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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another very special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host and super fan today, Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you. We've got a great show in store.

And just a reminder to be sure you guys go and fill out our podcast survey. Simply follow the link in the show notes, answer a couple of questions, and help us be sure that we're crafting the very best listening experience possible for you. As I said, the epiphany episode, y'all's answers are truly answers to prayers for us as we're praying about what we do this year on the podcast and moving forward.

Tomorrow, Friday is the last day to fill out and enter to win that \$250 gift card. So be sure you do that before the end of the day on Friday the 14th. Thank you so so much for that valuable input y'all are offering to us.

Intro: Today on the show, ah, I can't believe this, you guys, I get to talk with New York Times bestselling author, Francine Rivers. Yes, the Francine Rivers who wrote *Redeeming Love*, *The Mark of the Lion* series, including *A Voice in the Wind*, and many more books that I love.

She's such a talented author, a real-life legend in this space. I'm so honored to get to talk with her as *Redeeming Love the Movie* is releasing in just a few days. I think you're going to love getting to know her and to hear some of her behind-the-scenes thoughts about the movie and about her writing process. And y'all, I want to sit in this one and listen forever. I'm so thankful.

Here's my conversation with Francine Rivers.

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Annie: Okay, let's start. We're just going to jump right in.

Francine: Okay.

Annie: *Redeeming Love the Movie*. I mean, what do you think now that it's... I mean, it's coming out, people are starting to see it. What kind of response are you getting?

Francine: Oh, I'm excited that I'm hearing from people all over that they're seeing the trailer on TV, they're hearing about it on the radio, they're reading different things about it.

So we're all pretty excited that you know we're also... There's a part of me that I'll believe it when I'm sitting in the theater and I actually have a bag of popcorn.

Annie: Yes!

Francine: With all the regulations, you just never know, from one day to the next.

Annie: Right. Will you tell the story a little bit of getting this book into a screenplay? I've read the story. It's so interesting how this went to a screenplay and you had to get involved.

Francine: Well, we worked with other companies, had other options, and it just never worked out. And the scripts that people would write, they just did not understand Michael.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And when I started working with Mission Pictures and Cindy Bond, I thought, "I think I'm just going to try to write the script." I got final draft... And I love movies. And reading how to write a script, and I just decided to do it myself to show them what I think had to be in the film. That was the idea that they would buy my script because I'm not a scriptwriter.

And then they said, "Yeah, we like this one." And then I worked with D.J. Caruso because, you know, I wrote it as a linear story the way it is in the book. And if you're sitting in the theater to see that whole backstory about Angel when she's a child would be a little bit too much I think for a lot of people.

Annie: Yeah, sure.

Francine: As we restructured, we worked together to strengthen scenes. You also can't have God talking out of the sky. People wouldn't understand that.

Annie: Oh, sure.

Francine: So we had to find a way to show what's happening without having the voice coming in. And the conversation, the spiritual battle it's very evident in the book.

Annie: Right.

Francine: You can't screen see that on screen. So it was all a challenge. And D.J. and I worked together on that, so...

Annie: Well. It turned out beautiful. Our team got to see it a couple of weeks ago and everybody... I mean, all of us have read the book multiple times. I mean, as you know, for many of my friends listening, for me, *Redeeming Love* is almost like an Ebenezer stone kind of book in so many of our lives.

Francine: Wow.

Annie: And the movie is so much like the book.

Francine: Well, the main thing was to get the major scenes in there that really explain God's love. You know, the way Michael is loving her, he's showing her how God loves all of us. And that had to be in there. That had to be the central point of the whole thing. And that was the challenge really. And D.J. did an outstanding job filming.

Annie: What do you think about the people playing Michael and Angel?

Francine: I'm thrilled. I'm really thrilled. It was very difficult to find Michael. We had a lot of auditions, and they could not play pure, the purity side of it.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And then Tom Lewis... D.J. actually discovered Tom Lewis. He's a British actor, and he trained with classical training, and he read the book. So he has a way of showing the nuances of emotion in his face. And he can play pure, which was so important. So I'm thrilled. I hope it makes him a huge star because he's just a gifted actor. And Abby, first time I saw her I thought, "There's Angel. She's Angel."

Annie: Really?

Francine: Yeah. She is a terrific actress and she looks like Angel.

Annie: Wow. That's what I was wondering. I was like, "I wonder how your brain as the author, when you see people playing these characters, when you see these buildings that you thought up, this paradise, the town, I mean, you made it up in your head. Did you get to go when they were filming it and stand there?"

Francine: Yes, we went in. I was blown away when we went up to Paradise. I mean, Johnny Brett is the one that did the sets and built the set. Rick and I were walking up the street and looking at this and going, "It's even better than what I imagined in my head."

Annie: Really?

Francine: I thought of a tent mining town to begin with and then the buildings are coming up and a little rough. But it was gorgeous. And I think the set is staying there as well as the chapel. And they'll probably be using it for other movies.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: Really well built. You'd even go into some of the stores and you could see the things. They had filled the shelves. On one store they had a basket of real fish. So you had the fish stand, flowers, and all that kind of stuff because they wanted the actors have to get the feel of the real place. It really had that feel.

Annie: I'm a big fan of westerns. I partly blame you because of how much I read *Redeeming Love* and *The Scarlet Thread* when I was younger. So I love Westerns. And to me how dirty the ground is is always a sign of whether they've really paid attention to historical accuracy. And so when I'm watching *Redeeming Love*, I'm like, "Yes, all their shoes are dirty. They're doing it. This is right."

Francine: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I just finished... I have another book coming out in February called *The Lady's Mine*. And it's about the eight and 1870 silver mining town. And she can smell the town before she gets to it.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: I call it my COVID book because I just had fun with it. There's a lot of humor laced in it.

Annie: What makes that time period so interesting to you to write in?

Francine: Well, I'm a native Californian and I just love California history. And I can go up into the gold country and the silver mining areas and see it firsthand. I've just always been fascinated by it.

Annie: So that one comes out next month?

Francine: That comes out in February.

Annie: It makes me so happy. I can't wait.

Francine: Another Western.

Annie: Oh, another Western by Francine Rivers. What a dream! When you are thinking about *Redeeming Love*, I would love for you to back us up. I'm thinking about that movie *Saving Mr. Banks*. Have you seen that?

Francine: Oh, yes! Yeah.

Annie: In *Saving Mr. Banks*, for our friends that are listening that haven't seen it, it's when P.L. Travers sees for the first time her book *Mary Poppins* become *Mary Poppins the Movie*. Will you back me up to when you wrote *Redeeming Love*? Did you ever dream it would be a movie?

Francine: I really didn't. I actually thought that was going to be the last book that I was going to write. I had written in the general market and then became a Christian, didn't write for about three years. We did Bible studies and came to the Minor Prophets. And it's Hosea that really broke through to me, that I thought, Well, I had been getting letters from people who had followed my career, and I felt like, you know, Hosea really is about all of us.

You know, he start out as children of darkness, or we have no knowledge of God. And then there's that defiance. You know, nobody's going to control my life and tell me how to live. And then the fear when you realize God wants everything. Not just bits and pieces of you, He wants everything. And then the humility eventually you begin to see what God wants and surrender yourself to Him. And then joy in the morning.

So it really was I just felt like I wanted to explain to people that the steamy historicals I used to write, that's not real love. Like God shows how to really love. That's *Redeeming Love*. So it was a way for me to just show my faith kind of a statement of my faith through my writing. But it kind of opened the door too because I had so many questions. I didn't become a Christian until I was in my mid-late 30s.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Francine: You know, you can grow up in the church and be sitting in the pews and not be a Christian. You have head knowledge, but you don't have heart and you don't have heart change. And I just thought, "Okay, I got all these questions, but I can pimper the story with all the different points of view about that one question, I have one

struggling Christian trying to find God's perspective. And that's basically what my career is. One question after another.

Annie: Is that kind of how you start books? Are you answering a question?

Francine: Yeah, I usually start with a question. I think the next one I wrote after *Redeeming Love* was *A Voice in the Wind*.

Annie: Oh, yes. We're talking about it. It's on my list.

Francine: Well, the question I had there was: how do I share my faith with unsaved family and friends who do not want to hear the name of Jesus and they do not want to read the Bible? How do you reach them? And what I learned in the process of writing it is really... It's how you live your life. People are always watching us. A lot of them want us to fall but they're watching how we live.

And eventually, eventually, there comes a time when they'll ask the question of why you live the way you do and why you think the way you do. And at that time, God gives you the words that He wants you to speak. It's not you prepare your presentation, you know, and spew it out when you have a chance. God gives you opportunities, and then He gives you the words for that specific person.

Annie: That whole *Mark of the Lion* trilogy, how did you pick that character? Because the book it's the daughter of the man who was raised from the dead by Jesus, the young man named. How did you pick....? I mean, what a random tiny story in the New Testament to build an entire world off of.

Francine: Well, I was doing research with that question in mind. You know, how do I share my faith? And I was reading about the early martyrs, and I thought, "Okay, I want somebody like me because Hadassah starts out afraid to talk about... Sorry.

Annie: No, you're fine.

Francine: You start out and you're kind of afraid to share your faith at all, and then you have the chance. With her, I would like to be Hadassah. She's the kind of Christian I would like to be. And I want to have... Interestingly enough, the book was supposed to end with her in the arena. Because I want to have the kind of faith where you'd be willing to die. There would just be no question that we joyously going to the Lord.

The editor said, "You can't kill Hadassah!" And I had done enough research about Rome at that time of how the doctors learned and they could not do dissection to learn about the human body. They had to do [inaudible 00:12:03], which is a horrifying thing to think about. But it kind of paved the way toward having the second story about how she ends up as Rapha. So she's hard and she barely survived. But she does survive. And then she continues to serve the Lord with people who don't believe in Him.

Annie: Yes. I mean, I can still see in my mind's eye the visual of her walking down the road with all the people as they move to a different city. Your ability to write that in a way that made that Bible story come to life for me, I mean, it has impacted me forever. It's incredible. So I'm very-

Francine: I like to kind of drop in possibilities, because of course, we don't have any history of what happened to the young man who was raised from the dead in Nain. And I've done that in other places like Theopolis in *As Sure as the Dawn*. You don't know who he is until the very end. And of course, we don't know who Theopolis was. So there's always the possibility, but it's fiction.

Annie: How often when you're reading the Bible is your brain also doing this? I mean, it sounds like curiosity is what drives your creativity.

Francine: Yeah, very much so. Especially the women. When I worked on *A Lineage of Grace*, I'm just thinking of the five women that are mentioned, they're all edgy women. I mean, you think about them in today's world, it would be fascinating that those are the specific women that are mentioned. I mean, there's, I think, one Jewish girl, and the rest are not. So it was always open to the world. God was always trying to reach the world.

Annie: Something that I think is so interesting, more in the New Testament and the Old too, is how many women don't have names. Like the woman at the well, the woman with the issue of blood. Whenever I read those, honestly in my mind, I think, "I wonder if Francine Rivers is ever going to write a book about this woman and give her name." Because I feel like there are so many... there are men too, but there are so many women who when the gospel writers were writing the story just told the story and didn't tell us their names.

Francine: Yeah. I always think about the widow and the widow's mite. She intrigues me. And then I think about the priests that's in there, and he's talking about how, you know, he doesn't do this and he doesn't do that. Like that tax collector back there. And the whole idea of [cabin?] [SP] you know, where they would protect the money that

they have, they weren't going to give it to their parents because they've dedicated to God. But it was a way for them to get out of supporting their family and having her actually be a widow of a priest. And her son is in there serving and he's the one that's boasting.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Francine: It's this mind going.

Annie: Yes, I love it. I mean, I think that's what keeps me opening the Bible is that I continue to bring curiosity to it even if I've read the same thing I'm reading again.

Francine: Yeah.

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our incredible partners, Epic Will. Consider this a little heart-to-heart moment with your older sis Annie/concerned friend AFD. Okay?

It's easy to think we've got all of our responsible future-facing plans in place, right? Like we're working hard, we're budgeting-ish, we're investing-ish, we're taking care of our health as best we can. But there's one little thing that's easy to neglect and that's having a will in place.

See having a will set up, a guardian named for your kids and advanced directive, health and financial powers of attorney, the building blocks of an early estate plan, these are important things to have thought through and have determined even if they're not the most fun things to think about. The peace of mind we get from knowing it's all sorted out does sound fun, right?

If God forbid, I was in some sort of accident and couldn't communicate with the doctors, I wouldn't want my family to be flying blind not knowing what my preferences are, and left to make really tough decisions. I bet you feel the same way. Y'all, wills are not just about our possessions and they're not something you wait until you're older to do. It's something to do now. So it's just taken care of and done, check the box, you did it, you hit what are your goals for 2022.

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Ritual's Essential for Women Multivitamin 18+ multivitamin was formulated by exhaustive research to help fill nutrient gaps in the diets of women ages 18 plus. It's formulated with nutrients to help support brain health and bone health and blood help and provide antioxidant support.

But Ritual didn't stop there, you guys. They invested in a gold standard University-led clinical trial to prove the impact of Essential for Women 18+ multivitamins. What they found was that their Essential for Women 18+ was shown to increase vitamin D levels which we need, need, need by 43%, and Omega 3 DHA levels by 41% in 12 weeks. That is impressive, right?

Ritual is committed to third-party testing from USP and the Non-GMO Project to including traceable and vegan-friendly ingredients and to always making sure their communication is clear. My Ritual multivitamins you guys know I love them. They are a part of my daily morning routine. I love knowing that their clean ingredients are helping me make sure my body gets what it needs that I'm not necessarily getting from what I eat. And also they smell so minty and fresh. You know this. I love it.

Right now Ritual is offering my friends 10% off your first three months. So visit ritual.com/thatsoundsfun, and turn healthy habits into a ritual. That's 10% off at ritual.com/thatsoundsfun.

And now back to my conversations with Francine Rivers.

[00:18:18] <music>

Annie: What does your Bible reading look like? Like what does your daily rhythms look like at this point with the Lord?

Francine: Well, I'm changing it up this year I think.

Annie: Oh, cool.

Francine: Because I've read through the one year Bible year after year. Last year we did the Chronological Bible. We have a home group that's been going for 35 years.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Francine: And we challenge them to read the Chronological Bible. For me, I love it because when you're reading the old and the New and the Psalm and Proverb in the one year Bible, you can hear God's voice in all of this and how it ties together. Even though it's written by different men inspired by God, it's God's voice that you can hear through it.

But this year, Rick and I are just going to go right straight through the New Testament. And we're reading together. So we each take a chapter. We're just going to go straight through it. And then something I've never done before, but I heard David Jeremiah talking about it, of writing out scripture. So I'm writing out the book of Romans. Just longhand writing it out, taking just a little bit at a time to think about it to try to get it fixed in my brain.

And then I want to do the sermon on the mount in Ephesians. I have a whole-

Annie: A whole list of what you're going to write out.

Francine: Yeah. And then we do devotionals together in the morning, but we always start in the morning. Rick is up super early.

Annie: Okay.

Francine: I think he was up at two o'clock in the morning last night-

Annie: Oh, wow.

Francine: And I was up at 4:30. Then we did our devotion time at 5:30 in the morning. But it's really important to us. I mean, it really has strengthened our marriage. We've been married 52 years-

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Francine: And we've been through... you know, we've been through hard times, and it's that mourning time that really makes the marriage thrive I think.

Annie: How do y'all get into that rhythm?

Francine: Years ago, Rick had his own business, Rivers Aviation Services. And he had to be at the office early in the morning to do all of his Eastern calls, the sales calls.

Annie: Oh, sure.

Francine: We thought the only time we really had to be together without three kids in the mix was early in the morning. And then we were struggling in our marriage, and we decided we really needed to have that time with the Lord. And that's when we started doing the Bible studies and the reading in the morning.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: So it's probably been 30 years, 35 years.

Annie: That's incredible. And y'all just read a chapter out loud to each other in the mornings?

Francine: Yeah.

Annie: Do y'all pray at the same time?

Francine: We pray after we're done reading.

Annie: I'm not married yet but this sounds very exciting. I like what you're suggesting. I'm like, "I want to do that whenever I get married."

Francine: Well, really, we pray throughout the day, but we do pray in the morning together. I remember hearing years ago "those that pray together, stay together." And it's really true. You know, when you're coming before the Lord, you're in a love triangle, and God's got to be in the center. And that's really what builds your relationship.

People don't know that. People struggle. I mean, when you have God as the center, you know when you're having problems a lot of it is spiritual battle that you have to deal with. And it's going on in the mind. And you have to fix your thoughts, you know, renew your mind in the Word of God, because that's God speaking to you.

Annie: I'm thinking about our married friends listening who were wondering, Yeah, is the thing going on in our marriage that feels sideways a spiritual problem? What's the filter to send something through to figure out whether it's a communication problem, or a spiritual problem, or all the above?

Francine: You know, when you're reading the Bible, things pop out at you all the time, especially in the New Testament. You can see how people think and how they get off track, and how they can get back on track. Because we're not any different than we were in the garden of Eden.

Annie: That's right.

Francine: I mean, Adam and Eve are going like this. "You know, it's all her fault. God, it's your fault. You gave me this woman, you know, it's got to go back to you." The casting of blame. So it's really getting past that. I was sharing with somebody that to have a really thriving, healthy, loving relationship, you have to have Christ at the center. And it's hard work. Marriage is hard work, but it's worth it. It's really worth it. Because you're growing up together and your life constantly is changing. My husband has Parkinson's. So that's a whole new dynamic and a whole new challenge, but it also draws us closer together.

Annie: How has that changed your prayer time—him being sick?

Francine: Not really. We actually have more time now. We're not traveling as much as we were, although we do our devotion time on a ship or a plane or wherever we happen to be. But we do have more time together because we're not traveling because COVID shut all that down two years ago.

Annie: Right. We've all gotten very used to having our morning times in our own houses.

Francine: And I think COVID didn't really change my life all that much, because writers shelter in place in order to get anything done. So it worked out just fine.

Annie: I had a couple of books come out in 2021, and people were like, "Annie, how are you doing this?" And I was like, "You understand that for 2020 all I did was write. We didn't travel anywhere. I just sat at home and wrote, so we had a lot of stuff get finished."

Francine: Oh, yeah. When I turned in *The Lady's Mine*, it was 194,000 words.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Just for our friends listening, my books average about 50,000. So you wrote six books.

Francine: Yeah. Tyndale said when you cut out 75,000, then we'll turn it over to the editor. And then the editor and I were laughing. I had as much fun cutting as I did writing.

Annie: Really?

Francine: I mean, I had all that time. So what does a writer do with all that time? You write and you write. Anyway!

Annie: So what do you do with those 75,000 words that tell us more of the story that we don't get to hear? Do you just throw them away? Or do you save them somewhere?

Francine: I just toss them.

Annie: That's heartbreaking.

Francine: A chapter out here, you know, a chapter out there.

Annie: That's terrible. I mean, does that feel hard? Or at this point, you've written over 30 books, so...

Francine: No, it doesn't. Actually, I really like the editing part because you're working together with somebody who has a fresh eye, they know about structure and all that and they can see what I missed. You can get so close to a project you can't see what's going on. And I have an excellent one in Kathy Olson. So she'll say, "Well, we want to know more about this character. And then this might be cut out." So I had a cholera epidemic in there.

Annie: Oh, good.

Francine: It was literally my COVID book. Then I left the fire in there, you know, because we're in California and we've had one fire after another. So, you know, getting all that out of my system. But it's supposed to be more lighthearted and have more humor. Well, cholera is in this.

Annie: Cholera isn't really doing that. Yeah.

Francine: Oh, yeah.

Annie: So when all of us read it in February, we can be like, we have the inside scoop that there used to be a cholera pandemic in this book.

Francine: And it's not in there anymore.

Annie: Okay, so you ended up cutting it down to like 120 or something? 100?

Francine: I think it's about 120. I never do the word count. It's a little over 400 pages.

Annie: I only do the word count when I have to get to a certain word count. Then I'm like, "Okay, we did it. Now finish writing the book."

Francine: I should have a count to begin with to know when to stop.

Annie: That's right. That's right. Speaking of editing, one time I sat with my editor and we couldn't figure out the order of the chapters of the book. And she said, "Okay, let's reorder them by date. Let's reorder them by this." And then she said, "Let's reorder and by who, what, when, where, why, and how." And we realized when we did that that I had no how. That I didn't tell people how to do anything. I was like, "Editing is helpful. That keeps me from releasing a book that helps no one."

Francine: What they call a pantsier, too. So I don't really know where I'm going from one day to the next.

Annie: Really.

Francine: I have the characters in my head, but they also have to develop.

Annie: Wow. So you don't outline the whole thing before you start?

Francine: I have to turn in a proposal.

Annie: Sure.

Francine: But Tyndale has learned, you know, they learned many years ago that the book will not look the same as the proposal turned in. And they've really given me a lot of freedom. "Just write what God is telling you to write and then we'll see what happens at the other end." And then to work with editors and they ask questions and questions just get me rolling. That really encourages my creativity.

Annie: It's got to be good for our friends who are listening that want to write books to hear you and I say we both still... you still write proposals, I still write proposals. We do not skip that line the longer you do this career.

Francine: Yeah. Well, as a writer, I think you're always an apprentice. You're always learning. Every project is new. And I can't look at it as I'm going to be writing a book because if I look at it that way, I'll start...

Annie: Oh.

Francine: It's too big a project. So it's I can get four pages done a day and I can build over a year. And keep that center focus, that center question in my head.

Annie: This is my fan moment where I get to ask you questions, because I unfairly have this time with you. *Atonement Child*, what was the question behind *Atonement Child*?

Francine: Well, is their total forgiveness? That story was probably the most personal for me because I was Hannah. I had an abortion in my college years.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: I was still dealing with it years later. And when I thought I need to write a book about abortion and what it does, I talked to my mother and found out that she had had a therapeutic abortion. So she's Evie in the story.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And then I'd hear Christians thought, "Well, if it's a rape, then, of course, abortion should be allowed, and so on and so forth." And I thought, "I want to start with a rape victim."

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And it's so everybody in the story and I think it's true in society, too, everybody is impacted by abortion in some way. Even if you don't know the person you can see the after-effects of what it does to people. So there's that one character who's a strong Christian, but she's raped and she's pregnant. And it's "what do you do in that kind of the case?" So it's following her and all the pressures that come to bear on a rape victim who's pregnant to have an abortion, right?

Annie: It's such a redeeming story, though.

Francine: Yeah, it is.

Annie: I mean, you did such a beautiful job.

Francine: Well, and after I was done, I actually met a couple of people that came to me and they had gone through it. They had had children, and... I can't remember the name of the gal but she used to speak but she was raped when she was 18. And she had the baby and gave the baby up for adoption. And when the baby grew up, the daughter, she was on a search for her birth mother. And the reason she was on search for her was to make sure her mother was a Christian.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And when they met—and they were on talk shows—when they met the mom told her, "Yes, I'm a Christian. Being pregnant with you is what brought me to Christ."

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And she had talked publicly. It was an incredible story, but I thought we just never know. And the child of rape is a victim too.

Annie: Yes. How often are your novels coming from something in your own life?

Francine: Quite often. Just about every one of them comes from something, you know, a question in my life or something that I'm struggling with or some issue that I'm trying to work out.

Annie: Does that feel really personal? Because then your children are seeing it, your husband is seeing it, your closest friends are seeing it. So it's almost like letting all of us strangers and up-close people into your journal a little bit.

Francine: Yeah. And I talked to my husband... and my husband knew. But I talked to him because he was not involved. You know, this had nothing to do with him. It's something I brought into the marriage. But I had talked about children and say, "This is what I'm going to be writing about. This is why." That was the hardest thing to do. And also talk to my in-laws and tell them.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: So I didn't want them finding out through some interviews. And then I was concerned about Tyndale because at the time, you know, Tyndale... I had told my editor, my senior editor in confidence, "Don't talk about this." But then they got called in. There were two of them, and they got called in to the board, I think, with Tyndale, and they said, "We want to know if she had an abortion." And they were trying to get around not saying anything.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And they finally said, "Well, yes, she told us in confidence." And they said, "We'll go back to her and tell her we're behind her 100% in support." And that was just tremendously freeing. The things that I feared might happen never did. God just knew the way, and gave me a chance to share with people and it opened up for me to speak at pregnancy counseling centers and to talk to people openly about it. Because I think it's a secret that people hold tight, and it just continues to fester and hurt. And the more people that can speak up and speak out about what it does, the less abortions there'll be.

Annie: And the way you frame it in a fiction book makes it feel more palatable maybe than just sitting and hearing a preacher say it or hearing a testimony. There's something different when it's... I mean, it's what we've been talking this whole time. When you turn it from Scripture to story, we are able to receive it in a different way.

Francine: Yeah. That's the thing with fiction, too, is it's meant to be a bridge to the real thing.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: It's never meant to replace. It's always meant to whet the appetite, to get back into Scripture and see what's really there, what is God actually saying. I remember on one interview, the person was... they didn't know my story, but they were talking about how they were doing a march, anti-abortion march, and they were, you know, carrying placards or whatever.

And he's explaining all this to me. He says, "Well, what do you think of all that?" And I said, "Well, if I was a girl pregnant now, your church would be the last one I'd ever walked into. Because that's what she'd be facing." And he said, "What can we do?" And I said, "You need to be standing outside the door of the abortion clinic when the girl comes outside and realizes she's made the worst decision in her life. And she'll live with it forever." We need to love them, not persecute them.

Annie: Yes, yes. And be a part of their lives. Be a part of their lives.

Francine: Yeah. Well, so much of the information, the real facts about a human being conceived, and the stages of a human being are not allowed to be taught anymore. And they certainly don't tell them that when they're in an abortion. So the language they use makes the person coming in feel like, well, this is okay, because it's not really a life.

So then, later on, you know, it's like it when it really struck me as, you know, I'd had the abortion and then when you're pregnant with the child you want, the moment of conception that you know about it, that's a child and you love that child. So what's the difference? Yeah, there is no difference.

Annie: Man, the pain of sitting and writing through that, though. Are you in counseling during all that? Like how do you go that deep into your own story?

Francine: I was not in counseling, but I was in a post-abortion class in the local pregnancy counseling center. They were rallying for me that entire year, because it was the toughest year of writing I've ever done.

Annie: Really?

Francine: And the most healing at the end.

Annie: Wow. So they just walked you right through it?

Francine: Well, what I learned at the end, too, is that God had forgiven me a long time ago. I couldn't forgive myself. I couldn't let go of it.

Annie: Did writing help with that?

Francine: Yeah. Very definitely.

Annie: That's incredible.

Francine: And hopefully the story will help others.

Annie: Yes. Oh, it's absolutely beautiful novel. Your skill at writing, I can picture things from that book that I will never forget. It's almost like a memory of my own, your ability makes it such a real place and such a real story.

[00:35:04] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Everlywell](#). Maybe it's eggs, maybe it's almonds, maybe it's the unsuspecting banana or carrot. Listen, if you struggle with common symptoms like bloating or stomach aches, or migraines or indigestion and wonder whether they could be related to food, the Everlywell food sensitivity tests may help you find more clarity. And the results will guide a two-part elimination diet by measuring your reactivity to 96 common foods.

Y'all, I've been there before with gluten and dairy and caffeine so I can attest to how helpful this information you can find out with Everlywell really is. Everlywell at home lab tests give you physician-reviewed results and personalized insights so you can take action on your health and wellness, all at an affordable and transparent cost.

With over 30 tests you'll be able to choose the ones that make the most sense for you. Food sensitivity, metabolism, sleep and stress, and thyroid are just a few of the many options. So here's how it works. Everlywell ships your at-home lab test straight to you with everything you need for a simple sample collection. I've done one of their tests it really was like very simple process.

And then using the prepaid shipping label, you just mail your test back to a certified lab. In just a few days your physician-reviewed results and actionable insights are sent to your device and you can share the results with your primary care physician to help guide next steps.

Over 1 million people, including your girl AFD, have trusted Everlywell with their at-home lab testing. And for my friends here at That Sounds Fun, Everlywell is offering a special discount of 20% off in at-home lab test at everlywell.com/thatsoundsfun. That's everlywell.com/thatsoundsfun for 20% off your at-home lab test. [Everlywell.com/thatsoundsfun](https://everlywell.com/thatsoundsfun).

Sponsor: And one more cool thing to tell you about since we got the author of the book that this next partner is based on. Be sure you're planning to go see [Redeeming Love the Movie](#). Just like you're hearing from Francine and I, we both love the movie version of her international bestselling novel.

And we agree that the casting of Abigail Cohen, Tom Lewis, Nina Dobrev, Eric Dane, also known as Mick Steamy, and funky Jansen, among others, could not be better. They're each perfectly cast. And the dirty feet, y'all, they got it right. They know what California Gold Rush era is supposed to look like.

Redeeming Love is rated PG 13. That's important for you to know. And it premieres January 21 in theaters nationwide. That's a week from tomorrow. So Let's all make plans. We're going. Get your friends, get your book club, get your special someone. Let's all go see *Redeeming Love*. For more information or to get your own tickets at a theater near you, visit redeeminglovemovie.com. Again, that's redeeminglovemovie.com.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Francine.

[00:37:52] <music>

Annie: For our friends listening, if they have stories like that, how did you know... I mean, when you sat down and you started thinking how to answer that question, that moment where you go, "Oh, no, I'm going to have to write my own story," how did you get over the fear of "I don't want to do that. I don't want to tell people that"?

Francine: Well, because, for one, you're writing for God. And you're writing with... you know, He's present. I felt that, especially in *Redeeming Love*. I felt like Jesus was sitting next to me. Because I didn't have that background, I didn't know all the different emotions that she'd go through, so I was really just relying on reading scripture every day and then writing about Angel.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And then I heard from people... We have a Redeeming Love Sanctuary Foundation has come out of the movie-

Annie: Oh, wow!

Francine: Which I'm really excited about. One of the gals that's on the board, the new board, is Nita Belles, who was involved in our backyard and going to the Super Bowls and actually helping to rescue girls, finding young women. But she was watching the movie with me and she said, "That part right there, that's so typical of a survivor—what they go through."

Annie: Wow.

Francine: I wouldn't have known that. That's something that God just kind of revealed to me as I was writing this story is because it's really His story and he can see in the hearts of His children what they need. The only thing I had to go by was I had three

pictures and it was that the same girl and it had come from a woman's magazine. And the first picture was of a little girl of student picture. Perfect, gorgeous, little blonde, eight-year-old or whatever. And then another one, she'd been kidnapped, disappeared. They've confiscated a porno film. She was the same age, terrified look on her face.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: Then another one when she was a little older, maybe 12 years old and she looked totally different, she had dead eyes and just kind of a seductive look on her face. And I had those on my bulletin board and I thought I'm writing for her wherever she is.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And what got her to that point? So that was sort of in my mind. And that first 50 pages, of course, were the hardest pages I've ever had to write. Because I've been wanting to be inside that little girl's head and what she was through. But you had to have that setup so that you understood why she was the way she was at 18.

Annie: Yes, yes. I heard someone say the other day—I'm not going to quote this perfectly—but "if you don't pay attention to the problem you're not going to be able to see the redemption either."

Francine: Yeah, exactly.

Annie: Okay. Tell us about the nonprofit? What kind of trafficking rescue work are y'all going to do?

Francine: Oh, there's going to be a website. I think the beginning of the website is up now. But more of it is going to be by the middle of January. But it's really the money that we've made, Rick and I have made from *Redeeming Love* since the beginning has always been... we felt like the book is God's, it's first fruits belong to Him.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: So we've given the money away. Except for taxes. We found that we have to pay the taxes.

Annie: Unfortunately.

Francine: I can't afford to pay the taxes anymore. The taxes are going to have to come out. So that first and then the rest goes to God's work. And I wanted to focus it on survivors but I've never known how to do it. And this whole idea, we talked about it, Holly Caruso and I. But Holly Caruso is really the visionary and the one behind this. She's the president of the foundation. Whatever money I make from the movie is going to go into this foundation.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: And then we're giving grants that we've done for this year to 501 3c... (c)3s?

Annie: I don't know either. I don't know either.

Francine: We have somebody that vets them. And then we're geared toward helping survivors. So we're coming alongside groups that are actually on the frontlines working with survivors, and they have education programs and all kinds of things. So those are the ones that we're supporting. We're not starting a new work because it takes so long to know and it's so complex. We want to work with people that are there and successful at what they're doing.

So that's our hope. But we're small. We're just starting out right now and hoping to have supporters after the movie. Because there'll be information on the movie about it.

Annie: Will you tell me again what the website is?

Francine: It's redeeminglovesanctuary.org.

Annie: Perfect. We will share that when the episode comes out so that people can go and see it as well. *Redeeming Love the Movie* is going to be in all the theaters, right? Like, we can just go see it.

Francine: That was miraculous because Universal saw the movie and said absolutely they wanted it to be their film. So it's being distributed by Universal Studios. It's going to be here in my hometown.

Annie: I mean, are you going to sneak in and see it a hundred times?

Francine: Or I'm going to go in with friends because with COVID, who knows! There is a premier plan for the 13th but I think they're going to have to scale back because of

the new mandates. So we thought, well, if it doesn't work out, we'll just get together with friends and dress up and go to the matinee here.

Annie: That's right. You've been writing for decades. When you look back on the whole thing, could you ever have dreamed your career would look like this? Is this what you pictured?

Francine: No, no, didn't have a clue. The thing about writing is, you know, people have asked me who my favorite author is, and it's always who I happen to be reading at the moment because there's so many good writers out there. I mean, I think we live in the golden age of fiction-

Annie: Really?

Francine: ...and nonfiction really, because we have to have access to so many wonderful books. I don't pay attention to numbers and all that, I don't pay attention to reviews because they can either puff you up or they can devastate you. So it's better to stay away.

Annie: And the work is already done, you can't change it. I can't change it if they don't like the book. I'm so sorry.

Francine: Well, and too I'm a wife and a mother and a grandmother and I sit at my computer and write. That's not a very exciting work necessarily.

Annie: I disagree with you. The stories that you have in your head make up for a very exciting life. You've done incredible work. Of all the books you've written, do you have one...? Is it *Redeeming Love*? Do you have one that you say, "This is the one I love the most so I want to be remembered for" or is the closest to your heartbeat?

Francine: I think *Redeeming Love* or *A Voice in the Wind* because I would really like to be like a Hadassah. And I think Rome, that whole period of time when I was writing that book, I thought, "We're so much like Rome in a different way." But that whole way of living, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die, it doesn't matter. The morals are not there anymore and people are suffering for it. I see a lot of dysfunction and misery going on because they don't know God.

Annie: Will you continue to write in that time era? Do you see more books coming out from there?

Francine: Not ancient Rome, no. And if anybody asked me about Ancient Rome right now, I couldn't tell them anything. My mind tends to erase and then move on to the next file. I never really know what I'm going to do next. I'm not sure what I'm going to do from here.

Annie: How much of a break do you get? Like now that the new one comes out in February, are you ready to write again? Are you happy to sit and rest a little bit? Or what's the process when it's...?

Francine: I'm kind of resting right now. But I'm thinking about a story on a revenge and a gunslinger.

Annie: Listen-

Francine: Another Western. I'm drawn to Westerns right now, I don't know why.

Annie: Same.

Francine: This like, you know, what does revenge do not only to the person that's seeking revenge but what does it do to everybody around us? And also law and order. Because if he's a gunslinger he's going to have to come in contact with law. You know, it's still-

Annie: So right now it's just spinning.

Francine: Yes.

Annie: Okay. Oh, that's so interesting. You're just like paying attention to the little details that are coming to your mind as they happen.

Francine: Yeah, jot down. I have a notebook that I carry with me all the time because you get ideas all over the place. People can say something that's like, "Oh, that sparks something." And write it down. That's my advice to people that want to write. You know, just have that notebook handy and jot down the ideas you get.

Because I heard Ray Bradbury say one time in a speech that he had the idea for the great American novel, and it was at night, he thought, "Well, it's such a great idea. I'll remember in the morning." And in the morning he couldn't remember it. So always have a notebook beside you, on your bedside table, and have a flashlight, and a pen.

Annie: Write whatever comes to your brain in the middle of the night and then in the morning... Yeah. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you want to make sure we cover?

Francine: I can't think of anything.

Annie: Thank you so much. Truly you have inspired me, not only in my writing but in my faith. You have known me for 30 of my 40 years, and you didn't even know it.

Francine: The last question we always ask—we do have a final question—because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Francine: Oh, wow. This won't sound fun to a lot of people. But when we bought this property there was an orchard... not an orchard, a vineyard that just I didn't let go. So for me fun is working in that vineyard and work... Enrique and Raul are training me in pruning and all that management and it's really fun.

And there's so many spiritual lessons of vineyard. Incredible. And they and they're making wine because we don't drink. So it's like all the grapes are either going to go in the dumpster or they're going to go to somebody so they're making wine. We're in the wine country. That's where we live.

Annie: So you're doing all the work and you'll do all the harvesting, but you won't have any of the spoils.

Francine: Yeah. But it's great fun to be out there and working and watching how things grow and change in the little tiny grapes.

Annie: Where is it right now? Where is it in the cycle? Are there any leaves yet or anything?

Francine: No. Right now it's in the dormant cycle. And probably by the end of the month we'll be pruning.

Annie: Wow. And we're doing some retraining, you know, because the vines were let go for so long. With the first year that I really worked at was like two or three years ago, and the first harvest was 750 pounds.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: Last year it was 1,200 pounds.

Annie: Oh my gosh! Wow.

Francine: And we have 100 vines.

Annie: A hundred vines? That's not a little vineyard, Francine.

Francine: Well, it's little compared to the ones around Sonoma County.

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Francine: We think this is an area for growing Pinot Noir, but we think it might be merlot.

Annie: Wow.

Francine: Merlot and Pinot Noir mix because they're much sweeter. The birds love them.

Annie: What an amazing thing they get to watch year after year. I mean, you're right, the spiritual significance is insane.

Francine: Oh, yeah.

Annie: I came out to Napa with some girlfriends in February a couple of years ago. And we're standing out in a vineyard and the woman is talking to us about pruning and how they retry certain vines they go... I'm just standing out there crying, Francine. I'm just crying listening to her because I'm like, "That's what Jesus does to me."

Francine: Yeah, yeah. We must be connected to the vine, you know.

Annie: Well, listen, any time you would like to come back and talk about any of your books, you're so welcome.

Francine: Oh, thank you.

Annie: I cannot wait for people to see *Redeeming Love* and to read the new one. Say the title of the new one again.

Francine: It's called *The Lady's Mine*.

Annie: *The Lady's Mine*.

Francine: And it's got double meaning.

Annie: Oh, I can't wait. Oh, I can't wait. I cannot wait. We're all going to read it in February. I'm very excited.

[00:50:09] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Oh, don't you love her? I can't believe we got to talk to her. It's amazing. Okay, if you haven't read *Redeeming Love*, I think you should read it. Make sure you go see the movie.

Mark of the Lion trilogy is incredible. And that new book coming out, *The Lady's Mine*, I cannot wait. I cannot wait. Y'all. I mean, we don't even have a book club, but I think we might need a book club. You know what I'm saying? Okay, so make sure you grab that as well and go see *Redeeming Love*.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, all the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. I think that's it for me today, friends.

So go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. And today what sounds fun to me is opening up Amazon and ordering that book. I forgot to do it after our interview but I am not forgetting today. It is getting done.

Have a great weekend. And we'll see you back here on Monday as we observe Martin Luther King Junior's birthday with an inspiring conversation with my friend Shana Berkeley from Corner to Corner here in Nashville. Y'all are going to love her and the good she and Corner to Corner are doing in the world. Oh, I cannot wait for you to hear this one. So we'll see you back here on Monday. Y'all have a great weekend.