

[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. We have got a great show in store.

But before we dive into today's conversation, here's a word from our sponsor, [BetterHelp](#). I tend to be pretty optimistic and future-oriented. You know this about me. I'm not one to dwell on problems. But y'all, sometimes the only way to solve a problem is to sit with it for a little bit. Y'all know me. Sitting in pain isn't my favorite, but I do love the feeling of finding solutions and healing.

A therapist can help you become a better problem solver and make it easier to accomplish your goals no matter how big or small. I'm often surprised how conversations with my own therapist will meander, but we end up yielding exactly what I needed for the problems I was facing. Gah, I'm so grateful for her. And I want you to have that kind of support too.

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And be sure to check out the show notes for links to all of our sponsors for the transcript of the show and make sure you sign up for the AFD Week in Review emails.

**Intro:** Today on the show I get to talk with Jodi Benson, who is a legit Disney legend. You guys, she's the voice of Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. So needless to say she's an incredibly talented vocalist and voice actor who has performed everywhere from Broadway to concert stages, cruise ships to behind-the-scenes, booths for beloved animated features and series.

Her new book, *Part of My World: What I've Learned from The Little Mermaid about Love, Faith, and Finding My Voice* tells the story of her incredible journey. And I was beside myself to get to talk with her and hear how her faith has sustained and guided her through and hear some awesome Disney stories too. We are so

Disney right now. I'm very into it. I cannot wait for y'all to fall in love with Jodi Benson just the way you fell in love with Ariel.

So, y'all, here's my conversation with Ariel herself, Jodi Benson.

[00:02:36] <music>

**Annie:** Jodi, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

**Jodi:** Well, thanks for having me, Annie. I really appreciate it.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jodi:** You're so fun.

**Annie:** You have to know that every single person who meets you goes like, "Ariel's on my podcast. Barbie is on my podcast."

**Jodi:** Yeah, it's fun. It's a lot of fun. I love my job. And I'm very, very thankful.

**Annie:** In your new book, *Part of My World*, it comes out tomorrow when everybody's hearing this. It comes out tomorrow. I want to read you a line that you wrote. I was like, "This is where we're gonna start." You said, "Being Ariel isn't just my job, it's also my ministry." Will you talk about that?

**Jodi:** Yeah. I mean, it's not by chance that I was cast in this role all those years ago because I'd never done a voiceover, I'd never been behind a microphone. So like, Why me? But through the decades now, I see that it was divinely planned. You know, this was part of the story that God needed me to be on this journey.

And the people that I've met along the pathway, I mean, everything that's happened because of the film, because of the relationship with the company has been predetermined.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** It's just beautiful to see that because there's really absolutely no reason why I would have gotten the job.

**Annie:** When you write in the book about how often you keep boxes of tissues with you when you meet people at events or whatever, because when people tell you about their experience with *The Little Mermaid*, they cry. Tell me why. What are some of the themes of that?

**Jodi:** I think through the years when I get a chance to hear everyone's story, which I absolutely love, it triggers them to the first time that they saw the film. And whether it's with a parent who's no longer with them, a grandparent that's no longer with them, whether it was through treatment, you know, cancer treatments, chemo, skin grafting for a little girl that was a burn victim in a hot tub accident.

And you hear each of these stories, or recently... I just flew back from England last night, Manchester, and met thousands and thousands of people over the weekend. It was amazing.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** And to hear... I have a huge following for our film and for the character that are in the autism spectrum, on the spectrum and how many people have learned to speak that are nonverbal from my film.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** And a lot of people make a connection with Ariel who are not able-bodied, that are quadriplegics, paraplegics, a lot of wheelchair-bound guests that I meet that make a connection with Ariel who hope and pray for legs to be able to walk one day.

And so each of these stories has their own spin on it. And it's such a privilege really and an honor to get to be a small part of that story. So when they come to meet me, we try to create it to be private moment, but I love to hear the stories. You know, it's kind of like holy ground really to hear that intimate detail of what the connection is. Hence, the Kleenex boxes usually right nearby.

**Annie:** I mean, you just flew back from Manchester. Are you so tired?

**Jodi:** No. I have traveled internationally for nearly 40 years. I do a jetlag sort of program that was from the US government from the CIA back in the day.

**Annie:** What?

**Jodi:** I had this little book that I use, and it works. So I never get jet lag.

**Annie:** Tell me more. Is it like the grounding where you go stand outside?

**Jodi:** No, it's a jetlag diet. I use the word "diet" loosely. It's kind of a feast and... like a feast fast three or four days before you make your time change. But the biggest key

is when you walk onto your plane, you switch to the time that you're going. That's the key. And you live according to their time. You sleep, you eat...

**Annie:** And never look back. You've never look back.

**Jodi:** No. No. And it doesn't matter. Like this was a quick trip. So I flew through the night Thursday, got there Friday and flew back Monday. But no jet lag there and no jet lag back. So I was ready for work at nine o'clock this morning.

**Annie:** Jodi!

**Jodi:** I was up for 24 hours. So it just works for me. It works for me that I don't have jet lag. Because normally when I get off a plane I'm walking into work. And when I get back home, I either would be walking back into homeschooling my kids the next morning or back to work. So it works for me.

**Annie:** I am so impressed. I just traveled international this summer, and I said to myself, "I've got to figure out a plan going east," because when you go east and you land as the day's starting. So it is that feeling of like, Oh, no, my body thinks it's the middle of the night, but it's the day.

**Jodi:** No. You gotta trick your body by the second you get on the plane you go to bed. You go to bed and you wear your mask and your earplugs and you don't eat and you don't drink. Just your water. You wake up breakfast their time and you got yourself a nice healthy breakfast, get off the plane. You got to stay up all day till 10 p.m. You cannot nap.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** Don't nap.

**Annie:** Napping is no, no, no. It's the disaster.

**Jodi:** That'll mess you up.

**Annie:** Yeah, for days. You'll spend your whole trip recovering from that day one nap. Were you over there doing like... Was it like a meet and greet or was it an event?

**Jodi:** A convention.

**Annie:** A convention.

**Jodi:** Yeah, meet and greets, taking photos and getting to hear people's stories, which I love.

**Annie:** That is just incre... I mean, you write about this a little bit in *Part of My World*, but no one could have imagined that the people who are the characters of Ariel, that your life would be shaped by this.

**Jodi:** Right. Yeah, because when I did this film, we weren't going to be announced to the voices. It was going to be like it was traditionally with Disney Feature Animation where you just roll the credits at the end of the picture and before VHS and you wouldn't know who was who. But that was Walt's decision. Walt's decision was to get involved in the story and not focus on who's behind the microphone, which I really like.

So when I got the job, that was the way that we were going to proceed. So it would just be if you stopped your VHS you might see who was playing which role and that was it. It was never going to be announced.

But with the screenings of our film, changing Disney's history as far as animation goes with the second golden age of animation, it was such a huge change that I got a call saying, "You're going on a press tour." And I thought, "What? Why? You weren't going to talk about that."

And that whole perspective changed. And so my life accordingly changed, because I just was going to record it and then go back to New York, do eight shows a week and that was it. So everything changed right before the film came out in September of '89. And I went on 22 cities in 20 days of a press tour.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jodi:** And that was it. After that life changed drastically.

**Annie:** I loved in the book... I did not know this before, but will you talk about your friendship with Paige O'Hara? That Ariel and Belle are real-life good friends. That is-

**Jodi:** We've been friends since 1981. It's been a long time.

**Annie:** So many of our friends listening share, you know, whether it's the teacher next door, or it's another medical professional in their world where there's like, "Who's gonna get the next job?" or "Who's gonna get the promotion?" How did y'all handle friendship over competition?

**Jodi:** Well, it's interesting. We never auditioned for the same projects together ever in our life until it came up to Belle. I don't know why Disney had me audition. I remember calling Howard and saying, "Why am I auditioning for Belle? I just did Ariel and now it's been revealed who I am. That will be confusing to children that see me publicizing Ariel." And he's like, "Well, I think Disney is just trying to be respectful or something." I was like, "Okay."

So I auditioned. And then they called me and Howard's like, "Well, I just want you to know that you're not going to be cast." I said, "Well, I know that. I mean, it's just kind of..." I think they just did it out of... I don't know. Maybe just felt obligated to.

So when Paige was up for Belle, of course, I was thrilled and so excited for her. She called me before her final callback, and kind of said to me, "Can you help me through my final callback with Howard and with Disney?" I was like, "Absolutely. What are they saying?" She goes, "Well, they kind of want me to sound more like you."

And I was like, "No, that's not what they're saying. They want you to Howard Ashman-ize it, which in itself is kind of a unique way to communicate a character vulnerable and authentically not to overseeing things and to really be more intimate with it. So I think when they're saying for you to sound like me, I think what they want is more of Howard and the way that he's going about your character."

So we talked through that night, and she went to her final callback and she booked it. So it was awesome.

**Annie:** It's wild. And then y'all became Disney legends at the same event.

**Jodi:** Together on the same day. That was a magical day. Really a magical day to be together. We couldn't believe it.

**Annie:** For anyone who doesn't know what a Disney legend is, will you kind of define what that means?

**Jodi:** When I got the call, I thought I was actually being let go from the company because they were doing like a freshening up of voices in our character division. And I had done the part for so many years, I just assumed that they were going to be refreshing as well with sound alike. So when one of my bosses called that day, I answered the phone like, "Hey, Chris, that's wonderful to hear from you. And no worries, it's been a great ride."

**Annie:** "Thank you."

**Jodi:** "Thank you so much. I am totally ready for this call. I know that we're doing a clean sweep of our department. I understand. Thank you so much." And he's like, "What are you talking about?" And I said, "Well, you're kind of letting me go, right? I mean, we're moving on. It's been a great ride."

He goes, "No, I was just calling to see if you'd come to LA in August and we can induct you as a Disney legend." And I dropped the phone. I mean, I literally dropped the phone. And I think I picked up the phone, I think I said something like, "I thought you had to be dead to get this." I mean, I truly thought-

**Annie:** You're like, "Are you telling me I died?"

**Jodi:** And he goes, "No, you're all very much alive that are getting this award." So again, I was under the impression that it was done posthumously and that people had passed on and that they had been in the company for decades and decades upon where I was.

So many of my bosses and people that I had worked with at the company from day one were not Disney legends, so I just assumed that I would never get one because my bosses hadn't. So it never crossed my mind that I'd even be considered for something like that. So it was a complete shock and surprise when I got the call. It was a lovely surprise.

**Annie:** Our staff we are... There's a lot of us who love Disney. I was literally at Disney World two weekends ago.

**Jodi:** Oh, great.

**Annie:** But the staff has a question of whether you can get into Club 33.

**Jodi:** Well, I'm not a Club 33 member but with my legends status, you receive lifetime entrance into all of our parks for you and for your entire biological family.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** So at the time, it's me and my husband, my son and my daughter, which I can share their passes. So I have a standard gold main gate is what comes with the legends which is entrance to all of our parks except for Tokyo, which we don't own independently at Tokyo Disney Sea and Tokyo Disneyland. So I'm not a Club 33 member but as a legends, you know, we're allowed to go to do special things.

**Annie:** Oh, I would imagine you can go anywhere you want. You just like, "Hi, I'm Ariel. Let me in." Lightning pass for every ride.

**Jodi:** No. I don't throw that around at all. But normally when I'm at the parks I'm working. So I had my VIP guide, which when you're working and you're in any of our parks, you go with a VIP guide because it's all back door. So we don't walk through the park necessarily. We get in our car and they drive us around to the back. And we go in the back entrance, do the attraction however many times and then jump back in the car and drive around.

The only park that we can't do that in is Disneyland and California Adventure because it's walkable. You just walk back and forth between the two and back door. But in Disneyland in Florida, Walt Disney World in Florida, we can do that with all the parks of our parks except for Magic Kingdom you've got to walk it. I think we can back door at Space Mountain. But other than that, you gotta walk through. There's no driving access.

**Annie:** Because everyone recognizes you. So it would be impossible.

**Jodi:** Yeah. And I don't do the Incognito thing. It's even more ridiculous because you're walking around with a plaid vest. So when you have your guide-

**Annie:** Yeah, they know.

**Jodi:** People know that when you're walking around with a guide, you're either going to be, you know, a family who has paid for a guide and or what they call kind of celebrity VIP or high visibility kind of a thing. So going incognito is kind of silly. It's the only place that I get to wear ears or Ariel t-shirts. It's the only place I can wear that kind of stuff. And I do with the kids. We dress up and have a lot of fun.

So it comes with the territory that you're going to be stopped all the time to take selfies, but it takes like five seconds-

**Annie:** Right. Right.

**Jodi:** ...to say hello and take a selfie, and thank you so much. So I do that. I don't watch us through and don't bother me. And fans are lovely. I mean, they don't usually come up to me at a restaurant when I'm sitting with my family or if I'm actually eating. I just did the maiden voyage in our entertainment cruise for the Wish.

**Annie:** I saw it. It looks beautiful.

**Jodi:** Which is amazing. And it was so much fun. And I've christened the other ships and did the inaugurals for all of our other ships.



**Annie:** Really?

**Jodi:** So it was wonderful to get to be part of this one. Again, you're on a working cruise. So you're going to be stopped the entire cruise. That comes with the responsibility. And I'm more than happy to do that. Because like I said, our Disney fans are just the best and they're so kind.

But this was the first time somebody actually came to my table while I had food in my mouth to ask for a photograph and a meet and greet. And I swallowed my food kindly and I could see my people, my family, as well as our representatives staff kind of like, "Mm."

And I was like, "If you just give me 10 minutes and I finished my dinner and you go do something, I'll meet you at the entrance of the restaurant." That's very rare that somebody stops you while you're in the middle of eating, especially when you're with your family. Everybody is always so kind.

**Annie:** You've christened every cruise ship.

**Jodi:** Yeah, I did the Magic, the Wonder, the Dream. The Fantasy was actually christened in New York City in the harbor. And there was something going on that weekend with our kids that I couldn't. But then I did their next like Meteor cruise after that. So I just wasn't there for the actual event. That's super funny.

**Annie:** That's amazing.

**Jodi:** I love the ships. They're amazing.

**Annie:** Your legacy is so much more widespread. I mean, it's back to that sentence of Ariel: isn't just your job, it's your minister. I mean, literally it's just so widespread across-

**Jodi:** It is. It's kind of around the world and it touches different people in different unique ways. And you know, it kind of always blows my mind and is quite overwhelming to think about that the film has such a huge impact in people's lives and means something very unique and special to each person for their stories.

So I just go with it and try to be light and salt every single day and go for the journey and take advantage of the opportunities that are presented in front of me to be able to love on people well. I mean that's really what I'm kind of called to do while I'm traveling and working with the company is just to simply love others well.

[00:19:21] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hi friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our awesome partners, [Thrive Market](#). Some of you are probably better than me than this. I can promise you you are. But planning out a menu for the week, listing all the ingredients needed and going to the grocery store once a week to get everything is not my specialty.

I always forget something. I end up at the store day after day or overspend on impulse buys and then lose interest in the meals I had planned and the vegetables go bad. You know that story. You know the story.

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Okay, my chomps snack sticks for some protein on the go and those Kettle & Fire bone broth, y'all, I use that for soup. Every time I make soup, that's what I put in it. And I saved almost \$20 on my order. Okay.

I absolutely love how easy it is to use their website in their app. Yes, they have an app. They make it super simple to filter by 90 plus values and lifestyles to find what works for you.

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**Sponsor:** And one more amazing partner to tell you about, [stamps.com](https://stamps.com). Okay, so during the next few days, our team is working on a bigger project for the holiday season, and we are really excited about it. More on that to come.

But it definitely has us thinking about how busy November and December are going to get. If you own a small business like ours, you know how chaotic those months can be. So it always pays to get ahead of the craziness, right?

Well, luckily stamps.com has everything you need to make your life a whole lot easier. It's the 24/7 post office that you can access from anywhere. No lines, no traffic, no hassle. Stamps.com is your one-stop shop for all of your shipping and mailing needs.

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And now back to our conversation with Jodi.

**[00:23:07] <music>**

**Annie:** It's an interesting thing because so many of our friends listening don't work in ministry full time. But they are out in the world like you and I are. That is what we're asked to do is salt and light in how we do this.

So will you talk a little bit about your faith journey? We have a lot of our friends listening that are Catholic. I loved your conversation in the book about the beautiful parts of Catholicism that have come with you and when you fell in love with Christ and what that looked like and what happened. So will talk a little bit about your faith journey?

**Jodi:** I grew up with a faith. I went to Catholic school from first grade through 12 and belonged to a parish, St. James, for my whole life that I was there in Rockford, Illinois. And I just had amazing experiences. And God really, really spoke to me when I was in middle school and I really felt that connection.

I had a wonderful priest. I had some really lovely nuns, some maybe not so nice. But I remember sitting down with one of the priests, I think it was probably in seventh or eighth grade and just kind of said like... Because I would do the confessional. I would go to the box and get on the kneeler and then do my penance accordingly.

But I just remember having that conversation with the priest behind the altar in like his little sort of office area where everybody was kind of meandering in and out and just said like, "Why do I have to come to you? I don't really get that."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** I can talk to Jesus and He hears me and I hear Him. And I think he told my parents, "Well, I think your daughter asks too many questions," or something like that. I just kind of said, "Well, you know, yeah, but you still need to come to the box and do this and do that."

So I remember starting that kind of going, "Mm, I feel like this is a little bit more of a personal relationship." So didn't quite understand that. But there were so many aspects of the faith, I'm going to use the word religion, of the religious expression of Catholicism that I really related to.

I remember the Stations of the Cross. That was huge for me. Walking around to each of the stations and you would kneel, and you'd look at the beautiful painting and things and walk the journey of Jesus. And that was so powerful to me for some reason. I just really connected with that, connected with the sacraments, loved all of that and communion.

I don't know. I felt very close to Jesus during all of those things. And I just felt like I could really hear Him speak to me.

So to then transition into more of a personal relationship when I was 18 and living and working in Nashville at the time, and had met my husband, at the time my boyfriend, and he had told me about this personal relationship. I'm like, "Yeah, that's kind of what I've been thinking and talking about. I'd like to know a little bit more about that."

So he had been in Los Angeles working on a show and I went out there, he goes, "I want you to meet the pastor and his wife." And would sit at the kitchen table and just have these great conversations with them going, "Yeah, this happened to me when I was a kid and all growing up and it just kind of feel like there's something missing." It was really amazing.

**Annie:** So Opryland in Nashville is where you kind of had your first real show that you ran that was public besides in school?

**Jodi:** My first professional job I was 17 turning 18. Let's see. Was it 18? Yes, I was 18 when I auditioned for Opryland theme park, which doesn't exist anymore.

**Annie:** No, sadly.

**Jodi:** It's parking lot at the hotel.

**Annie:** It is. Yes, yes.

**Jodi:** Parking lot at the hotel. Oh, my gosh, I had so much fun. I auditioned at the University of Illinois campus in Champaign-Urbana, and I got cast in the Broadway-themed show, which was a decades show called *I Hear America Singing*. And we did anywhere from four to six shows a day. And then you'd have a day off because we had a red cast on a blue cast.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Jodi:** Our theater was indoor, air-conditioned. There was a full orchestra, which was amazing. And it was a great job. It was a great paycheck. So I was 18 and man, I was living my highlight that summer of my freshman year.

And then I met my husband. Had an apartment with a high school friend who also got cast in a different show. Unfortunately, he was cast... We had this great apartment, loved it. And he was cast, my friend, in *Showboat*. So he was in the outdoors space.

**Annie:** On the General Jackson?

**Jodi:** Yeah. He was in the outdoor space, and I felt so badly.

**Annie:** So hot.

**Jodi:** So when he come home from work after it being 101 with 99% humidity, heatstroke and ice baths, I'd be in the comfy AC all day long. I was like, "Oh, I feel

so bad that I got so lucky." But it was a great summer. We loved Nashville. We played at the lake and all sorts of fun stuff and met a lot of really wonderful people that summer.

**Annie:** I grew up a Christian as well. But one of the turning points in my faith was when I was 19. So I think, man, for all of our friends listening who are either in their 20s or who are raising kids who are getting close, it's amazing that you feel like that's so young now to me. It's so young to think about 19. But I'm like, Man, you and I made real choices in those years that have shaped the rest of our lives.

**Jodi:** Absolutely. I was just having this conversation with my son and his new wife last night. We were just talking about how you're one decision away from changing the course of your story, of your legacy forever. You know, one decision away.

And thankfully, they are solid in their faith, knowing that each of those choices is going to be directed by God. If they are open and listening, He's going to guide and direct his kids, you know, because He obviously wants the best for us and wants us to make those right choices.

**Annie:** You were so honest in the book talking about you and your husband Ray from when y'all met to when you broke up for a couple of months to even after... I think it was right after a *Little Mermaid* that y'all separated for a little while.

**Jodi:** Yeah. Right.

**Annie:** So talking about one decision that impacts your life, I mean, partnering with him for your whole life, even in the ups and downs, will you talk a little bit about now when you look back on your 30-plus year marriage? Why did those dips matter? And why did it matter to get to the other side of them?

**Jodi:** Right. Well, I met him when I was 18 and he was 22. He's four years older. And I knew at the end of that summer that was the man I was gonna marry.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** I just sensed it in my heart. I just felt like it was God's plan. So we dated on and off for those four years and broke up. And the breakup was by his doing. Then about three months later, we got back together again and he proposed. So we definitely had an up-and-down road during dating.

With the success of *Mermaid*, and that was kind of a big surprise and things started kind of taking off for career stuff was really overwhelming. I think a lot of the unsettled luggage, baggage, junk from my childhood—my dad left when I was 11

and it was a difficult divorce, and I didn't have him in my life—I think I hadn't dealt with that abandonment and rejection and insecurity.

So that started to rear its ugly head within our marriage. So it wasn't really rear in our marriage as much as me needing to have that inner healing from my inner child really. So I went through a very hard time where I wanted to end my life. And God just brought miraculous people into my life.

I actually lived with my animator Glen Keane and his wife and kids for three months and started some really intense therapy and counseling, which was a huge lifesaver for me. Ray and I were separated for 18 months and then we got back together again and recommitted our marriage and renewed our vows and started a family afterwards. It's quite miraculous after 38 years of marriage and 42 years that we've been together that we are still going strong. It's a miracle.

**Annie:** Will you talk to our friends who are in month 10 of a separation and they don't know if it's going to be 18 months or 12 months or if tomorrow? You know, because you couldn't have known at month 10 that it would be 18.

**Jodi:** No.

**Annie:** So when you're in the middle... And this is true of your Ariel story too. Like you auditioned and it was a year before you even got the call that you'd gotten the job.

**Jodi:** Right.

**Annie:** What do you do in the middle? What's your conversations with God like in the middle?

**Jodi:** I think with my counselors—I had a couple of different people I was working with—said, "At this point you really do need to live hour by hour." It wasn't even a day-by-day type of thing. That was just a little too overwhelming for me to think about the whole day. But I could handle the next hour. "Do the next right thing for this hour."

So that's how I lived my life for several months. And they'd say you can't think about your marriage. You can't think about Ray. You can't think about getting back together or getting a divorce. What you need to think about is the next hour.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** And you can handle that and God can handle that. It's the image that they gave me. And I use this image a lot. When you are in the dark and you're outside and you

have to get from point A to point B in pitch black and you have a flashlight, you have your phone, whatever, it just shows enough light for the next step. It doesn't show the destination of where you're going. It just gives you enough light for the next place for proper footing for the next safe step. That's what it's like. That's during that hard time of walking was I need to put my next foot down in the next safe right place.

But He didn't need to give me enough light to show further because I couldn't handle it. God doesn't want to give us too much to be overwhelmed because we can't handle it. We can't handle that. It's too much. And He loves us too much to put that amount of worry and stress and frustration upon us. Because the walk with Him is supposed to be one of peace and joy and freedom, where we do not fret, do not fret, do not fret. But I think if I were to have seen the end result of any of those times during the darkness, it would cause me to fret.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** So anytime I started to get panicked and panicked, "But what if we get a divorce? What's it going to look like for my faith walk? And am I gonna disappoint my family and I'm gonna do...? And she would be like, "No, no. What's the next one hour that you can do? And think about what God wants you to do with that 60 minutes." And that really saved my life.

**Annie:** That is so helpful. I think about some of my hardest days... I'm not very good at thinking hour by hour, but I can do like, "Here's what time you can go to bed." You just have to keep going until-

**Jodi:** I will do that. I would do that. I'd start at the end and then work my way back of what would be productive, what would bring peace, what would bring a sense of contentment or a sense of purpose for today. And sometimes it would be something simple like taking a shower and working out and eating properly for the day. That was a successful day.

**Annie:** If there's one or two things you can do today on your worst day, that's a success.

**Jodi:** Right. Absolutely.

**Annie:** That's beautiful. I mean, I think it's so important. You tell this beautifully in the book, that that is sitting on top of when *Little Mermaid* comes out. So your biggest professional thing that change your whole life-

**Jodi:** The highest of highs and the lowest of lows were simultaneously.



**Annie:** Yes, at the same time.

**Jodi:** And I think that God ordained that timing to be messy like that.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** I really do. I think He needed me to realize that during the lowest of lows He could still find me valuable and able to be used for Him.

**Annie:** Right.

**Jodi:** And that was very against the way I grew up, that you have value because you're productive or you have value because you're successful, or you have value because your behavior is appropriate.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** So I was having the worst of the worst while the career was at the top doing all these interviews and I'm like, "I'm just nothing but a hypocrite." And He's like, "No, you're just a vessel and I can use you in whatever state you're in. When you're at your lowest of lows and you're messy, I can still use you. Because my plan is bigger and I think outside of the box."

And His plan doesn't always make sense. So I needed to realize that God is God and I can't even begin to figure out how He thinks and how He makes these plans."

**Annie:** And how He aligns things for the right time.

**Jodi:** Yeah.

**Annie:** I think a lot about our jobs having a public face but personal tragedy, right? And often that hypocrite question when it comes to my mind, I'm always like, Well, a surgeon doesn't not go into work because they got dumped yesterday. So just because I have a public life does not mean I can't go to work tomorrow. Right?

**Jodi:** Right.

**Annie:** So it's that balance of like God has ordained today to be today, and everything I meant to hold today can all be held at the same time.

**Jodi:** Absolutely.

**Annie:** But that is hard. It's hard to live. It's easier to sit and talk with you about Jodi. It's hard to live.

**Jodi:** It is. And you know, it comes from that God does take ashes and makes them beautiful. And he takes the messy and it's complete. But we in our little human minds can't make that equation work. We just can't.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Jodi:** So to think that he would bless my career at the worst time of my life I didn't feel worthy of that. And I was booking jobs left and right. And I'd be like, "Oh, no, I don't deserve any of that because my life is such a mess." That's just not how He operates. He doesn't operate the same way I think He should. He gives sense to me and my little brain.

**Annie:** That's right. I say a lot that I don't like to "should" people. It doesn't ever get the thing I want. Just a few days ago when I was talking to Lord, I was like, "I think I should you a lot of what I think you should do and shouldn't do." But I won't do that to my friends. Why do I do that to the Lord? But I do it too.

**Jodi:** Yeah, yeah. Again, He has the perspective that I don't have. So He does see a different viewpoint of the picture than what I do. And again, the viewpoint of my picture is just here in my earth suit on earth. His is eternal, so I can't even fathom that. And a lot of things that have happened in my life, I'm not going to see any type of fruit or completion or getting to the other side.

That just doesn't really matter to him that I have all those answers. And even when I'm in heaven, I don't know if I'll have those answers. And I'm sure it won't even matter at that point. So I think he's just trying to encourage me to just let go and trust Him and live freely and talk to Him daily, love others well, be light and salt and keep it simple. You know, don't make it so complicated.

[00:40:06] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting one more time to tell you about another amazing partner, [Liquid I.V.](#) So a major theme in my books *That Sounds Fun* and *Chase the Fun* center around why we all need hobbies. The things we do just for fun are so important in keeping us mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy.

And one of the hobbies that I've missed the most during the time I've needed to take it easy from my knee injury and surgery is simply getting to take walks or go on hikes. I'm easing back into that and I love it so much.

Here's the deal. Y'all, we need fun in our lives. No stakes, no pressure, just pure enjoyment. And you can fuel your play with Liquid IV for hydration that is two times faster than water by itself. Because life's better and more fun when you are hydrated. This is true.

I pretty much always have my water bottle with me and I love that Liquid I.V is conveniently packaged in individual packet so they're easy to grab and go. I just mix one stick in my water bottle, carry it along on a walk or keep it with me in the car. It helps me recover so quickly.

And with three times as many electrolytes as traditional sports drinks and five essential vitamins, I know that I'm getting what I need to keep feeling my best. Liquid I.V has 10 refreshing flavors. Okay, listen to these options. Concord grape, I love; lemon lime is delicious; pina colada, it's so good; and Tropical Punch. And since it's non-GMO and free from gluten, dairy and soy, you don't have to worry about any of those potential sensitivities.

So grab your Liquid I.V in bulk nationwide at Costco or get 15% off when you go to [liquidiv.com](https://www.liquidiv.com), and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN at checkout. That's 15% off anything you order when you shot better hydration today using the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN at [liquidiv.com](https://www.liquidiv.com).

**Sponsor:** So I've been podcasting since 2014. And let me tell you, things are definitely changing and have definitely changed and grown in the podcast world. From the technology to the variety of options to the number of people listening to podcast. It's part of the reason we grew from the That Sounds Fun podcast to the That Sounds Fun Network.

All that growth experience and learning leads us to refine the tools we use for bringing you all of these great shows. And one that we absolutely cannot live without is [Anchor](https://www.anchor.fm). You've probably heard me say it before, but Anchor is seriously the easiest way to make a podcast. It's free as in it cost you zero doll hairs, but it has simple-to-use creation tools that allow you to record and edit your podcast right from your phone or computer.

Anchor will distribute your podcast for you as well, helping you get your content to so many people on Spotify, Apple podcasts and all the other platforms where people love to listen to shows. 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 all 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 across the That Sounds Fun

Network. And we are just huge fans of how easy they make it to create great-sounding, far-reaching podcast episodes.

Just download the free Anchor app or go to [anchor.fm](https://anchor.fm) to get started. Again, that's anchor.fm or you can download the free anchor app today.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Jodi Benson.

[00:43:20] <music>

**Annie:** Our friends from the AFD Week in Review email that we sent on Fridays, a few of them sent in some questions for you.

**Jodi:** Okay.

**Annie:** And one of them kind of goes along this path of do you wonder what would have happened if you wouldn't have voiced Ariel? You know, thinking of God's sovereignty in our lives, do you ever think about how your life would be different?

**Jodi:** Oh, yeah. It would be completely different. I would be leaps and bounds different, I'm sure. But if that would have been God's plan for me not to, it would have been another incredible journey, just a different path.

**Annie:** It would have been harder to get into Club 33. You'd have had my life of just longing for Club 33. I try my card and every door and that has yet to turn green, Jodi. It has yet to turn green. I'm always like, "They are watching," and like, "Here's this girl again trying her card."

**Jodi:** They've got the cameras on the door.

**Annie:** For sure they do. They're like Annie Downs cannot... That is girl is barking up the wrong tree." Another interesting question that came in from one of our friends is wondering about your view on Disney princesses. As culture has changed over the last few years, what are your thoughts on that? I think Disney culture is so helpful because another one of our friends said she finds great joy and peace and strength through her experience with Ariel and through Disney princesses too. So it's an interesting thing.

**Jodi:** Well, things are very different now than they were. Originally we started out with Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella in 1961. And then we didn't have another Disney Princess until Ariel in 1989. And she's totally different. Totally different.

**Annie:** There was none in between them.

**Jodi:** Correct.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jodi:** So you have to think about the progression of time and the time period. You know, you got to think about the decade that we were in. And they're fairy tales remember. They are fairy tale. So they're not based on reality.

**Annie:** That's right. You do not brush your hair with a fork.

**Jodi:** Passion fairy tales. Hans Christian Andersen. So with that, Ariel is very, very different than Snow White Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella. Very different. Very progressive for 1989, you know, with her slight rebellious spirit, and her independence and her boldness and tenacity and courage and all these wonderful attributes. Well, we had to move on from there.

So you're talking about from 1989 till 2022. There's huge growth and huge changes within our culture, especially for females as well. There should be. So when I get that question of like, you know, "What did Ariel do for a man and this?" I'm like-

**Annie:** Oh, gosh.

**Jodi:** "Well, just the first 15 minutes of the film-

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

**Jodi:** ...because the first 15 minutes as you can see her *I Want* song is *Part of Your World*, which means she has studied the human world her entire life. And she is fascinated with living outside of the box. She's wanting to explore and try something different, which is really, really scary, and filled with a ton of fear.

But there's something in her that wants to be this crossover connection between these two worlds that's really beautiful. And she happens to meet Prince Eric, she happens to fall in love, and he happens to be part of that other world.

So it kind of follows them and she saves him. I mean, you could see all these different changes in the way things were with our original princesses. So now as we've gone on with our princess collection of these amazing characters, there's got to be growth and change and progression according to the time and culture.

**Annie:** As you're talking, I'm like, Ariel, really... Like Prince Eric was kind of a vehicle to the life she wanted more than the results.

**Jodi:** Absolutely.

**Annie:** I love that.

**Jodi:** No, yeah. Because she had her dreams and her eye wants before she came across him. But he was kind and he was respectful. And he was not the monster that she had been told that humans were.

**Annie:** What a gift!

**Jodi:** I think I love the legacy of the princesses and I love the growth that we see. I love where we start with Snow White, you know. And that was a time period back then. 40s, 50s, and 60s was just a whole different world—a whole different world for females.

**Annie:** Do you have a favorite princess outside of Ariel?

**Jodi:** I grew up with Cinderella. And that was a beautiful story for me being in a small town and wanting something more and wanting to have this other experience. So I could really relate to Cinderella. I really did. I love the music. I love the animation. Oh, gosh. That's the one that I grew up with. Yea

**Annie:** Tell me why this was the right time to write *Part of My World*.

**Jodi:** Well, I didn't want to write a book. It wasn't my plan.

**Annie:** Really?

**Jodi:** Tyndale reached out to me in February 2020, and I said, "Absolutely not. God will literally have to come and speak to me because I'm not writing a book."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** That is not anything that I wanted to do. Not a memoir, not an autobiography. Nothing. And they came back in March and said, "Could you consider it?" And I was like, "No, I really, really don't."

It was finally Sarah, the publisher for my little project that said, "Jodi, if I were to tell you that one person could possibly be encouraged in reading one of your little stories..." because I don't call it a book, I just call it a little collection of some

stories of my life, of mistakes I've made, and what God has done. And I consider it to be a love letter to Disney and a thank you letter to the people along my journey.

And she said, "If I were to tell you that one person would be encouraged by your stories, that you could help them get from point A to point C without having to go through the trauma of point B. If you were to help one person make a different choice than you made, would you write this book?" And I said, "Yes. I'll do that for the one person."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** So it wasn't my heart's desire. I'm very much not about self-promotion. That's not my comfort zone. I'm much more of a cheerleader. I like to get behind the scenes and really encourage and build others up. Yes, I can stand in front of the stage and sing in front of over 20,000 people live but ultimately, I like to be behind the scenes. And I just felt like this was very icky, cheesy to write a book about myself. So I never talked about it.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** I worked on it for a year. I worked on it for a year and I didn't tell anybody except my immediate family.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** So when the announcement came out, there were a lot of friends and family that were kind of like hurt like, "I can't believe." And I said, "You know what? How would that come up in conversation?" "Oh, how are you doing, Jodi?" "I'm doing great. I'm writing a book."

**Annie:** Right. "In the middle of a pandemic. What am I talking about?"

**Jodi:** Like every other person is writing a pandemic book because they have no other jobs. I was like, "It's the worst timing. It looks bad." I just thought it looked bad. So I just had to let it go. I really did. I had to let it go and just trust that these little stories that I share, it kind of meant like a devotional. You can kind of pick one up and read one little story and either get a scripture connection or a mistake and what God did, and, you know, don't make the same mistake I did, and then put the thing down. You don't just sit there read it. It's just kind of leave it there. And occasionally, if you want to find possibly a word of encouragement, maybe you'll find that in a story.

**Annie:** We've had a couple of Broadway people come through on the show. So there's a ton of great Broadway stories in the book, too, that are just fascinating of reading about Broadway in the 80s and 90s. It sounds so different than it is now.

**Jodi:** It's very different. It was very different. And again, it allowed me to get to say thank you to so many people along the journey, because, you know, it's not about me. And it truly is a love letter to Disney because, you know, Howard changed my life forever. And I was able to tell him that on his deathbed, and be able to say thank you-

**Annie:** That was a moving story.

**Jodi:** "Thank you for changing my life and my family's life." And, yeah, it was just really remarkable. So we have this little collection of stories and it's going to be out there September 13th whether I like it or not.

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

**Jodi:** So Tyndale is like, "Well, you will help us share it, right?" I'm like, "Absolutely. I'll do everything that you guys ask me to do. But if you want me to jump up and down and be a cheerleader, like, "Oh, my book's coming out, no." Because what did I do the day that it was announced? I think that they released it and I spent the whole day crying.

**Annie:** Did you?

**Jodi:** The entire day.

**Annie:** Jodi. Wow.

**Jodi:** And the team was just like... Of course, they're constantly like, "Oh my gosh, oh, my gosh, this is so amazing. Amazon this and Books-A-Million this and this." I just spent the whole day by myself crying. I think it was maybe cathartic but it was also sheer fear that my life is out there now.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Jodi:** And stories that were very, very private to me were out there. So I just had to give that to God. And I just said, "You know what? This is all you." So here we go. Very scary. Very, very scary.

**Annie:** Well, I will tell you I read every page and I felt so invited. I felt so invited into your life and to your story. I think people are going to absolutely love it.



**Jodi:** Wow.

**Annie:** So thank you for putting it out there. I'm sorry that it hurts.

**Jodi:** No, it's a walk of obedience. That's basically it. Sometimes God calls us. It's just way out of my comfort zone. And sometimes, and that's kind of how I felt God was saying, "I'm calling you on this. It's way out of your comfort zone but you got to trust me and you just got to take that leap of faith and let it go. Don't worry about it. You were obedient." I did it. And now it's done. I don't have to worry about the rest of it. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** Yes.

**Jodi:** It's his doing. He called me to do it through the publishers. Literally, my husband had been talking about a book, a book, a book for 10 years.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jodi:** And finally I said to him, I said, "Honey, you have to stop. Please don't ever mention that to me again. It just causes so much anxiety and I'm not doing it." And the next month Tyndale called me. I told him, I said, "The only way I will even consider this is that phone has to ring. God's literally going to have to speak through somebody before I'll even consider it." And they called.

**Annie:** And then they called.

**Jodi:** I was like, "Oh, my gosh." And my husband was like smirking, laughing when they called. He's like, "I told you you had a book inside of you." I'm like, "Stop it. Stop that."

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh. Well, the other fun thing for people listening to know is if they listened today on September 12th and preorder it today-

**Jodi:** Today.

**Annie:** ...preorder things is a trip to Disney and get to meet you.

**Jodi:** I mean, this is really cool. I'm super excited about this. So yeah, everybody that pre-ordered from the day it was announced up until tomorrow, September 13th, you get entered into this fun little contest. It's one person that wins a trip to Walt Disney World. And we'll meet down there, and we will ride *The Little Mermaid* attraction

together and I'll sing along with it, which is so fun. And then we'll have lunch together.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh. You're gonna sing along?

**Jodi:** And then we'll have lunch together.

**Annie:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** Jodi.

**Jodi:** I always do. I always think along when I get to the attraction.

**Annie:** To be fair, I do too. I'm just not Ariel. So I do too.

**Jodi:** I can't help but do. And I don't mean to but it just happens. I've just done it. I just started singing along. I think under the sea. I think everything. So we'll do that. And we'll do lunch. We'll have lunch together. And I'm sure we'll float around to some other fun things to do at the park together. But we'll be at Magic Kingdom. It'll be some fun.

**Annie:** Well, listen, you know I'm pre-ordering. I am trying to win that because that sounds awesome.

**Jodi:** And then I had fun doing the audiobook because that was super-

**Annie:** Ain't that great? I love doing the audiobooks.

**Jodi:** That was super challenging and intimate at the same time and really special. So then it comes with that audiobook as well when they do the little preorder thingy. So anyways, I thought Tyndale came up with some fun little activities and ways to just make it kind of extra special. So I think the Disney thing will be something really special.

**Annie:** And super generous of you to spend your time that way. That is-

**Jodi:** Oh my gosh, are you kidding? The park is my favorite place.

**Annie:** I know.

**Jodi:** That's a no-brainer.

**Annie:** My two must-dos are our *Little Mermaid* and Peter Pan. Those are two that I have to do.

**Jodi:** I need to. Yeah, I have to do those two. They're classic. They're so fun.

**Annie:** They are so fun. Okay, is there anything we didn't say about the book that you want to make sure we say?

**Jodi:** Oh, no, no. Totally fine. Whatever happens with the book it's gonna be fine. It's definitely in God's hands.

**Annie:** Yes, that's it. So many of our friends who wrote in questions are so excited about you being Nia in *The Wingfeather Saga*. That is so fun.

**Jodi:** I'm excited about that. That was such a God thing. I auditioned for that quite a while ago. So when I hadn't heard anything, I just assumed I didn't get it, which is totally fine. Because you do like 100 auditions and you might get one. Maybe. But if you get a good one like Ariel, then it'll last for the rest of your life. So you never know.

When I auditioned for *Wingfeather Saga*, I didn't really know anything about the books. I didn't know about the faith that was running through it. I just did the audition and that was it. Pushed the button and it was gone. So when I got the job, then I kind of heard more about it was like, "Whoa, wait a minute. This is super cool. This is gonna be so much fun." So we're recording the episodes. Nia gets to sing in one of the episodes.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Jodi:** She is so fun.

**Annie:** Oh, that's cool.

**Jodi:** It's a great cast. Of course, I work by myself and just through Zoom and stuff in the studio, but the staff and the creative team, they're amazing and so nice and so fun. We have a lot in common, you know, just with our journeys and with homeschooling and with just wanting to put out some great content out there. So it's a great project that lines up with my heart.

Nia is an awesome mom. She is quite the warrior. She has amazing passion, loyalty, but she is a die-hard Mama Bear which I am too. So I love that about her. Don't mess with her kids or you're gonna be in big trouble.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Annie:** Andrew Peterson is a friend of the show and a dear friend. Those books are unbelievably good to me. So we're so thrilled. And Ellie Holcomb is another character that's in there with y'all too who we love. So that is really fun that you get to do that.

**Jodi:** It's gonna be super fun. And I hope one day that we all get to meet in person. That would be really fun at whatever that little event would be. It would be fun to meet the rest of the cast. I've been in the studio working on that. And that's really fun sessions. I've been enjoying that project a lot.

**Annie:** Oh, I can't wait to see it. Jodi, the last question we always ask on That Sounds Fun, because the show was called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

**Jodi:** Oh, well, what's always fun to me is going to the parks. I absolutely love Disneyland, California Venture and all of Florida's Walt Disney World. And anytime that I can get on Everest expedition in our new roller coaster cosmic rewind, that is fun. So much fun.

**Annie:** Okay, so average, how many times a year do y'all go to a Disney park?

**Jodi:** Well, it's interesting. Every year is a little bit different with work responsibilities. This year has been quite a bit, which has been great. And then when I'm not working, because we live in North Georgia, we can jump on a plane or jump in the car and go down as what I call "went in there as a civilian."

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

**Jodi:** I go as a regular person. We love that too. Super fun. But yes, it differs every year. But as many times as possible. And I'm a happy camper.

**Annie:** That is lucky part of your life. I love that place.

**Jodi:** I love it.

**Annie:** I'm like, "I've got to figure out how to get down there more."

**Jodi:** There you go.

**Annie:** Jodi, thanks for writing this book, and thanks for doing this today.

**Jodi:** Oh, thanks.

**Annie:** I'm really excited for people to get to read it and just love to get to talk with you.

**Jodi:** Well, thank you, Annie. You're so sweet. And I appreciate you and all of your listeners and your team that invited me to participate with this interview. It's wonderful. I appreciate your support. And I wish you all of God's blessings.

**Annie:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Jodi:** Awesome. Thank you so much.

[01:00:42] <music>

**Outro:** Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Can you believe that's Ariel? Listen, her life at Disney World... I am so jealous. She has such a cool life where she gets to go to the parks.

Okay, be sure to grab your copy of *Part of My World* and follow Jodi on social media. Tell her thank you so much for being on the show today. And you know, just talk to Ariel. You can talk to Ariel on the internet, you guys.

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's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is we're going to dinner for my friend Kelly's birthday. So today what sounds fun to me and celebrate my friend Kelly. Happy birthday, Kelly.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with a return visit from Jon Acuff. But this time, this time, y'all, he's bringing his amazing team daughters, Ellie and McRae with him. Y'all are gonna adore hearing from them. This is great. Get your teenagers around. We got a great show for you. We'll see y'all on Thursday.