Episode 32 - Going Where The Wind Blows - Season 2 Finale

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**SPEAKERS**

Katie Kriegel, Jenn Mattern Lalich, Vivek Venugopal, Sachi Graber, Anton Jones, Nicholas Lampietti, Leslie Bleichner, Meredith Benjamin

**Jenn Mattern Lalich** 00:00

When I got to New York City, I was circling ads in the New York Times wanted section. And I came across one that said Junior copy editor and copywriter needed open minded and outgoing are a plus. And I thought, Okay, open minded, outgoing. I went to Grinnell, I got this and I went in. And the whole place had a strange vibe, people peeking at me really sizing me up from around corners. And during the interview, the boss, Pat had this bleached blonde hair and like talons bright orange. She said to me, "So some things of a slightly explicit nature might come across your desk, you okay with that?" And what do you say when you desperately need a job? I was like, Sure. So she's she looked at me a little more. And then she tapped her speakerphone and said, "Babs, bring in, you know what we do?" And Babs, this unsmiling woman in a big Yankees shirt came in and dumped a stack of hardcore porn magazines onto my lap. This has never happened to me in a job interview. I was wholly unprepared [laughing] that I could feel my face turn so pink. And she said, "refer to page three, of a big butt magazine, if you will." I did because what else do you do? So it was the letter from the editor page. And in the middle was Ginger, who was the like, Cover Model associated with big butt magazine. And it was a little letter to the readership. And she was like, "No, get it you you'd be Ginger. The porn actresses don't actually write it, but you'd be Ginger." I did wind up getting the job. And I think they hired me just because they knew it'd be funny to watch me squirm. And you should have seen my spell check program.

**Meredith Benjamin** 02:23

that was Jenn Mattern, whom I spoke with way back in September, sharing the hilarious story of one of her first jobs out of college. Jenn practically raised me. I've known her quite literally since the time I was born. But in 21 years, that was the first time I'd ever had the pleasure of hearing that incredible tale.

**Katie Kriegel** 02:44

Wow. You know, I had some reservations about releasing this. Writing for a porn magazine is not your typical straight-out-of-Grinnell job.

**Meredith Benjamin** 02:53

Pretty much my jaw was on the floor. My jaw was on the floor, I was cackling.

**Katie Kriegel** 02:58

I don't know how I'd respond.

**Meredith Benjamin** 03:01

But she did it. Yeah, she made it work

**Nicholas Lampietti** 03:05

On going forth. We love these kinds of stories, ones that are crazy, unexpected, and don't necessarily make sense at the time. Because it's stories like these, that sometimes lead us to exactly where we're supposed to end up. So, for our season two finale, we're revisiting stories from our guests that can only be described as serendipitous.

**Meredith Benjamin** 03:32

Up first is Leslie Bleichner, class of 2007, whose myriad of experiences in education which we discussed in Episode 24 Education is my playground, didn't always fit together neatly.

**Leslie Bleichner** 03:48

In the moment, I would not have said it was serendipity. In the moment, it was well, not safe for work words. Um, I was in Oklahoma working at a law school and I got I didn't get fired. I got laid off. I got laid off on a Monday at noon. Right. So I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy at work. And so was already kind of like starting to sort of look in the market but like not anything serious, because I'm somebody that like needs a plan and needs a plan for the plan. Until life blows up anyway. So yeah, it was a Monday I like done on like my morning stuff. I sent out a newsletter to like the student body doing whatever and my boss was like, Hey, before you step out for lunch, you can swing by my office for five minutes. Sure. And so I walk in and he's like well, your positions being eliminated effective immediately. You can like pack up like whatever you need, but like, security's like waiting for you in your office, like and he like walked through like, I got a small severance and this is the other thing, but I was like, what? Um, and so that was really hard one because I've never been terminated, or, you know, eliminated laid off or like there was just a new thing. I was a new mom. We just bought a house like there, I had all kinds of questions. And so I say that it's serendipitous now, because one, I was all like, when I look back on it, I was already unhappy. And sometimes the world moves through you in ways that you're not prepared to move yourself. And so I think had I not been terminated, I think I probably would have stayed and been unhappy for way longer than I needed to. I also needed to lose that job in order to be able to be in a good place to return to Grinnell.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 05:55

Leslie is proof that sometimes, a door needs to close, or in this case be slammed in your face, so that another can open for Vivek Venugopal, class of 2001. That door came in the form of a package, which he discussed with Sneha Saigal, class of 2012. In their conversation, Episode 25: We're not in Kansas Anymore, covering everything from nonprofit fundraising, to leveraging new technology.

**Vivek Venugopal** 06:27

One day, I got a package in the mail. And my wife and I had been trying to figure out if there was a good reason for us to move to California for like a long time. And a package came in the mail. And I was with another class of 2001 alum. I was with Chris Neary and I said, Chris, this package is going to change my life. And then I turned it over. And it was from my wife's grandmother, I was like, it's probably cookies, and better be some pretty darn good cookies if it's going to change my life. And I opened it. And it was a book called leaving Microsoft to change the world. And was written by a guy named John Wood. And I read it and it was about him starting an organization called Room to Read. And Room to Read operates in India and Zambia, which are two countries that I call home. I was born and raised in Zambia. And then I, I went to the website, and we work in close education and literacy. And then I went to the career section and said, we're looking for a fundraiser with five years of experience. And I was like, now, I have to apply for this job. I don't have a choice, I have to do it. And I applied for the job. And they flew me out to San Francisco I interviewed got the job. Two weeks later, my wife and I packed up our red Toyota Corolla and drove across the country. And that that again, Sneha speaks to your idea that you have to be open to it. Because opportunities present themselves, often, and if you're willing to put yourself out there and take that plunge, it can it can draw you towards things that actually bring you the joy and allow you to like, not just do something because you can do it, but do something because you want to do it.

**Meredith Benjamin** 07:57

Vivek is right. Sometimes life is serendipitous, and things just happen to you. And other times you need to make them happen for yourself. On Going Forth we also love these kinds of stories, about putting yourself out there and taking the plunge. Here's Anton Jones class 2002 on how an email to a former mentor reaffirmed his love of theater.

**Anton Jones** 08:20

I emailed one of my mentors in high school, Buffy I was like, hey, remember me from seven years ago? Can you chat? What are you doing? And so we had coffee, she got me to work with the Guthrie or other theaters in town and on stage managing and directing and just got me into a lot of spaces freelanced around the Twin Cities until about '09, moved to DC for a minute but then I met my wife back in Minnesota while I was on a fellowship and I was like, Well, I'm gonna be back here because I love this person. This posed questioning whether I really want to be in theater. I love what I was doing. I love education stuff more often than productions on stage. But I'm just as that happened on Buffy emailed me saying, Hey, I'm branding Barnes company at CLIMB, and I'm about to retire. Are you considering applying for it? I'm like, Sure. So I applied for it, and got that position.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 09:09

To hear more of Anton story and examples of how a cold conversation leads to something great. check out Episode 21: It's A Party at CLIMB. And if you're not sold on the power of a cold call, email or conversation, let Sachi Graber class of 2012 convince you that it works both ways. In Episode 26 on climate work, entitled, It's Not the End of the World

**Sachi Graber** 09:37

while I was working at Rocky Mountain Institute, so that's like an energy transition focused nonprofit that's based out in Colorado. I was doing work on solar mini grids in Nigeria and so there was this like, really funny thing happening where I was an American who worked most of the time in or you know, thematically about Nigeria. And so my contacts were kind of all over the place. And I got a LinkedIn request, actually, from a student who is, you know, at some public university in the US just asking for information about our work. And it turned out that they were a Nigerian who was in the US to study and to get their master's degree. And we talked, and they were really interested in the work that we did. And they, you know, sometimes that happens when you get on a call with someone and you just like, you're thinking about things in the same way. It was one of those moments where I was like, yes, like you absolutely have it, you have what I want on my team. And so you know, I stayed in touch with this person, and also got them in touch with my supervisor at RMI. And actually, after I left, they ended up being hired and brought in as a new associate on the team working on the same program that I had been a part of.

**Meredith Benjamin** 11:04

I think what I take from these stories is that although the Grinnell network is strong, there's also a whole wide world out there waiting to be explored. For this reason, I'm excited to share that you won't hear my voice and going forward to next season, because I'll be studying abroad with a multi country travel program focusing on global human rights. While I'll miss recording with Nicholas, Katie, and our fabulous guests. We're excited to shake things up on going forward to try new things, hear new voices, and build on the work we've done over this past year of podcasting. I'm so excited to watch it grow.

**Katie Kriegel** 11:40

And we are going to miss you tremendously. Meredith,

**Nicholas Lampietti** 11:44

we will, it's been it's been such a journey, a year. It's crazy.

**Meredith Benjamin** 11:51

It really is crazy. We've done a lot.

**Katie Kriegel** 11:53

 Yes. And you're going to do awesome things on your trip. So I can't wait to hear about it when you get back.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 11:59

Yeah, I know. You'll have to send us send us lots of pictures. I know it might be difficult at times, but lots of pictures and lots of updates.

**Katie Kriegel** 12:08

We hope you'll carry with you everything you've learned from these conversations as you go forth on your incredible adventure.

**Meredith Benjamin** 12:15

They definitely will.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 12:16

And of course, not all advice is necessarily professional. To wrap things up. Vivek shares the story of what started as a cold call, but turns into serendipity.

**Vivek Venugopal** 12:32

So right after we graduated from Grinnell that fall, a Grinnellian threw a party in Chicago, and we went there with all Grinnelian, and then two guys walked in and nobody knew who they were. And everyone was just kind of like, I don't know who those two guys are. And I went and just started talking to them. That was my cold call. I was just like, Hey, what's up? I'm Vivek, and I chatted with them. And then their friends showed up. And one of their friends was a girl named Katie. And I got her phone number. And now we've been married for 17 years and we have two children. And so that's my cold call success story.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 13:10

Stay tuned for season three in February. And until then,

**Meredith Benjamin** 13:14

happy holidays from Going Forth

**Nicholas Lampietti** 13:20

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