

[00:00:00] <music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Thursday, February 17th is a day we've been looking forward to for a long time. And we have got a great show in store.

It is a really special day in our little corner of the world. Our That Sounds Fun tour kicks off tonight and we have a fun weekend of cities followed by two more fun weekends of cities. Y'all, grab those tickets to join us in any of the cities that are not sold out yet at Anniefdowns.com/events or snag virtual tickets for the live stream at compassionlive.com.

And a big group of friends are going through *100 Days to Brave* and *100 Days to Brave for Kids* together starting today. It is not too late for you to join us as we take this 100-day journey together. Just sign up at the link in the show notes. You'll get email reminders and other fun encouragement throughout the process.

I'll be posting the first five days starting today on my Instagram stories so you can order your book and follow along there until your book arrives. I cannot wait to see all of us grownups and MiniBFFs alike get a little braver over the next 100 days.

But before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment to share about one of our incredible partners. This podcast is sponsored by [BetterHelp Online Therapy](#). We all know that this is the truth. Relationships take work. A lot of us will drop anything to go help someone we care about. We will go out of our way to treat other people well. But a lot of times we forget to prioritize what's arguably the most important human relationship in our lives and that is our relationship with ourselves.

So this month BetterHelp Online Therapy wants to remind you that you matter like everyone else does and therapy is a great way to make sure you show up for yourself. My counselor has been an incredibly helpful advocate for my mental health and I think it would be amazing for you to have that in your life too. You can find it through BetterHelp.

BetterHelp is customized online therapy that offers video, phone, and even live chat sessions with your therapist. So you don't have to see anyone on camera if you don't want to. It's much more affordable than in-person therapy and you can be matched with a therapist in under 48 hours. Give it a try and see why over 2 million people have used BetterHelp Online Therapy.

This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp and That Sounds Fun friends get 10% off your first month at betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun. That's betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun.

Intro: Today on the show I get to chat with my friend Morgan Harper Nichols. Girl has been busy since the last time she was on the pod in Episode 208. You'll probably know her as the fantastic Instagram poet and artist who creates work around the stories of others.

She's the author of *All Along You Were Blooming*, a book of poems and art she created in response to the personal stories submitted by her friends and followers. She also hosts a podcast *The Morgan Harper Nichols Show* where she shares daily reflections on finding meaning and peace and life and work.

Morgan has also performed as a vocalist on several Grammy-nominated projects and written for various artists including the billboard number-one single performed by her sister Jamie Grace, who I love. She's done brand partnerships with Anthropologie and Coach and Adobe and Vogue Singapore and Aerie and Target, Starbucks, KIND Bar, Gaps, Splendid, John Paul Mitchell, and more, you guys.

Her latest book *Peace Is a Practice: An Invitation to Breathe Deep and Find a New Rhythm for Life* just released on Tuesday. I asked her all the things. So let's dive into my conversation with my friend Morgan Harper Nichols.

[00:03:51] <music>

Annie: Morgan, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Morgan: Oh, thank you for having me back. Oh, my goodness, it's so good to see you again.

Annie: I know. I know. We used to see each other a ton about a decade ago. We were on the road together. So it was like, "Oh, I'll see you in two weekends." But now it just never happens.

Morgan: Oh my goodness! Yes.

Annie: Okay, so last time you were on the show was the very actual beginning of the pandemic. I mean, it was like we did not know what was going on.

Morgan: Oh, yeah.

Annie: So two years later, tell me how's the family, how's the baby, how's Phoenix.

Morgan: Yes. Okay. Yeah So literally nothing has changed. Everything-

Annie: You're like weirdly, "Our life was very normal for the last two years."

Morgan: Yeah, it's been super easy, super calm. Nothing really going on. No, yeah, literally after we spoke, we kind of uprooted our lives out of Southern California.

Annie: Yeah, because I was going to say y'all were in LA when we spoke.

Morgan: Ah, yes. And it was a hard move.

Annie: Really?

Morgan: I mean, we had just kind of started... so my husband is my business partner and we had just started, like the online shop part of our business right before. Literally end of 2019 is kind of when we were first getting everything going.

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: You know, obviously, for many reasons, early 2020 was so hard for so many people. But as new small business owners, it was just really hard to keep our business the way that we had it in California. We needed more physical room. So we were like, "Where can we go where we can just get more room to store our products?" Because we had to go remote with our staff and my husband was the one shipping out all the orders.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Morgan: We just didn't have space.

Annie: Morgan!

Morgan: We just started looking-

Annie: He was shipping all the orders.

Morgan: All of it.

Annie: I cannot deal.

Morgan: This was with our son who's like eight months old. It was a whole ordeal.

Annie: Right. Moving to anywhere. Oh my gosh!

Morgan: So we ended up moving just... I mean, the biggest part was... I remember still looking on Zillow and looking for somewhere to move, and like just zooming out on the map. And before I knew it, I was in Arizona. I was in the state next door. I was like, "Oh, where is that?"

Annie: Sometimes this is how we hear God. Yeah, sometimes we hear God on a map.

Morgan: Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Through that Zillow map, I zoomed up into. And I was like, "What if we move to Arizona?" Because we still have to go to California for different things like with shipments and some products coming in. So it was just... I don't know. It felt random. But at the same time, it didn't feel random. Like now that we're here, we're just like, "Oh, this kind of feels like where we're supposed to be."

Annie: Morgan, that is a wild story that that's how y'all got to Phoenix. You've zoomed out on the map.

Morgan: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Annie: Did your parents come with you? Are Jamie and her family still in California?

Morgan: Our whole family. Everybody came. They were like, "Y'all aren't leaving us here."

Annie: You zoomed out on a map and moved the entire Harper family.

Morgan: Yeah, because this was right in the middle of it. It was like that point where it's like, "Oh, this is going to be more than a few weeks." You know my sister's a full-time touring musician. So her whole world changed overnight in that way. So we were just like, "Let's just go take it one year at a time. Let's just see what happens." And now we're all here and we all love it. So it was random, but it ended up working out.

Annie: Tell me your experience with God in all of this. Tell me what you know about God now that you didn't know when we saw you in March of 2020?

Morgan: Oh my goodness! I'm going to say this. I'm like, "Oh, man, it's big." It's that I'm not going to see the blueprint. I want to see the blueprint so bad. I want to get to this point in my life. I oftentimes I'm like, "I know what the plan is. We got to plan. We got to strategy." And then I'm like, "Okay, I can see God in this. We're on the right track." And then everything changes. Everything. You know, having a move, having to adapt constantly.

And sometimes for me, I remember in those early stages are really considering, "Okay, yeah, we're going to have to make this big move." It felt like, "What have I done wrong? What am I hearing? What am I not understanding? What did I miss? What mistakes am I making?"

Annie: Huh, Morgan!

Morgan: And I feel like some of the greatest spiritual growth that I've kind of experienced is just like I have been trying so hard to seek the presence of God and the answers. And God is asking to meet me in the questions and to be with me in the questions and to just live with those questions.

And it's okay to move to a new state and not have everything figured out and to just be so grateful that your basic needs are met. It's like I can complicate it so much like, "Oh, what am I going to do about this?" It's like, there's a shelter over your head. You have a young child who has food to eat. It's like, it's a pandemic. That right there is huge. There are people who don't have that. So just recognizing, Wow, there's a lot of grace that I feel like I sometimes take for granted when things aren't figured out.

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: Yeah, yeah. So I just had a birthday like four days ago.

Annie: Yes, happy birthday.

Morgan: And even just kind of going to where I'm at now is like my hope this year is just really try to not take everything so seriously. I think being a grown-up it's like there is a lot of responsibility there. And sometimes I think, though, I can take that too far where expect myself to have every little thing figured out.

So I was like, "My goal this year is to find as many things as possible where I'm just going to unapologetically be like, I don't know. I don't know. We're just going to figure it out as we go. We're not going to stress out about this."

This might be a small thing for some people, but it might be big for others. This kind of thing where you are, but I decided I'm not going to stress out about social media. I'm just not. I'm going to post whatever I want when I feel like posting it. If I feel like posting it at all. I'm like, "I'm not planning out a feed this year."

Annie: Yeah. I mean, you are so scheduled about things. Yeah.

Morgan: Yeah. So it's just being free. I've been learning a lot.

Annie: I mean, my summary, if I'm reflecting back to what I'm hearing, is that the longer you're doing this with the Lord, the less control you're holding, which sounds terrible.

Morgan: Yeah. I know. It's pretty terrifying.

Annie: In your art and in your family and in your own life, that has to be very scary to let go of that much control in that short amount of time.

Morgan: Yeah, absolutely. Because I thought I had finally figured it out, if you will. Because I had spent a decade of my life. Prior to the stuff that I'm doing now, prior to 2019, I had spent a decade being very financially insecure. Like really just not knowing what the long-term strategy was.

And I talk about that because I think a lot of times we can overlook how much financial insecurity can really impact our mental health, the way that we are in the world, our motivations, our choices. And that was a huge one for me of just not really knowing, like, "Wow, how are we going to pay rent next month? We're being stretched very thin all the time."

So when I finally got to a point in 2019 when we were finally like, "Okay, we actually aren't month to month now and we can actually see a plan and how we can grow this business that we've created," it was a blessing. But at the same time, I did become distracted. And I did become like, "Oh, we're good now. We got a plan. We got it figured out."

And in many ways, early 2020 was just a reminder of like, "No, you don't. You don't have it all figured out. But that's not what your worth is. Your worth is not in having it figured out. So it's okay to be in process and to be living with these questions as you figure out what's next.

Annie: I had this weird conversation with myself when I got out of my car last night after dinner, because I'm thinking about getting a new car. I'm in that place, right?

Morgan: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: And said to myself, "What car could you buy that would actually make you happy?" And the answer is none. So I was having that kind of conversation of like there isn't ever going to be a number in the bank account that's going to make any of us go, "Oh, now we've done it. There it is." Or any vehicle or any relationship.

I mean, I feel like the longer I'm Annie the more I'm experiencing what you're saying of like the Lord will hand you things and then go, "Hey, did you notice that's still not filling the hole you thought it was going to fill?" Until there's nothing left?

Morgan: Yeah, yeah. Oh my gosh! Yes. Oh, my goodness. I was having, not about a car, but I was having that very similar conversation with myself last night about-

Annie: We should have called each other. "I'm having this conversation with myself."

Morgan: Yeah. Because I had someone make a snarky comment on something that I shared. And honestly, here's the thing. A lot of people don't know... I mean, you've talked to me, you know I'm not just like, "Okay, pretty poems," and that's it. I'm kind of sarcastic, I kind of just...

So people were coming to my defense, like, "Oh, don't talk about Morgan's poem like that." And I'm like, "If only y'all knew I made fun of myself all the time." I'm like, "I don't put things out there like, 'Oh, people have to take this seriously.'" I'm like, My poems are showing up in the middle of memes and jumping through sprinklers. I don't expect everyone to have this deep meditative spirit to what I share.

So I just started spiraling and I'm like, "But is that how people perceive me? Oh my goodness! Am I letting people down if I'm not super serious?" And I just started thinking, "What version of this is going to just make me feel like all right? What version of me creating some branded narrative of myself is going to make me say, 'Wow, Morgan, good job.'"

Annie: "Now you've done it."

Morgan: "You've figured it all out. Everything is great." It's none of that.

Annie: No.

Morgan: I just gotta let it go. I gotta let it go.

Annie: I mean, with 2 million followers on Instagram, are you constantly seeing negative stuff all day every day, or do you mostly not have to look at it?

Morgan: I'm going to be real with you. It's increasing.

Annie: Is it?

Morgan: It's been interesting to me because for a long time I felt like I dealt with very minimal anything. But just to be completely honest, a lot of the stuff that I receive it's very clear to me that it's not personal. It's very clear to me that like, Hey, look, it's a lot going on-

Annie: Like, that person has something going on in their life. Is that what you mean?

Morgan: Exactly. I'm like, "I have no idea what's going on in your life. These are chaotic times." And I even actually had someone—and I had missed the message... They had sent me... So I sent out a daily encouraging email and they responded to the email, and they were like, "Why are you always talking...?" I don't know what the accusation was. But they were like, "Why are you always talking about X, Y, Z?" I don't remember what it was. And they actually responded a year later and they said, a year later, they said, "Hey, I really apologize for the email that I sent." I had to go back and find it because I didn't even saw the email.

Annie: You're like, "That's why I deleted it. You've been thinking about it for a year. So who wins?"

Morgan: I know. Yeah. And they were like, "I was just in a really bad place and I took it out on you. And I'm so sorry."

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: And I was just like, "You know what, that's probably most people." I was like, "I don't know. They could have just gotten in a whole text messaging argument like five seconds before they saw my video." So most of the time it doesn't even register as a heaviness, if you will. It's just like, "Okay, there's a lot going on right now." And I just tried to peace myself through it. I don't go in my DMs all day every day.

Annie: No. No.

Morgan: It's just like you can only do that at certain times. And I try to just peace myself through it.

Annie: The interesting thing is—I'm with you—I don't get a lot of hateful people. Usually, people treat me like a gnat. Like if I bother them, they just swipe me away. So I don't get yelled at very much. But I got a pretty unkind one this morning. And I started thinking like, "Why am I letting this get to me? And why did she say the things she said? Those are two things I couldn't get off my head.

So any of our friends listening could get a negative comment for anything from a stranger or from a friend. How do you shake it off? What is your pattern for shaking stuff off?

Morgan: I think for me, it's... I wish it sounded more professional.

Annie: Oh girl, tell me you go eat ice cream and I'm going to hear it.

Morgan: In real life it really is different. My sister got a weird one today and she texted it to me. And we were just going back and forth, like, "Oh my God, why would they even say that?" I literally took a picture of my face. Like I was like, "There's no emoji to encapsulate how I feel." So I took a picture of my face to show her what my reaction was.

Annie: You're like, "Jamie watch."

Morgan: Yeah, exactly. So there's some times where just texting it to my sister is just like that's the end of it. Like, we have a laugh about it. We're like, "Oh my gosh! Okay, move on." But sometimes I really do try to respond. And sometimes it goes well, sometimes it doesn't. But yeah, it really does vary situation to situation. And also just how I'm feeling in the moment. Sometimes I'm just a little bit more spicy than others.

Annie: Oh, I responded back to someone at like 11:30 the other night. I came in to work and I was like, "I need y'all to know I don't need to be responding after about 10 o'clock." Because spicy Annie comes out and has some thoughts. Some thoughts.

Morgan: And also for me it depends on who I'm around. So, to me, my sister and my husband. They will both be like, "Oh, yeah, you can totally respond." And I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, I was just telling you. I was just trying to get it off my chest."

Annie: But they're overwhelming response, I mean, people share your art constantly, Morgan. I mean, it has to feel... Well, I don't know how it feels. How does it feel to know 2 million people baseline are impacted by your art every day? I mean, what does it feel like to know.

Morgan: It is very surreal. I think in some ways this is probably why I have been able to share so much is that for me I do kind of have... like Instagram in particular, it doesn't feel like real life to me always. So there are times where I'm sharing and I'm just like, I know that those people are real on the other side of those usernames, but I'm just such a real-life connection person that it doesn't always really register to me what's happening or how much it's getting shared.

But I'll tell you this. There are times that I am able to engage with people in real life who are like, "Here's how your work impacted me." I am just in awe. I am stunned. I don't even know what to say. I am like, "What? Wow, thank you."

So I'm grateful for those moments and I'm grateful that I was able to have some even kinda before you know everything, you know, happened in 2020. So I have written a lot of things for people in response to things that they shared with me and I was speaking at a conference and I had someone walk up to me. And she showed me her phone. And it was something I made for her.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Morgan: And in that moment, I mean, I've written for definitely over thousands of people at this point, now individually, but in that moment, I remembered her story. It was just like right there I was like, "Oh, I remember exactly what we wrote about. I remember exactly what we talked about." And that was just so special to me. So yeah, it's really surreal. I still feel like I'm trying to make sense of it.

[00:20:46] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible sponsors, *Spoonful of Faith*. *A Spoonful of Faith* is a children's book by Jenna Holiday that released this week.

Jenna is an amazing graphic artist and freelance illustrator based in Minneapolis. I think my MiniBFFs are going to love this book. It's about a little girl named Layla who wakes up nervous to go to her new school, so she looks at her mom to help her feel better.

The mother and daughter duo head to the kitchen and combine all the necessary ingredients, kindness, hope, warm hugs, and prayers to create a new tradition of confidence and happiness. It hits on some themes we talk about a lot around here. Things like trusting God and being brave and trying new things.

In addition to this sweet book, Jenna has a stationary line at Target and has all these amazing illustrations and art pieces inspired by the diversity of people in the world: her love of botanical elements, her journey of motherhood and faith, and everyday life. Her work can be found at spoonfuloffaith.com. So be sure to check out her work and grab a copy of *A Spoonful of Faith* wherever you love to buy books.

Sponsor: And I have one more amazing partner to tell you about. It's [Indeed](#). You know what they say, right? If you dream it, you can do it. If only self-fulfilling prophecies worked for hiring your team! When you partner with Indeed, building the right team is actually pretty simple. It's the only job site where you're guaranteed to find quality applications that meet your must-have requirements or else you don't pay.

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And now back to our conversation with Morgan.

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Annie: I would imagine all your friends feel this. But it's real fun when I see a celebrity or a stranger sharing your words. Because then you're like, "Oh you don't even know Morgan. You don't even know who she is. This is so cool."

Morgan: That is pretty wild when that happens. One thing that happens though is I don't always get credited when that happens.

Annie: I know.

Morgan: I'm fine with it though because there have been times where I have had something shared and then I get flooded with like a whole bunch of DM and I'm just like, "I can't. I don't know how to manage all these."

Annie: You're like, "Jennifer Garner, don't tag."

Morgan: Honestly, I'm like, "It's fine. You don't have to tag me. It's honestly fine." But I think there are some times where it's just super like, "What?" So I have Google Alerts on my name-

Annie: You'd have to.

Morgan: ...tagged to my email.

Annie: Yes, of course.

Morgan: So this is like... Okay, I'm forgetting who it was. I'm not that familiar with the Royal Family but-

Annie: That is not the sentence you just said to me. That is not the sentence you just said to me.

Morgan: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Annie: I don't know who it was, but I'm not that familiar with the Royal family.

Morgan: I am so sorry. Okay, I'm going to try to find it. So Prince Charles' goddaughter, India Hicks, her son read my poem at her wedding.

Annie: Oh my gosh! Okay, to be fair, I did not know who Prince Charles's goddaughter is either. So to be fair, I'm with you. But that's in it still goes down in the history. 500 podcast episodes that may be my favorite sentence anyone's ever said. I love that so much. So how did you find out? Was it in the news article when they talked about the wedding?

Morgan: It was in Daily Mail. Like the English-

Annie: Oh my gosh. You were in a Tabloid?

Morgan: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, okay." I was like, "Why am I showing up in the Daily Mail?" Then I clicked on it. That to me was probably the most... I'm like, yeah, there's no way I would have imagined that.

Annie: That's another country and that's royalty. So yeah, that's all the way different.

Morgan: Yeah, that was throughout.

Annie: We ask our friends that get our emails on Friday called the AFD Weekend Review, they can submit questions for our guests the next week. And so this leads me right to one of the questions someone asked is, What do you do on the days you don't feel inspired to create? And my question is, you are writing so much, do you wait until you feel inspired? Like how do you get the words out of your body?

Morgan: I have a very specific way that I think about inspiration.

Annie: Okay.

Morgan: So inspiration in a medical sense that's actually another word for inhalation, which is obviously a part of our respiratory cycle. And when I first learned of that, the artist in me just couldn't resist. I was like, "Hold on, wait a second. Inspiration is not about what we put out but it's about what we take in."

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: So to be inspired, that's even kind of an interesting way of saying it like to be inspired. It's more about inspiring, about taking in. Actually, it's the exhalation that's the actual pouring out.

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: It's like after you take it in and then you breathe out. So what I'm breathing out, I feel like I don't have anything to give, well, I need to inspire more. I need to take in more.

Annie: Wow, okay.

Morgan: So I actually use that as a cue. There are times when I literally sit down to paint and I'm like, "I got nothing." I'm like, "Well, it's time to go watch one of my favorite art documentaries."

Annie: Yeah. That's what I was going to say is, what do you do?

Morgan: Yeah, yeah. I love our documentaries. I will watch them over and over and over again. I have a lot of art books, like big hardback art books. And what I'll do is I'll just split them open and just have them out in my house and just look at art that's not on a computer screen. That's like a whole thing. It's looking at art that's not on a computer screen.

I love listening to music. So one thing I've had to relearn how to do because I have a full career in this, like, is listening to genres I have no association with.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Morgan: And one of those is classical music. I don't know any classical music producers. I do know one composer. But I don't know a lot of people in the classical music space. So I can actually turn on classical music and just get lost in it because I'm not thinking about "Oh, who wrote that line? Who wrote that song?"

Annie: Right. Right. Right.

Morgan: If you're in the industry, sometimes it's kind of hard. So I'm always looking for little things to kind of inspire. And to be honest, over these past few years, I've had to get really creative because what I would love to do is take more trips.

Annie: Right. Right.

Morgan: I was supposed to go for a month trip to Australia in October 2020.

Annie: No.

Morgan: Obviously didn't happen. But I'm like, "That's the something to be inspired by."

Annie: That's inspiring. Right. Right.

Morgan: I'm like, "That's inspiring."

Annie: Right.

Morgan: But yeah, a lot of that stuff that I would even... Like I know for a fact, if I were able to take a traditional book tour right now and just do it the way that we used to do those things, that will be so inspiring. I would love it. I would be so hype and so pumped to get to meet people who have been a part of this community. But I can't do that right now. So I have to find other ways.

So I'm always looking for like these little things to just fill me up. And sometimes this might be kind of weird for some people. But sometimes when I'm feeling like, I'm like, "Man, I'm just not feeling inspired," sometimes I'm like, "I might physically need to be filled with food."

Annie: Oh, right?

Morgan: I'm like, "When was a time I had a good hearty meal that just makes me happy?" Because I think sometimes if you're let's say you're working a lot or whatever, sometimes you even get in a routine even with the things we eat. Like we might just start eating the same few things over and over again, which is fine, but sometimes take the break. Get the pasta that just literally makes you smile.

Annie: That's such a great answer. Because I feel like a lot of times when people talk about inspiration to create, they kind of say, Muster your way through the first 45 minutes, and the inspirational come. Like treat it like a well that you have to go and pull from, pull from. And I do think that's respectable. And I have to do that with writing sometimes. But man, I love the idea of if you feel empty, don't force yourself to be full. Go do something that fills you up.

Morgan: Oh my goodness. And I will say this. There are times where I have a deadline. For instance, if I do like gift books where I have to make the art and write, that's like

two jobs in one. It's a lot. And there are times where I'm like, "I've got deadlines, I gotta write. I've got to write. I've got to paint my way through it."

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: And what I do for that is I character what makes me angry.

Annie: Tell me everything. What do you mean?

Morgan: I got this a little bit from the author, Austin Kleon who wrote the book *Steal Like an Artist*. And I heard him say this on a podcast. He said, "All of my books start from what makes me angry." *Steal Like an Artist* is a book about finding ways to find different creative inspiration.

And he was like, "I came to that because I was so frustrated," He was in Austin, Texas, like, "Hearing all my artist friends complaining about not being able to get their work done. He's like, "Guys, we have all these tools, and here's how we could do it." And he walked through how every single one of his books started with something that was frustrating him or angering him in society.

So for me, like one thing that makes me angry right now is something very similar to that, actually, the how many people just accept that they're just here to just consume and that they don't have anything to contribute, and that it's only the people with the blue checks and all the followers have something to say. But that literally makes me angry because I'm just like, "It's just not true."

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Morgan: "It's just not true." We need more perspectives out there. That's how we're going to have more empathy in the world, more people talking, more people sharing their stories. And I'm like, "Ohh." I'm like, "What can I do to change it?"

So a lot of times, that is the force that helps me through this work to make it because if I'm writing from my perspective, I'm like, I'm going to show people that there's a page in this book that has just little yellow specks of color. It's nothing elaborate. It looks like something that a 4-year-old could do. That's their own purpose is there as a symbol that yes, it's that simple. You're allowed to make art out of simple things, and share it with the world. So yeah, sometimes when it really gets to that crunch time, I do try to think, I'm like, "What's really irritating me right now?"

Annie: Right. Okay, you're giving me great things to work with when I'm trying to create because I got to create. I'm like, Okay, what makes me mad and what makes me feel full? What pasta do I need? And what situation am I pissed about?

Morgan: Oh, I love that. I love that.

Annie: Okay, let's talk about *Peace is a Practice*.

Morgan: Mm, yes.

Annie: I mean, it comes out February 15. Tell me why this was the right topic.

Morgan: This is something I need every day all the time is peace.

Annie: Really?

Morgan: And I talk about what peace looks like for me. And that is, peace is the freedom to breathe. It's freedom to breathe with everything that's going on.

Annie: Wow.

Morgan: I was diagnosed with autism about a year ago. And before my diagnosis, I knew that I was struggling with something, but I just didn't know what it was. And within my autism diagnosis, I also have a sensory processing disorder, which means that my senses... I mean, everything from bright lights to loud music, it impacts me in a big way. And before knowing that, I thought it was just like, oh, I wasn't sleeping enough, or maybe I'm stressed or something.

Annie: I mean, how did you even decide to figure out if you had autism? How did you even know to ask that question?

Morgan: So there were some hints in my childhood that my parents thought it could be possible that I was on the spectrum. But most of the studies that are done on autism are usually on young white boys. Like that's the demographic. If you're not in that demographic, for a lot of girls, women of color, people of color is very hard for you to even get someone to listen to you, to even get a doctor to understand.

And it's slowly but surely getting better. You know, because now we have the internet, we can find specialists that... Back in the 90s, I mean, my parents didn't have like... It was just the doctor that you went to down the street. There was only so much.

So they weren't really able to get anywhere with that. And then when I was 27 I was feeling like I was just really struggling with just socially and just feeling like not understanding. I don't hear tone and voice very well. I don't pick up on that very naturally. So it turned into a lot of miscommunication a lot of because I don't always pick up on sarcasm or anger in someone's voice.

So I was like, "Something's going on here." So I went to my doctor, just my primary care physician, and without even looking at from his clipboard, he was just like, "Oh, you're perfectly normal. You have nothing to worry about." And sadly, I took his word.

Annie: Wow. Oh my gosh,

Morgan: Until three years later I'm on Tik Tok and for whatever reason, the algorithm started showing me experiences of women who are diagnosed as autistic as adults.

Annie: No!

Morgan: It was through TikTok that I was like, "Oh my gosh, they're describing my whole life."

Annie: Were they?

Morgan: They had similar stories like what I have with my doctor, all of these different sensory experiences. And I was like, "Whoa, wait a second." Because autism for a grown woman looks different than how they would look in a young child

Annie: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Morgan: So it's so much

Annie: Because you've had to build all these coping techniques to exist in the world that a seven-year-old white kid doesn't have?

Morgan: Yeah. It's like, yeah, we're two different people, we're not going to look the same in any context. So it's very fascinating. So I was able to find a specialist in my area based on that, because through these TikTok videos are like, "You got to look for someone who specializes in adults."

Annie: That is unreal. A map told you where to move and TikTok helped you diagnose a lifelong disease.

Morgan: Yeah.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Morgan: So it was through TikTok that I was able to find a specialist in my area. And that started the whole diagnosis process. So yeah, it was a look at my whole life. I mean-

Annie: Morgan!

Morgan: It was several months long and just going through every-

Annie: Was it sad?

Morgan: Yeah. It got pretty intense to the point that even my specialist is like, "There's a reason why... Because we had like all these dates scheduled for different tests within the diagnosis, she's like, "You're going to notice that some of these are very short, like 30-minute sessions because it's so intense."

So it's just a lot of just really looking back at every facet of my life and trying to recount and examine so much of how I've been in the world. Everything from what I eat to how I eat to health issues to social issues to relationships. Just really in-depth look at my entire life. It was very, very exhausting at time.

I would say there's a lot of grief in that too because it's like when you go so long without knowing what it is sometimes you grieve all that time you didn't know. You're like, "If I had only known I could have gotten the support. If I had only known I would have not been so hard on myself. If I had only known I wouldn't have taken that job." Like all these things. So there was a ton of grief, yeah.

Annie: What do they do for adults that are diagnosed? Sorry, I don't know. You're my first friend that's this happened with. Is there medication? Is there physical therapy? What is the solution?

Morgan: So, you know, it's different for everyone. But one of the things that I've seen a lot of autistic people, especially autistic adults say, and this has definitely been my experience, too, is that what we have that's called Autism is it's differences. There

are differences that make it harder to function in society as it is. And that's different for every person.

Like let's say you're 21 years old, you're grad student and you just got diagnosed. Well, you may need a... not a tutor. What am I trying to say? Where you have support for a learning disability. Like you may need like a test proctor or something.

Annie: Yeah, yeah. Modifications like that.

Morgan: Yeah, modification. You may be something like that. Or, let's say you are working in a field that requires you to talk to people, maybe you need some type of aid, like, you know, maybe, oh, I need to have like transcripts or something of the documents that I have to go through. It can get very, very specific for each person.

And also too some people may as a result have heightened anxiety that may make it difficult for them to even go outside because on a sensory level they're having to deal with all the sounds and noises. So they may need medication for that. So, yeah, it's different for every person.

And I feel like for me the most support that I have needed is on the anxiety level. Because the sensory processing issue it can get really bad really fast. So I am a huge component of medication if you need it. And anxiety medication has been that for me and it has definitely helped with some of that sensory input.

I remember like getting on a flight, for instance, oh my gosh, that is some of the worst sensory overload I have ever experienced in my life, because I'm very sensitive to bright lights. And especially like for rested kind of lights.

Annie: Oh, and they are everywhere.

Morgan: They wear me down. And being in that close quarter with those bright lights and then flying with a facemask on. So I can't really take the breaths that I wouldn't normally take, it just makes it so much more tense that my nervous system is just fighting to get through it.

Annie: So, man, hearing you describe it, your book *Peace Is a Practice* makes so much sense to me now. That you're like after you get a diagnosis like that and start doing the things that support that you need. Because the other thing about my friends with autism is there's always a gift in it for the world. Right?

Morgan: Yeah, absolutely.

Annie: Like there's something really tender and lovely about people that are diagnosed with autism because usually y'all see the world in a different way than those of us without that do. But it makes sense why you wrote *Peace Is a Practice* after that. I totally get it.

Morgan: Absolutely.

[00:41:54] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our amazing partners, Prose. Y'all heard me rave about Prose before because it's the world's most personalized hair care. Prose takes natural ingredients and combines them in innovative ways to give you and me clean hair care that yields incredible results.

Their formulas offer actual answers to your individual hair needs, not the same old mass solutions. I've been extremely impressed with how shiny and manageable my hair has been since I started using Prose. Stress can do some crazy things to our body like causing an increase in hair shedding and thinning and people usually lose about 50% of their total hair before they even notice that their hair is shedding more. Oh my gracious!

But Prose is a way to stop stress-related hair loss in its tracks and spark new stronger growth. Not only does Prose specializes in custom haircare, but now they also make custom hair supplements to help reduce excess shedding and spark fuller, thicker hair growth with just two capsules a day.

Your part of the process is simply to complete an online consultation and then Prose takes it from there. They'll customize your supplements to address all the factors that could be triggering your hair issues like age or hormonal change, stress levels, nutrition, and more.

You'll be happy to know that Prose supplements use only natural clean and safe ingredients, not drugs or hormone disruptors. In fact, all their formulas are toxicologist-approved, gluten-free, and vegan.

And the bottom line is Prose works. Multiple studies show that over 90% of women taking Prose hair supplements saw less shedding and more growth and improved overall appearance in just 90 days. Try your own custom hair supplements and

you'll get 15% off. Get yours at prose.com/thatsoundsfun. That's prose.com/thatsoundsfun for your free in-depth hair consultation and 15% off custom hair supplements. Just go to prose.com/thatsoundsfun to try custom hair supplements and get 15% off.

Sponsor: Here at That Sounds Fun and at the That Sounds Fun Network we love learning new things about podcasting and continuing to improve in the work that we do. And that's why we are so glad to learn about [Anchor](#).

If you haven't heard about Anchor, it's seriously the easiest way to make a podcast. Let me explain. Not only is it free, yeah, that means you paid \$0 for it, but it has simple-to-use creation tools that allow you to record and edit your podcast right from your phone or computer. And Anchor will distribute your podcast for you. So people will be able to hear your content on Spotify, Apple podcasts, and all the other platforms that they love listening on.

Anchor even has ways that you can monetize your podcast with no minimum number of listeners. It's everything you need to create a podcast in one place. We hear from people all the time who have great ideas and are looking for how to get their podcast started. Well, Anchor is what we use all across the That Sounds Fun Network. And we are just huge fans of how easy they make it to create a great podcast.

So just download the free Anchor app or go to anchor.fm to get started. Again, that's anchor.fm or you could download the free anchor app.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Morgan.

[00:45:01] <music>

Annie: I mean, do you consider now the practice of peace one of the support things to go along with how you be the healthiest version of yourself?

Morgan: Absolutely. Yeah. To me, everything from the titles, everything that I write about in my book, it's literal. I'm like, "I literally have to breathe deep breaths to function." I feel like, you know, for me it's like God equipped us with these bodies to breathe.

And that's not just like a little side feature of being human. That is fundamental. You have to be able to breathe and to breathe well and take deep breaths. So I'm like, that's been a very literal practice for me to find just enough peace to be able to

function. I'm not even talking about the thriving point. I'm just talking about be okay in the world.

Annie: Just being a person.

Morgan: Yeah. Because being a person who doesn't have to take eight naps in a day because I'm so overwhelmed. So yeah, it's very literal for me. And I think that in that way is kind of I am in a weird way... I can see the good in not having my diagnosis prior to because I now have all of these experiences that end up being relatable to people who are not autistic.

And I just think that's the beauty of it is that like, you know, it's not like, "Oh, here's this autistic person talking about autistic experiences, but it's like, no, because of what I've been through, I've spent a lot of time, I have a lot of experience thinking about all of these little things that can help us breathe deep throughout the day and miss everything that's going on.

Annie: My only complaint that I'd like to lodge with the Morgan Harper Nichols complaint department, if you're that good at poetry, it shouldn't be legal that you're not good at prose. It's a problem. You should have to pick one. And unfortunately, you're a better writer and prose and poetry than me.

Morgan: Oh my gosh.

Annie: I'm super annoyed.

Morgan: Okay. See, this is really funny because I actually have that feeling every time I see an athlete do something artsy. I'm like, "Oh, no, you are not allowed. How dare you?"

Annie: "How dare you have a body and a mind? Don't you do it. Don't you do it."

Morgan: I'm like, "Oh, no!"

Annie: So now you understand how I feel. Poetry you're unstoppable. Also prose. Also prose. And painting. And your hair is so cool. Everything. Every bit of it.

Morgan: Thank you. But it kind of stops there.

Annie: No, no, it doesn't. I just ran out of the listing. I can keep going about your family, your mothering, your wifing. Okay, talk to me, for our friends who aren't seeing

you but are hearing you, your hair is black and the very front of it is beautiful gray stripe.

Morgan: Thank you.

Annie: It's a conversation my girlfriends and I are having because I'm 41. We're all kind of in the early 40s. And we're talking about aging. Will you talk to me about why do you not fold to any pressure you feel to change your hair color or to pursue youth in that way?

Morgan: Hmm. Oh, my goodness. I love that question. So I have this natural gray streak right in the front of my hair that started growing in my 20s.

Annie: Okay

Morgan: And it's so fascinating to me because my dad has it too. So I got it from him.

Annie: Yes, he does. Yeah.

Morgan: And it's so fascinating to me. I'm like, "Huh." Watching my dad, I'm like, "That's okay if he has gray hair?" Those aren't questions that men get.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Morgan: And it's almost like they're allowed to age more than we are. It's really bizarre. So I was just like, "Yeah, I'm going to allow myself to be great and have gray hair. I'm not going to put that on myself that I have to change it or I have to dye it." But it's something that I think about because while it is maybe easier with my hair, because I just happen to like the way it looks, in other areas, it is very hard to accept the idea of aging.

For instance, I get asked often, why don't you do music anymore? And I think about that, and I'm like, "You know what?" I'm not saying that this is the reason why people ask that. But I'm like, "The amount of women releasing music in their 30s or 40s and 50s needs to drastically increase." I'm like, It is wild to me that the music I created at 25 because I didn't keep going in my 20s that I'm not doing it anymore. I might make my next album at 52. It's really bizarre.

Annie: I have never thought about that till you're saying it.

Morgan: Even from a musical standpoint, it makes no actual sense because your voice matures as you get older. Yeah, it's like, we sing better the older we get. Why is it that everyone that [unintelligible 00:50:15] they didn't win 18 Grammys by age 28 we stopped listening to them? I'm like, "This has got to stop."

Annie: Is it that we stopped listening or is it that they stopped making the music? Which one is it?

Morgan: I think they maybe stop making the music in a professional way. But I think if you look around enough, churches and communities all over the world, you'll find women of all ages singing amazingly. Just maybe they're not recording an album and leasing an album. But it's like, "Oh, my gosh, she's amazing."

I'm even seeing that now. I've been loving it. I've been seeing it on TikTok now. TikTok likes to just show you random people's live streams. Sometimes it a little bit crazy. But some of the good ones I've seen have been like women in their 60s and 70s sitting there with their guitar just singing songs.

That is inspirational to me. That helps me cool down and calm down and say, "Yeah, just because you didn't do X, Y, and Z in your 20s or 30s, it doesn't mean..." It's like there's so much joy and wisdom and beauty in what they're sharing. And I'm like, "Yeah, Someday, I hope to be in my 70s on TikTok with my guitar. Album or not. I feel like that's the goal.

I do feel like we're seeing more people share more, but at the same time, it shouldn't be like a shocking thing, where you're like, "Oh, wow, look at you and your old age making music."

Annie: Yeah. Right.

Morgan: It's just like, no, it should be okay.

Annie: I mean, I'm racking my brain right now trying to think of artists that are older than me in their 50s and 60s females that are still making new albums. And my brain is not pulling up very many, if any.

Morgan: Yeah.

Annie: Nice. Because men are doing it.

Morgan: On the top of my head I'm like, "Yeah, exactly. Exactly."

Annie: So I wonder why.

Morgan: All I can think of is Reba and Dolly Parton.

Annie: Yeah, Reba and Dolly.

Morgan: Those two are coming to my mind.

Annie: Yeah, Reba still. Yeah, you're right. Well, this is the start of a conversation for us, Morgan.

Annie: This is in the end and I'm like, "I'm really thinking about this." Also, I need to get on your TikTok algorithm because mine showed me last night a guy who has built Disneyland in his house. Like a replica and he does a live firework show every night. It's actually pretty baller. But I'm telling you that I got served a live firework show in a guy's living room and you're getting beautiful musicians. So I'm doing something wrong or I'm doing something right.

Morgan: Oh my goodness.

Annie: He does a whole firework show, Morgan.

Morgan: That is pretty. I'm going to have to look for that.

Annie: I know. I'll send it to you. It is really something. It is something to behold.

Morgan: Yes. Oh my goodness.

Annie: I think that aging conversation is one I didn't know we would have 10 years ago. I didn't know it. But it's very interesting to pay attention to because there isn't a sin or not sin version of this. Like, if you dye your hair, it's sinful. If you don't, it's not. Or if you don't dye your hair it's sinful. It's not a sin issue. It's how do we age really well and really authentically, but also care for what we love about ourselves?

Morgan: Exactly.

Annie: I can't figure it out.

Morgan: Yeah, I can't either. I'm glad you're having that conversation, we're having this conversation because, like you said, it's not going to look the same for everyone.

Like if I decided that I wanted to dye my hair black tomorrow and not have the gray anymore, that should be absolutely okay. It shouldn't be like, "Oh, whatever to your gray hair? You're no longer accepting that you're aging?" It's like, "I just wanted my hair black."

Annie: "I just wanted purple hair. Let me live."

Morgan: Exactly.

Annie: My mentor and I are talking about it because I'm like, "Do I want to do this?" or "Do I want to do this?" I don't want to listen because I don't want everybody to have all these feelings about things. But I'm thinking through all these things I want to do and or don't want to do and she's like, "Yeah, there isn't a right answer." I'm like, "Oh, nobody tells you about this. Nobody tells you about this once you're not 35 anymore or 25 anymore." I mean, it's just a whole different game.

Morgan: Yes.

Annie: Okay. What do we not talk about that we need to cover?

Morgan: I think we have talked about amazing, a lot of-

Annie: I was going to say, What is left for us? We're just getting something started. I'm going to send you that firework show.

Morgan: Oh, yeah, I need to watch that.

Annie: I cannot wait for our friends to read *Peace Is a Practice*. Truly your writing obviously is globally loved by royalty even. We are in a long line of royals who love your stuff.

Well, you know the last question you always ask, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you?

Morgan: Oh, what sounds fun is just like a lot of small joys right now, and just letting them build-up to one big firework show.

Annie: Yeah. What would be some of the small joys in y'all's family?

Morgan: Oh, man, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts right now.

Annie: Girl!

Morgan: They're special because-

Annie: When they're warm? Do you care if they're warm?

Morgan: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

Annie: I mean, when that HD side is on, when it tells me hot doughnut, interested.

Morgan: And there's barely any here in Arizona. So I have to kind of go out of my way to get that. But I don't care. No offense to all the other donut shops that I pass along the way. But it's a comfort. It's a comfort thing.

Annie: Yeah, I hear that.

Morgan: And also, I mean, going back to TikTok, I'll give a shout out to my favorite TikToker right now. His name is Demarcus Shawn. His account is @artbydemarcusshawn. And it's just like this amazing observational comedy.

I think he's like 24, lives in Illinois. It's so specific. And I just love it. And I'm just like, actively making a collection of things like that in my brain of just like, it's got to be the little things. As life in many ways feels like it's becoming more complicated, I'm finding that the simplicity of those small joys are becoming even more potent to me. So those are just some of those that I've been loving. But yeah, just all the little small joys in life.

Annie: Okay, you shared him with me, I'll share a firework show with you. You're going to really glass up my "for you" page and I'm really bringing you a new... I'm bringing you a new genre.

Morgan: I need this. Yes, I need this.

Annie: I'm not sure declassing you but it's bringing you a new genre. Big grown-up Disney fan energy is what I'm about to bring you.

Morgan: I love it.

Annie: Friend, I'm so glad to talk to you. I love you. Thanks for making time for this today.

Morgan: Oh, thank you. Thank you. I've really enjoyed this.

[00:57:01] <music>

Outro: Oh friends, isn't she just the best? I love Morgan so much. What an incredible story over the last few years? It makes her book make so much sense. Listen, y'all be sure you grab a copy of *Peace Is a Practice* and follow Morgan on social media, tell her thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find in Philadelphia because we're on tour. I'm so happy. Also, I'm Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. All the places you may need me, and Philly, that's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. And I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, well, you know this answer, kicking off *100 Days to Brave for Kids*, starting the tour, and trying to figure out today's Wordle. It's very hard. So that's what sounds fun to me.

Y'all have a great weekend. I hope to see you out on the road tonight in Philly or in Baltimore, in Columbus, or in Greenville. And we'll see you back here on Monday with my dear friend Jennie Allen. We'll see y'all then. Y'all have a great weekend.