

Sarah Taylor:

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Sarah Taylor:

Hello, and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out the lands on which we have created this podcast, and that many of you may be listening to us from, are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met, and interacted. We honor, respect, and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions, and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Sarah Taylor:

Today's episode is the online master series that took place on August 18th, 2020 in conversation with Sonia Godding-Togobo. Sonia is a film and television editor to know. Her rise in the industry is nothing short of prolific. After 20 years, she's acquired an assortment of credits, including editing television programs for the Oprah Winfrey network, Channel 4, the Discovery Channel, HGTV and BBC. In this episode, we discuss the award-winning CBC POV documentary Mr. Jane and Finch, a portrait of a long-standing community activist, and amateur documentarian, Winston LaRose .

Sarah Taylor:

This talk was moderated by Sedina Fiati, a performer, producer, creator and activist for stage and screen. She yields a BFA in music theater from the University of Windsor. Sedina is was very active in the Toronto media art scene, advocating for increased representation of people of color, LGBTQ+, deaf and disabled artists on camera and in all creative and crew roles.

[show open]

Sedina Fiati:

Welcome everybody. Sonia, tell us right off the top, Mr. Jane and Finch won a CSA. This is amazing. Like what, a Canadian Screen award. This is a year for black people. I mean every year is a year for black people to see this film when speaks so much to this moment and what you need to know. Just to start back, tell us how you became an editor. Why were you attracted to it?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Okay. I kind of became an editor officially, I think in 2003, but I wanted to become an editor when I was in film school, I went to Humber. And while I was there, it was clear that everyone wanted to produce, everyone wanted to direct, which I liked those departments and those crafts, but I was , "Well, first of all, if we leave this place and everyone wants to direct and produce, none of us are going to be doing that. So none of us are going to be working in that field." And I quickly learned that editing is where the magic happened. When I would work on my film projects, I quickly learned that editing is where it actually happens. You don't have a film until it's edited.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And so for me, it was while I was in school, I was just if I can master this craft, then I can really learn the art of storytelling via editing. And so, yeah, I quickly was attracted to editing while at school and everyone would give me their projects. I was dating somebody at the time who was like, "Oh, you're a really good editor." So my friends wanted to direct they would send me their projects and I would edit their projects. And I liked the isolation of it. I liked the fact that I was left alone to just create something that blew people's minds. My goal was always to sort of enhance directors visions or producers visions.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I always wanted to create something that felt magical and better than their own expectations. So out of film school, my first gig was with a post house called Post Producers Digital. I learned to assisting editing there. And from there quickly moved around the city. I worked in animation, I was working as an assistant editor. At that time we were hooking up decks, right? Instead of knowing codecs and all that, that assistants have to know now I was literally physically hooking up super beta decks and digital beta decks.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I mean, I'm sure there's some young people in here that don't even know what that means. Really showing my age, but it's cool. So yeah, I really learned the chops of assisting editing, and I was always lucky enough to work with folks who let me edit stuff while I was assisting in editing. And so I remember the first film that I worked on was for my mentor, Alison Duke. She worked on a film called Deathly Silence for the CBC. I literally was working at Nelvana at that time. So I would go to Nelvana and I would assist to edit there and then I'd go and work on Alison's film afterwards. That's when I fell in love with documentary and I knew I wanted to work in documentary as an editor and director. And so the rest is history.

Sedina Fiati:

Amazing. Okay. What was the name of the production house you worked at as assistant editor?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Post Producers Digital, which it does not exist anymore.

Sedina Fiati:

Which is what I thought.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I mean, there's still post houses, of course, but there was tons of posts houses at that time. There was so many of them because commercials were big in the city at the time and obviously series where the big King street was the Mecca for post houses. So we had tons of them on and off King and queen street at the time. And so I gained ground at Post Producers digital.

Sedina Fiati:

So further question to that, you just marked such an important moment in film and television. In that move from analog to digital. And what were the big differences? Because I know now you can edit from home quite easily without needing thousands and thousands of dollars of equipment and the freedom that gives people. I'm so interested, and even just going from all of that to now, everyone can edit not as well as professionals, mind you, not at all, but everyone is learning that craft. I even feel like 10 year olds are learning it.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

My daughter doing TikTok videos. Right?

Sedina Fiati:

Right? Yeah.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

It's literally an editing app for sure. Absolutely.

Sedina Fiati:

Totally. Yeah. Tell me about that trajectory and that was for you moving from this analog world to this digital world where things are a lot different. And even then needing to go in editing studios. You don't even need to do that as much anymore. So yeah. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

One of the things that I keep telling folks timing is everything and I was at the right place at the right time in terms of where I was in my career and also where I was physically, right? So I was at a place called Nelvana, like I mentioned, and they literally just started going through the transition. And so they were editing on avid and they had to get a dongle and they had these big part drive systems that you had to buy. They were hundreds of thousands of dollars and the editors there were used to working on avid and suddenly this thing called Final Cut Pro came out. Final Cut Pro also with those first digital cameras, which I'm going to butcher because my memory. I think it was the Panasonic camera. I can't remember which one it was, but there was a Panasonic camera that everybody started using and it was still tape at the time, but it had that look.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And so after that period they went to DSLR. And I think Final Cut Pro was really what made the digital era along with Canon and Panasonic and Sony sort of come to where we are now. Instead of using these big cameras with these big tapes, it just, everything started becoming smaller. And then the editing software became more comprehensible in terms of being able to digitize this footage and use this footage. And in a way that was more comprehensible, right? And you didn't need a dongle, you could edit from your laptop. I remember the day, literally one of the editors who I was assisting for say, "Wow, I can edit on my laptop. I can edit my pitch down." He was so ecstatic about that, right? And so that shift changed a lot. It changed the industry hugely. As an editor it allowed you to access more genres, right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

For me anyway, I was at the time, like I said, working in animation, but I was really into drama and I was really into short films. And so my friends, because of the medium changing they had access to these cameras. So they were like, "Oh, we need someone to edit it. Sonia edits. Let me send her my stuff." And why that was good is that I was able to practice the craft, learning the craft, and then also just develop a little demo reel. And so would I be here if the digital era didn't happen? Who knows? Right? I know that it allowed me access and it enabled me to be able to afford to be in this medium. Let's keep it real. Right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I remember buying my first Mac and being able to install Final Cut and work my friend's music videos from home. Right? Opposed to having to be hired by somebody else to do that.

Sedina Fiati:

Another followup question to that though, do you feel there's a sense of community that was a little lost from having to physically leave your house and go places? You know what I mean? As opposed to you could edit it in your pajamas, as you said, it's now become an even more solitary art form?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Right? That's a good question. I think even at that time, everybody was still especially is expected to be in the office at work. Right? So you could edit from your Pj's, people weren't. Even now I think literally it's because of COVID that we'll see a big shift in terms of editing from home. But prior to that last year, I was in edit suites all the time. All the time. It was more independents that I would edit from home. But most production companies, they want you in office because of that face-to-face collaboration, which is a crucial part to editing when you're working with somebody directly. Even right now I'm working on a project and I have my junior editor here because it's much easier to collaborate face to face than it is via virtually. Right? So I think there's something to being sad about being in isolation and working from home. But I still think it's much more efficient to work Face-To-Face. I say that and everyone going to look at me like, "No, don't say that. I work from home."

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Well I do too. There's something about, I think that face to face collaboration that you can't replicate virtually. I'll say it. I'm sorry. I'm sorry y'all.

Sedina Fiati:

No, it's true though. It's true. It's that collaboration piece, right? That instead of writing a bunch of emails or a bunch of notes, or even chatting back and forth on this kind of chat. To see someone to hear them and understand what they're saying is way different. You know what I mean?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Listen, we can do 90% of our job here. My thing is, I think there's still should be space for seeing each other [inaudible 00:10:08]. I think we can do [inaudible 00:10:10] job. I'm not trying to be in the office for no reason y'all [crosstalk 00:10:13].

Sedina Fiati:

No, but when you do have that time, let it be valuable. You know what I mean? We're not meeting just for the sake of meeting. It's just, this is going to be valuable time for us to really dig deep into the work and we have done the preliminaries. So, okay. All right. Who are some editors that you look up to? Or even just overall mentors in the possibility models within the industry?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

The first editor who unofficially took me under their wing was this woman named Susan Maggi. She's old school. She cut a lot of Clement Virgos films, and we would have phone calls where she would just kind of let me ask her questions. I'd ask her about how do I move into the industry? What's it like? What kind of stuff should I start doing? And she was very generous with her time and very generous with her

advice. And she wasn't a possibility model. But let me be honest, I didn't have many because only black woman I knew who was editing.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I remember when I mentioned to another mentor, I said to her, I want to get into editing. And she was like, "Oh my God, you're the first black woman I've ever heard say that." Right? So do it, but just know that there's not many of you. So there's lots of folks that of course inspired me from an editing perspective but just to seeing somebody that looks like you, we all know how important that is. I didn't really have that. And so when I think about mentors, all my mentors, they came from other parts of the industry. Somebody like Alison Duke, who I mentioned earlier, the first black woman who let me work on a project directly, right? Who let me put my hands on her documentary film, A Deathly Silence.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

There were others but I was really inspired by a lot of American filmmakers. I was really inspired Kasi Lemmons, Spike Lee of course. Those are the big two that but I remember literally seeing Eve's Bayou. Oh, of course John Singleton, rest in peace with Poetic Justice. When I saw Poetic Justice, I was like, oh my God, I want to do this. I want to make these films. I want to be able to tell the stories that are important to me.

Sedina Fiati:

I have another question I was going to ask you later on but I'll ask you now and then maybe we'll show a clip. So how does your eye as a black woman affect the work that you do and how you edit, how you direct? Why is it important to have a black editor?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Right now? You just go it in. Okay.

Sedina Fiati:

I know there are so few black women, black people period, doing editing. I'm sure there's more now especially with a younger generation with more accessible technology, but still it's still just this is one of the overlooked positions that is actually so important. Why isn't it important to have the black women's eyes, especially if it's a black project?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Well, this is the thing, right? There's two ways to answer that question. The way that feels authentic to me is I can't separate myself from being a black woman, right? How I view the world. And so I think what I bring is a sense of compassion, a sense of storytelling that really lends to a certain level of uniqueness. And so I think in terms of my own personal sensibilities, I kind of came up through music television and worked much back in the day. So I know music sensibilities are a big part of the work that I do and the projects that I even am attracted to. But at the end of the day, storytelling is storytelling.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I do hear that. I don't only have to edit black projects, I love them because really rare, but that's an ingrained number one. And two, I think there's universal realities, right? There's universal themes that obviously crossover race, gender, class, sexuality, and for me is good storytelling is good storytelling. I

just think I bring myself to every project and I bring a lot of heart and compassion and honesty. I feel I bring a lot of honesty to my storytelling. So I hope that comes across in the work that I do.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. And it's interesting, you talking about your lens on storytelling, right? That is unique to you and give a project to different editors and they're all going to see different things. But it's important for me if I could have a black woman's eye I would want that. Even for a project that isn't necessarily about black people because I'm interested in that eye because that storytelling eye hasn't been given enough voice. Has not been given enough space. So we don't even know what that means. We're still deciding it. I think we have a lot of clues because I think as black storytellers, storytelling is actually in our DNA. It's an important part of who we are as people is to be able to tell stories, period.

Sedina Fiati:

And be able to tell engaging stories. Not even just stories, engaging stories. Because black people are just like, if you're boring I'm not going to listen to you.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Did you see that meme that came out a few weeks ago about black people?

Sedina Fiati:

Which one?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

It was about black storytelling. And it was like, when somebody says this person right here showed up. It was little points that we use to emphasize our stories. Mind you, when this is mind you, listen to this part right here. [laughter]. Yeah. I just thought it was really cute because there is definitely vernacular. And there's a way that we tell stories that I think. Yeah.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. I don't know if you remember this thread last year on Twitter, that was the black dissertation thread. It gave me life. I don't know if-

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

That was brilliant.

Sedina Fiati:

Wasn't it so good? What did someone say? It was such a great prompt on Twitter she just be like, "What is your real black dissertation?" And just the storytelling that came through. I'm going to be there in 10 minutes. Meditations on blackness and relationship time. They actually told so many stories just within a made up dissertation title. So in general black Twitter gives me life. But yeah. Okay. Speaking of your storytelling eye and such, tell us about Shella Record. I think this is such a cool project. When I read about it at hot docs, I just was like, what is this? This genre bending? Yeah.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So cool filmmaker approached me and actually I was [inaudible 00:16:04] again timing, right? I was coming out of a lot of reality, and if you know its cool, but I wanted to take from that. And [inaudible 00:16:13] time that I wanted to edit documentary because Flanagan who was the director of Shella Record approached me about this film. And he had gotten my contact, I think, he said from Leah Marin, which was pretty cool because I had never worked with Leah. We had the talk, I've met Chris on my vibed with Chris, I liked what he wanted to do. I think he said it early on in our conversations that he wanted a black woman or a woman of color to be on the project.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

He knew he was making a film about a Jamaican woman. And so I said, cool. Yeah. I like that fact that you had that awareness. Part of the intro, there's kind of two interests to this film, the second intro to Shella Record where it's really setting up Chris's mission, who he is as an artist. And with this, I think it was cool because we went back and forth on it a bit and we were structurally trying to figure out how the film was going to work. I always big up Chris, because he would come up with these ideas and I'd be like, "Okay, I'll try it." and then they would work. So. Yeah, I remember us talking about the intro and he's a really strong writer and he came up with this idea about linking the earlier opening or I think we did this part first. It was his sort of final section.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And so, yeah, this is a little bit about him and his love of music and the whole mission of the film. And I think we did it in maybe two minutes. I'll preface the second clip when Chris showed me a really loose assembly of his film, I don't even know if I told Chris this, but this part here is the part that I was like, "Oh my God, we have a film. This is magic." And so I love this second clip. A little change we tightened the scene or whatever, but I just love the organic-ness of the second clip.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. Where can we watch it?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Okay. So the timing is amazing because Shella Record actually has its premier television slot. Isn't that cool?

Sedina Fiati:

And then do you think it's going to be on Gem?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yes. It's going to be on Gem.

Sedina Fiati:

Amazing.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Amazing. Congrats to you Chris, once again, it's not easy to make an independent film and then get that acquisition afterwards so it's a big deal. I'm really happy that that happened because it's such a cool project.

Sedina Fiati:

A quick note about it. Tell us a little bit about this decision to use subtitles

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yeah, Chris and I went back and forth about it. I personally don't think we needed subtitles with the IDs, but I get it, for him his audience needed that. Right? My audience wouldn't need that.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So I get it. And you'll see in another film that we'll go to later, we purposely did not put subtitles on anyone who had accents. And so yeah, it's a decision that has to be made. And so, yeah, I mean, Chris felt he need the clarity. Listen, my patois isn't the greatest. So at the times.

Sedina Fiati:

True.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

But yeah, I mean that was a choice that Chris made.

Sedina Fiati:

You know what? It's so familiar to my ear. I know I'm not Jamaican but I've been around so many Jamaicans and my sister is Jamaican so it was so familiar but I hear you. Sometimes, especially some folks who are very immersed in Jamaican culture, the way that one of the gentlemen was, it's just, yeah, maybe it would make sense to have them on there.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Right, right, right, right. Right. Exactly.

Sedina Fiati:

And then this segues right into talking about Mr. Jane and Finch. But yeah, tell us how do you choose projects? What's important? I feel it at the beginning of your career, I'm sure you were just, for the most part, you had to say yes to a lot of things. And then now you're at the point where you're like, okay, what am I going to choose to do? And so how do you make those choices?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I don't think I'm quite there. I'm en route to that. There was a few things that since COVID happened, Black Lives Matter resurgence happened.

Sedina Fiati:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I got a lot of phone calls, which is interesting. But for me perspective is really important. What's the perspective and why is the perspective that? And so I'm really interested in people who have boundaries, I'm really interested in folks challenging stereotypes. I'm really interested in folks giving us something like with Mr. Jane and Finch. Jane and Finch, hello you had this stigma and one of the things that Ngardy was really big on was getting rid of that stigma and helping us dissect that stigma. And so I'm interested in things that kind of push the envelope truth be told. I'm really interested in illuminating a brilliance, the complexity of black folks. I am. So projects that have that I'm like yay, I'm in. And then obviously timing, right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I've gotta be available first of all. And it's got to feel relevant. And then also I think there's something about the collaboration process that I'm learning about. How important it is. We can't always know how well you'll collaborate with somebody, right? And so figuring that out, I've started to learn how to figure that out, right? Can we vibe? Can we work together? Is this something that we can collaborate well on? Because the collaboration process in post is everything. It really is. In these two projects I was really lucky. It wasn't to say that we agreed on everything, but we had a mutual respect whereby we could hear each other out when there were disagreements or different points of view.

Sedina Fiati:

Oh, very cool. Okay. Mr. Jane and Finch, let's talk about this. Another amazing project that you're part of. How did you come to be involved with it?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Alison who's the producer on the film, Ngardy, who's the director producer on the film and myself, we worked on [inaudible 00:21:15] films called The Akua Benjamin legacy project, which was about profiling and pioneering black activists and individuals. And so we worked on that project and we got on really well. Ngardy had me look at one of her films and it was brilliant. And I gave her a little bit of notes. At that time Ngardy just had a baby. So I know she was really busy and she was looking for someone to help her with the vision. It was such a good film in the end and [inaudible 00:21:44] reading process was pretty smooth. And so I think from there, she felt like [inaudible 00:21:49] Mr. Jane and Finch and it was a pleasure because I hadn't worked with Alison since maybe six or seven years prior to that.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And so working with her again was pretty smooth. It just felt really good. And so when they joined forces, Alison and Ngardy, and brought me in and it was like a trifecta. It was just really good to have three sort of strong women working together on a project. And we just had a nice synergy and I think it shows, I hope, in the project.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. What are we looking for in this film? And just tell us a little bit what it's about.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So, similar to Chris's film, I picked the introduction and you actually see some similarities. You'll see in the introduction of our main protagonist, who in this film is Winston LaRose. And he just kind of gives the bio in terms of who he is as an elder in our community. I just love everything about it because he's 80 and in this sequence, you see him running on a track, you see him doing a plank. It was mind blowing

when I saw that stuff. And so I felt really good starting the film with that footage because it set it up like this is not your average 80 year olds, right? This is not your average granddad.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So that was cool. And then you see him walking through the mall, which is where his community office was. And he's just got so much swag. He's just so cool. Well, I do love that opening sequence. Oh my God, the second clip it's heavy, but I picked that part because it's relevant. It's Mr. LaRose, Winston LaRose interviewing Mr. Ubowo, Isaac Ubowo. So whose son went through some traumatic stuff and who ends up dying? And so there's this really intimate conversation that's happening between the two of them. It's actually probably my favorite part of that film because when we think about activism, it's usually people protesting, aggressive, fist in the air.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And yeah, that's good, right? I think that's generally good for young people, but I feel like seeing Mr. LaRose in this role, it just really reminds us that activism can look different and how it evolves as you get older. Such a strong intimate conversation. And then it's just the history of police brutality in our community, right? It's implied. And some folks might see it as paranoia, but it's just such our lived experience. And I feel this clip really speaks to that.

Sedina Fiati:

Thank you for sharing. Yeah. That was such a beautiful film. And using Mr. Jane and Finch as an entry point for understanding a much maligned and misunderstood community, it was just brilliant. It still had so much hope personally. Personally I'm always looking for hope and joy. Well, we need the sorrow, we need what's difficult. I'm interested in black joy and I'm interested in black progression as well.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I'm so glad you said that Sedna because two things Patty was really clear about when we started this, she did not want to re-trigger, re traumatize, re stigmatize people from Jane and Finch and the community. Really clear about that. And so we were really clear about when we're choosing footage, how we chose footage and even at the end he lost, but we wanted to end it up on the up because you know what? Man, he's 80. So we just felt that piece around black joy, it's just so needed. And so that's important to me too.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. I'm so interested as to how the vision of the film evolves from this idea that you all had to this final product.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yeah. But as you know like in docs, right? It happens all the time because you really find the story in the edit. And so initially the film about a elder filmmaker who had been filming the black community in Toronto for close to 25, 30 years. And so initially Ngardy had wanted to really profile him as a, sort of an archivist documentarian. This man who had been documenting black Canada, literally, the greats in our community. And so while she was in development, he announced that he was going to run for city council. So I was like, okay. And so we were committed when we started the film to tell these stories alongside each other, but then it became clear that essentially we had to choose. And so we chose the

story of him running for city council, which was brilliant because it was such a momentous year with our city council.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So that was pretty cool because we also got to tell that story. Right? And so we did get his archive in the film, we got that little history section. I call it a philosophy section because we really understand Winston's headspace as to why activism is important to him. And so we got to see sort of his evolution as an archivist. And that's where we got to put his archive in the film. It was a little bit of the broadcaster, it was a little bit of, hey guys, choose one story here, and so that made it easier for us. When the broadcaster was like this is the story I want you guys to focus on.

Sedina Fiati:

How do you think just politically as well, Mr. Jane and Finch is a part of this moment of reckoning, uprising for black lives. And what a triumph for all of you to make this. We were like as black people, I feel we're ready. We've been ready, we done been ready. And for you to make this. Yeah. So what are you thinking of it in terms of sort of given the timeline, because so interesting your initial impetus was a film was to document his documentary, but then it just actually became about him. So just tell me about what is going through all y'all's minds, as you think about this moment that we're having and what the role that Mr. Jane and Finch plays within that?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I think it's crucial. I think if the timing is so crucial because, number one, I have not seen a story like this told about any black person in Canada ever. We don't get to see our elders on screen and we know what elders are in our community, but I don't think folks outside of the community really necessarily get that. And so for me it really gave window to this whole idea of eldership. And then again, like I said before, this idea about what activism looks, there's a very narrow perspective of what activism means. And I feel he just represents a more nuanced version, a different version that folks are not necessarily familiar with.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

There's people literally who sit down and just talk to folks who need help with reading their mail. There's a scene where he's reading an elderly woman's mail for her. What? Their scenes, where he's talking to parents whose kids need help. If that's not activism, I don't really know what is. And so I feel it serves of reminder that there's not one way to do things. It serves as a reminder that we need all of these multi-pronged approaches to solving problems. Yeah. That's what I love about the film, that's why I think it's timely. And I just have so much reverence for elders. There's so much to learn from them and so I just love the fact that we were able to give space to somebody who dedicated 30 years of his life to a community that he wasn't even from.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

He used to travel in from Hamilton every day to go be in that community because he was like this community needs help. It's been stigmatized and I'm going to help change the stigma. I don't know if that's not commitment. I don't know what is it? So I just find him so inspiring.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. You bring up such good points that your editors, I picked up on it, in terms of what is activism? And what people think it is versus what it actually is in practice.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sedina Fiati:

And I think immediately images come to your head about when you heard the word activism was marching in the streets, protesting writing letters, standing up the city council. You think about all those things, but from Mr. Jane and Finch, for Winston, it's also, as you said for you to capture those moments of tenderness, of caring, that is hugely a part of what the revolution is about. It isn't always about running for city council, which is great too, but what led him to that point was so many moments of caring. For those to be captured and then for you of course, to be able to draw that out in the storytelling, I think is so beautiful. And speaks to the eye that you have and the lens that you have on the work. So.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I want to give props to the producers and the director. It was a journey to get there. When the story got turned on its head, we had to turn ourselves in our heads and just kind of approach it differently. I always tell folks, there's always a point where you're like, what is this about? What is the film about? What are we doing here? And so it's part of the process. I always big up Ngardy because there was one point where we were in that and Ngardy was just like, no, we got to tell a little bit about who he is as a man and his motivations, because it's consistent. Why he's running for city council is the same reason why he documented black Canadians. It's about uplifting us. It's about us knowing who we really are. It's the same motivation. And so once we were able to connect those dots, it changed everything.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. That's amazing. Talk to me a little bit about that moment when you said, if they ask what is this about? And it's a really scary moment, right? There's from production to post, it's scary. Because in production everyone has a sense of what they're doing. You're like we're doing this thing, we have a thing and there's suddenly what are we doing again? Whoever directors, producers, everyone's like do we have faith in and what was done? That this is actually going to come together? And it could be, as you said, a scary and confusing moment. So what are some ways you navigate through that with folks who are, what's going on? I'm not sure.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yeah. You just got to breathe through. I literally repeat to myself, everything is, figureoutable. Literally those are the things that I say to myself. It's always coming back to the intention but then at the same time letting go of that. It's a weird dance that you do, right? Because footage tells the story. The footage tells the story, you just have to lean into it. I'm old school in that way. I'm willing to surrender to what the footage shows, right? You've got to be able to obviously craft it, but the footage of itself has its own story. And so leaning into that and finding that, I feel like that's really what my job is. And then being able to represent the audience in the edit suite in terms of clarity and emotional potency, that's what my job is.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

My job is to say, hey, yeah, this is what hits, this is what misses. Just leaning into the mess, leaning into it. It's okay. Honestly, that advice was given to me by some editors that I worked with years ago, it's a puzzle

and it's going to change and you're not going to know where you're going sometimes, but just lean into the processes and trust it.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. I feel like also as a producer, I'm now asking the editors to perform miracles. You're just, "Okay, I have a thing I'm unsure about what this is going to be, or I am sure." Which is rare. And then it's, "okay, work some magic here." And you know what else is magical? It is, it sounds so cheesy but it just is, does all these disparate parts and then you get first cut. Right? And you're like, "Oh, okay. Okay."

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And I also will say this too, right? The format helps, right? For us, we were part of a series of documentary films that has a particular format. And there's times where you fight the format. Right? There's times where you're just like, "Oh, this is the form." And there's times where you're grateful for the format.

Sedina Fiati:

Right.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Because it helps you make decisions, right? So I think that's, there's something about editing a television documentary versus editing a documentary for trickle release, right. They're different. And so I think just understanding the format is a big part of the decision-making too. I just cut something for a young filmmaker in the NFP. And first of all this film maker, her name is Olivia Combs, it's one of those places you see this talent you say, Oh my God, she's gonna blow up. She's just so talented. And it was really smooth. It was really smooth to the very end and Leah who was the executive producer on it was like, "Yep. See, it always happens, it always happens. The edit is smooth there's things like legal, you have to think about, right?"

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

This ability to be flexible and not rigid. I don't even know if I was born that way, but I definitely became that way as a result of being an editor, right? There's something about being flexible that I think lends itself to good storytelling. Or if you're okay with being flexible, I think that helps. I don't know, that's me. Some people may disagree with that, but I think that helps myself my storytelling.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah, sure. I hear you. As you said, everything is solvable. You know what I mean? Before it's just like, "No, we didn't get the sound, but we got something," You know what I mean? Something was messed up with the picture but okay. Okay. I hear you as a constant problem solving that you have to do creative to tell that story the way it should be told. And it also, I've always found that I always use challenges as opportunities. Are there opportunities to learn, opportunities to try something new, opportunity to be more creative. I always view them that way. So yeah. You were born flexible.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yoga. Yo, it's the yoga!

Sedina Fiati:

Okay. All right. Let's get to some questions. We've got a few here so Let's get to them. Okay. Any post houses you would recommend for an up and comer here in Toronto, specifically Urban Post.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Recommend for an up and comer. Okay. Urban Post. Yeah, Urban Post. Is that the post house we worked with Ngardy? I think that was where we worked. I can't remember. I'm not the one to answer that question because I work in post houses. And so I feel I shouldn't necessarily recommend one, but I would say, do your research, talk to the people that work there. If you can get your hands on one of the editors that worked there, because they'll give you the in. And more so than a post house find an editor that you like their work, you've seen their work, you've seen their credits or whatever, and find one that will be willing to mentor you and bring you in.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I don't know, someone correct me, but I feel the post house model is different now because there aren't that many and a lot of us are working as freelancers. And so if you can find an editor who's willing to sort of train you a bit and then recommend you out, I think that's a good look. A company that has a lot of shows that you can work your way up in is where you want to be. So somewhere like a CineFlix or Cream would be good. Oh yeah, media group, Hello, they've got a whole youth training program called pathways to industry and maybe that's something we need to look at in terms of assistant editing. I think that's a good idea actually, because that's a whole other beast. But I would say find an editor more so than a post house.

Sedina Fiati:

Well, that segues to another question about, as someone who is searching for a mentor, what steps did you find worked for you to find one that fit?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I think you ask around. You talk to people that you know and you network. I was pretty good at networking at a young age. Talk to people that you whose work you admire, if you can get in contact with them drop an email and drop a LinkedIn, but then that personal face-to-face, which is hard, obviously during COVID always helps too. When you go to those networking events, I feel like that's a good entry point. But then also I think just in terms of mentorship and you want to make sure that the person that whose work you like has the capacity to be a mentor because mentorship, that's a serious thing.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Somebody may be a very good editor, but they may not be a good mentor. Right? Or even have the capacity to mentor. Right? And so I think you just got to have an honest conversation about what your expectations are both ways and hope that it works out. I don't know, mentorship, I feel , it's like a dying thing. I don't know, maybe that's just me. There's people who've asked me to mentor them and I'm very particular because I've got to see that you're committed if I'm going to spend time mentoring somebody. And in the past, that was really hard. Seeing folks who had the commitment to the gig because editing is not an easy gig. Let me just say that. Editing is not easy. Right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And so it takes a certain amount of commitment and stick-to-it ness that I struggled to find in a lot of mentees. I found one, she's literally in the hallway right now and I'm going to work with her because I

see that she's got that. I think if you can prove that you're committed and you can prove that you're willing to learn most folks who have the capacity, we'll bring you in.

Sedina Fiati:

How was it working editing animation? What experience did you have with animation to know how to work with it?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Okay. So animation. So I was working for this company that was producing all the big animated shows. And so Nelvana then they did all these big animated series. It was cool because literally shows that I was grew up watching, they had produced. It is so different than what I thought. From an assistant editing perspective what you would do is you would edit together the drawings, the storyboards of stuff before it got animated. That was a lot of what I did was called animatics at that point. And so you would edit that together with sound effects and sort of create the vibe. And then the animators would take that and then create the animation. Right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

And then the senior editors would take that footage and trim it down and give them notes on if things needed to be corrected in terms of color and whatnot. So it's its own beast but if that's something you want to learn, you definitely need to hook up with an animated producer or an animation house if you want to learn animation as well. And you'd have to go through that whole process. Right? Look for the animation studios. So Nelvana is one and there's another one that's I don't know the name of it, if it comes to me, I'll mention it. But look for those places and see if you can get in. See if you can get an internship.

Sedina Fiati:

That's the way it is. I mean, from my perspective, as a producer and an actor, editors, there's not that many of you. It's a smaller pool of people, because of that mentorship is really key as you said, and it probably won't be terribly hard to find somebody. It's not there's tons and tons and tons of people who want to be editors. I feel I could be wrong, but my impression of it is it's a small community of people who do this and a lot of you know each other.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yeah. And the hard thing is that we're always busy. That's the hard-

Sedina Fiati:

Yes, right?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Just busy. Editing the full-on gig. It's really full on. You know, it's just the time capacity that's hard for folks. It's not about sitting in the edit suite. I don't think that's what mentorship looks like for editors, but it's really is the time piece.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah. Just finding that time and yeah, whatever you can avail yourself in terms of any funding as well. If there's funding that you can find and CTE has a mentorship program. Oh, great. CCE is offering a one

year free associate membership to new members, identify as BIPOC. That's amazing. Some thoughts from my end, just to give you some my for some newcomers, which I suspect are also on this call, definitely check out ACTRA Toronto. I used to be the co-chair of the diversity committee and still a member and ACTRA has two programs. They have the Yap program, which is a partnership with real world. So if you're looking for projects to edit that will actually be seen in a festival that is one way. Just go and network with Yap. And then also they have talk, which is the Toronto ACTRA committee.

Sedina Fiati:

They do one project every year that there's funded and supported by ACTRA. So that too is another way. Just wedge yourself in. And also for folks who identify as black, indigenous, or people of color, there's Bipoc TV and film, who's been doing all kinds of work. They've been staggering. I don't know how they do it all. It's just been a lot. They have a great Facebook group, which is probably another place you might even be able to find a mentor as well. If you posted in there and say, hey, I'm looking for a mentor. Who's out there? Who has some time to take me on?

Sedina Fiati:

No matter what aspect of the industry you're in, you will do better if you network and make relationships really be out there attending things like this. This is how the inroads happen, there's no magic. It just is a lot of relationship building and a lot of work. It's worth it in the end. Another question, but have a few more...

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I thought you would have asked if Sonia get nominated for CCE? Yes. I got nominated for Mr. Jane and Finch, which is-

Sedina Fiati:

Amazing.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So, y'know...

Sedina Fiati:

That's amazing. Congratulations, very much deserved. As you said for docs the story is made in the editing, so much of it. So congratulations. All very well deserved. I remember when I watched it at the Toronto Black Film Festival, it was a full theater, which is great. People from Jane and Finch were there, which was great and there was so many wonderful reactions. That's something I clocked. People were really invested in it. I was invested of course. There was a big emotional investment to what was happening. Laughter and gasps and tears so this is such a wonderful offering. You're just hitting it out of the park for a Stella Record.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Thank you. Timing, right? Timing is everything in this business. If I don't know if that's luck or being prepared or whatever, but the timing just worked out.

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah, very much so. How do we nurture this next generation of editors and specifically black editors? What do you think needs to happen? So that there's more people. And there's more black women doing it, more black men doing it, do you know what I mean?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I think mentorship is huge. I think folks who are outside of the black community, it's a hard business to get into, but there's lots of programs that are popping up that are really good and I think creating that portal or pipeline is really important. I think reaching outside the film schools, I think a lot of the film schools are good and listen, I will always recommend a film school. For me I did well with it. But there's programs like Pathways To the Industry that OEM media group is running.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Programs that are around the city, Centre for Young Black Professionals runs a film program as well. Right? Getting post-production programs in those types of environments. I don't know, I just think being here and having a commitment to bringing somebody in, that's something that I'm committed to. And I think as people who work in the industry yourself, when you see that young talent or if you see something in somebody who may not have even tried post, maybe it's something that you recommend. I think it's just even like, "Hey, you should try this. Do you know that this career exists too?" Right? Because I think a lot of the times folks might run to the producing of the directing because that's what people know, but there's not knowing that editing is such a big part of a business as well.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

I feel like the younger generation, I just see them, right? They're so amazing first of all, I would like to big up gen Z because-

Sedina Fiati:

Me too. Big up Gen Z, big time.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

They are so dope, right? They're so smart. They're so on-point. There's such a efficiency, a go get it-ness that I really admire. The fact that they do so much, Right? I think that's dope. So I was big up that generation for their ability to just get it done. I think it's been really encouraging to the next generation and letting them know what the challenges are, being authentic about what those challenges are really allows for things to be made and [inaudible 00:45:22] had like, "Oh, I can do this too."

Sedina Fiati:

Yeah, for sure. What is on tap for you? What are you working on right now that you're excited about?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Listen, there's so much happening. Can't really speak about some of them, but there's a series that's coming out in October called Enslaved: Stories From The Ocean Floor. That was produced with CBC and Channel 4 in the UK and Epics in the States. And that's a pretty big series. I worked on it for about two months. It's a huge series. It's with Samuel Jackson and a Afua Hirsch and Simca, oh my God, whose name I'm just going to butcher so I'm not going to try right now. It's a pretty amazing series that's coming out in October. So I'm looking forward to that, seeing that on air. Got to touch it a little bit.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Yeah. There's a few things that are just kind of in development, floating around. I'm hoping to be working on my first feature drama in January of next year. That's it for now really.

Sedina Fiati:

That's great. That's amazing. Good luck on October 2nd is when the virtual CCE awards are going to be so fingers crossed, say your prayers. It would be amazing if you won and I'll just steal a question from amazing podcast that I've listened to called Here To Slay with Roxanne Gay and Tracie McMillan Cottom, they're two amazing women and they just sit down and talk about all kinds of thoughts. How can we support you?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Can you all become editors so that I can give some of this workload? What about that? You know what? Honestly, for me, it's really a personal thing. Those one line texts like, "Hey, you good?" That means so much to me. During COVID when folks were doing that, coworkers, friends who just dropped that line and be like, "Hey, you good? What's up?" Because editing is such an isolating field.

Sedina Fiati:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

A lot of editors are introverts, but some of us aren't and we appreciate the face to face and the interaction with folks. I think just staying connected, you can reach it out and that's important to me and just remind me that it's okay to promote myself. I even feel bad, I think I promoted this three hours before it started, you know what I mean? It was just so busy. So the support is tell me to take time for myself, tell me to rest, it's okay to rest. I don't always have to be so busy. But I think from a more just professional standpoint or just drop me a line, send me a DM. A thing I always tell folks, let me know if there's anything you want me to take a look at and I'm always happy to do that with folks.

Sedina Fiati:

That's wonderful. Okay. A couple things actually. Where are you at in terms of programs that you're using?

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

So I still love Avid, Avid is my best friend. I love Avid. I love it, that's how excited I am. Because every time I go on something else, when I go and premier I'm like ughhh.. That's how I feel. I literally feel, okay, I can use this, but I don't love it, right? FCP 10, nobody uses, I still use that sometimes.

Sedina Fiati:

The way you said it. You're [crosstalk 00:48:23].

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Quick projects. There's some things that I do like about it, but generally nobody uses it. They mess that program up when they went to the 10, when they went to the X. Premier is the one that everyone loves. I use it now. Actually Chris and I had to migrate our project from Final Cut to Premiere and that's when I was forced to become familiar with it and since then I've make myself do projects in premiere just to

continue to learn. And so, yeah, I'm pretty good at it now, but I could be better. But Avid is for me. Yeah. That's the one that I always use it.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

There's this whole thing of the younger generation not sure about, or being told that Avid's no longer industry standard, it's a lie. Avid is still industry standard for sure. So you can get your on a version do it it's worth.

Sedina Fiati:

It's lasted, It sounds like. Because Avid's the one you said you started at, you know what I mean? And that FCP, I bet you're like, you know what? It's spinach is to kales, spinach is still good.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Exactly.

Sedina Fiati:

Kale shouldn't get all of the attention. It's good too, but spinach is the OG super food and Avid is the OG editing suite. It still is solid. Even if it isn't as fancy or as well-marketed as Adobe.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Exactly good analogy. For sure. Thank you so much Sonia, you are such an amazing woman and juggling Parenthood and juggling this really extensive editing career and directing and activism. I know you do activism as well, so I'm in awe of you. So thank you for sharing so much of yourself with us today.

Sedina Fiati:

Thanks everyone.

Sonia Godding-Togobo:

Bye.

Sarah Taylor:

Thank you so much for joining us today. And a big, thanks goes to Sonia and Sedina for taking the time to sit with us. A special thanks goes to Jane McCray. This episode was edited by Charlotte Pang. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall, additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music provided by Chad Blain. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao.

The CCE has been supporting Indspire - an organization that provides funding and scholarships to Indigenous post secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca or you can donate directly at indspire.ca. The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry and we encourage our members to participate in any way they can.

If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and tell your friends to tune in. 'Til next time I'm your host Sarah Taylor.

[Outtro]

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