their TV programing, unquote, and also the fact that many of the early cast and crew, which had come up through quite interconnected black entertainment world in New York, had actually been quite involved in Black Panthers, Black Power. One of the early presenters of the show, MS. Long, who had been a teacher at one point, had also co-hosted Soul, a Black Power Showcase. So it's really interesting that those things are so upfront and present.

Dr. Fletcher:

What I like about her, her being Cooney, is that any time, for my understanding, anytime that Sesame Street was met with some form of critique there was an effort to honestly address the critique. So if it was deemed The Early Show was deemed to be too white, And so here we are. We have folks like MS. Long and other community members who come to the table, and especially, especially women. There was one point where there was a critique of the show being a male dominated space, and that happens in the 1970s. And I think that critique came from the

National Organization of Women and Sesame Street responded by hiring not just more women writers, but also women puppeteers. So I always thought that that was, was interesting. There's, there's, there's action, you know, okay, here's the critique. We need to do this. And Sesame Street has seemed to have done that. Even when it comes to the changing landscape of what children are dealing with or what we're willing to acknowledge that children are dealing with.

A couple of years ago, they introduced a Muppet that had incarcerated parents as their way of, you know, mass incarceration clearly is an issue that we have in this country. And we tend to focus on prisons, but we don't always focus on the impact of children who have incarcerated parents. And so Sesame Street. There were people who didn't like it. But that's fine.

Easton:

So as someone born in 1999, when we started speaking

Dr. Fletcher:

My Lord!

Easton:

When we started speaking on Sesame Street, it was so wild for me to sit down and think like the characters that I think of as synonymous with the show's brand. I didn't grow up like when I watched it there wasn't a such thing as a Sesame Street without Elmo on it and Elmo's and Elmo's World Cookie Monster, Big Bird. And I know Big Bird was around, but you know, they weren't all present at like the actual birth of the program because like you would have told me Sesame Street was on in the seventies, I would have been like

All:

Laugh

Easton:

Like we talking like the 1970, like white, you know,

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes, the 1970's

Easton:

We had only just gotten to the moon.

Dr. Fletcher:

Oh my God!

Easton:

So when you, so you sent us this and I'll just be like, I don't have to TikTok, but you sent us this TikTok as you often do. So me on my little Google pixel, I click the link and it takes me to TikTok.com and I, and I look at the TikTok and I got to unmute it first and unmute it. And then I watched this clip and these people in this do walk in named Roosevelt Franklin. He starts teaching these black

Dr. Fletcher:

Muppets.

Easton:

Muppets. And of course I feel weird calling the Muppets because when I say Muppets, I think of the Muppets with like Kermit and all of them. While Kermit did come to Sesame Street in 2000 has been on since then. But like, you know, these very much like they got black. These Muppets have black hair. Like, they like they they speak. I'm seeing black people on Sesame Street. This is this is off the chain. That's what I said to myself. When I first watched think this is off the chain. We're talking about Africa. We're talking about all this in this in this very urban. Like, I, when you said like Sesame Street, like the setting is based off of Harlem, I was like, I could totally see that absolutely. But, there in like a black school talking about black stuff. And it was just it's like I'm looking at a completely different thing. And I really sit back and wonder, like, how many people like me had no idea that this is this was the original Sesame Street.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah, that was hilarious. This is the blackest Sesame Street I've ever seen in my life.

Easton:

Oh!

Dr. Fletcher:

Roosevelt Franklin was on in the early seventies and so just for reference, the clip that I sent because excuse me, he, his character would come in, the teacher would be out of the room and he would give these lessons. And so that particular lesson was about Africa. And he asked his classmates, what do you know about Africa? And one Muppet says, it's a jungle. And he's like, nah, bruh there's cities in Africa. There is this there is that and all of these things. And and Easton's response was, this was the blackest Sesame Street I've ever seen in my life. But he was on the show briefly, actually. And I want to say it was like from it was the early seventies.

Hannah:

I got that it was in the... I need to double check the initial year

Dr. Fletcher:

It is like 70 to 75 or something like that

Hannah:

Something like that because he was on he started up in in year two of the Muppets and it looks like he was cut from the show year three or you're four.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah

Hannah:

So he wasn't in it for super long and apparently there had been some kind of like

Dr. Fletcher:

There were, there were complaints

Hannah:

Yes but from from two different areas.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes.

Hannah:

One, one from the fact from primarily white communities of him being

Dr. Fletcher:

Disruptive

Hannah:

Disruptive and but then a response kind of or a equal complaint from from some members of the black community that they felt like he was reinforcing quote-unquote negative stereotypes about black children.

Dr. Fletcher:

Right. That he was disruptive in the classroom and you know, he was a bit unruly even though if you see clips and you can Google him, he's not unruly. We wouldn't consider him to be unruly in 2022.

Easton:

He's quite reasonable actually.

Dr. Fletcher:

He's quite reasonable. But just the things that he, he brought to the show, just that that one skit alone was pretty revolutionary for 1971 on public television. So

Hannah:

And you're bang on with that year. November 10th 69 is the first year it was founded. And you're right with going on the moon that is the same year we went to the moon.

Dr. Fletcher:

There are black Muppets shortly after the moon landing. Yes.

Easton:

Oh yes. There were.

Dr. Fletcher:

Now when I was growing up he was long gone. Franklin, Roosevelt Franklin he was not on the show when I grew up watching Sesame Street. But there were a whole host of other folks like I distinctly remember seeing people on Sesame Street, like the first time I saw Dionne Warwick on TV, it was on Sesame Street. She was singing with, I want to say, it might have been Cookie Monster. I don't know. It was one of the Muppets but Dionne Warwick was singing. There is and I this iconic animation that teaches you to count to 12 is a pinball. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 12. That was the Pointer Sisters.

Easton:

Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:

And so like So this is 84, 85 where you started and it's like seven. It is. It was fantastic. I still sing that and I'm in my forties. But you saw folks in the seventies, people like Nina Simone were on Sesame Street, but

Hannah:

I saw James Earl Jones.

Dr. Fletcher:

James Earl Jones,

Hannah:

He was a baby.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah.

Hannah:

It was so good.

Dr. Fletcher:

Absolutely. So it was a time. James Baldwin, I believe at one point was on Sesame Street. I could be making that up. I'll have to double check but Maya Angelou was on Sesame Street. Whether they're reading with puppets, whether they're singing with puppets or just having conversation about life being a good person, it was common to to see to see Muppets interact with all sorts of people, all sorts of people. I miss it.

Hannah:

I just going to say, I thought it was really cool reading through, because it almost was like a commonality of Sesame Street, like how we got to obviously where we are, which is our whole kind of point that a lot of these things took. And it was really cool to me that as a lot of for a while, obviously, we can talk about where we're at today. And I don't know that anyone would say we're at the same place today Sesame Street once was, but in the seventies and early eighties, it was pretty cool to see that as obviously this was modeled off Harlem and representing an inner city neighborhood. And as a lot of those areas were changing with migration and immigration, it was cool that the show was really changing with the neighborhoods. There is a point at which in the mid, of the early seventies that there were complaints, especially from Puerto Rican and Chicano communities, as well as from the wider Latin American community, that they felt like they were absent from the show. And so an advisory committee was put together of Latin American activists and artists, and a bilingual version of the show suddenly was created, like you were saying before, they were super, super

Hannah and Dr. Fletcher:

responsive.

Dr. Fletcher:

Oh yeah.

Hannah:

It's so cool. Actually, to see things could be done that quickly and change that quickly to...

Dr. Fletcher:

The intention was there like it's not. I think that's what matters. The intention was there. The demographics of the world are changing. What children are learning, what they're experiencing, who they're interacting with. It's not about revenue or who's upset. It was literally about children like that purpose that that that goal was their children need to have these basic understandings and these these basic skills before entering a classroom. Who are they going to walk into a classroom with? How, you know, how should children get along? What all of those things. That was what was important

Easton:

And express themselves.

Dr. Fletcher:

Absolutely.

Easton:

Because Sesame Street got I mean, its deep and it was deep back then to.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes. Yes. I mean, listen, Sesame Street, it wasn't just it wasn't just the show. Like I remember having there was a they weren't encyclopedias, but they were like it was this set of like 12 Sesame Street books. And there were certain things that you learned as you move through the books. And so, of course, basic reading skills were there, obviously. But it was also about proper, you know, social skills, social development. And so it moved beyond just that. Well, when I was growing up was about an hour long. It will move beyond the one hour TV show and so you could get Sesame Street anywhere, whether you did. And that was before the Internet. Sesame Street was everywhere.

Easton:

Oh yeah.

Hannah:

I think this might be a good time to pull in our extra special guest, Janna, because I think what you guys just pulled us back full circle to this is what ideally these children should have been receiving in the preschool classroom. Preschool is supposed to be, from my understanding, more about the social and emotional education of a child than them necessarily learning their ABCs or their one, two, threes. And it's important to note that she runs the preschool in which we actually record this podcast, which I feel like continues to help our own personal, emotional and social learning. So I'm going to pull Janna in. So we have just found the first we were talking about the origins of Sesame Street.

Janna:

I didn't really watch it as a kid that much.

Dr. Fletcher:

Why?

Janna:

I was outside all time I lived on a farm, and we just our TV got three stations and usually it was like fuzzy and wasn't not great. So we just didn't watch Lot TV. So

Dr. Fletcher:

Welcome, Mama J.

Janna:

Thank you.

Dr. Fletcher:

I just said to somebody earlier, you know, when I was growing up, we didn't have the Internet. Like that wasn't a thing. Or if the Internet, Al Gore's Internet, it existed. But but it wasn't accessible in everybody's home. And then even then we have like America Online and *makes connecting sounds* you've been made all this noise to connect, but it wasn't something that everybody had. And now the Internet is a utility. So, you know, screen time, whether it's TV, whether it's iPad, whether it's a computer, it's still a screen.

Hannah:

And so our parents and grandparents, were spending almost as much time, if not more than 35 hours a week from the television. That's a lot.

Easton:

That's a lot.

Dr. Fletcher:

It is.

Hannah:

Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:

Especially in the seventies.

Janna:

I mean, I guess we can say at least we can walk around with our phones and iPads to do things. Whereas like then it was just like you were stationary.

Dr. Fletcher:

Right. Right.

Janna:

You were sitting down and. Yeah, you were not doing anything else.

Dr. Fletcher:

That's true.

Janna:

I guess I don't know if that's a positive or not, but

Easton:

In any other case, it makes me a lot like really thankful for Sesame Street existing because if kids are going to be in front of the television anyway and they're not getting the stuff anyway, and I have a really good question for you later about that. But it is really important, though, for them to have that access. Since you're there, we can reach you here in ways that people might not be reached in the people who needed it most, especially in an age where now it seems like whenever companies particularly the successful companies get called out for things, they're quicker to like make posts and take stances to be like, well, we're not going to do anything about it, here's why. But like with Sesame Street, you really did see more action taken quickly to be like, not only are we going to try and fix this, but we're going to call in the people who know more about this than us. And that's something you don't really see a lot of anymore. So

Hannah:

So those are some of the things we were talking about to kind of fill you in a little bit of that as well, is that we were talking about how like in the mid-seventies, there were comments from growing communities in these cities that were supposed to be represented especially spaces like Harlem, that Puerto Rican communities, Chicano communities, these Latin American communities were absent. And so they quickly created a bilingual version of the show. Right? So they were kind of responding quickly. And so there's this really awesome positive side that's very activism based, really grew out of ideas that the founder, Joan Ganz Cooney, had gained from a documentary she had done on Harlem's preschool program. Which helped inspire aspects of Headstart and led to her interest and involvement on the War on poverty. Also, the co-creator Lloyd Morissette, who's a psychology guest who was studying preschool education. And so they both saw this opportunity with this primarily female African-American team of experts. They worked together to create a heading curriculum in Sesame Street. To show a harmonious community, and this is a quote, a harmonious community to challenge the marginalized portion of African-Americans that children routinely saw. That's the really awesome side of it. And as we were talking about before, a lot of the early guest stars and the characters on the show were very multicultural, but especially very black.

Janna:

In a time when there that wasn't represented in any other. Yeah. Anywhere else. On TV. Really. Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:

I do. Not for children.

Janna:

Not right. Not for children. Right.

Hannah:

I do think there's a negative piece of it that when they're looking at the impact assessment shrink calling it revolutionary a lot, the the looking is that money and they're saying it costs \$5 per child to create Sesame Street whereas it costs \$7600 to put children in a Head Start program like as much as this show like Sesame Street was amazing and revolutionary. I think as a preschool teacher the reason we wanted to hear from you is to hear like a television show can't replace preschool right? Like...

Janna:

It can't really it can't replace actual face to face interaction. I mean that's the problem with it really is that it is on a screen. It... all good things that you're saying, right? All so many good things there, except that it's not a replacement for an actual real person in front of you are in front of your face having that real conversation or that real conflict or even like just joy. Right? TV is really good at and especially movies are very good at helping to elicit some of those emotions. Right? If it's written well, if it's acted well, if the music's right, all those things right. But there's just no replacement for a real-life person. Yeah.

Easton:

As much as you love Big Bird, you can't magically teleport him to your house to play with you. I'm playing with big bird.

Hannah:

I never would have done that because he was part of the reason why I didn't really like Sesame Street that much because he freaked me out.

Easton:

He was big

Janna:

He was he was really, really big. And that was my like, you know, the few times that I did see that show, I was just like, oh, gosh. Like, he's for a small child, right? For a child. Like...

Easton:

He's towering

Janna:

He's huge. Even though he was he was kind and he was gentle. And he had this kind of, you know, this, I don't know, kind of a peculiar voice, you know, whatever that was. Right. But he was big, and I just I couldn't get past that, but. Yeah, no, yeah. There's no there's no replacement for a real person. Yeah. In that real time. Right. Because again, like, when you're watching TV, that's that's a one way interaction. Like, there's no there's no back and forth. There's no you know, what we see at our schools and what we hear at our school are all these conversations that are very spontaneous and, and can can involve a variety of people that just kind of move in and out of that. Right. And there is that remember, it's a television program. It's programed, right? It's very specifically designed and there's lots of good parts to that. And it has to be because that's how it's designed to be. But yeah, there's just there's we can't that can't be the complete full replacement for a person. So...

Hannah:

And the child can never lead. Right?

Janna:

No

Hannah:

And like the show will always lead the child instead of the child being able to.

Janna:

Exactly. Exactly.

Dr. Fletcher:

That makes me think of when the show came out in the seventies the Mississippi Board of Education, they voted to remove the show from the local PBS station. And the, the argument was we don't want our children watching a show where white children and black children, they didn't want this integrated show on, you know, in their homes and, you know, their children seeing this integrated show. But there were so many Mississippi residents that were outraged by that. Like but our kids are learning so many other things what's wrong with this integrated TV show? They had to rescind that vote. And so it ended up on television in Mississippi. But just like you said, it's it's one way. But you still have this this program that is forcing people to have real time conversations

Janna:

Absolutely.

Dr. Fletcher:

about the way that we interact as people or the way we should interact as humans and so I think that that is another benefit, perhaps unintended, but another benefit of just folks having dialog around Sesame Street and other programs like it. Did I do something? Oh

Ryan:

In your opinion, Dora, cause Dora...

Dr. Fletcher:

Ugh.

Ryan:

Has to have interaction but it almost always falls flat.

Dr. Fletcher:

I hate that show

Ryan:

Sorry. Not to derail.

Janna:

I just I'm not a huge fan of of children's programing. I'm just not. I'm not. I never got into Dora my kids never gotten into Dora either. The I think I couldn't get past the song. The song was so annoying for me.

Dr. Fletcher:

I couldn't either... Yo Soy Dora.

Janna:

Yeah. Well

Easton:

oh man. I wish they could see your face!

Janna:

The way you said that. That was it right there. The was you said it. I mean, we don't like at our school we don't talk to children in that kind of voice. Right.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes.

Janna:

We talk to them as we do anyone else because they're humans.

Dr. Fletcher:

They're People.

Janna:

They're People.

Dr. Fletcher:

Exactly.

Janna:

And whether they're three or they're 103 and we talk to them with the same tone of voice. We don't have the super HIGH-PITCHED sounding voice and we don't dumb things down for them. Yeah, I just, I, I'm really sensitive to that, and I think that's why I am like, I even, even all those years ago because Dora is Dora has been around for a long time. Really, obviously Sesame Street much longer. But yeah, I, I can never get past that, I think. That's why I never it just didn't and never sat right with me. I thought that's not how I view children. That's not what I think about children. Right? That, that I have to change the way I interact with them versus an adult.

Hannah:

Peppa Pig's a wonderful example of that as well.

Janna:

Yeah.

Hannah:

I hate Peppa Pig.

Easton:

Well, I mean, a lot of them are like that. I mean, and it almost makes me think like, did Sesame Street. Sesame Street is revolution so it's like whenever you have something that's really, really revolutionary, other companies and properties want to make their version of that and so what we've seen is this like, you know, when I was watching things like, you know, Dora and Blue's Clues, of course, love those shows. Love those shows.

Hannah:

Bear in the big blue house.

Easton:

Yeah. Bear in the big blue, bear in the Big Blue House and all that stuff. It's like we love those shows, but also some of them like I'm getting annoyed with Dora because she's like, Where's the house on the hill? It's right behind you. Dora, turn your head 90 more degrees. You don't need to elicit me in every single decision you make. But that's the thing is like, I never I never got that when I was watching Sesame Street and I felt more like up here in Sesame Street and versus for Dora, I felt like I was being dragged on a.

Dr. Fletcher:

It's condescending

Easton:

I was dragged on an adventure that I didn't even want to really go on..

Hannah:

Consent to.

Easton:

I did not consent.

Hannah:

Dora should have had tea.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes

Easton:

It's as easy as tea.

Dr. Fletcher:

It's condescending.

Easton:

Some people don't want tea.

Hannah:

Easton doesn't want Dora.

Dr. Fletcher:

And I don't blame him.

Easton:

That's why I like I go, Diego, go better.

Hannah:

I like Swiper.

Dr. Fletcher:

See, I've never.

Janna:

I don't know what that is either.

Dr. Fletcher:

I don't know. Yeah.

Sara:

It was Dora's adventure into the, like, interactive with animal programming.

Hannah:

Oh,

Sara:

So Diego is Dora's cousin. Made by Jake T. Austin, at least at the beginning and they explore animals he's a jungle explorer.

Easton:

Sara is also here so y'all can hear her off the mic. Well see and that's the thing also at this time I was experimenting with violent cartoons so I was watching Tom and Jerry so by that time I was having sympathies for the bad guy so I never thought swiper, I kind of wanted Swiper to get away with it every now and then.

Hanna:

I loved swiper.

Easton:

I just wanted swiper to go dawg just go.

Dr. Fletcher:

This is hilarious.

Hannah:

Swiper go swiping

Easton:

Go!

Dr. Fletcher:

This is hilarious.

Janna:

Oh my god.

Dr. Fletcher:

My daughter never watched Dora, but I also couldn't tolerate it. Because it's condescending. It's the, you know, like you said, turn your head 90 degrees. You'll see it too. Do you not think that young people are capable of critical thinking? And it may not be to the degree of, you know, a Harvard professor, but children are capable of thinking, they're capable of deduction, they're capable of Problem-Solving and you did. You got that more with Sesame Street than you did with other and I don't know what's on TV now, but Dora got on my nerves.

Hannah:

I've heard good things about Bluey.

Dr. Fletcher:

I don't know what that is.

Hannah:

It's all about dogs in Australia. But everybody I've talked to who has little ones says it's it's very clever and not talking down and a lot of the parents seem to label it. Do you feel differently? But I have not seen it.

Janna:

I don't, but I haven't either.

Hannah:

I hear about it all the time.

Janna:

That reminded me of is that that was something that was a show that my children did enjoy watching was zoboomafoo

Easton:

Zoboomafoo!

Janna:

But it's changed since my kids watch. Now it's it's a cartoon and it was real life people with real right with animals like zoboomafoo is a real lemur.

Easton:

May he rest.

Janna:

Yeah, my kids liked that. They got into the, you know, animals. Animals.

Sara:

Zoboomafoo and the crocodile hunter, we're my two mains.

Janna:

Your go-tos.

Easton:

Pour one out. We are just pouring one out.

Sara:

I know! Steve Irwin and Zoboomafoo.

Easton:

Man!

Hanna:

Poor Steve Irwin.

Janna:

Its changed a lot since my kids were younger. I mean, my well, yeah, my youngest now is 16 and he really didn't see it that much. But I would say my older children did. So it's been at least 18 years ago and now it, it's cartoon-ized, you know, so it's, it's a little bit different but

Dr. Fletcher:

The show I hated. Dear PBS.

Janna:

Oh dear.

Dr. Fletcher:

I don't even know if this was on PBS. Caillou.

All:

Oh...

Sara:

Caillou is supposed to be a doll. I did not know that.

Dr. Fletcher:

I hate that show!

Easton:

Really?

Janna:

That's weird.

Sara:

I never would have known that.

Easton:

It's kind of like that thing that came out when they, they revealed that hello kitty is actually a human instead of a cat.

Sara:

Yes.

Ryan and Dr. Fletcher:

What?!

Janna:

What's happening right now? My whole...

Easton:

Hello Kitty is actually a little girl.

Hannah:

One thing, though, that I wouldn't want to say with all of this is it's fascinating to me. I do want to acknowledge this and the conversation about Sesame Street because everyone else has has exposed their own personal relationship. And it's interesting to me hearing all of these shows, I don't recognize most of them because I wasn't raised in this country. And so I had some American programing, but mostly it was British programing. A lot of BBC stuff

Easton:

Postman Pat.

Hannah:

I had a whole lot of Postman Pat and his black and white cat and Fireman Sam saving the day and but I never saw Sesame Street. For some reason, they showed Elmo's World, but we never had Sesame Street. BBC at some point must have bought the rights to Elmo. And I used to get to watch Elmo like really early on a Saturday morning. They used to have one episode of Elmo I remember on the BBC and an episode of Barney and my dad used to get up and we used to watch them together.

Dr. Fletcher:

I couldn't stand Barney either. Im sorr.

Hannah:

I mean, now, no, but a small child, he was like addictive,

Janna:

Which is probably a whole other thing.

Hannah:

Um, but yeah, I think, I think the biggest thing to ask you is we were talking about the purpose of preschool, not necessarily just on TV, obviously, in person. And we were talking about the importance of social and emotional learning. And that that was one thing Sesame Street was attempting to do was move beyond just here's your ABCs and here's your one, two, threes, but what should children be learning in a preschool classroom or an outdoor preschool or whatever space they're at?

Janna:

Right. So yeah, we are an outdoor preschool here. And yeah, what we say here at preschool on the prairie is the child is the curriculum so we don't have a standard set of things that children ages three, four and five should be learning. They play. They come and they play and they're learning all the time through their play. But we don't have a set, set of standards or things that we're looking for that we're like, they've got to be able to do this by the end of their three year old year with us moving into a second year or whatever that is. We don't we we don't look at any of those things we are paying attention to: Are they trying to pick things up with their fingers and what kinds of materials and tools are we giving them to help them practice those things? Right. We just say they're practicing a lot of things right now, but particularly what we're after here is definitely their social emotional growth. You know, I referenced that earlier just with their being able to solve a problem or resolve conflict, celebrate and find joy in someone else's accomplishments. Right. To invite someone into something with you, to learn how to to compromise and to collaborate together in their play. Those are the things that we're after. Not are they able to write their name when they're five? Some of them are actually. A lot of them really are. But it's not because we're making them sit down with a piece of paper and a pencil it's because they've been able to climb, they've been able to run and roll on the ground, and now their bodies are ready to do those things. That's because those are the type of things we tend to look at, particularly in our preschool. Do they know their colors? Do they know their numbers? Can they can they cut with scissors? Can they, you know, all of those things and they're not those aren't bad. But that's really not the goal. In order to move on to whether it's a private school or a public school. Whatever, the rest of their education is going to look like if they're able to if they can look at someone else that's crying and and feel compassion and empathy for that person and be able to go over and offer them comfort, that's what we want to see. Right? Because all those other things will come and they'll come when they're ready. Not because we made them sit down and try to do it.

Dr. Fletcher:

But those skills of empathy and compassion. That's what we need as adults.

Janna:

Yes.

Dr. Fletcher:

That many of us just don't have.

Easton:

That reminds me a story from my childhood. I was walking at a friend's house. They had like this wooden railing, and I was walking down like there at their porch outside, and there was a party

going on, a little kid party. I had to have been like five or six. And of course, I was holding the rail the entire way down. So I got a splinter. And so, like, I get moved into the main room where all the kids are and all the kids, like, circle around me. So I'm there wailing while someone's trying to get, like, tweezers to get the splinter out and this little girl just, like, walked up to me in the middle of the circle, sat down with me, and we both just cried together.

All:

Awe

Easton:

She was not injured in any way. But seeing me cry made her cry. So she just sat there with me and cried. I think there's a picture of it somewhere, but... Hannah are you Okay?

Hannah:

Now I'm going to cry

Easton:

Yeah. And then the splinter was removed and. Yeah, I hope you're listening to this. I hope you're doing okay. Whoever you are.

Hannah:

I bet she has the best social and emotional skills of the adults around me. I bet she watched Sesame Street.

Hannah:

I bet she did

Dr. Fletcher:

My goodness.

Janna:

That's a beautiful story, though.

Dr. Fletcher:

It is.

Janna:

Again, like, to your point, Dr. Fletcher, just as adults, the things that that we don't often either possess ourselves or maybe it's a matter like we don't take the time to do it right. But someone saw you, right? And she recognized that something was really wrong and she knew she could come and sit with you and. And yeah. Her expression of that was feeling your pain a little bit. Right. Crying with you and just staying with you. And

Dr. Fletcher:

Even if she couldn't get the splinter out herself, she could still be present.

Janna:

Right.

Dr. Fletcher:

And we're not present. That's why we have wars anyway. I'm just amazed at the things that you remember from your early child.

Easton:

Oh, yeah, yeah. No, I got a lot that is still up here. My parents are baffled. Like, how the heck do you remember it? I don't even remember it. I'm like, Oh, yeah, this song was on the radio. I remember the shoes I was wearing.

All:

Oh, wow.

Easton:

All that stuff. Yeah, yeah.

Hannah:

That's really cool.

I think I want to ask you one of our major sets of questions and then probably let you break free if you wish to.

Janna:

Okay.

Hannah:

Um, so I think one of the things that this conversation about Sesame Street and where it comes from really lets us hone in on obviously Sesame Street itself is of great importance, but also the gaps, the, the reasoning behind creating it. We're kind of revealing. Um, so do you think the gaps in preschool education have been filled in since 1969 and our children from minority communities still being let down by our early education system in the same way as they were.

Janna:

Yeah. Still still lots of gaps and yes. Yes. To all of I mean everything you just asked, I mean I mean there's definitely some things that have changed but so many gaps that just it shouldn't be just shouldn't be. We know better, we know better, we should, you know, we should be held responsible for that and we should want more for all of our children and to see all children as our children not yours and mine and someone else's right. We have to love them all.

Dr. Fletcher:

Whitney said the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.

Easton:

She never lied.

Hannah:

I want to do one last thing and hand Janna Soapbox for a second and ask you. We had a whole wonderful conversation with Brandy last week about education in the museum space, but today

we're talking so much about your people about preschoolers, you know, how do we fix it? Like, what do we do? Where do we do better and how do we, you know, learn some of the lessons of Sesame Street, but bring them into the real world? Like.

Janna:

Yeah, wow. Where did where to start with that? That's a really big question. But deafinately.

Hannah:

Sorry.

Janna:

No, and definitely really the the the place to start is to let the children lead that, um, I cannot come up with something that's going to meet the needs of even 16 children in a three hour setting all by myself. Like I might have a couple of ideas based on things I've seen them do. But they're they are they're the teacher here and they should really be the teacher wherever they are in their preschool lives. Right. I mean, we should be watching them. We should be observing them, learning from them. But definitely when we are noticing there are some things will always be some things within a classroom of children that you're going to notice that they need a little extra support, they need a little something that I can provide or they do need an outside resource. Those are things that we can provide for them. Right. But children should be leading us.

Dr. Fletcher:

I agree.

Janna:

We should be paying attention

Hannah:

And our dollars should be following them.

Janna:

Yes.

Hannah:

Preschool teachers should be earning a lot more money.

Janna:

And the rights of children, I mean, they don't they don't have rights, um, particularly in the United States. They don't. And so that's a big problem. We should care an awful lot about that. That should be something that is a very high priority for us is children's rights. We don't talk about it. I think it's just assumed that there, there are young people that need us to do everything for them and make all the decisions. And while that's appropriate in some respects, they should be a lot more involved in all in in their life. Right.

Dr. Fletcher:

Because they're people.

Janna:

Because they're people. Yes. Children should be leading as we should be paying attention to that. They should be valued and and definitely seen as as Charlene, as you point out earlier, just as capable, capable to do anything. That's what we say here. And that's the way we look at our children here in our school, is that they can they can really do anything. And if they're not ready yet, they're not ready yet.

Dr. Fletcher:

They will be.

Janna:

They will be. Yeah. But because we have we have that confidence in them. Right. And we get the privilege of watching that grow in them over the time that they're here. And so because we're not focused on a specific curriculum, we're not focused on a set of standards or things that someone else has told us that these are things that children under the age of five should be able to do by this point in time, which is kind of ridiculous anyway. We're able to really watch and see the growth that's actually happening right in front of our faces every single day. And it's it comes to us in a million different ways. So.

Dr. Fletcher:

And the same holds true for older children.

Janna:

Absolutely.

Dr. Fletcher:

You don't learn compassion and empathy from the Istep test.

Janna:

No. Oh goodness

Dr. Fletcher:

And filling in bubbles on standardized tests. You also don't learn critical thinking and how to analyze things. You're being taught to take a test. And that that's I mean, I don't know. We wonder why adults don't have or often pushed that empathy and that critical thinking off to the side where we're taught to. The older you get, the more you're taught to push it to the side which is unfortunate.

Hannah:

That's making me emotional as well hearing us talk about this. But I'm thinking and I didn't think that when I first read it, but I think investing in parents as well because these children who are spending 55 hours per week in front of the TV set are there because the adults in their lives are being so pushed by external factors to be making money and doing all these things that they were missing, all of those experiences with their kids. The childhood you were talking about having Janna. Um, in an ideal world, those children would have been in the park with their moms and dads.

Janna:
Right.

Hannah:
But they weren't able to be. And that's, that's actually really sad.

Dr. Fletcher:
It's the American dream.

Janna:
Oh, oh, boy. That's another podcast.

Dr. Fletcher:
That's another podcast.

Hannah:
That's a whole other podcast.

Janna:
But that is so true and how connected all of that is, right? I mean, absolutely. Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:
But in some cases, Sesame Street did lead to those moments I remember watching Don't Eat the Pictures. It was a Sesame Street movie, and I had to be six or seven, probably six first, second grade. And my grandmother was in the kitchen and I'm watching Don't Eat the pictures. So everybody on Sesame Street goes to the Metropolitan Museum of Art because they live in New York and and Snuffy and Big Bird didn't follow instructions. They had to meet up front and they missed the the the thing. And they got locked in the museum overnight. And so they meet this little Egyptian boy, ancient Egyptian boy that comes to life at night. And he has to find his way to a particular part of the exhibit so that he can have his heart weighed against the feather Mayet, so that he can be in the afterlife with his parents. And in this movie, once his heart is lighter than the feather, he becomes a star because his parents are stars. And so I remember asking, I remember watching this and I'm so involved in this. I'm six years old. I'm crying. Big Bird and Snuffy are emotional as well because he does become a star. So I go in the kitchen Granny, did the ancient Egyptians really believe this? And she's looking at me like, what is this child watching? Sesame Street but she told me, she said, I don't know, but we can find out. And so the next day, we went to a local black book store in town and she bought everything she could about ancient Egypt. Half of it was not for children. Well, these were adult books.

Hannah:
Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:
But she read them to me. She read them with me so that we could find the answers to the to the question.

Hannah:
Yeah

Dr. Fletcher:

That's one of the reasons why I'm a historian is because of that moment. But for some, for in some occasions, that was the outcome. If there was something on Sesame Street that sparked enough curiosity Mom, Dad, what about this? Well, I don't know. Let's go find out. So it's it's possible. It's possible.

Janna:

Mm. Yeah. I mean, you had an adult in your life that.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes.

Janna:

Was listening to what you said and you trusted right. You know, you can go out and ask that question. And she was paying attention to your question

Dr. Fletcher:

Exactly

Janna:

and had enough courage to say, I don't know, instead of just dismissing it, like, you know, what is this stuff?

Dr. Fletcher:

Its TV.

Janna:

Yeah, right. She she knew this was a moment, right where she needed it because you can learn about this together.

Dr. Fletcher:

Exactly. Exactly. And that's what we did.

Janna:

Powerful.

Hannah:

Thank you, Sesame Street.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes.

Janna:

Yeah.

Hannah:

And Grandma

Dr. Fletcher:
Big Bird is the boo.

Janna:
You well, because it was it was like one new episode a week. Is that kind of how it went? Or I mean, it was a new one every day or how did that how did that run?

Dr. Fletcher:
Now, that's something I don't know how frequent. I mean, every day you watch it, it's a different episode. But how did they what was like the production schedule?

Janna:
Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:
That's a good question. I don't know.

Sara:
I know that at the beginning, Jim Henson's productions would tape their bits and then according to their very busy schedule and then send those in, those can be set in between but once they add live puppeteers and puppets on set. I'm not sure how that changed.

Dr. Fletcher:
Okay. Yeah, I don't know.

Janna:
Is okay. So how connected, I guess is Sesame Street and Muppets are? Because I did watch Muppets.

Dr. Fletcher:
Yes.

Janna:
Okay. So they're like, it's the same Jim Henson, right?

Dr. Fletcher:
Jim Henson is.

Janna:
He created both?

Dr. Fletcher:
He's the father of the Muppets. He's not the father of Sesame Street. He didn't create Sesame Street, but his Muppets became the vehicle through which Sesame Street became all that did.

Janna:
Yeah

Dr. Fletcher:

But yeah. So Muppets, Muppet Babies. I watched The Muppet Show with the two Grumpy.

Janna:

Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:

They were my favorites. Statler and Waldorf. I think that's their names.

Janna:

And the Who's the Swedish Chef?

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes. I loved him.

Janna:

who's oh Animal. Animal. Was Sesame Street right? Or was he?

Dr. Fletcher:

He was a Muppet. He was on the Muppet Show.

Janna:

Oh Muppets.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah.

Janna:

That's the I that's where most of my memories of that come from. I think I make that connection with Sesame Street a lot because of when they did introduce that to. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Fletcher:

I remember watching The Muppet Show every morning when my mother would braid my hair and then Sesame Street would be on later. She would comb I here before she'd go to work and The Muppet Show would be on. And The Fraggles, I used to love Fraggie Rock.

Janna:

Fraggle Rock!

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes. That was my other show.

Hannah:

I've never thought about this, but it was really interesting to me why the Muppets must have been in the UK because my mum talks all the time about the Muppets and my aunt like my aunt loves Animal.

Sara:

They were filmed London.

Janna:

so I guess the Muppets from British TV too.

Hannah:

But Sesame Street was not. And it's really interesting. That's so interesting, because my granddad dressed up as one of the old men one year.

Dr. Fletcher:

Oh, that is hilarious.

Janna:

Those grumpy old man.

Dr. Fletcher:

But why do we even come here? I really do not know. Okay, sorry.

Sara:

Also a little tidbit, little children, big challenges incarceration was the the multi episode program where Alex The Muppet debuted.

Dr. Fletcher:

Okay.

Sara:

And so this was pushed originally the ten pilot states for this for quote, deep dissemination of parental incarceration materials. One of the states was Wisconsin the report I'm reading. The Wisconsin department of corrections use the materials in their visiting rooms for children and their caregivers for some of the group their groups of incarcerated individuals. So these were played directly in situations where children would already be interacting with that topic and show a Muppet character going through the exact same thing. It's notable that he's not an animal based muppet. He's a human based muppet.

Dr. Fletcher:

Okay.

Sara:

Like Burt and Ernie.

Dr. Fletcher:

Mm hmm.

Sara:

And that he's talking directly about the big feelings and all of the struggles he has with it and big challenges that come out of that situation and how he deals with that. I'm not sure if it ever aired as a Sesame Street episode. It's just those programing bits. But that's

Dr. Fletcher:

Okay.

Sara:

All I can find reliable sources.

Dr. Fletcher:

Okay. Gotcha.

Sara:

Yeah at least the fan wiki.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah, well, I know that they also had and I don't know what happened with this one either, but I remember people being upset about it. There was a Muppet that had been diagnosed with HIV on Sesame. It was a Sesame Street character that had been diagnosed with HIV. But I don't know the same situation. If that particular Muppet

Sara:

That I believe aired the publicly.

Dr. Fletcher:

It did? Okay.

Hannah:

When I was reading about it before, I didn't put the resource down here. One thing that really interested me was that actually because Sesame Street has international versions, there are versions and loads of countries The coolest one I read about was it's called Alan Simpson, and it was created in the Middle East to help refugee children who don't have access to the education systems that they would have had access to in their home countries. I thought that was really cool. But there's a South African version, and it was saying that the HIV positive Muppet was originally created for the South African version. Yeah.

Sara:

AAMI for the South African Sesame Street. 2002 was her debut

Hannah:

Then, I guess she was brought into due to popularity for how to tell that story and engage with audiences. I believe that's when she was brought into the US

Dr. Fletcher:

Interesting

Hannah:

in Sesame Street. So I thought that was really cool.

Dr. Fletcher:

Interesting.

Hannah:

Different countries impacting the choices. I think that takes us really nicely into kind of the modern day.

Easton:

Asking this to anyone who wants to answer: As someone who has well, I guess we can't answer, but as people who have lived through this process of the gentrification of Sesame Street, is it safe to say the lessons that the show teaches have changed over the years?

Hannah:

And you want to speak any to how the street has changed as well?

Dr. Fletcher:

Well, considering that I'm 40 some odd years old and I haven't diligently watched Sesame Street in quite some time. When my little person watched it, I don't think that the lessons were different. I think that they were modified to address current issues, hence a Muppet with incarcerated parents, a Muppet living with HIV. I think that Sesame Street has a interesting way and an effective way of addressing topics, sensitive topics. In during the pandemic, there was a Sesame Street, maybe CNN partnership, where they created an entire one hour program on how to talk to children about George Floyd. And I remember sitting with my little person and watching that. She had, of course, were living in the Panini, the pandemic and I remember her asking me just, you know, just sitting there watching CNN and watching these protests and understanding who George Floyd is. And she looked at me and she for a while didn't say anything, but she looked at me and said, Mommy, why do they want to kill us? I didn't know how to respond to that. And so, obviously, I'm not the only parent in America who has to address questions like that. Among, you know, little people. And so Sesame Street did this thing with CNN and the CNN anchors and you saw, what is that man's name? Don Lemon talking to Elmo. And, you know, what does this mean? And so I don't think that the lessons have changed. I think that Sesame Street is still a conduit for addressing tough conversations with little one and not necessarily preschool age, because she wasn't in preschool when she watched this. But hearing that seeing these interactions helps and also helped me to have a conversation with her right. I think the gentrification of Sesame Street is the fact that is on HBO and is no longer that was the thing anybody could watch Sesame Street because it was on PBS. When we talk about being funded by the federal government in its early days, it was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. That's that's what PBS that's who houses are, PBS stations. But you don't need cable. You don't need or you didn't need cable. You didn't need anything else to access Sesame Street. Now, Sesame Street, new episodes of Sesame Street are effectively behind a paywall, full episodes are effectively behind a paywall. And granted you can go watch them on YouTube, you know, older versions or like the clip that I sent you of Roosevelt Franklin, you can see that on YouTube. But again, for some folks, Internet is a luxury. Or if you don't have reliable Internet that may not be accessible. So I would say the gentrification is the fact that it's behind a paywall and no longer accessible to just anymore.

Easton:

HBO has now made it so it it is on HBO, Max, for like primary access. Now, it does still come on

PBS but PBS doesn't own anything anymore. And it also is months after the fact. So if your friends have HBO, they see the new Elmo's World immediately whenever they want. But if you don't, then you have to wait months. And there, of course, is this whole thing of like, you know, now that things are on social media and the whole spoilers and all that, I mean, I don't know if Sesame Street now, it now has like more like continuity and stuff like that. So it's not like a Marvel movie, like, you know, so but like, you know, if something important does happen, you know, there's definitely now a thing of like where did you see Sesame Street? Did you see it on HBO or did you see it on PBS? And I can just kind of unfortunately see that turning into something that Sesame Street never really should have been.

Hannah:

I think that..

Easton:

Sesame Street is Sesame Street.

Janna:

That's so interesting to me, though, because that was something that really got brought to light. I felt like a lot during the pandemic was. The, the children that have either no Internet access or unreliable Internet access. Right.

Dr. Fletcher:

Right.

Janna:

So the assumption is they're that, well, everyone has

Dr. Fletcher:

something

Janna:

something, you know. I do.

Dr. Fletcher:

Mhm.

Janna:

That's

Dr. Fletcher:

And that's not the case.

Hannah:

Where my husband grew up and he's only from 2 hours south of here, two and a half hours south of here out in the country, they were all driving to the school parking lot to access wifi. They were sitting in any weather and they had vehicles. Those were the kids that were lucky to have vehicles to get to the school. But there just is not internet. No one is supplying it. It's incredibly expensive. Like it's a very real, it's a very real problem.

Dr. Fletcher:

And you saw government programs I mean I can log into my AT&T account and the banners are always there. You could qualify for assistance, you know, if you need assistance. But that wasn't you didn't see that as frequently until we were faced with a global pandemic and no one could leave the house. So, okay, what's in the house? Who does not have access? And so we don't think these things through our government certainly doesn't think these things through. And what does that mean? What educational opportunities do you not have access to, whether it's quality or whether it's, you know, mediocre whatever you're getting in a in a in a school system, we don't. Not everybody has access to this.

Janna:

Who, who is it for?

Dr. Fletcher:

There you go. Mama J. Exactly

Janna:

Who is it for?

Dr. Fletcher:

Exactly.

Janna:

If you're going to shift it all over to HBO, it's not for everyone.

Dr. Fletcher:

It's not for everyone. Not anymore.

Hannah:

And it's it's losing its soul. It's this endless commercialization. Right. And like, I'm feel like I'm going to sound like I'm on my soapbox here. But it horrified me when we were talking about ownership and trying to figure out who the heck owns Sesame Street

Dr. Fletcher:

Sesame Street.

Hannah:

Which was shockingly hard to parse out and like, there are 1001 problems with the BBC. I can do my whole own podcast on that. I will sit here and on the bridge Broadcasting Company's issues all day long. But I was floored as someone who grew up with the BBC, who has complete ownership of their product and the people feel like they own that product, it's the people's television. That PBS doesn't. And never really has actually had ownership over, and yet public money was going into this like that just like stirs up the fire in my soul. That like everybody's money was going into the. So why the heck don't the people own it?

Dr. Fletcher:

Made in part by viewers like you.

Hannah:

But we don't own it.

Janna and Dr. Fletcher:

But we don't own it.

Hannah:

What the?

Dr. Fletcher:

And one of the things that I did read, there are so many episodes that Sesame Workshop could come could complete outside of this capitalist model, but with being owned by Warner and HBO Max, they could double or triple. So you have more content. But again, that's just more content that people don't have access to unless they have the resources.

Hannah:

And why do you own more content? Sell more advertising, like

Dr. Fletcher:

Exactly

Hannah:

Why.

Janna:

What happens, though, to when you have more and more and more content? I quality starts to go down and maybe, I don't know. I guess I guess that's to be determined. But will Sesame Street still be as willing to or will whoever it is that does on Sesame Street be willing to let them really dive into some of these issues, topics, things that they have in the past that they really were really the only ones willing to do and only one way at least so early on, too.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yup.

Hannah:

I would argue that kids don't care either as well at the amount of shows I have rewatched clips of on YouTube as a child and not even I never knew there were only 12 episodes ever made. Children don't know if they're rewatching episodes of Sesame Street and they don't care

Dr. Fletcher:

they don't care.

Hannah:

So that's not serving the kids.

Dr. Fletcher:

I never care. There was another. But the same holds true for you mentioned BBC programming. At

the same time Sesame Street was running. There was a show on Nickelodeon called Pinwheel and it was Canadian. And it was the Canadian answer to Sesame Street. They had puppets and and that's how I first met Simon in the land of chalk drawings. I do you know what I'm talking about?

Oh, my God. I loved that. And Paddington Bear

Hannah:

oh, yes

Janna:

Yes, I'm a Paddington Bear fan.

Dr. Fletcher:

OMG. But you could watch Pinwheel over and over and over again. And there were times where it's like, okay, I've seen this episode of Simon. I know what happens in this. Who cares? Who cares? The music was awesome. I was just intrigued by the British accent at six years old. Like, Why do they sound like that? It sounds so cool, but no one cared.

Hannah:

I'll give you a hilarious example. One of my favorite shows as a child was Dragon Tales, and I didn't learn till I was 20 years old. The original Dragon Tales was not in Welsh because they only showed it during the Welsh language programming hour. So I used to watch the whole Dragon Tales and Welsh, and I didn't know I. I didn't care. I loved it.

Janna:

Right.

Easton:

Dragon on the flag. The Dragon Tales.

Hannah:

It was the language I didn't speak, didn't matter, but I loved it.

Dr. Fletcher:

But more content gives you more. More things to commodify more things to put behind paywall, more things to restrict access to. And that's sad.

Sara:

And like TV standards, there's certain numbers of episodes you hit for syndication for rerun. It also means further profit from subsidiaries and like Yeah. Residuals and stuff.

Janna:

Ew.

Dr. Fletcher:

Its just gross.

Sara:

It's. Yeah,

Hannah:

yeah it's gross.

Dr. Fletcher:

It's gross. That's just gross.

Hannah:

That is something about American TV that always interested me. Y'all always had 22 or 23 episodes. We always had like seven or eight and that's what I think. I mean, as well as I like it never mattered, but like that was very normal and still is with the BBC because I do think, and because it's public money in a lot of ways they valued quality over quantity and so you would often have these teeny tiny short seasons.

Dr. Fletcher:

I wonder if that's the same with other PBS shows specifically from the eighties because there used to be three two one contact. It was a sci. I loved that show and the intro music was a bop. Okay! Google it, it was a bop, right? Anyway, it was like, Oh, anyway, so there were times you knew that you were watching reruns, right? wAnd the same way there was a math show called Square One Television, and then they had little shorts within them. Three two one contact. That's where Degrassi Junior High first appeared, the Bloodhound Gang, things like that. Math net they were like math detectives. It was, you know, it was the eighties, but after a while, though, started to recycle, but then, you know, before you knew it all of those shows were were gone. And I wonder if that's one of the things that fueled that.

Hannah:

So we wanted to end on a note where we get to all talk about our favorite puppets. So I think since Janna has real experiences with the Muppets, let's say our favorite Sesame Street and or Muppet characters, and we were going to do it as children versus as adults, we thought that could be kind of fun. What was your favorite as a little kid and where are you at today? Are you still scared of Big Bird?

Janna:

Still not. Still not my favorite and might also be that yellow is not my favorite either. I don't know, I, I don't know. I don't know. I'm going to have to dig a little deeper into this big bird thing like why do I really I really not connect with Big Bird, but because he is fluffy.

Dr. Fletcher:

He is!

Janna:

I did like that. But I like how his feathers moved on his body, you know? But yeah. All right. You want me to go? Yeah. Okay, so who was my favorite as a child? And then an adult Oh, wow. Okay. I think that as a child, honestly, like, that Swedish chef was one of my so goofy. I had no idea what he was saying. And I don't know. But then as an adult Animal is definitely my favorite.

Just. He's crazy, right? And just totally lets loose, and he's just like, you know, I don't know. He is who he is, so. Yeah.

Hannah:

I was saying to Easton, I feel like by default, I have to choose Elmo because as a child, he was the only one I knew. So I feel like on the periphery as I grew up, I got aware of other ones. Like, I remember seeing Bert and Ernie on Friends because my dad always watched Friends and they had Bert and Ernie and an episode of Friends, and I remember seeing them there. I think that's probably how I was introduced to Bert and Ernie. And I did visit over here and we used to watch snippets of TV, but I remember like seeing Boy Meets World for the first time over here, like early morning programming. But I was always here two weeks in the summer, so it would just depend whatever was on and my grandparents lived in the middle of nowhere and got no television signal. So it would depend. So I don't remember Sesame Street here. As an adult. Who did I say when we were talking earlier, who did I choose? I'm now trying to remember.

Easton:

Was a Cookie Monster.

Hannah:

Probably Cookie Monster. I do love him cause I love cookies. And I like our soul. And I love the color blue. Our souls connect. Now I want Cookies.

Easton:

I do love Cookie Monster. For me. I said when I was a kid, I always really, really I like Big Bird because he his voice was always so soothing. It made me feel very warm and safe and all that stuff. So I was a huge Big Bird fan. But like, now that I'm older, I have to say, I mean, I appreciate them all because they all added something. They all taught us something. And I think that's why I hate Caillou so much is because Caillou didn't really teach us anything.

Dr. Fletcher:

Nothing.

Easton:

And so to be completely honest,

Hannah:

He was whinny

Dr. Fletcher:

He is.

Easton:

All he did was whine and be

Dr. Fletcher:

Entitled

Easton:

Throw tantrums. And, you know, but you know, who never whine and threw tantrums except when he did was Elmo because Elmo became my favorite, because there's this whole revisit I've done to Sesame Street and his beef with that dang rock. Rocco, his cousin Zoe is always his cousin, right?

Dr. Fletcher:

I don't know

Easton:

Zoe. They have some kind of relationship, but Zoe has that pet rock that's like her half pet, half imaginary friend. And, like, him and, ah, him and Rocco have had beefs since, like, the early days where, like, Elmo wants a cookie, there's only one cookie left. That's the flavor that Elmo wants. Rocco wants that cookie. So. So she's like, what's that? Well, Elmo. No, you can't have that cookie. Rocco wants that cookie. And Elmo just. That's the first time I ever remember seeing Elmo lose his mind. Because he was just like, Zoe. How's Rocco going to eat this cookie? Rocco is a rock. He doesn't have a mouth. Rocco's not alive. And so this whole thing where, I mean, YouTube, like Elmo just having Rocco problems, it's like it's it's just ten straight minutes of him just completely losing his mind. I mean, I could go on and on. I mean,

Dr. Fletcher:

I would, too. She's wasting food.

Easton:

I mean, and

Dr. Fletcher:

I'm sorry,

Easton:

It's a Rock. And I also didn't really like the way they always pushed it as if it was, like, Elmo's fault, because they would always be like, Elmo, you need to support this person because they have an imaginary friend. But also, it's like you get the feeling that Zoe's doing it on purpose.

Janna:

Yeah, that's to say the cookies for Zoe.

Easton:

Oh, Zoe's his best friend. Okay.

Hannah:

But then Rocco is Zoe's best friend, so it's like a whole friendship triangle.

Sara:

Oh and Abby is in there, but we don't need to get into that.

Dr. Fletcher:

Oh, see that's, that my Sesame Street days.

Sara:

That's my Sesame street days and we don't have to go there.

Easton:

Well, Auntie, uh, I know who you're going to say.

Dr. Fletcher:

You know, my soulmate is Oscar the Grouch. Because that's just my attitude. Just leave me alone. But when I was. When I was little, Grover was my favorite. I think it's because Grover was meant to be a toddler, and he would he would sing songs that really tapped into empathy and that just pulled at my little heartstrings between him and the count. I loved the count. I don't know why. I just giggled when he One! Ah ah ah. That was hilarious to me as a child, but I loved Oscar then Oscar's my boo, and Oscar will always be my boo.

Hannah:

Thank you, guys so much.

Easton:

Yeah. I feel like we could talk for hours but we got to call it some time.

Dr. Fletcher:

And it's cold in here.

Easton:

Thank you, Mama J and my dear Auntie Charlene for coming in here and talking with us about the best parts of our childhood.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yay!

Easton:

I'm still mad at that rock. You know how how quickly I would have thrown Rocco in the ocean?

Dr. Fletcher:

You know, I'm upset for Elmo. I think we should get Elmo some cookies.

Easton:

Yeah, we should get Elmo some cookies.

Hannah:

Some therapy.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yeah

Janna:

It sounds like Zoe needs to bake Elmo some cookies.

Dr. Fletcher:

Yes!

Janna:

I think. I think it's a Zoe.

Dr. Fletcher:

I bet she went back and ate the cookie. That's just mean.

Sara:

And it's the last oatmeal raisin. And that's his favorite

Dr. Fletcher:

And it's a healthy cookie?

Sara:

And not only that, but Elmo wanted to switch the cookie.

Easton:

So Rocco still gets a cookie.

Sara:

He wanted to switch, but Rocco gets that one.

Janna:

Oh, yeah. This is all Zoe.

Sara:

Just being mean.

Dr. Fletcher:

That's just disrespectful.

Hannah:

Troublemaker.

Dr. Fletcher:

We. Well, well, I tell you who I don't like, so I don't like Zoe I don't like Rocco either.

Hannah:

It's now hitting me in all of my emotions that this is our last episode for the year.

Easton:

Yeah, it's been a it's been a ride. We've been all over it, all over the property it feels like. Tackling problematic history, but there's no one else I'd want sitting next to me then, then Hannah

Everyone:

Awe

Hannah:

There is no one I'd want to be sitting next to me other than you too. There I go injuring you while I give you a hug. We thank you all so much.

Ryan:

Sorry that was nonsense

Easton:

Sorry, Let's do it again. But there is no one I'd rather have next to me than Hannah.

Hannah:

And there's no one I'd rather have next to me than you either everywhere on the property. And in between. Thank you guys so much for taking this journey with us as we've learned the art of podcasting. We can't wait to join you all for season two. Which should be premiering sometime mid-next year.

Easton:

But until then, you can find us wherever you get your podcast. That's Apple Podcasts, Spotify, the Conner Prairie website.

Hannah:

Yeah, or really any other hosting software. Let us know if you guys have thoughts and ideas as always, on our Instagram and Twitter Instagram as this is problematicPodcastone and Twitter is problematicPodtwo

Easton:

until next season.

Hannah:

Bye.

Dr. Fletcher:

Naw, I'm so proud of you