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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to a special bonus episode of That Sounds Fun. Wowie zowie. Yes, I pushed the mind-blown emoji for our own selves because today's episode is so fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today and I'm so happy to know you.

Today on the show, we are celebrating the release of my brand new kids' book, *So Happy To Know You*, which is officially out today. I'm so excited to finally put it in my MiniBFF's hands, to see it in classrooms. Don't even get me started. It makes me feel teary already. I'm already loving seeing some of your pictures and posts with the books. Keep them coming.

Tag me when your kids get the book so I can see it and share it. I just... I love it. It means so much to me that y'all have this book in your hands and in your lives and in your classrooms. God, I just... yeah, yeah.

I know a ton of you always want to hear more about the writing process and the behind-the-scenes of writing and launching a book. So today, the illustrator of *So Happy To Know You*, also the illustrator of *What Sounds Fun To You*, she is here.

For the first half of the show, we're gonna talk about how she takes my words and creates these beautiful illustrations and characters. I mean, Jennie Poh, you guys, she's just so talented. And then during the second half, you'll get to hear my conversation with Taylor Ann, who y'all know is in charge of our MiniBFF. She's in charge of the MiniBFF Podcast, she's been in charge of the MiniBFF Book Club, and she helps us launch books and get books out and really create the whole thing. You're just gonna be blown away by her. She's unbelievable. And Katy Boatman, who is our content manager, helping us get all the information out to you. Also, Katy is an author. She has a book launching. So we talk about the process of releasing this book and releasing Katy's. I'm telling you, it takes a village, y'all. It just takes a village. It takes a village.

So here is my conversation to celebrate the launch of *So Happy To Know You* with some behind-the-scenes info with Jennie, Taylor Ann, and Katy.

Jennie: How did you find me? In the world of so many illustrators and artists, how did you come across my artwork?

Annie: That's a great question, Jennie. You're asking questions before I am. I love it. You know what's really funny is we found you on Instagram.

Jennie: Did you?

Annie: Yeah.

Jennie: Oh, okay.

Annie: Another friend of mine, Ellie Holcomb, who writes children's books, she had said that they found their illustrator on Instagram. So we started looking and found you.

Jennie: How about that?

Annie: I know.

Jennie: I never knew that. You went straight to the agency and maybe they sent you a few illustrators with a few different styles. So I had no idea it was done via Instagram.

Annie: I think so.

Jennie: I love Instagram.

Annie: I think so. I don't think I'm lying to you. I can double-check. But my memory is that we saw your Instagram and that's how we found you. There's a world where your agent sent a couple, but I don't remember looking at other ones. I remember finding you and telling our publisher that that's who we wanted to work with.

The way you draw humans is so grown up and childlike at the same time that it's really unique. So it just felt like such a good fit for the books that I want to write. And I've never had an illustrator before. So there was no process before you. It was just me and Jennie riding off into the sunset together.

Jennie: Well, that was it, because I got an email and it was basically asking me, do you want to do it? The job is yours, do you want to do it? And of course, it was a yes from my part. Because usually they say, there's a few people going for the job, you know, they're considering some people. Do you have any clashes that you wouldn't work timewise? So it was all very clear. It was quite a simple process for you and me then, wasn't it?

Annie: Yeah.

Jennie: It was literally, that's the one, and then the green light and then we're off.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. From the first time you sent us illustrations of *What Sounds Fun To You*, it just felt like the right partnership. I thought, "Oh, she gets it. We speak the

same language. I don't know how to do anything she does, but we are speaking the same language."

Jennie: I felt the same. I remember it very clearly actually. The first, I think, few illustrations I sent you, it was a few. I think the main character of Annie in children's book world, that was the first with maybe a couple of characters. That's how we started off, wasn't it?

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Taylor Ann: It was just literally doing a few characters. Do you like this kind of style? Do you like this color palette? And that's where it took off, didn't it?

Annie: Yes.

Taylor Ann: That was the very start of it.

Annie: Yes, 100%. That was it. Once I saw how you saw little Annie... and I knew she was always going to be in the books. I knew she was always gonna be our narrator, she was always gonna be the one that my MiniBFFs knew as their friend. Once you made her the friend that I pictured in my mind, it felt like that was such an easy go from there.

Jennie: It really was. And it was that because I just remembered... because you sent quite a few photos of your little BFFs.

Annie: Yes!

Jennie: So, that was really sweet. You know, children [inaudible 00:05:37] being able to see themselves in a book is such a precious gift, isn't it?

Annie: Yes.

Jennie: During my childhood. So it must've been really lovely for them.

Annie: Oh, it still is. Even the little girl on the cover of *So Happy To Know You* tells everyone. I mean, she's like, "That's me in the basket with Annie." I mean, she tells everybody that it is her on the cover.

Jennie: Yeah. Her claim to fame.

Annie: Truly.

- Jennie:** That was a really nice touch actually. I mean, there were a lot to get through, but that was a really nice touch to the book that made it so personal for everyone involved.
- Annie:** Yeah, I'm really thankful. Okay, Jennie, I mean, talk to me about the complication. You can tell me the truth. I mean, when I send you these pictures of the kids, how many of them were you like, "Oh, this is gonna be really hard to draw?" Or is that easy for you? I've just never been an illustrator. It feels like it would be hard.
- Jennie:** No. I just want to keep everyone happy because, you know, you get asked about, Oh, do you mind drawing me or my child? Well, I'm fine with that as long as you are not offended. I hope it comes out the way you want it. That's always the biggest worry when somebody asks you to illustrate someone they know. Right?
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Jennie:** I think in the first book, I remember... I think there was an email saying, "You don't have to do everyone. Maybe just some." I think that's right, isn't it?
- Annie:** Yes. Yes.
- Jennie:** And then I thought, "Well, okay, well, that's fine on my end. It is less work for me. But then again, you know, how do I get to pick who's in and who's out? So I just thought, "Well, maybe it's just best we do everyone. We're just gonna have to slot people in. I'm sure we can find room on the spread, which we did. We managed to get everybody in in some way or other, didn't we, within the scene, within the spread?"
- Annie:** Yes. It is amazing your ability to... You know, you did it in *So Happy To Know You* too, when everyone's standing on the globe and when there's a bunch of kids playing together. You just managed to find a spot for everyone that I care about being in the book. It's just incredible.
- Jennie:** Oh, I'm pleased. And the animals as well. We had to squish them into.
- Annie:** That's exactly right. Okay, Jennie, will you back us up a little bit? Before you were doing this for me, you've been an illustrator for a really long time. Will you talk about how did you get into this as your profession?
- Jennie:** Well, it was, I think, a bit of a slow burn actually, because I graduated from university. I did fine arts at university. I think I was about 22 when I graduated. I actually originally wanted to go into fashion illustration.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jennie: But something just kept calling me back. I've always loved children's books. I've always loved walking into a bookshop. I sort of walked past the adult stuff and I just... I love the children's section. It's so much more appealing visually for me. And something just kept pulling me back.

But I actually applied to the Bright Agency to be represented, but I wasn't quite ready. Jumping from fine arts going to children's illustration is a very different world... Two very, very different worlds. So they had me in what they would call their development area, where they would develop an artist and they would get their portfolio ready and up to scratch.

So I was actually working an office job and working in retail shops as well as my day job. And then in the evening I would really crack on it with the illustration portfolio stuff. I remember at this time being really, really focused. There was a real, and still is a real fire in me to crack the illustration world. Because it's so hard. It's so competitive. There are so many amazing artists all around. But I just pursued... I had a really great team advising me. I actually started out with greeting cards.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jennie: Yeah. It was a funny one. I started to get a lot of jobs in greeting cards, gift wrap. And then Howard's asked me to do their accessory range as well. So that was really exciting.

Annie: Wow.

Jennie: In the meanwhile, which, I mean, it was amazing, but I thought, "Well, I want to go into publishing," and just one day it happened, which was a huge deal. And then you make that sh... You can do both. But then it really did start to shift into children's publishing, which was amazing.

Annie: Tell me about the first time you saw your illustration in Harrods.

Jennie: It was weird. It was really weird. It was weird. I was like, "Is that my stuff?" It was a really weird moment. Because we were sent photos, first of all. But I thought, "Well, hang on. I want to go into the shop. I want to have the experience of walking into Harrods of all places and be able to see my designs on their umbrellas and their bags. That was a really special moment, actually.

Annie: Oh, I bet. Do you keep all the books you illustrate? Like, do you have them on a shelf and your first one is like, "Oh, this one is always gonna matter to me." Or with art, is it easier to create and let go?

Jennie: I have kept all my books. I give a few copies away, I'll be honest.

Annie: Sure.

Jennie: But I always make a pact to myself. I always have at least one copy for myself enough. I've got a seated box that I keep all those in because I think it's important. I think it's important just to sort of have something to look back on as well, physically. I know it's all out there digitally, but, you know, just to physically be able to hold something that was my book I think is really important. So yeah, they're kept safely. But they're not on a shelf yet. I haven't made a feature shelf. I'll get round to it one day.

Annie: So for our friends listening who are kids, I mean, when you were little, did you draw all the time? How did you get better at drawing?

Jennie: I mean, you hear it a lot. I drew all the time. There was paper all over the floor, all over the house. I guess I did it every day. And yes, you know, you are enjoying yourself. But what you don't realize as a child, you know, the more you do it... it's practice. You are getting better and better each day.

I knew from a young age that's what I wanted to do. There wasn't really a plan B. I think, Oh, this is something I really love. I enjoy it. I can't imagine not doing this. Obviously, I had no idea you could be an illustrator, that that's a possible job because you don't get told that at school, really. Not when I was young. It just wasn't an option.

Annie: Will you walk me through the process now that this is your full-time job that you drew all the way through and now you're here? Because it's not like you're just drawing characters now. I mean, I'm flipping through *So Happy To Know You* and you create entire scenes. I mean, I just don't know this at all. When you get my manuscript and you start reading it, and you know the pages because we lay it out for you by what page is, will you talk to me about the process about how you go from where it's just my words to having an entire scene?

Jennie: Yeah. It's a funny one. I always thought I was better at drawing people characters, but as time's gone on, I love drawing animals and anything to do with nature, which, you know, I'm so into. That's what really inspires me actually is landscapes, believe it or not, landscapes, nature.

I think even from the beginning, some art notes from the editor was about having really lovely backgrounds, plants, trees featured in the spreads, animals incorporated in. So for me, that was pretty easy because it's something that I love. Obviously, I'll read a page and some art notes, but I would always visualize the composition of, you know, the background. And I know a lot of fields, open spaces are featured in your books. You know, quite a few sort of green. I mean, we have an interior spreads, don't we?

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Jennie: But there are a lot of outside, outdoors sort of spreads. But yeah, it is funny. It's almost like the characters and the backgrounds are very, very separate things. I think we do work up the characters early on in the process and make sure that you are happy with the color palette, the outfit, etc, etc.

And then for me, as I'm reading through the manuscript, it is the background. How am I gonna do the background? What time of year is this going to be set? I think there are some words around autumn and falling leaves, which I love illustrating. So that's super easy for me. That comes pretty quick, more so than the characters, I guess.

Annie: You are so good at seasons. I mean, because every page, it's amazing. You're like, oh, it's winter. Oh, it's fall. I mean, yeah, you do seasons really well. So it's interesting to hear you talk about that. When you're doing those landscapes, Jennie, I mean, as I'm flipping through the book, I'm curious, in 2023, how much of illustrating you draw with your hand on paper and how much of this is using a program and a computer and making art through technology?

Jennie: I mean, I used to keep a sketchbook. It just doesn't work like that anymore. Also, it's time. You know, the deadlines have got shorter... The demand is higher, the deadlines are shorter. So I literally do go straight to the computer and everything's done via my work in Photoshop. There's no more sort of scanning in and then work. That's what I used to do. I used to scan, I used to draw it, scan it, clean it up on the computer, and then layer by layer, you know, I'll start putting on the color. But it is time-consuming. And when you're juggling, you know, it's sort of like, you know, other projects as well. Time's very, very precious. So it's straight onto the computer.

Annie: So how do you know when to stop on an illustration? How do you know when it's finished?

Jennie: I don't know. I don't know. It is when you get that feeling of, oh, I feel good about this. It feels right, it feels complete and you feel good about it. I kind of feel when I walk away just so I have to stop because I've got to go onto something else. If I feel

slightly agitated or something isn't sitting quite right, I don't feel quite happy, that's how I know there's still a bit more to go.

But also when you're illustrating a book, Annie, as you know, writing a book, there are so many people involved, the designers, the editors. And it has to go through so many people. Everyone else has a say as well. They have the comments and the feedback, and then you might feed back to me with some comments as well. So everyone has to be happy before we go onto the next stage.

Annie: How do you remove emotion from that? How do you not let it hurt your feelings when people want to make changes?

Jennie: I'm not easily offended. I think that's just my natural character. And it's a job at the end of the day. Yes, it's my artwork, but it's a job. I just try and be as professional as possible. And everyone has different ideas, different tastes. And I think you have to be very respectful of that as well. It's not just about me and, you know, the bus starts with me. It's so many people involved, like I was saying previously.

And we're a team. That's the thing. I tell myself, well, you know, we are part of the team. Everyone's got to be happy. If something isn't right, that's fine. There's also room for me to have my say as well. So it's not like I just get the orders and then I have to work on it. I can have a say as well.

Annie: I'm glad you feel that way with me because when you said that we are a team, I mean, that is a hundred percent how I feel about these children's books that we get to do together. I feel like each of us are bringing part of the book together, and I can't do it without you and you can't do without me. That's why I'm glad both of our names are on the cover, is I'm like, "Oh yeah, this is Jennie's book too. Jennie is the one who's making us see what we could not see with just my words.

Jennie: No, you're absolutely right. We couldn't do it without the other one and all the how many people behind us as well. It's this sort of machine, isn't it? We've all got different parts, but Yeah. And it's amazing how many people are involved in it.

Annie: Oh, yeah. I mean, this might be interesting to our friends listening. Besides you and me, would you think it's fair to say there's 20 people involved?

Jennie: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah.

Jennie: Or more, who knows? Maybe there's more you don't know about.

Annie: Right.

Jennie: There's so much behind the scenes. It is a great thing to be involved in, isn't it?

Annie: Yeah, that's right. One of the things we're hoping with *So Happy To Know You*, with every book, but you know, the one that we are really hoping happens this week is that this book will get in enough hands that it hits a list like New York Times or Publishers Weekly just because it exposes the book to so many people who may not know it exists otherwise. How does it change the illustrator's life when a book hits a bestseller's list? Does anything change for you?

Jennie: I think you feel like you've, you know... it is actually a real milestone, I think, in an artist's life. It's a funny world. It's such a rewarding industry to be in. But it's so competitive. You hope and pray you'll make a list somewhere, you'll have some recognition in that kind of way.

I think you also talk to yourself and say, Look, this may never happen and I've got to be fine with that. So I've got to be okay with that. I can't let that rule me. I think if it did make a list or got some recognition of that kind... I mean, I think that would be huge. You would've felt that you'd achieve something.

Annie: Have any of the books you've illustrated yet hit the New York Times bestsellers list?

Jennie: Not yet.

Annie: Okay.

Jennie: But I've got a feeling they may well do one day. I've got a good feeling about our partnership. This is big. I'm hopeful. Maybe. Maybe.

Annie: Me too. I mean, to me, for authors, it is kind of the stamp of approval to get on Publishers Weekly or New York Times, or one of those to say like, Okay, this person is a voice that is trusted in this industry. Is there a different kind of equal thing for artists? Is there an award you can win beside it? Or is it the same that when your illustrations hit New York Times, does it do the same thing?

Jennie: I think it more or less does the same thing to be honest.

Annie: Oh, interesting.

Jennie: This is the thing. I mean, somebody else may say something very different, but I think when once you found an author that you get on well with, you gel with

creatively, personally, and then when that book gets some recognition or an award, that's a pretty incredible thing.

I think the other thing is as well, illustrators, you know, there's... I think you're always looking for a really solid partnership in an author as well.

Annie: Is there anything authors can do...? I mean, you can correct me in front of our whole listening audience. But is there anything an author can do that makes the relationship easier for the illustrator?

Jennie: I'm just going on my experience. I've always had really respectful authors. I'll be honest. I've been very, very lucky. I feel I've been treated equally. I think that's one thing perhaps in the past and other people's experiences, they felt maybe they didn't get as much recognition as the author, you know, the illustrator is quite second. But I've worked with you. I've worked with another author called Jamey Jones, who she did *Princess Poppy*.

Annie: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jennie: Yes. Yeah. And she was always from the very beginning once we were introduced with each other and we were developing work together and titles, she was very much "I want Jennie's name on the page, on the front cover. Same as you. Front cover. It's 50/50. You can't have one without the other.

Annie: That's right.

Jennie: Yeah.

Annie: Good. And if at any point you say, "Here's what I really wish Annie would be doing, but she's not doing," just tell me, Jennie. Just tell me.

Jennie: No. Good. We're happy. We're very, very happy over here.

Annie: I am too. I am too. And it's fun. We can't tell everybody yet, but it's fun that we are still getting to work together after this one. I am really, really grateful. Okay, is there anything about *So Happy To Know You* that we should share? I mean, you are the queen of putting Easter eggs on pages, which I love. I love that you hide little things on pages. Is there anything that you remember that I may not even know yet? Anything stand out to you from *I'm So Happy To Know You*?

Jennie: I don't know if you noticed there were lots of little tiny bugs hidden. Did you come across those? Were they easy to follow?

Annie: I'm just looking and noticing that there's ladybugs everywhere.

Jennie: Yes. Very small little... I think the other thing as an artist. Quite nice when people go back to your work after, But oh, I never noticed that before. Oh, that's in there."

Annie: I love it. I mean, I love the grandmother you have illustrated in both of the books so far is so much like one of my grandmothers that you could have never known. It is crazy. It looks like her.

Jennie: How funny.

Annie: It is crazy. But even she's knitting on the last page. I mean, you have them all doing the cutest things.

Jennie: Aw, thank you. Oh, I never knew that.

Annie: It looks so much like her. In *What Sounds Fun To You* where she's standing outside talking about the birds... I mean, I know I wrote those words, but you made her look... The white curly hair, the whole thing. I mean, we all have been amazed at how much that really looks like my grandmother.

And the other thing, Jennie, that I love, you are so brilliant at making sure we have diverse kids in our books. So they look different, they have different abilities. Will you talk about why that matters to you that we make sure...?? Because it's as much what you bring to our books as I bring of like, Hey, we need to make sure that every kid sees themselves in this book.

Jennie: Absolutely. I mean, I think it's vital, you know, because that's the reality of our world, isn't it?

Annie: Yes.

Jennie: You know, we have so many friends in school, outside of school, we have kids from different backgrounds, different abilities, and it's so important that they see themselves on these pages. It's really important. It's part of our reality.

Annie: It just reminds us that no matter where we are, when you see a book that has a bunch of different kids, you're like, Oh, yeah, not everybody looks like me.

Jennie: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Different kinds of people, different backgrounds. It's because I had that growing up as well. It's so important for me to have that in the pages on, you know, whatever books I'm working on.

Annie: It's the best. Jennie, thank you so, so much. Happy launch day to our new little book *So Happy To Know You*.

Jennie: Thank you. Thank you for having me, Annie.

Annie: Oh, of course. Thank you. Thank you.

[00:25:15] <Music>

[Lauren Daigle song playing]
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
I'd probably fall off the edge
I don't know where I'd go if You ever let go
So keep me held in Your hands

Annie: Y'all, that song! Okay, have you heard the whole thing yet? My gosh, it is so good. It is my girl Lauren Daigle's new song, *Thank God I Do*, which is featured on her latest self-titled 23-song album titled *Lauren Daigle*. The album features hit songs like this one and *These Are the Days*. I have the whole thing playing on repeat. So I need you to check it out wherever you consume music. Or you can visit laurendaigle.com to buy the entire album. This is her first album in five years, y'all, following her last one *Look Up Child*, which included the hit song we all know, *You Say*.

Lauren's currently out on the Lauren Daigle Kaleidoscope Tour. So make sure to check out dates and see if she's visiting a city near you by visiting laurendaigle.com. That's Laurendaigle.com to learn more. Y'all go listen to the album, go see her show, tell her how much you love her. You are going to really, really love this new music from our friend Lauren Daigle.

[Lauren Daigle song playing]
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
I'd probably fall off the edge

[00:26:49] <Music>

Annie: Friends, welcome to That Sounds Fun. Taylor Ann Dietrich.

Taylor Ann: Annie F. Down.

Annie: Welcome back.

Taylor Ann: Oh, I'm so glad to be back.

Annie: So glad to have you here. Katy Boatman.

Katy: Hi.

Annie: Welcome back.

Katy: Thank you.

Annie: Will y'all both kind of start by saying what you do at AFD Inc.

Taylor Ann: Well, I am Tylor Ann and I do the MiniBFF.

Annie: Yes. All things.

Taylor Ann: All things kids.

Katy: All things.

Annie: Some might call you... We try to give everybody a C-suite seat. So would you be the chief MiniBFF officer?

Taylor Ann: Oh yeah.

Katy: 100%.

Annie: CMO? You're our CMO.

Taylor Ann: CMO. I like it. I like it.

Katy: Me too.

Annie: What do you do, Katy?

Katy: I am the content manager.

Annie: Chief content manager. CCM

Katy: Sure. Just got promoted.

Annie: Yeah, yeah. Congratulations. You can now have employees under you. Happy launch day to you guys.

Katy: No. Happy launch day to you.

Taylor Ann: Yeah, seriously.

Annie: I mean, to all of us. I just write the book and that is about all I do. Y'all kind of do the rest of everything. I thought it'd be fun today since y'all are kind of the team who handles all things MiniBFF but is particularly handled getting this book in front of our friends to kind of talk about the behind-the-scenes of this.

So Tylor Ann, let's back up a little bit. You're in charge of MiniBFF Book Club. You're also in charge of MiniBFF podcast. A lot of people have asked what's happened to MiniBFF Book Club.

Taylor Ann: Well it's taken a break. It was so much fun while we did it.

Annie: Every Monday night-

Taylor Ann: Every Monday night.

Annie: ...for two Years.

Taylor Ann: And it was great for the season. I feel like the MiniBFF community was in at that time because all of their activities had stopped. And now, thank the Lord, they have ramped back up again. So that was really fun. And I think it's fun when you occasionally come back to it every once in a while now because it was just such a special time.

Annie: I think what you modeled for us really well and what the team modeled really well is pay attention to what people need and serve them where they are. And in a lot of ways the level of MiniBFF stuff people needed from us in 2020 is not the same as in 2023. But you've really taught me well how to pay attention to that. And yet people love MiniBFF Podcast.

Taylor Ann: Oh, yeah.

Annie: Girl.

Taylor Ann: I love MiniBFF Podcast.

Annie: My own sister is like, "Will you please do more episodes? Because I'm so tired of hearing you do the same thing over and over again."

Taylor Ann: Oh my gosh. My kids feel the same. I feel like the MiniBFF podcast is so sweet because it can be there forever. The stories... It's the bible. And it's you telling stories about the Bible, which makes it even more fun.

Annie: Why do you want to be the CMO here? Why are you the right person?

Taylor Ann: Because I love you dearly.

Annie: That's mutual.

Taylor Ann: Because I love kids and I taught kids for seven years. I have kids of my own. I mean, I just think creating resources and things for kids where they can feel their best and they can feel excited is such a gift. So it's wonderful.

Annie: You do it really beautifully.

Taylor Ann: It's a wonderful post-teaching job. Because It's like you're still with the kids but in a different way.

Annie: And with *What Sounds Fun To You*, we have some resources on teachers for teachers.

Taylor Ann: Teachers Pay Teachers.

Annie: Teachers Pay Teachers. Even better.

Taylor Ann: For the teachers so they can implement it into their classroom. And we've already done the work for you.

Annie: So hopefully at some point we'll do that for *So Happy To Know You* as well to resource teachers. I mean, when I taught school in 2000, in the yonder years of 2000s, we did not have Teachers Pay Teachers. We didn't even have Pinterest. I bet teachers are so much better resource-wise.

Taylor Ann: I mean, I think it just opens your eyes to like so much more creative options out there. I mean, Teachers Pay Teachers has been great for teachers because they can put the stuff they created out into the world and they can make money in a job where you don't make a lot of money.

Annie: Will you talk a little bit about how you see people using *So Happy To Know You* in classrooms and in schools?

Taylor Ann: Well, I definitely see them using it for the alphabet. Because that's in there, which I think is so much fun. And it's a really great book to teach adjectives and learning also about yourself, like ways to describe yourself, what you love about yourself. I'm talking about the kids, not teachers. But well, teachers do too.

Annie: Well, why not? Right.

Taylor Ann: And also just teaching about how there are so many different types of people in your classroom, from what they like to do, the way they look, where they live. All those things you can use *So Happy To Know You* in that.

Annie: That's one of the things I'm most proud of. And we talked to Jennie about it. But this book shows and so does *What Sounds Fun To You...* We make a point to show a lot of different kids like which way you part your hair and what color your skin is and how you walk and your abilities and your different abilities and glasses. I just am like, that matters so much to me that all of our friends reading see a kid that kind of looks like them in some way.

Taylor Ann: I'm really grateful for how much it matters to you because I feel like you make it a very big point for all of us and I appreciate that.

Annie: It does matter to me. That's my school teacher me. This book is extra special to your family.

Taylor Ann: Yeah, it is.

Annie: Because one of your daughters is on the cover with me.

Taylor Ann: Oh my gosh.

Katy: That's the best.

Annie: Isn't that fun?

Taylor Ann: It is the best. I mean it's one of those things where I'm going to sleep at night and I'm like, "Oh, Lampley's on the cover."

Annie: I know. I'm so happy-

Taylor Ann: I just love it so much.

Annie: That's one of the kindest things Jennie has done is taking my real friends and put them in the books. I think that is so fun.

Katy, when you jumped in, when you joined the staff here, we were already down there. We'd already had the book finished and it was time to start telling people. Will you talk a little bit about what you've experienced from the MiniBFF community of our friends?

Katy: Yeah. Well, I thought it was so funny when you got back from tour and you were like, question number two from the road was-

Annie: Literally. Did you know that, Taylor?

Taylor Ann: Yeah.

Annie: The top two things people talk to me about in every city were the single series that we were running in June and MiniBFF.

Katy: Right.

Annie: I couldn't believe it.

Katy: So I was just like, okay. I mean, everybody was so excited and hungry for it. So it made it easy to then go back and be like, "Hey, guess what? This is actually what's been being built behind the scenes, you know? And I know people love to see behind-the-scenes, but sometimes it's fun to kind of keep things a secret for a little bit and be like, surprise.

Annie: Yeah, surprise. We have a book right now.

Katy: Exactly.

Annie: I think one of the most fun things about being on this team with y'all is y'all are the ones who are every day talking to people. I mean, through the MiniBFF Book Club Instagram or through their emails or whatever. I mean, y'all are talking to parents all the time. Taylor, you are a parent as well. What is it parents need right now?

Taylor Ann: You know, I think parents need to remember how great parents they are. And they need to take ownership in the fact that God put them here to be their kids' parents no matter how that happened and that they need to remember that. There was a lot of times when you read books on MiniBFF Book Club and I'd be sitting there listening to it being like, "Oh, I needed this message too."

And I feel like with this book it's like, Yes, you are reading this to your kids or your grandkids or your nieces or your nephews, how we're *So Happy To Know You*. But

also remember when you're reading it, God's happy to know you parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles. God is so happy about who you are. So yes, you're reading it to your kids, but remember you're also reading it about yourself.

Katy: I think that's what I love the most about this book is that it is one of those messages that it's like, it doesn't matter how old you are. That can hit you on a day where you're feeling kind of left behind or unseen is that this is the message where you might be reading it to your kids at night and you're gonna remember something. It's good.

Annie: A behind-the-scenes, picture books take a lot longer than other books because the illustrator needs a lot more time than the person who's just printing our words on pages. So we've had this one in the hopper and we've changed a lot of it through the last couple of years, Taylor Anne. But will you talk a little bit about the names that are in the front and back of this book? It is so hilarious. Hayden, Earnest, EmmaRay. I mean-

Annie: Refreshing Rowan, Radiant Riley, Playful Penelope. Oh, get out of here.

Katy: Oh, that's so cute.

Taylor Ann: Oh, I like Dazzling Dottie.

Katy: That was cute.

Annie: I know. It's so sweet. So on the very front and the very back page of *So Happy To Know You* are just... What is it? 700? 800? How many is it, Katy? Do you really know? Seven?

Katy: It's Seven hundred something.

Annie: Seven hundred-something different people who've given us names. Will you talk about it, Taylor?

Taylor Ann: Well, I was trying to remember that actually today. Like how long ago did we ask for that? Was it like a year ago?

Annie: I think it was fall of '21 or winter of '21 into '22. Because-

Taylor Ann: I think it was.

Annie: ...that's when we were finishing the manuscript.

Taylor Ann: So all these people who wrote... and that was something else I was thinking about actually the other day, is all these people put their kids' names in this book. And those kids are older now. And it's like, look, you were Dazzling Dottie then and you still Dazzling Dottie now.

Annie: Sassy Sage.

Taylor Ann: It's-

Annie: Where are you at Sassy Sage?

Taylor Ann: I just think that's so fun. But yeah, that in itself took planning and time. It's a process.

Annie: It's fun though. Because to me, every time we make something, I want us to make something and never forget who we're making it for. And with our stuff for MiniBFFs, I think about Joshua. I think about the kids that we see every time we do a MiniBFF Book Club or every time sends us mail. Oh my gosh. Will you talk about the mail we get? Lucy Ray.

Taylor Ann: Lucy Ray. Girl.

Annie: Yes. Tell us about the mail we get.

Taylor Ann: The mail is so much fun. Anytime... Did you get stuff on the road from kids too? Like parents still bringing it-

Annie: Yes. I came from every city with a drawing.

Taylor Ann: I mean, it's just sweet for the kids to offer just a little bit of the joy that they've received back to us. And also shout out to all the parents who-

Annie: Actually get us down.

Taylor Ann: Like put it in the envelope.

Annie: Bless all of you.

Taylor Ann: My daughter makes a lot of stuff for Annie.

Annie: You just hand deliver.

Taylor Ann: All I have to do is hand deliver it. But I can't promise it always makes it here.

[crosstalk 00:36:57]

Annie: ...what's in the mail this week?

Taylor Ann: Oh gosh.

Annie: Had no return address and did not have my name on it and it looked like younger handwriting and you're like, "This is either a criminal or a child." It's either a MiniBFF or something very scary." And luckily it was a MiniBFF telling us what sounds fun.

Taylor Ann: Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

Annie: It was the best. I loved it. It just is such a good reminder to me. I just don't ever want to freak because every one of these kids that are in this book in 10 years will be a teenager who could pick up *Perfectly Unique* or who could pick up *Speak Love* or Katy, you have new books out, *You Can Trust*. You were on the show with *You Can Rest* and then next week you're releasing a devotional. So we're gonna talk about that. But I just love that idea too, that like when Lampley and Jane Taylor and Vaughn grow up, they're gonna see themselves-

Taylor Ann: Well, Vaughn's not in the book.

Annie: This is pre-Vaughn.

Taylor Ann: Vaughn wasn't born yet.

Annie: Was Vaughn even a Vaughn at all? No-

Taylor Ann: I don't know. Vaughn wasn't born.

Annie: So the girls are in this one.

Taylor Ann: Yes, they're in it. But Vaughn, we love you.

Annie: Yes. Vaughn, we do love you. If you ever listen to this in the future, we do love you as well. But I mean, I just think it's really sweet that like these kids will... You know, our friend Kiki is on the cover of *What Sounds Fun To You* and she's in this one too.

Katy: She's beautiful.

Katy: Can I turn the table on you for a second?

Annie: Sure.

Katy: Why this message? Like why in 2021 when you were sitting down to write the manuscript, why this one?

Annie: That's a great question. Thank you for asking. You know, all along when I've dreamed up what I wanted to say to kids, to MiniBFFs, I mean... because we have been contracted for these books since 2019. So before the pandemic, I wanted to write kids' books. And part of it is the teacher in me is that I never stopped being a fourth or fifth-grade teacher who's like, Okay, could this help my fifth graders write a five-paragraph essay about fun? Could this help my fourth graders know how to use adjectives, you know?

But this to me, Katy, it mattered so much because the thing is so much of what I write, and what we make is what I wish I would've known then, whatever the then is. So *Perfectly Unique* is for when I was 17, and *Speak Love* is for when I was 20, and *Looking For Lovely* is when I was 30. You know, that kind of thing. I'm just like, "what would I say to her?"

And so much of *So Happy To Know You* is what I wish I would've heard when I was eight. You know, of like... or even like five of like, Man, if I could have drilled into my own brain that God didn't make a mistake when He made me and that I was exactly the way He meant for me to be, I think that would've eased up my teen years.

Katy: Sure.

Annie: So that's why *So Happy To Know You* matters so much to me is because that's genuinely how I feel. I had a funny thing happen at church yesterday, I haven't told y'all yet. A friend of mine that's on staff was reading this article and came up and said, "This reminds me of you." And the person in the article said, "Every room I walk into, I assume everyone likes me and I assume I'm gonna like everyone." He was like, "That's just like you. You think everybody's gonna like you." And I was like, "I hope it's a compliment. I'm not really sure."

But I do walk into every room a little bit like that of thinking like, "We're gonna be friends," and thinking, "This kid's gonna like me." I mean, I walk into every room with kids thinking these kids are gonna like me because I already like them. I'm already in. So this book is kind of my, like, I already like you just the way you are and we would already be friends and I'm making an assumption that you're gonna like me back, which does not always serve me. But I thought it was really funny,

that just when this is coming out, just yesterday someone said, "You assume in every room that you're gonna like everybody in there." And I do assume that.

Taylor Ann: Sure.

Annie: so I assume I'm gonna like every kid who picks us up. So I assume I really am so happy to know them. It feels like a real honor we get to serve people's kids.

Katy: Absolutely.

Taylor Ann: And it's a real honor that parents let us.

Annie: They trust us. I know.

Taylor Ann: They bring you into their living room and into their children's ears. I mean, when you say every kid... You do love every kid that comes up to you. I mean, there's a reason my daughter calls you to read her a story. If she doesn't feel good, she's like, "Call Annie." That's fine.

Annie: There is a phone in MiniBFF Book Club for some people.

Taylor Ann: No, this was actually, this was pre-MiniBFF. This is how it got started. She got really sick and we had to go to the hospital.

Annie: Truly. Jane Taylor was one of the first people that-

Taylor Ann: I did not know that.

Annie: ...kicked off MiniBFF Book Club.

Taylor Ann: We called Annie and Annie was like, "You want me to read you a story?" And she was like, "Yeah."

Annie: She had like a washcloth. Is that a word?

Taylor Ann: Yeah. Because we didn't know what was going on. But anyways. Annie was... yeah, that sort of stuff.

Annie: Will you talk about where MiniBFF stuff is going? I mean, we're doing the teacher thing right now, which is 50 teachers got selected to get a gift card and I'm gonna go read in a school somewhere in America.

Katy: I mean, can you imagine being in a classroom and having-

Annie: No

Taylor Ann: ...an author that you look up to like that you enjoy coming to your class.

Annie: I can't believe it.

Taylor Ann: Oh man. I'm so excited for all those teachers.

Annie: I know.

Taylor Ann: I mean, it's very cool.

Annie: I know you can't tell us all the plans for MiniBFF life over the next year. But do you see MiniBFF Podcast coming back?

Taylor Ann: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah. Me too. I think it's gonna be really fun.

Taylor Ann: Yeah. I'm very excited.

Annie: Do you see other resources coming with *So Happy To Know You*?

Taylor Ann: Yeah, yeah. I do. I think especially for teachers and... And parents too. I know we've talked about Teachers Pay Teachers. Y'all get on there too. There's a ton of free stuff. If you want something fun to do with your kid that's different from, you know, Play-Doh, or even if you want to do Play-Doh, they got stuff for that too. Just great.

Annie: In a world where someone wants to say, "Here's how y'all could really serve our family," how do they get in touch with us?

Taylor Ann: Go anniefdowns.com.

Annie: Oh, okay.

Taylor Ann: I think there's a lot of resources there for you. And then get in touch. Maybe probably on email, minibff@anniefdowns.com I would say it would be the best way.

Annie: Just because I'm always like... honestly until tour, I don't think I realized how much people wanted us to serve their kids again. So we need to hear from parents of like, Hey, it would help us a ton if...

Taylor Ann: Yeah.

Annie: There's a bunch of MiniBFF Book Club on my Instagram. There's a series. But then there's some on MiniBFF Book Club.

Taylor Ann: Yeah. Because for a while we moved everything over there. So I think there's still a lot on MiniBFF Book Club, the Instagram.

Annie: I think so too. Katy Boat, next week your book launches.

Katy: It does.

Annie: As long as we're talking about serving the next generation-

Taylor Ann: Let's give them some more.

Annie: We gotta talk about *You Can Trust*. So much of *So Happy To Know You* as like birth to... what do you say?

Katy: Eight?

Annie: Birth to 10?

Katy: Yeah.

Annie: I mean anybody can read it. I read this in my fifth-grade classroom. But this isn't for middle schoolers to sit and read on their own.

Katy: I think if they picked it up that'd be great.

Annie: Yeah, it'd be sweet. But it's for elementary.

Katy: Yes. Yeah.

Annie: But Katy, who are you writing *You Can Trust* for?

Katy: I wrote it for that 8 to 12-year-old age range. But my experience with the last book, with *You Can Rest* was there really were a lot of girls that read it that were older

than that. So it's almost an eight-and-up resource. I even had adults tell me that they read it and loved it.

Annie: Oh yeah.

Katy: So by all means.

Annie: So *You Can Rest* that you released two years ago? A year ago?

Katy: March of last year.

Annie: March of '22. And it was for eight to twelve-year-old girls.

Katy: Yes.

Annie: And *You Can Trust* is the boy version?

Katy: Yeah. I call it the Brother book to *You Can Rest*. And I don't even know if I said this to you, but it was out of our conversation on the podcast about the book that the-

Annie: With Shelby.

Katy: Yes.

Annie: It's a great episode.

Katy: With Shelby, my niece, that *You Can Trust* really started to get legs. Because I knew I had been asked a lot about, well, why are one of these for boys? But I was not feeling led to write that. I didn't think I was the right person. And you asked me about that on the podcast, which then turned into me just talking to more friends and mentors and praying about it and like, really should I do this? And next thing I know, here it is, it's about to come out.

So it was a challenge to write because I am not a boy obviously. So to understand what it is that boys worry about took more work.

Annie: Oh yeah. When you talk about all the boys sitting around the table, did you see this picture?

Katy: No, I haven't seen it.

Annie: It's amazing.

- Katy:** I sat down with my nephew, Blake, and his group of friends. I called them my board of bros.
- Annie:** Oh I love that.
- Katy:** And I asked them, "You know, what do you worry about?" And to be honest, the conversation was about 15 minutes. I had their attention for about 15 minutes.
- Annie:** Table covered in candy.
- Katy:** Yeah. Oh, I brought snacks and fidget toys and all the things. But they opened up and answered my questions. And then I called some of my guy friends too and said, "Hey, when you were this age, what did you worry about?" And just put all of those answers on paper and use that to write just because I wanted to make sure this wasn't something that was just, you know, my idea of what they might be thinking-
- Annie:** Sure.
- Katy:** ...but really something that was useful.
- Annie:** What is the theme? I mean, *You Can Rest* the theme is anxiety and helping your daughters sleep and not worry. Is *You Can Trust* also about anxiety. Is that what the boys told you?
- Katy:** It is but I came at it from a different direction. So what I realized is the problem is the same for both the boys and the girls. It's just that it looks differently. So with the boys, what I was realizing is a lot of times their "what if?" questions are rooted in fear or anxiety. It's like, well, what if this happens at school, or what if this happens tomorrow? So I came at it from that approach of every day in the devotional is a different question and then we look at what God has to say about it.
- Annie:** I mean, as a mom and as a teacher, I mean, you taught kids that are in this age bracket. What do you think about having a devotional for boys? I mean, *You Can Trust*, what are you thinking when you're hearing all this?
- Taylor Ann:** Oh, I mean, I'm just sitting here, I'm kind of like a little teary because we read devotions every night in our house and I just don't think you're even gonna know how much this is gonna impact. And especially boys. I feel like there's a lot out there for girls because, you know, I guess our worries seem louder, maybe, more vocal.
- Annie:** And girls tend to read more books.

Taylor Ann: Yes. So having a son, I'm like, Yeah, I get to have both in my house. I'm pumped. But I think it's amazing.

Katy: Thank you.

Taylor Ann: I'm very excited

Katy: It's funny when you said "and girls read more books". It's true. And even with my nephew, I was like, "Are you actually gonna read this?" He kind of nods along, but I'm not positive. So what I did is almost gave the cliff notes version.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Taylor Ann: Oh, nice.

Annie: The main devotional is blue.

Katy: Yeah. Or a green.

Annie: Or greenish blue. And then an orange is the question and answer.

Katy: Yeah.

Annie: Brilliant, Katy.

Katy: So I'm like at the very least if they decided to pick it up, but they didn't actually read the whole thing, they could see a quick answer.

Annie: Will you read the question and answer for day 20? Can we just hear that?

Katy: It's what if I don't want to be patient? The answer is, thankfully God can help. Patience doesn't always come easily, but you have a helper in the Holy Spirit whom you can call on when you know you can't be patient on your own.

Annie: Brilliant.

Taylor Ann: I'm gonna write that on a notecard.

Annie: There's like four paragraphs if they want to read a little bit more.

Katy: Sure.

Annie: That is so smart, Katy Boat.

Taylor Ann: That's very smart.

Katy: You know, learning from actual people in my life.

Annie: I mean that's the fun thing about what we get to do with these books, with *So Happy To Know You*, with *You Can Trust* is a) we were this age at one point, we love people that are this age at this point, and we want to serve our friends who are raising kids because you and I are not raising kids right now. So we get to step in as aunts and as friends and say, "Listen, I'm not raising you, but I can hand you this." This is one way we village with our friends and family.

Katy: A hundred percent.

Taylor Ann: Well, and you write, like I said before, like you writing this book, it's a message for kids but also for parents. You writing *You Can Trust*, it's a message for kids, it's a reminder for parents. Like, Hey, your kid might have a hard time feeling patient because he's eight and he wants that candy. I mean-

Annie: But also I want to say you're right about what we are doing. But Taylor Ann, I mean people probably know this, but really you are the heart behind MiniBFF.

Taylor Ann: Yes.

Annie: It's what I love, but what the amazing thing... This is what I do not deserve. There's a lot I don't deserve. But the amazing thing is our staff is full of people who I can say, I'm really passionate about this and y'all say, Me too, let me run with it. And that's what you've done with Mini... you've made it such a better, more beautiful place than I could have ever made it. So that makes me even more excited about where we're going over the next year. We have a few fun things next year for our MiniBFFs. I love you being on that team and running it really.

Taylor Ann: Well, it's easy to do because you're excited. You're equally excited. Yeah.

Annie: That means a lot to me.

Taylor Ann: It would not be easy if you were like, "This is cool. Have a good time."

Annie: I don't want to, Taylor. I don't want to. No, no, no. Katy, I feel the same you being... I mean, I cannot believe we get to have an author on our staff who is releasing things like this into the world at the same time to resource our friends. It just is awesome.

Katy: It's really kind of you.

Taylor Ann: It's like Jesus is in the building or something.

Annie: It's like. I know.

Katy: He knew what He was doing.

Annie: I know. I mean, I'm telling you, Taylor, Katy's first week or second week, I was like, "Can you come put some *You Can Rest* on our shelf? Because you work here. When people come through, I want you to hand them your... I'm gonna give away a lot of your books, I'm sorry to say. But we need handfuls of these in the office because anybody in our office that makes things, that resources, I mean, that's what you do. It's what both of y'all do.

What did we not say about *You Can Trust*, we need to say? It's available next week. When they go on today and get *So Happy To Know You*, just go ahead and grab *You Can Trust* as well.

Katy: Sure. You better get *So Happy To Know You* and then you can just add a little to your cart. But yeah.

Taylor Ann: Do it so many times that Amazon makes that "suggested bundle."

Annie: That's right.

Katy: And it's like, *You Can Trust*, *You Can Rest*, *So Happy To Know You*, *What Sounds Fun To You*.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. That's right. We'll get you from birth to the end of middle school.

Katy: We're ready to serve the whole family.

Annie: Yeah, that's exactly right. Well, thank y'all for doing this. Thanks for making time for this and thanks for all you do to help me serve the next generation. I do not want to do this without you. I don't think I could, but I really don't want to.

Taylor Ann: You do it very well, Annie.

Annie: Thank y'all. You're a great team.

Taylor Ann: You're a gift to my kids for sure and lots of kids out there. Happy launch week.

Annie: Happy launch week.

[00:51:05] <Music>

Outro: Oh friends, wasn't that fun? Oh, I love these episodes. They kind of give you a peek behind the curtain of what we do and how we do it. I just think it's so fun. So publishing a book is such a long process from the point of ideation, which was 2019, and then writing it and then illustrating and all the process, and it lands on your doorstep or your bookshelf in 2023. So I cannot believe today is finally release day. I just can't wait to hear which adjective your kid picks to describe themselves and what you pick to describe yourself and what they think of all the friends and the animals in the book.

And if you haven't ordered one yet, today is the day. You can find it wherever you love shopping for books. And if they don't have it, just ask local bookstores. We love a local bookstore. They can order it for you. They can often ship it straight to your house. So I would love for you to check with your local bookstore or check with Parnassus here in Nashville. They can ship it for you as well. And they have some sign copies so you can call them and get that.

All right, if you need anything else from me, you know I'm extra embarrassingly easy to find on book launch days. Annie F. Downs on everything everywhere all the time. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me.

All right, I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same. Well, you know what sounds fun to me today. Always Annie is out and about and we are having a great time. I'm so excited to share with you everything that is going on with the book today. So all book things. All book things. I'm so happy.

All right, you guys have a great Tuesday. Happy launch day to all of us. We'll see you back here on Thursday with my friend, one of my favorite musicians. Y'all are just going to fall in love with her. Riley Clemmons. She'll be with us on Thursday. We'll see you then.