

PUBLISHING FAT WITH EVETTE DIONNE

Sophie: I'm Sophie and this is She's All Fat, the podcast for fat positivity, radical self love, and chill vibes ONLY. In this episode, we're talking with Editor in Chief of Bitch Media, Evette Dionne about loving middle grade novels, fat body politics, and the publishing industry.

Sophie: But first, it's time for our SAF Bookclub. You know the drill! This past week, we read Chapter 8: Fat, Revisited... which is also the name of my upcoming memoir! Jk. Here's what our team's got for you: Laila's got a bone to pick with individualism — she asks At what cost to ourselves do we strive to attain a "thin" body? Isn't our mind part of our body, and shouldn't we value its health? Producer Lynn has questions about how police and politicians excuse the murders of Black individuals by blaming "pre-existing conditions" and How medical malpractice against fat folks, especially fat Black women, is excused by framing fatness as a "pre-existing condition." Check the shownotes for more from Laila & Lynn. Fatmily, this is the last full chapter of Fearing the Black Body! We're going to discuss the epilogue next week, but it's a short one! If you haven't caught up yet, no worries, we're gonna give everyone the next few weeks to catch up — you can follow along with our Book Club Questions and Exercises on our website shesallfatpod.com/bookclub. Then, for our final episode to end our COVID Staying In series, we're going to have on a special guest to talk about the book in full. It's going to be very.... VERY good. We hope you'll join us! You still have time to get the book! Read the epilogue for next week.

Sophie: Shoutout to our Fat Babysitters Club! All month long when you join our Patreon at Team Paisley Mumu, we're giving you a special shoutout! That's what we call a Patreon Drive! This week, we're shouting out Libby Kaczmarek for joining the club! Now, as you know from NPR, a funding drive usually has stuff like tote bags for the generous donors! We're raising you an exciting INTANGIBLE thing that is maybe even better — our Babysitters club! A fun little weekly livestream where I read and giggle at a chapter of The Babysitters club with y'all. It's going to be very silly and very Fat Girl™. We're gonna do the first one this Sunday, August 16th on our Insta Live for all our listeners, and then every week after that we'll have a special stream for our Fat Babysitters... and listen, we know

how much y'all love tangible goods. We're WORKING on it! Make sure to tune in this Sunday, August 16th to read some Babysitters club with me on Instagram live. OKAY! Here's the episode.

Sophie: I'm here with my guest, Evette Dion, who has been, uh, someone I've wanted to have on the show for a really long time. I really look up to her work and I am so glad she's here. Um, can you just give a brief intro of yourself, talk about your work, your connection to fat justice and who you are.

Evette: Of course. So, um, as you mentioned, my name is Evette. Uh, I identify as a Black feminist culture journalist and critic, and I always say by happenstance became an author. Um, just as an aside, um, I am also a fat Black person. And so that initially was my connection to fat justice is just to being within the identity and trying to figure out my own body through the world. But now I write and edit a lot about body politics overall, and the ways that fatphobia moves through the world. Um, I don't know if I mentioned I'm the editor in chief of Bitch Media, but that is also true.

Sophie: Yes. Which is incredible. And what is one thing you've done during quarantine to take care of yourself? That's what we ask in our little intro.

Evette: Oh, I love that. I am a person who feels guilty when I'm doing nothing. Like I should be doing something. I have been giving myself permission to do nothing, to lay in the bed and whatever gives me pleasure, whether that's watching a show. Usually it's the same shows over and over, but if it's watching a show or reading a book or literally doing nothing, I give myself permission to do that and then tell myself, like, don't beat yourself up. It is a quarantine. You need to rest.

Sophie: Yes. A hundred percent. It's hard. It's hard though.

Evette: So hard.

Sophie: Yes. I'm someone who like, used to feel a lot more of that. But when I figured out that I had ADHD and, uh, needed to work differently, I had to change all of that. Like my expectations for myself for work, because my old expectations were just self punishment, it turns out.

Evette: Yes. That's something I'm actually working through in therapy is, you know, recognizing that if you really want to push against capitalism, you deserve to take a break. like that is the baseline thing that you can do

for yourself is to cut yourself some Slack and give yourself some grace and take a break.

Sophie: I love that. Okay. Let's get into the meat of it.

Evette: Okay.

The Meat of It

Sophie: Okay. Here we are. In the meat of it. The first thing I want to talk about is, uh, your book, which is incredible. Your, you published a book. That's crazy.

Evette: I did! During a pandemic, I still can't believe it. Feels like it happened a hundred years ago.

Sophie: You did it! Oh my God. Oh. So tell me all about your book. Um, it's on our list. We're currently doing an anti-racist book club all season.

Evette: Love it.

Sophie: And next season as well. So we started with Sabrina Strings' *Fearing the Black Body*. Um, we have your book on our list to get into at some point. So us a little bit about your book.

Evette: Of course, first of all, I love *Fearing the Black body*, what a book. So *lifting as we climb* is a middle grade nonfiction book about the Black women who fought for the right to vote from before the abolition of slavery in the United States. It ends in the present moment. Um, after a Supreme court ruling basically gutted the voting rights act. And it just looks at the ways that Black women were integral to that struggle, but also thought beyond it. So how they thought about lynching as a part of suffrage, how they thought about abolition as a part of suffrage and it just traces- And really, I say excavate is the way that I describe it. These Black women who have in some respects been lost to history.

Sophie: I love that. Tell me about why you chose to write a middle grade book as opposed to any other level.

Evette: Well, that's what I was approached for. That's important to note is that I was approached to write this book as a middle grade, but what made me say yes is I have two young nieces, one of whom is eight and another of whom is nine. And I have [inaudible] be two years old. Um, but I wanted to write a book for them. And I realized they were going to be

around fifth grade when it came out. And that it's something that they could read in their classmates could read. It just brought in the idea for me that not only is this personal work that I can hand off to people in my family, but that little girls, especially little Black girls could learn real history from the start, opposed to going through the process that I went through, which was unlearning once I was already an adult.

Sophie: Yeah. I mean, when I was looking at this book before the interview, I was thinking about how much I would have- I mean, obviously I'm very white, but I would have also loved this book as a kid. Like I read a lot of like those, um, like Dear America books,

Evette: I loved them!

Sophie: They were so good. Right? But a lot of them were focused on white history. And I had some that were like other kinds of history, but a lot of it is like white American history. And I feel like more books like this would have been amazing for me then, because then like, I just was never presented with a lot of this info ever and, not in school and not in my, like, whatever you call it, extracurricular reading or like fun reading. It just wasn't, you know what I mean? And it wasn't because somebody was handing me books, like I was going to the library and looking and choosing what I wanted. But there were like, librarians are also people who exist in a society. You know what I mean? So like this, I think this would have been so nice for me to have, because like you said, then I wouldn't have had to learn stuff and then be like, Oh wait, that was wrong. Let's learn this new thing. It would have been there all along. That would have been great.

Evette: Exactly. I felt the same way that, and I was a big Dear America girl.

Sophie: They were so good.

Evette: They're so good. Um, but I was a big American girl child too, but I had books like this. I feel like my entire trajectory would be different. Or I've, I've told myself that any way, because there's just something about realizing you're part of a lineage like this, that just, it blows your whole world up. It makes you just see things differently.

Sophie: I mean, I think I, yes, I'm sure that's true. And again, like, I think for myself, I think it would have been extremely helpful for like the work that I'm doing now in therapy and anti-racist work to not have to unlearn like white savior things that I learned there.

Evette: Yes.

Sophie: Do you know what I mean? Like a lot of the way I learned about Black people voting was about like, Oh, and then they protested and then we kindly gave them the right to vote. Like was, you know?

Evette: Yes. And then after 1965, it's just been smooth sailing.

Sophie: It's great, now it's great.

Evette: They fought for three years. It was a three year struggle. Yeah.

Sophie: You know, so like that, that would have been helpful, obviously, not only in terms of like, just the truth, but also in shaping, like I, if I had had access to more information, it would have shaped how I thought about feminism earlier.

Evette: yes.

Sophie: differently. You know?

Evette: Same. Same, same, same, same. And so that's, one of my goals is to really provide that kind of information for the next generation that's coming behind me so that they have more of this information. Of course, my book is not exhaustive. There are other resources they should read, but they at least have that.

Sophie: I love that. Let me, gosh. Okay. In terms of ordering, where do you want to order it?

Evette: I, what I tell people is that I already got paid for the book. Um, and so the best way that most aligns with my ethos is bookshop.org, which is donating a percentage of each book sale to an independent bookstore in your area, which feels important in this moment when bookstores, I know they have to be struggling.

Sophie: Yes. So true. Okay. We will link to bookshop.org in the show notes with the link to your book. And I encourage everyone to get this, um, and read it and get it for you or kids and talk about it. I still read middle grade stuff. I think it's really helpful to like, I mean, first of all, I want to be a middle grade author, I'm working on like that too. But, um, also I really think it is like those books were the first books that I chose to read.

Evette: yes.

Sophie: on my own. And that's a really important time for shaping your tastes and how you think about yourself and who you think you are in terms of your own self education. Yeah. What are some of your other favorite books to recommend from this era or this grade level?

Evette: I always recommends, um, Renee Watson's books. I always recommend her books because they feel very real world to me.

Sophie: okay.

Evette: Um, most of her protagonists are Black girls, but in general, just her books are phenomenal. I also really love Ibi Zoboi, and I hope I'm pronouncing her name right. But she wrote this lovely, like romance novel for teenagers called *Pride* that I absolutely loved. And then Julie Murphy too, who is releasing a new book called *Faith*? Um, yeah, it's like a plus sized superhero.

Sophie: Yes, I'm so excited.

Evette: I'm so excited. I have a [inaudible]. I cannot wait to dive in. Um, but I, I recommend her. And then in terms of the nonfiction space, I think George M. Johnson is doing really important work. Um, he just released a book, *All Boys Are in Blue*.

Sophie: I love that.

Evette: About his own journey, um, around Blackness and queerness. And that, I don't know if there was space for that type of nonfiction in middle grade when I was a child. But I'm glad that it exists now.

Sophie: That's amazing. I've been thinking about it a lot too, in terms of some conversations I've been seeing on about, um, like the ways that specifically, uh, a bunch of African, like a magical realism slash fantasy authors books are being critiqued right now. I was reading a thread that I will try to find, although I don't know if I'll be able to find it at this point, I'm scrolling through so much, but it was this thread about how, um, like some books by like African authors often get reviews that are like, uh, the pacing doesn't make sense to me. Or like the storytelling is weird in this spot, but the rest is good.

Evette: I saw that! It was on the books I reviewed or something. Yeah.

Sophie: Yes. It was like a Kirkus I think it was about Kirkus or books circle or, or something like that circus or, and, um, it was like basically saying

like part of this is because of unfamiliarity with anything other than like hero's journey, like European style of storytelling. I'm like, yes, that's so obviously true. And if I had been exposed to more kinds of stories at that age, also, how much richer my literary experience would be right now.

Evette: Right. You will be a different literary citizen. But I, I agree wholeheartedly with that. I also think that has a lot to do with the publishing industry overall.

Sophie: yes.

Evette: and the fact that it is even right now, very white and very straight, the people who acquire books, like I have been through an entire process, um, and encountered one Black person in my entire book publishing process.

Sophie: Wow.

Evette (13:34):

And that's a common experience, you know, like everyone from, from your agent to the acquisitions editor, to the marketing and sales team, all of whom are usually white may not be familiar with the way in which you tell stories, down to who reviews books. And that is a disservice, not only to the industry, but to the way the books are marketed and sold and reviewed. It just becomes a whole ecosystem that to me, in some respects is rotten.

Sophie: A hundred percent, a hundred percent. I mean, it's like any other artistic or like artistic adjacent industry where you make like pennies, so the people who go into it are all like rich white people who have their parents help pay for stuff-

Evette: exactly.

Sophie: a lot of the time,

Evette: sounds like journalism.

Sophie: because otherwise how else, how else can you make it? And I mean, like, you know, I, the whole industry, I hope will like reckon with some stuff, but I don't know if it will happen until we continue to force people's feet to the fire, but we'll see.

Evette: We'll see.

Sophie: But-

Evette: it's going to take time, but we'll see.

Sophie: Um, okay. This is a good transition to another, um, another area where a lot of white decision makers keep people out of stuff, which is just in online journalism, which is why I want to talk about Bitch magazine. So can you talk a little bit about your path to being Editor in Chief of Bitch?

Evette: Of course. So I have always said that I thought I was going to be a radio personality.

Sophie: Really?

Evette: That's what I- I did. I did. That's what I went to college for.

Sophie: You would think it that too. I feel like.

Evette: It would be interesting, but you know, writing is my passion now, but for a long time, I thought it was going to be a radio personality. That is what I went to school for, for broadcast journalism. Um, and I met a mentoring professor who just immediately recognized very early on that I had what she called a gift for writing and that there was something in writing for me to pursue, but I was really resistant to it because she was probably the first person that I'd ever met, who made a living from writing. Like it wasn't something that I grew up thinking you can live and live well from writing and editing, from words.

Sophie: Yes.

Evette: It was like the most, like I heard people on the radio every day. Up until I met her, I'd never met a professional writer before, but she knew and she recognized it and she really took me under her wing and nurtured me and taught me the business. Really. She taught me how to edit. She taught me how to be a good literary citizen as I call it now, thanks to this other writer, Laura Good. Um, and she taught me how to be in the business and, and play the politics of the business. Um, and so like when I was coming up into journalism school, the path was really, you start at an internship, you make no money, you use those internships to make connections. You use those connections to rise up in the ranks. Like you start as an assistant editor and then you rise up to be an editor in chief. But by the time I got out of undergrad in 2012 and then graduate school in 2014, like that path had dried up because there were no jobs.

Sophie: Yeah.

Evette: Like there just were, where do you go?

Sophie: That was the path that I thought I would be following. And I graduated in 2014 and then I was like, Oh.

Evette: Doesn't exist. Doesn't exist anymore. It dried it up. Some people get lucky, but luck is not enough.

Sophie: No.

Evette: And so I started freelancing and realized very early on that freelancing was really exploitative.

Sophie: yes.

Evette: but I could bend it to my will in some respects.

Sophie: yes.

Evette: And so I just became like a really prolific freelancer. You know, I already had all the skills of writing and editing, and grad school where they gave me context for the writing and editing work. But freelancing is what allowed me to make connections and really become like a distinctive voice in the space and like build an online platform of sorts. And then I finally got a full time job at this website called [inaudible], which is pretty much at this point, defunct. And I was a senior editor there and went through all of the, this is the worst place ever kind of stuff that we see coming up now.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: about other places.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: Yeah. I mean, it was, it was fun at first and then it wasn't.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: Um, but then I decided to go to Bitch when an opportunity presented itself, um, to become a senior editor there and then was

promoted to being an editor in chief there. And I've been editor in chief now. Oh my goodness. Almost three years.

Sophie: Wow.

Evette: Time flies,

Sophie: that's amazing.

Evette: time surely flies.

Sophie: Oh my gosh. And I think you're doing, I mean, you don't need me to say this, but you're doing incredible work there.

Evette: thank you.

Sophie: And I'm really, I love everything you put out as a writer and an editor. You're like someone who I follow closely because I trust your voice on things.

Evette: thank you.

Sophie: And I think you're really smart. And like on things always, I'm always like, what's Evette have to say, I got to know

Evette: I've, I've gotten to the point where I say, especially what I share publicly on Twitter. It's like 10% of what I'm thinking about at any given time.

Sophie: Uh, yeah. That's cause you're smart. That's what I'm saying. Yeah.

Evette: I receive that. Um, but it, it has been like a really kind of weaving journey, but I've felt for the first time in a long time that I ended up kind of where I'm supposed to be.

Sophie: can you tell us about, um, like if you feel like fatness and Blackness are centered at Bitch and if they have been historically and how you being editor in chief might have changed that or didn't.

Evette: Yeah, so historically, no. So Bitch was started in San Francisco in 1996. So we're nearing our 25th anniversary. Um it originally started as a zine and then became a quarterly print publication. So now we have a quarterly print publication, and then we have a daily online version of that print publication. And it started as a feminist response to pop culture. But that feminist response was like very white, very straight, like even the

pop culture they were responding to, like television movies, were created and made for white people.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: to consume and to enjoy.

Sophie: yeah, sure.

Evette: And it was that way for 20 years. And then five years ago, they kind of had a shakeup, um, in terms of the leadership at the top of the organization. And they realized that if they wanted to evolve, one, people have to get out of the way,

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: which I say all the time, you have to get out of the way to make space for people to, uh, promote and grow and evolve.

Sophie: yes.

Evette: Um, but also you need an entirely new strategy. So when I came on as an editor in chief, I was very clear, like I'm only hiring people of color. You can't officially say that on any job application, of course,

Sophie: yes.

Evette: but I was being very clear that this was my vision. I want to hire all people of color. I want to hire queer people of color. So both of the people on my team who I've hired are both queer people of color. Um, I needed a new vision entirely. So we are very intentional about disability, about chronic illness, about the pop culture that we cover. Is it written by a person from a marginalized community, or is somebody, the person who writes the show a person of color, those are the kinds of questions we are always asking ourselves in order to broaden our audience. And so we're in what we call cultivation, um, which is a long process of literally shifting the audience to be more reflective of who we are as a staff and the people who we want to reach. And to be honest, it is difficult because our Facebook comments are full of people saying like, I don't see myself represented anymore. What am I going to do? And it's like, okay, go read 90 other publications.

Sophie: oh my gosh.

Evette: Like 90% of the rest of the industry caters to you. Can we do something different? Um, so it's been a process, but I, I think now we are more intentional than ever about who our audience is and why that's our audience and who we're trying to reach. And the ways in which we try to reach them are just more reflective of us as a staff.

Sophie: Tell me more about that term cultivation, what that means.

Evette: Cultivation is essentially like when we came in, we do an audience survey every year and that audience survey breaks down the demographics of our audience. And so when I came in, our audience was 90% white and I think 80% cisgender and heterosexual. So we set literal percentages around that, that we wanted more than 50% of our audience to be people of color and more than 50% of our audience to be queer people of color. And so now we use our content to what we say, acquire community members. So to bring them in because we're community funded, like it's like a pipeline of you bring them in and then we turn them into members.

Sophie: I see.

Evette: and then they help support the organization. It becomes like a self sustaining circle.

Sophie: it would be really great if more places started doing that. Because like you said, um, I just think that there's a lot of opportunity to like broaden audience, even broaden white audiences, like taste, information, like decolonizing your own taste-

Evette: yes.

Sophie: is like something you should be doing if you're white,

Evette: yes.

Sophie: Like, and that's not like you can still like all your stuff, you know what I mean? You can still like Gilmore girls or whatever.

Evette: right.

Sophie: It's just like, don't you think you could also like this thing and read about it.

Evette: mhm.

Sophie: Like, it's not that hard, yeah. So I highly recommend Bitch and everything you guys have been doing. Okay.

Evette: Thank you. Thank you.

Writing about Fatness

Sophie: Tell me, uh, you've been writing about fatness for a long time, much longer than I have. I mean, much, you know, whatever, we're like the same age, but you have been writing about it for a longer than I have and like a large part of your career. So how has the culture, or like space around that changed since you've been writing and what would you like to see next?

Evette: It has changed so much. I think I wrote my very first article about fatness in maybe 2011 or 12.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: And at the time there was so much resistance to the idea. It was, I mean, vitriol everywhere. I mean, it was, it was an uphill battle to get the editors to accept the stories. It was an uphill battle to get audiences, to even consider a perspective other than lose weight, you're fat, lose weight, you won't have these problems.

Sophie: uh huh.

Evette: And then it felt like the world's kind of shifted its perspective on fatness and fatphobia to a small degree, primarily because of the emergence of body positivity, which I have so many problems with, so many problems with.

Sophie: yes.

Evette: But one of the things that it did and did successfully was say that fat people are deserving of dignity. We deserve to have nice clothes. We deserve to see someone on a magazine cover or runway who's reflective of us. We deserve to be represented in media as we are not on this quest to lose weight all the time. Like we deserve to exist in the way that we are, which I think is a powerful message to have. I also think that brands and media publications really hopped on that, um to the point now that the larger fat liberation part of that is, has been obscured.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: where we don't talk-

Sophie: yes.

Evette: a whole lot about legal protections or as much as we should talk about legal protections for fat people. We don't talk a whole lot about wage disparity and, and unemployment rates and, and, and the, the more, the less flashy, but equally as important parts of existing as a fat person have kind of, um, been buried. By, by body positivity. Um, but now what that did for me and my career though, was really gave me a wider lane to do the work that I was really invested and interested in. It allowed me to build an audience. It allowed me to think more deeply about what it is I want to say about bodies, which was not something that was available to me in 2012. It just wasn't. The lane wasn't there. But now that we are this far in and I've been writing about fatness for eight years, nine years, my hope is that we kind of find the middle ground between celebrating how you look on Instagram, you know, pinching your fat rolls, dancing, doing all of that stuff that makes you feel good, but also thinking more deeply about the political realm, you know, literal body politics, opposed to just, can I buy clothes? Can I be on a magazine cover? Can I do a runway? Can I profit from my body?

Sophie: Yes.

Evette: Yeah. We've- we've determined. Yes, yes. You can. Now let's think about everything else.

Sophie: what feels like the, the things that are pressing to you to talk about right now?

Evette: Um, right now what's top of mind for me is police violence because, body size has been used to justify people being killed by the police. So it is police violence to me is a body politics issue.

Sophie: yeah, wow.

Evette: So I think a lot about that, I think a lot about COVID and the fact that an epidemiologist stood on a national stage and said that quote, unquote, obesity is a preexisting condition that could cause you to get a harsher strain of COVID-19. And I'm thinking about those sorts of things, of how fatness intersects with the things that we are largely thinking about as a society, um, and how to reverse that in a way that, of course,

I've always thinking about the dignity of fat people. So, you know, what does it mean to retain your dignity, but also what does it mean to remain safe and alive? In this fatphobic society.

Sophie: I'm writing these things down. I'm like, wow, we need to think, yes, these are great things to talk about. have you written articles on all these things?

Evette: No.

Sophie: Well you should so we can share them!

Evette: So, soon come.

Sophie: Yes. But I've been thinking about that a lot too. And how, um, differently bodies are policed, um, relating to race and size as well.

Evette: Absolutely. I think about it a lot, of course, as a fat Black person, I think about it a lot. Um, I think about it a lot in terms of my medical health, which I talk a lot about online-

Sophie: yes, me too.

Evette: about being a heart failure patient and like navigating a system that every day I'm convinced is trying to kill me. Um, but I also think about it a lot in terms of when we're talking about the pandemic, because it's not just, of course the race and the size component, it's also class, it's also disability.

Sophie: Yes.

Evette: Like all of those layers just leaves fat people, particularly fat Black people, fat Black trans people like really vulnerable in this moment. And so I'm thinking a lot about how to continue to raise awareness about that and help people, what I always say, save their own life.

COVID CHANGES

Sophie: How has your work changed during the pandemic?

Evette: I will say that I am fortunate in that I have always worked remotely as an editor in chief. And so we, as a staff were really prepared to be remote because we already were. Um, but in terms of my ability to work with writers, that has shifted a lot because I'm trying to hold space

for the fact that nobody's life is the way that it was in February. And so I spend a lot of time thinking about how do I extend grace to people in a way that lets them know that I appreciate them beyond what they're able to produce. So what that means,

Sophie: I love that, you're such a nice boss.

Evette: I try to be! You know, I, my approach to being a boss is one, I want my employees to flourish. Like I want the people I work alongside to come out of this experience, feeling confident about their ability to do their work and just more skilled in their work. That is my goal. I think of myself more as like a mentoring boss, than a standard's boss. Like you have to meet this specific standard. I'm not that person. Um, but when it, when it comes to like our contributors, I'm trying to extend them the grace that I would want them to extend me. So one thing I've, I've been practicing is like, literally asking, when can you turn in a first draft opposed to giving a deadline? Because that way they can think about all the things they have going on and then say, okay, I can give this to you by this date. I've also found that there's a lot more anxiety among just the people I'm interacting with in general right now. Um, they're worried about missing deadlines. They're worried about disappointing. And so I find myself being like a reassurer of whenever this is done, I will be here to receive it, take care of yourself because you cannot produce good work if you are emotionally unhealthy, if you are mentally unhealthy, if you are physically not feeling like yourself, take care of you first. And the work will come later.

Sophie: I love that. I think that's a really great attitude. That's kind of our attitude at She's All Fat as well. It's like, it's always a balance between, um, like we have to have, you know, the deadlines have to happen. Cause the audio's got to go up every week.

Evette: Right.

Sophie: But we spent a lot of time as a team being like, did you not finish, oh my god, it's okay. I'll do it for you. that is our ethos. I feel like it's, um, especially in media, which can come with a lot of external like shit that a lot of other jobs don't come with,

Evette: that's right.

Sophie: It's like important to have. I've never worked at a space other than the one I created where I felt very valued. Um, and I think that would like when you're doing something like the work that you put out at bitch is like vulnerable work, a lot of it, and important work. So I think that's part

of why that work's able to be produced is like the leadership that you're taking to it, it sounds like you're doing a good job.

Evette: thank you! I'm trying. And, and ultimately I decided to be this kind of boss because of the bosses that I had had. Who were not that way. And I often felt undervalued and underappreciated. And as if you know, I just existed to meet their bottom line. I didn't want to reproduce that feeling when I was in a position to make decisions,

Sophie: yes.

Evette: but I wanted to approach it differently. And so far so good.

Sophie: I want to know. Okay. So did you read this piece? Obviously you did. It's on Bitch. So you've read this piece, called the literary world may never recover from hashtag publishing paid me.

Evette: yes I did.

Sophie: and that, yes. And that made us think about Bitch being a small independent media with intersectional feminist lens and how little money, uh, places like that have. So how does Bitch work to fairly compensate people? And how does that compare to your experience before Bitch? Or like what's, what is the deal with that right now?

Evette: Oh, it is so tough. I'll be honest. It's really, really difficult. I often say that I'm expected to perform miracles on a really shoestring budget. Um, because Bitch is community funded, everything that we are able to do as an organization is because our literal audience pays for it. So, you know, the majority of media is funded by advertisers who pay millions of dollars sometimes to have an ad placement in a magazine.

Sophie: Mhm.

Evette: The sponsorship that we do have is usually an equal exchange of, we, you give us this ad in exchange for us giving you an ad. There's usually not money exchanged. And that makes it really difficult. Um, because my both digital and print budgets compared to other places are really small. They're just really, really small. Um, but I try and my team tries, we present a budget every year, um, to over time, compensate our writers, particularly more fairly. Um, so right now we start at like 175 or so for digital stories, which is not ideal. I would hope at some point we can triple that. So like our start is at 300 bucks. Um, but to be honest, if, if, if we paid everyone 300 bucks, we would have like five stories a month.

Sophie: right, right.

Evette: because our budget is so small.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: But a part of that is, and why I'm, I'm not wholly optimistic about media making a big shift toward inclusion is because they have bottom lines to meet in order to appease advertisers. So the work that I have done over the last three years and that my team has done to really shift our audience and it's, it's long work. It's not, you know, You do it for 30 days and it's done,

Sophie: right.

Evette: It's long, it's intentional. It takes a lot of labor and effort and it's, it's a lot. And I just don't think media companies are patient enough to make it happen, to be honest.

Sophie: I don't think a lot of media companies are willing to do the first step of that, which is to put non white people.

Evette: yes.

Sophie: in this like leadership, you know?

Evette: Yes. And they're going to make them uncomfortable, you know, when I came on, I know that I made people uncomfortable in terms of pushing for what I thought should happen. People don't really buy into the vision until they see it work.

Sophie: Yeah.

Evette: Which is tough.

Sophie: Yeah.

Evette: If you already have a disadvantage coming in as a person from a marginalized community and it just makes it tougher, like it's, it's more of a uphill battle.

Sophie: Sure.

Evette: Than if you look like the person like your predecessor, but in terms of my own experience, um, I definitely felt exploited at the beginning of my career. There were many times that I wrote for \$0 dollars. I went to fashion week when I was 19 years old for a publication. I covered all of the costs myself,

Sophie: oh my god.

Evette: you know, all of it. I covered every cost and then wrote up all these stories and did not get paid for it.

Sophie: Whoa.

Evette: You know, when I first started writing, I made maybe \$25 an article. And that's standard in the industry,

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: I always say had I not had the safety net of my parents who financially supported me for a long time until I was able to financially support myself. There's no way I could have made it this far.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: because the media industry thrives on exploitation.

Sophie: There's no way I could make this podcast without already having support at all.

Evette: exactly.

Sophie: Like there's no way we, and I try to talk about that all the time. Cause I don't think there's, there's, it's a it's, it's not just that there's no point in it, but it's, it's actually harmful to hide that fact that like it, you have to be transparent that this work requires money. And so we need to be thinking and talking about that, who gets to do it and why.

Evette: exactly.

Sophie: and who are the people with the most family money? Obviously it's white people,

Evette: Exactly. Who are able to go to New York or Los Angeles or another really expensive city and work for pennies.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: and not living on the street. I knew that even if I didn't make a lot of money initially with my writing and editing, I would never be homeless. I would never be hungry. I would never feel like I had no like zero, no options.

Sophie: yeah.

Evette: I always had a safety net. That's the only reason why I've been able to stay in the business long enough to get here. And now I make plenty of money. And there's still a, often a disparity between the amount of work that I have had to do to make the amount of money that I do and what my white counterparts do.

Sophie: To wrap up the meat of it. I just want to go back to a term you used earlier, which is literary citizen. And I want to know what, if you can talk more about that.

Evette: The very first time I heard about a literary citizen is from this phenomenal writer named Laura Good, who I believe runs a writing program at Stanford university,

Sophie: cool.

Evette: which I had the lovely opportunity to go and speak there last fall before the world shut down.

Sophie: oh my gosh.

Evette: And, and she talks about literary citizenship as just the way in which you were in community with other people who share your vocation. So she calls it literary citizenship clearly because we're in publishing and journalism, but she talks a lot about kind of the qualities that you espouse as a literary citizen, and how the qualities you espouse are what you get back in return. So if you're a very graceful and in some respects kind and always looking out for others, as well as yourself, the hope is that you receive that tenfold because it's what you put out. And it was something that really stuck with me because it felt like my ethos pared down into words that I was like, yes, that's it, it was like a light bulb aha moment for me, of that is the way that I like to think that I navigate through the journalism of publishing industries, is just with a lot of grace because that is what I would hope that when I fall down on the job I get in return.

Sophie: I love that that is such a something to like aspire to, to be. You can find Evette on Insta and twitter @freeblackgirl, on her website, evettedionne.com and also in everything to do with Bitch magazine. So make sure you are following her cross platform and you can check out all those links in the show notes. We're going to go record our Patreon episode. Thank you so much for being here with us. This was a dream for me. I'm so excited to have you here.

Evette: Thank you so much for having me. It has been such a pleasure.

Sophie: Yay.

Sophie: And that's our show! Producing SAF in COVID times is made possible by our beloved patrons!!! Special thanks to:

- 1. Noelle Mettill**
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- 8. Emily R Warren**
- 9. Jennifer Noveck, Ph.D.**
- 10. Jess Gafkowitz**

Thank y'all so much, we appreciate you, you keep the lights on over here at SAF!

Sophie: This week, your call to action is to listen to the podcast Housing Justice LA. Housing Justice LA is a monthly pod started this year in January featuring "personal stories from people who have experienced homelessness and conversations with experts on the front lines of LA's housing crisis." I think many of us who have not experience housing insecurity really need to hear these first hand accounts paired with how we can organize for housing justice! 2 episodes you need to listen to: the first, Why Housing Justice, for an intro to the topic and the pod hosts. The second, Othering, NIMBYism, and Criminalization — which is from July and is contextualized in the pandemic and months of protesting. I want to encourage you to look into your local tenants union — there's a ton of

activism going on right now in correlation with the Black Lives Matter movement — because Housing Justice is Racial Justice — and it's a really good time to get involved. Whether you're a renter or a homeowner or someone experiencing homelessness, there's a space for you to help and get help.