5.04 10 Lessons I've Learnt from Making This Podcast

Angourie [host]
Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music fade in]

Hello and welcome back to *The Community Library*: a fortnightly podcast for anyone interested in stories, and how and why we tell them. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music fade out]

Angourie [host]
I've never been one to celebrate or take note of anniversaries. I love my birthday, of course, I'm a big birthday person, but I've never really paid much attention to the anniversaries of big events in my life, such as a movie coming out or graduating high school. And the same goes for this podcast: it wasn't until I actually went back through my Instagram that I discovered it's been two and half years since *The Community Library* was launched. If you haven't been here for the past two and a half years, hello, my name's Angourie, I'm an actor with a podcast. I know, it's a bit cliché, I promise I did it before it was cool. I'm kidding, I completely jumped on the bandwagon. I love books and I love movies, and I love talking about them here on the podcast, sometimes in the form of audio essays, sometimes in a more casual discussion like this. So if that interests you, feel free to look around!

So I know two and a half years isn't necessarily a big milestone or cause for occasion; but since I have not celebrated the last two yearly anniversaries, I feel like now is as good a time as any. So I want to do a bit of reflection, and share 10 things I've learnt from creating this podcast. Originally I came up with 9, and then I was like, no it needs to be an even number, so 10 things, here we go!

1. Short is sweet

Time is of the essence. I think. I don't really know what that phrase means. But to explain how this relates to the podcast: with the podcast, I'm always conscious of taking up people's time. I know I'm not forcing my listeners to stay for the whole duration of the episode, but I am aware that you've taken time out of your precious day to listen to me yabber on about a book, and so I want to make it worth your time. I don't want to indulge my own importance and assume that you have two hours to listen to me talk at you! So I've always been conscious to keep my episodes under an hour. But a by-product of this is that it's actually pushed me to make my scripts a lot more concise and efficient in getting my point across – without compromising meaning, of course. And I think my writing's better for it: hopefully it's clearer, simpler, more accessible. And if it isn't, then I'm ruthless in the edit.

2. Preparation is key

I've always been a planner, but creating the podcast has really confirmed my love of research, preparation, and planning. When I look back on the 80+ episodes that I've done – I think that's the number we're up to now – the ones I'm most proud of are the ones that included the most research and planning. And preparation, you know it encompasses the big things, like researching to see if anyone else has written articles on the same topic, and then reading and watching related material and taking notes – but it's also about the little things, like researching pronunciation and making a note about it before I sit down to record the episode. It saves a lot of time and also potential embarrassment. And also, another thing about this is that I have never once regretted researching something that didn't make it into the episode. I recently did an episode about *Sleeping Beauty* and in that script originally there was a paragraph about the difference between a spinning wheel and a spindle. And that paragraph was ultimately cut – the episode didn't need it – but I have no regrets researching that because now I know about spinning flax into yarn. Cool stuff. I'm really fun at parties, I promise.

3. When to abandon and when to persevere

I must admit this isn't something I've completely mastered, but I'm working on it. I'm a very ambitious person and love to work hard and make creative projects the best it could possibly be. But throughout making the podcast, I've learnt that some things actually aren't worth the work and time if it's just going to make me stressed and burn me out. There have been many episodes I've left as notes or first drafts, because I somehow along the way lost excitement for that idea. And I've learnt that letting it go was always a better idea than trying to push through, and ending up with something I wasn't excited about or proud of. Conversely, though, I've learnt when to persevere with a script that's difficult to write. I'm much more likely to keep going with an episode – even if it's difficult and time-consuming – if I know that nothing like it already exists, or if something like it does exist, then I'm confident that my perspective will offer something different. And sometimes these two processes happen one after the other, so my episode on Taylor Swift and Shakespeare was started and abandoned for six months before I eventually got excited about it again and finished writing it. My excitement returned because I knew I hadn't found any videos, podcast episodes or articles making that exact same comparison between this particular Taylor Swift song and this particular Shakespeare sonnet, and so I really just wanted to share it with others, because I knew that it wasn't out there already. But listening to myself and gauging my own capacity for work is still a tricky thing that I'm trying to get better at.

4. Just because you haven't heard of it, doesn't mean it isn't good

I've done a few reading challenges for this podcast, and they often take me to strange places and books that I'd never heard anyone talk about – at least in the online space and the people that I follow. And when this first started happening, I was quote wary to try things I had no preconceived notions of. Plus I was worried it wouldn't be interesting for the audience if they had never heard of this book or play or movie. But I soon learnt that this is actually one of the most exciting ways to discover books, and it's also one of the best ways for me to expand my perspective and reading tastes. Hold for plane, please. [plane drones in background] Okay, I think we're in the clear now. Through these reading challenges I've found new favourite books that I otherwise wouldn't have discovered, and I'm so glad that I

did. And I think I've taken this lesson to other aspects of my life, too. You know, just because something isn't widely known or talked about, that doesn't mean it's not worth my time or attention.

5.   Just because everyone's talking about it, doesn't mean you'll love it

So this is the opposite lesson of the previous one, but it is no less important. Sometimes I've read – or tried to read – books for no other reason than the fact that everyone was talking about it, and in most cases it's led me to disappointment. Because had these books not been as hyped as they were, I probably wouldn't have picked them up, because, you know, maybe it was something about the premise, or there was a trope or a concept in it that I knew I didn't like, or even, you know, it was just the genre. But to apply this in a broader way: I've learnt that it's fantastic to try new things, but also to trust my own taste and preferences within that. I always want to give myself the best possible chance for enjoying something new.

6.   You don't always have to find inspiration, it will find you

This is really cheesy, but it is very true. As I mentioned before, I'm a very ambitious person, and I always want to plan, but trying to come up with interesting podcast episodes for every week for months in advance is really not a sustainable practice. If I'm not feeling passionate about an idea, or struggling to come up with a concept or a topic, I've learnt to not force it. Some of the discussion episodes I'm most proud of arose in a really organic way – from a conversation with a friend, or a YouTube video I watched, or even a Tweet I saw – not from me sitting in front of a computer screen and trying to wrack my brains for good, entertaining content. And so in life it's taught me to … I don't know, I guess stop and smell the roses? No, that's dumb. I guess it's taught me, like, sometimes it's more productive to *not* do work, because you'll accidentally find something that will help you with your work.

7.   If you don't know what to think, ask other people

This one seems obvious to me now, but perhaps in my ~youth~ I was too attached to the authority of my own thoughts and opinions. I've since been humbled. Sometimes I come up with an episode concept and know exactly what I want the message to be, or what I want to say with it. And then other times, I come up with a situation, concept or idea that I think is interesting, but I don't know what I want to say about it. And in that case, I've learnt to ask other people. Hearing other people's opinions doesn't always influence my opinions, but it often reveals them. Because sometimes I don't know my opinion until I'm confronted with someone else's, and I have to determine if I agree or disagree. And beyond that, I think the podcast has taught me that even if I think I know what I think about something, it's always helpful to get the perspective of others, because I'll inevitably learn something new.

8.   Follow the rabbit hole

This may seem counter-intuitive, considering there's so much discourse about how internet rabbit holes eat up hours of your time and don't make you any happier. However. Researching for the podcast has taught me that rabbit holes are brilliant. I think it ties into the idea of researching things that won't make it into the episode, and also letting inspiration find you. Because even in the event that an internet rabbit hole has led me to something that's probably not helpful to my life in any way, it's at least sparked a curiosity in me. I wasn't forced to click on that next link, and the next one – but I did, because I was

curious. So, I think following the rabbit hole like Alice has taught me to indulge my curiosity, even if it seems frivolous.

9. Cast your net far and wide when you learn, and then throw it all out the window

Okay, maybe I don't need to phrase it in such a dramatic way. But this something I learnt in particular while writing my episode on J. K. Rowling and *Harry Potter*. When I reached the end of my research phase for that episode, I had compiled notes from articles, videos, research papers, even my neighbours and friends whom I'd asked about the topic. And I was feeling so overwhelmed with all this information, and I started to question whether it was even worth continuing with the episode. I felt like it had all been said before, and said much better than I could ever say it. But I talked to my mum about it, and she told me that for her there comes a point in any creative project at which you've done all your research and preparation, and you've listened and read about what everyone else thinks, and then you have to just ignore it, and start writing what you think. And this isn't to say that research isn't important – it is absolutely vital, and that's why it was one of my top lessons, research is so important! – but I had to remember, specifically when writing that episode, that I wasn't writing a summary of all the thoughts that were already out there, because, well, they were already out there. I was writing what I thought. And I think this has also given me a new perspective on my acting work, as well. You know, I love preparing for a job and doing research; whether it's about the creative team, or the time period, or the book that it's based on. But, you know, at the end of the day, when they call action, I'm not thinking about the articles I read or the videos I watched. The research informs my performance, but it doesn't dictate it. And yeah, I just think this is good advice for anyone who works or plays in a creative field. So, thanks, mum.

10. I know nothing

Another way I could frame this lesson is also 'I have so much to learn'. I know it's kind of, you know, cliché and annoying, but it is very true. And I think this lesson underpins all the others about preparation, research, consulting others, developing your own creative projects. Even though I do everything for the podcast myself –I write, produce, record and edit everything – it's far from a solo effort. It's informed by videos, Instagram posts, books, music, articles, conversations, advice, Twitter threads. A lot of this podcast is my own ideas, but my own ideas are always informed by others. I know nothing. I don't really see this lesson as disheartening, but rather exciting. Because I think it fuels me to keep learning, to stay curious, to keep listening to others. And I think the day that I don't feel excited to learn anymore is probably the day I should stop making this podcast. When I created The Community Library, it was all about sharing knowledge. I didn't make it with the intent for it to be an educational resource, because I don't qualify myself as an educator, but I wanted it to be about learning together. And, you know, sorry to get sentimental, but I truly am so very grateful to have had this community to share with and learn from for two and a half years.

[theme music fades in]

Oh my god, that's enough sappiness for now, and that's all you'll get for another two and half years. I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you like this shorter style that's more

reflective and casual and chatty, I'll link some similar ones for you in the shown notes. I've brought along my sister to a few of these more chatty, casual episodes, and she's way funnier and more interesting than me. As always, you can find more links and resources on my website, angourieslibrary.com. I've just upgraded it, it's super cute, it's all pink, which I love. Pink is one of my favourite colours. So check that out! Also you can find a full transcription of the episode on my website, too. I'll chat to you all in two weeks, and until then, I hope you're all taking good care of yourselves and reading fabulous books. Bye.

[theme music fades out]