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Annie: Hey friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be with you here today. We've got a great show in store. So y'all know that Valentine's Day is less than a week away and your girl AFD is here for you with a great gift idea. If you're stumped on what to get that special someone for Valentine's or if you're looking to spread some love to your Galentine, or just treat yourself, tickets to the Here For You tour make the perfect gift and give you something to look forward to together. We've even got a little certificate you can print out and present to that lucky receiver.

Carlos Whittaker and I cannot wait to see you out on the road in June. So pop on over to hereforyoutour.com for all the details today and to grab your tickets and your little gift that you can give when you give this for Valentine's Day.

Sponsor: And before we dive into today's conversation, I want to share about one of our amazing sponsors, [BetterHelp](http://BetterHelp.com). It's the actual best when we get enough rest and are in a good place mentally and emotionally, right? We're more likely to be confident and empowered to make a positive impact in the world around us.

Sometimes, though, things are just too much. I get it. You might feel overwhelmed or like you can't see a clear direction forward. A hopeful way to get closer to a healthier version of yourself is to see a therapist. You've heard me say it again and again how much my counselor has helped me over the years. Sometimes I see her more frequently when there's a lot going on or if I'm struggling with decisions or patterns I want to dig into. And sometimes it's more like a monthly check-in and an emotional tune up.

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If you want to live a more empowered life, therapy can get you there. Just visit betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun today to get 10% off your first month. That's betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun.

Intro: Today on the show, oh, I'm so ready for y'all to hear this, I get to talk with my sweet friend Nikki DeLoach. You may remember her from our 2020 Christmas Party episode all about Hallmark movies. If you missed that, we'll link to it in the show notes below and you can go listen. Or you may know her from, you know, The

Mickey Mouse Club when we were kids, or from our all-time favorite Hallmark Christmas movies.

She's an actress, a producer, a writer, a philanthropist, and all-around, amazingly talented friend who loves God and loves her family and loves her work. I'm just so excited she's back so we can hear more about her latest project for Hallmark movies and mysteries called *Curious Caterer: Grilling Season*. Y'all, it is so good.

It premiered just a few days ago. I got to watch an early screener of it while I was on my treadmill. I enjoyed it so much. Y'all know I love when my friends become friends with my friends. So I'm excited for you to get to know Nikki as a friend today. I know you already know her as a star on your television but now she gets to be your friend. So here's my conversation with the dearest Nikki DeLoach.

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Annie: Nikki DeLoach, welcome back to That Sound Fun.

Nikki: I cannot even begin to tell you the amount of joy. Like I literally giggle hearing just words come out of your mouth. Your smile on your face, you are a light-bringer in the world.

Annie: Oh, stop it.

Nikki: Hi, Annie.

Annie: I mean, we are so cut from the same cloth. When we saw each other in December... No, I'm sorry. When we saw each other in October at the Hallmark Christmas Launch Party, oh, yeah, it was like no one else was in the room. I was like, "Nikki is a star in this place and I cannot leave her. I will not stop talking to her."

Nikki: I was happiest just us being tucked and cozy having our conversation. I'm going to be quite honest and this might be a big surprise to a lot of people. I am deeply an introvert who has had to learn how to perform to be able to get up on a stage, be in a party, do a red carpet, do all of those things. They don't feel comfortable. When all the eyes are on you, right, I'm much more comfortable tucked into a little nook with a friend having a meaningful conversation. Like that's my happy place. I'll do it because it's part of the job, obviously. And then at Hallmark, every single person in that room I knew so that feels a little different. But that's where I'm happier. So thank you for taking me to a little happy place.

Annie: I loved it. Okay, that's the first time that Hallmark had ever done a countdown to Christmas huge launch like that, right?

Nikki: Wasn't that incredible? I just remember standing on the top of the double decker bus, the ones that you see that are notorious in New York that you take the tours on. And I was standing up at the top with Andrew Walker because we've both been with the network for seven years. Him longer actually. And we were just looking around as the bus drove down New York City, pulling up to Radio City Music Hall, and I just got so teary because I just thought, when we started at this network, I said this to Andrew, I was like, "Did you ever imagine that we would be standing on a double decker bus driving through New York City pulling up the Radio City Music Hall?" This is insane.

Annie: You know, our friends send in questions for you, they get the AFD Week in Review email. And Ana said, "Who is your favorite Hallmark leading man, and why is it Andrew Walker?" He's wonderful. Is he nice as a person? Please say he is.

Nikki: The nicest.

Annie: I needed him to be.

Nikki: The nicest. Andrew and I, we always say that maybe in another lifetime or something we were like brother and sister because we met for the first time and did a movie together and we're like, "Oh, it's you again. I know you." We've just had this brother-sister super tight bond. He's one of my best friends.

We tease each other like brothers and sisters. Like I will check him like nobody's business. He will also tell me he helps me because when I'm away from Bennett, I often have a lot of like... For those who don't know, my youngest went through a lot of health stuff. He's had three heart surgeries. So when I'm away from him working, I go through these really difficult bouts of PTSD, and it's very intense. And he'll help me lay down my fear. He'll be like, "DeLoach, DeLoach, we're gonna lay down the fear for a minute." So we each help each other.

Also in our lives, we're just really good friends. The fact that we get to keep working together it's a 'pinch me' situation. I feel like we're getting away with something. Like, I can't believe they're letting us do this again. It's so fun.

Annie: Well, I just want to honor that you get to work with up close friends and even at that party be surrounded by friends. But it takes a lot for someone to step outside of their natural personality and create something else. So I just want to honor the work that takes for you to be a public person when you're an introvert by nature.

Nikki: Yes, thank you so much. I'm so happy at home. I'm very happy at home. I'm really happy. I'm writing full-time now and I can just be in my little Lululemon. I wrote from the bathtub last night.

Annie: Oh, that's very good.

Nikki: I finished the second act of the script that we have a second draft due, and I wrote from the bathtub. Like I can write from anywhere, the coziness of my house, I don't have to leave. I don't have to put on makeup or do my hair. That is just such a little happy place for me.

And I think in the past, I felt like I had to almost kind of separate myself into two to kind of put myself out there. And what I've been learning in the last couple of years is how to take the self that wants to stay at home and take her out into public and instead be more integrated. Like I'm working on integration, like all the different selves to becoming essentially what I believe is like that one divine self that God put us here to become.

Annie: Man, that's beautiful. Because there's so many of us, I mean, so many of us who go, "When I'm at work, I have to be like this, but when I'm at home, I'm gonna be like this." And that's always gonna be a little bit true, right? Because we have to wear clothes in public.

Nikki: Absolutely.

Annie: But there is this, like, is our work of being a human integrating ourselves?

Nikki: That's it.

Annie: Like, is that it? I think you're right. That's a really interesting... Like, I wonder if I took time, I may do this this weekend, if I took time and thought through what has made me healthier, is it that I've integrated parts of my life together that I used to separate?

Nikki: I just chose. My answer to that, probably without knowing this whole journey that you've been on, just listening to the podcast and hearing that growth, I would say absolutely, because if not, our body and our mind is at war with itself.

And I would say this, like do an exercise. I did this exercise when I was starting to do this work, where I wrote down all the different voices in my head. There's the voice in my head that's like, "You know, you're never going to make it. You're going to be left behind. You know, your dreams are not going to come true in the way that you desire them." And then there's another voice that's like, "You know, 'This

industry doesn't get to tell me who I'm gonna become. I'm gonna become whoever Jesus says I'm gonna become. And I got Jesus on my side, so I'm gonna become whoever I want to become."

Annie: That's right.

Nikki: And then there's the voice that goes, you know, "All is well. You're exactly where you're meant to be." So everybody has those voices. Those are all your different selves that come from some part of you or some experience or some person in your life from the past. And the goal is not trying to erase them, but befriending them because they are a part of you. Like my fear voice, my hyper-vigilant voice that I've wanted to get rid of for so many years because that's where a lot of the panic sometimes comes from, that voice has also saved my life, it's saved my child's life. So I don't want to get rid of that.

Annie: That's beautiful.

Nikki: I just want to befriend it and bring it really close and sometimes say, "Hey, you're a little loud right now. Everything's actually okay. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for the ways in which you protect me but right now, I just need you to take a back seat and I want the divine peace voice, I want that to come to the forefront and just be a little louder right now."

So it's part of integrating. And it's not that negative self-talk when you're... Because when you talk negatively of you, it puts you in a shame spiral. "Why am I saying these things to myself again? Why am I doing this to myself again?" And then you go into shame. God gave us all the feelings for a reason. They're meant to serve us in some way. We just have to become friends with them.

Annie: Wow. That's right. Versus kicking out ones that feel negative.

Nikki: Yeah. And just integrate them. So I'm just working really hard on integrating all those different selves to kind of really anchor myself into that divine self.

Annie: So your Christmas movie, *The Gift of Peace* with Brennan Eliot, who I adore, I think so highly of him. He's so nice on the internet.

Nikki: Annie, he is the nicest. I mean, I'm like a real nerdy actor type. I love the work of being an actor. Like I really get nerd out. He was like I met my match with him in the world of Hallmark. He and I talked about craft, and script and story, and character. And we would take walks every weekend. I would force him to come and watch college football with me on Saturday.

Annie: How about our Dawgs? Listen!

Nikki: How about our Dawgs?

Annie: What? Two in a row.

Nikki: Not to take like a left turn or right turn, I was there at the stadium-

Annie: I saw. Was it just unbelievable?

Nikki: When I tell you it was one of the best nights of my life... And it belong to everyone in that stadium. It belong to everybody who loves the Georgia Bulldogs. It belong to... And that's the cool thing I will say about, you know, college football. And it's like you might disagree on politics, you might disagree on education, you might disagree on, you know, socio-economic issues-

Annie: You can disagree on Jesus and share the Georgia Bulldogs.

Nikki: You can disagree on Jesus. But if you meet someone and they are Georgia Bulldogs fans, that's six hours of conversation.

Annie: There's something. That's right. There's something. That's exactly right, Nikki. Oh my gosh. I mean, I went to the game in Indy, and I said to people, "Now I'm not married yet but that's the best feeling I've ever had when we won the National Championship."

Nikki: I would say definitely top five.

Annie: It's such a good feeling. Oh my gosh.

Nikki: And that's up there with the birth of my children and my wedding.

Annie: I know. Okay, so you made Brennan watch football with you is how we got there.

Nikki: I made him. Every Saturday we would go and we would eat lunch and get oysters and grab beer and I would make him watch college football and then we would just walk the city of Vancouver for hours. He is such a dear, dear, dear soul. He is beyond talented. And the joy of working with him was like really and truly... We wanted to make a movie about grief that was really for Hallmark.

Annie: So the integrating is what made me think of it, Nikki, is because you have publicly grieved the loss of your dad. We know from Brennan's Instagram, his wife is dealing with a round of cancer.

Nikki: Four times.

Annie: Yeah. Both of you have to integrate in a way to even do this movie on grief, that as a person who had the most grievous year of my life last year-

Nikki: I know.

Annie: ...I connected so deeply with that movie. It was beautiful.

Nikki: Thank you.

Annie: How did you do that? How do you not protect yourself? How did you bring your real self...? What it felt like. I mean, you're a very great actress-

Nikki: Thank you, Annie.

Annie: But some of that was that you've lived through real grief. And you did a Christmas Love movie about grief.

Nikki: I know. I always go into any situation, but especially this one, this one was probably the hardest, you know, in terms of like the subject matter, and how do we weave through this and still not make it sad the entire time and still represent grief in the most authentic way, and make it real, and like you said, not try to protect us?

So you go into something thinking, "This is sacred, this was given to us for a reason, you know, so let's go into that." And then when we got to Vancouver, I always do this, I always ask for a read-through. But for this one, I asked-

Annie: Will you tell me what that means?

Nikki: So a read-through is when you sit down and you read the whole entire script with your number two-

Annie: With people?

Nikki: Yeah.

Annie: Wow.

Nikki: Or with the whole cast, if they can come. The last movie, we were able to get the entire cast to a read-through. But sometimes you're only able... For me, it's like,

especially that number two, because it's really mostly you and him in these movies and then the director and the producer.

So it was just the four of us. And I said, "I would love for us to sit down because Brennan is carrying some really heavy things into this and I'm carrying some really heavy things into this. And I just want to sit down and talk and read through the script, yes. But let's talk because Brennan was terrified."

I have had to put myself out there in ways, like, especially in Hallmark, you know, I was filming *Taking the Reins* three weeks before my dad died. I knew he was dying, and every day I had to get up and go to work and wonder if that was going to be the day. And that was probably the hardest experience of my life, just the anxiety of like, "I gotta get through this movie so I can be there with him, so I can be there with him." Within five weeks after he died, I went and did *Five More Minutes*, which was also about grief. That was brutal.

So I had done a version of this and, you know, Brennan had never and he was terrified, because Cami's cancer had just come back and the odds of her making it were not great. So he was walking in so raw, and I grabbed his hand and I said, "You're gonna have to just trust me. I'm gonna be here with you. You're gonna fall. I'm gonna catch you. I will not abandon you. Like Jesus, I will not abandon you." And I didn't.

And it was such a moving experience for him because he has moved through this world of cancer in a lot of ways in isolation. And it was really, you know, allowing somebody to really see all the messy, emotional, hard, honest, parts of him was not something that he does. So when we sat down and started talking, I said, "I need you to tell us your fears. I need you to tell us what you're scared of. I need you to tell us how you want... let's talk about all of it." So we started there.

Annie: Wow.

Nikki: And when you have a trust between people when you're creating something, you're allowed to freefall into it, and know that you're going to be taken care of. So it was that meeting, it was that day. We sat for six hours together.

Annie: Oh my gosh. And just read through the whole thing and worked out... When you do that, I assume you go, "Oh, I think the tone there should be..." Is that kind of what you do?

Nikki: "The tone there should be..." or "This line feels very inauthentic to this moment. Can we talk to the writer about maybe changing the line to something like this?" Or this beat, it doesn't feel like there should be comedy inside of this moment," or

"This feels like there needs to be levity. Can we give the audience a breath and let them laugh for a minute and have a break?" You know, you kind of work through all of that together.

And I think when he left that room, he knew that he could get out there and do his work. And he said, "I've never done anything like that in my career." And also, you know, there was five of us in that grief group and three of us were going through grief. Princess, the one who-

Annie: In real life, of the five in that group, three were really going through it.

Nikki: Princess who had lost her mother in the movie, she had lost her stepfather just a couple of weeks before we started filming. Like two weeks before we started filming. So her grief was so big. And we just like held each other. And we had this fabulous director who was the most gentle loving soul you could ever imagine. We were covered. That's all I can say, is we were covered in a blanket of protection.

And I do feel like, you know, sometimes this industry, I'm just gonna be really honest, they pat themselves on the back quite a bit. I mean, I think we have like 15 different award shows, and I'm like, "Oh, really?" Like, where are the awards for the doctors and nurses and teachers and surgeons and all the people that are saving lives, the first responders?"

But I do feel like this is when art really matters and makes a difference is that if we can tell a story about grief to people who are grieving, a grieving world, and we can help them not feel alone, and maybe even offer a blueprint for their own healing journey, then that is when what we do as artists really make a difference in the world.

[00:21:01] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Raycon](#). So I think I feel like I'm noticing is that the smallest changes to your routine can make the biggest impact, right? We're seeing that with Let's Read Through the Gospels, a relatively short amount of time each day, and so many new observations from the stories we've read thousand times before. And the same way you don't have to break the bank to make a big deal purchase. Even the smallest things can change your day if it's something you use every day, like my Raycons.

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Ashley's got her Spotify playlists going to help her stay focused. That noise isolation feature is legit. And Lillian's listening to next week's episodes for edits and mine are in my backpack in case I need them. They're just so comfortable with the little custom gel tips so you get a personalized perfect fit.

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And now back to our conversation with Nikki.

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Annie: I have told so many people, I don't care what time of year it is, Go watch *The Gift of Peace*.

Nikki: Thank you, Annie.

Annie: I mean, it's just a beautiful... I mean, you did give me pictures and language for things I was working through in my heart that I didn't get... There's a point where Brennan is sitting on the bench and he's having a conversation with his wife who's died. And I was like, "That is so profound and helps me..." Because he's scared of what's coming next. And I didn't have language to say to people, part of the pain of this loss is the fear of trying any of this again. Oh, man, I thought...

I started like in Brennan and Cedar Cove when he was a bad guy. So to like him as a pastor is a very different thing. The lives of an actor.

Nikki: You know, actually, he's a person of deep, deep faith. A lot of people don't know this about Brennan. He's in church every Sunday. He is a person who's on his knees in prayer every morning, every night. It's not something he's very, you know, vocal about, in general in his life. Like even him talking about Cami and her cancer was really hard for him to do. So we prayed a lot. Prayed a lot.

So I feel like sometimes... not sometimes all the time, God blesses the minutes and moments of your life. But this in particular was truly blessed. And we were surrounded by all the angels that we needed to do what we had to do. Yeah, Brennan was extraordinary in that movie.

Annie: I figured his faith was a real thing because we've deemed a couple of times where I've just told him... Like when he talks about his wife, and I'll just say, "Hey, I'm praying." He responds like prayer matters to him.

Nikki: That's right. It does.

Annie: Will you talk about having... because you were saying a minute ago that even when you and your writing partner are working on movies, y'all are praying the whole way through. I don't know that people would connect that when actors and directors and writers are working on the movie that they're actually like partnering with God for... Not every one movie in the world.

Nikki: We are.

Annie: Y'all are partnering with God in everything you're doing.

Nikki: Everything. Every single thing. Again, integration. There's not a part of my life that I have not integrated God into, including the surrender of, you know, seeking and searching for a career my whole life. I had this very specific vision of what I wanted it to be. It doesn't look anything like what I thought it was gonna be.

Annie: Sure.

Nikki: It's consistent surrender to God. It's like, well, listen, I don't know what's going to make me happy.

Annie: Right. Right.

Nikki: I'm so happy in my life right now but I didn't imagine this.

Annie: No.

Nikki: And so if I was wrong then, I could be wrong now about what's gonna make me happy. And why would I leave God out of all of it. I was in nooks and crannies, and I managed to meet and become partners with... I don't know how... I mean, I don't meet a lot of people in this industry that are as vocal about Jesus and God as I am and Meghan is.

But I managed to meet the other person in this industry that loves Jesus as much as I do. So we do devotionals together every day, we pray over meetings, we pray over our writing sessions. We just pray for each other all throughout the day. I mean, I can believe but also is still in awe that God brought me my perfect person, my perfect partner, my perfect...

You know, the other, I think, that separates us from a lot of people sometimes is that in this industry there's such a hunger to make it, there's such a drive to be successful, that people are sometimes only looking at you like, "What can you do for me? How can I use you to uplevel me?" or "How can I use you to get to the next step?" Or there's also this will, how can I kind of do something to get what I need or get what I want?

And for me and Meghan, even if it means us losing out on a job, even if it means us not getting to where we desire to be at the rate that we want to be, always it's, "Well, what's the right thing to do? What is the right thing to do? What would Jesus want us to do in this moment?"

Annie: So you and Meghan McNulty are partners in the writing and in the producing of movies?

Nikki: Producing, yeah.

Annie: She also acts as well?

Nikki: Yes. She's a fabulous actor.

Annie: Oh, really?

Nikki: Anybody who saw Taking the Reins-

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Nikki: ...that was a movie that we produced and then we rewrote the script. So the movie that you see was our version of the movie. She plays my boss, Amanda Carter. And she's got this short black hair thing, short black hair, and she plays my boss in it. And we were really struggling to find a role. We had actually written that role with

Meghan's tone in mind. And finally, after like three rounds of casting, I just said to her, "Sweetie, I just need you to throw yourself on tape."

Annie: "It's you."

Nikki: "I just need you to throw yourself on tape and I just need to send it to the executives. We won't tell her it's you. And let them just watch it and then be like, "Well, who...?" And then they did. They looked at her tape and was like, "Who's this? She's fabulous. She's right." Sure enough, she gets the job, and I was like, "PS, that's also the writer."

Annie: Right. That's amazing.

Nikki: It's amazing because we both... We started an acting class together like 13 years ago, 14 years ago, doing scenes in class together. So sitting across from each other on set, with cameras rolling, on a movie that we produced and wrote, we just kept looking at each other going, "I can't believe this is happening." It was incredible.

Annie: Do y'all have any coming out this year that we already know of that are already announced?

Nikki: We are writing three so far. And then another one that's coming in.

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Nikki: So we're writing a Christmas movie right now that is based on a true story about a man that crashes a woman's Thanksgiving dinner and they ended up... I mean, skip, you know, they end up falling in love, but he lives in London and she lives in New York-

Annie: Oh, I love it.

Nikki: That's the one that we're on the second draft for right now. But it's based on a true story. And it's been a delight getting to know these people and writing their story. And then we have a mystery wheel that we're writing that is so different and really like... I'm so excited about it for our audience. We have another Christmas movie that we're writing. It's for me and Kris Polaha.

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Nikki: It will also star his three children, which is amazing.

Annie: Oh, it's really sweet.

Nikki: So we're writing that for us. And then I produce a wheel called *Family History Mysteries*. We just got a second one of those. So we have a kickoff call this afternoon for what the second story is going to be about.

Annie: Nikki!

Nikki: I know.

Annie: Do you have a whiteboard that you just like, "This movie's here. This movie is here."

Nikki: Hold on. Wait, guys. Wait. Hold on. Hold on.

Annie: I hope so. I'm so glad we're gonna get to see this. Oh my gosh, it's a legit whiteboard. Oh my gosh. It's just like in a beautiful mind. Look at that.

Nikki: Yes. And then you can flip it. Hold on. And then you flip it and then we're breaking. I post it for like the story, we break on the other side.

Annie: You'd have to, Nikki. You'd have to. I believe it.

Nikki: Okay, that's such a good segue too, in two ways. Because part one, I just watched *Curious Caterer: Grilling Season*, one of your mysteries. And there's a big whiteboard in that one too. Nikki, you're so good at mystery movies. I missed the first *Curious Caterer* but this one was so good.

Nikki: Thank you, Annie. Oh, I love them. I love the snooping. I love-

Annie: You do not stay in your own business as a curious caterer. You do not stay in your business. There were like three times where I was like, Nikki, you're doing that thing in mysteries where you're getting yourself in a bad spot. You're getting yourself in a bad spot.

Nikki: Yes, yes, yes. It's so fun. I love actually figuring out ways to make it funny. You know, that was the thing I think in this one. In the first one, it was very serious. And I was like, you know, I do comedy. So that's where I've spent a large chunk of my work is in comedy. So in this one, the writer saw the first one and we shifted some things to kind of bring in some comedy. And I think he saw it and was like, "Oh, we can do that."

This was funnier and it's a little bit... our chemistry has been kind of figured out a little bit more. I wanted to bring in the girl who plays my friend in the movie,

Marla, because she's so funny and talented. So we utilized her a lot more and utilize some of the external characters more. For me, I just feel like when somebody really is good at something and nails it, write for that, and give them more to do. So our writer really did that, not just for me and Andrew but for all the characters.

Annie: I'm kind of hoping your friend and that second detective it's kind of dopey. I hope they fall in love.

Nikki: I know. I was like, "I really, really need Riley who plays Mason to have a love interest because I just need to see what he looks like falling in love with a girl."

Annie: Yes. Okay, here's the funny conversation that happened behind the scenes last night. I said to my friend, "Oh, I'm watching Nikki's movie for tomorrow before Nikki and I get to chat." And she says, "I sometimes like the mysteries. I mainly like when it's just a love story at Christmas." And I thought, You know what? That's what I love about *Curious Caterer*. I actually like that there's like a secondary major plot besides just two people falling in love.

Nikki: I do too.

Annie: So fun.

Nikki: It's so fun. And then, you know, I've said to them, like, "Guys, I want to do fight sequences. I want to do like, let's make it weird.

Annie: You fell off a dumpster. You fell off a dumpster.

Nikki: I have never had more fun than trying to figure out how to get that dumpster down the sidewalk.

Annie: Oh, the angle that they shoot you, were there on... The cameras on one end of the dumpster and it's your little face picked up over the edge of a duck. It's so cute, Nikki. It is so good.

Nikki: It's so fun. And that's the thing I love about this whole process is getting to the set and you have your director. And we had a fabulous director for this one, Paul Zeller, who is just so talented. He's probably done 400 movies in his life.

Annie: Wow.

Nikki: And he did some really cool camera tricks with this, which made my nerdy little, you know, theater brain just pop. And just going, "Okay, how do we make it funny? How do we make this fun and funny for our audience?" And Paul was like, "I'm

gonna put a camera on the trash can." And I'm like, "Yeah, we're gonna put a camera in the trash can."

Annie: It's awesome. I think there's a really interesting art to this because these kinds of movies, you know, someone sees this and falls in love with you and goes, "Oh, Nikki's great. What else does she do?" And then they go watch *The Gift of Peace* and they just run into a really deep, beautiful God-honoring movie. That's so cool. I don't even know if you plan it that way, but it's cool to do these that are like murder mysteries on the heels of a grief movie.

Nikki: I feel really blessed because I feel like, I don't know, you know, I've always felt like there's about a thousand characters in me that are just like dying to kind of come out. And Hallmark is really been so good to me and giving me a lot to chew on in the movies that idea. I'm so grateful to them because *A Gift of Peace* was its own thing and then *Curious Caterer* is complete opposite of that.

Annie: That one is like a series, right? Like we'll get to... Because the first one for people... I mean, these titles are hysterical. *Curious Caterer: Dying for Chocolate*. Dyeing for chocolate. *Curious Caterer: Grilling Season*. Now, the thing that everybody's going to learn in the first minute of watching *Curious Caterer: Grill* is the grill blows up. They went so hard on that title. The grill is part of the murder, you guys. You can't name your movie grilling season.

Nikki: You also have to know what the situation was with this grill because the week that we were filming at that house with the explosion-

Annie: Is this in Vancouver?

Nikki: It was in Vancouver and the biggest snowstorm that they have had in November happened the week that we were filming all of that party stuff and all the grills stuff.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Nikki: And I kept saying, "Hey guys, the storm is coming." Like we really got to figure this thing out because we are about to be buried in like a foot of snow in like an hour. So the whole week we were working inside of this giant snowstorm, making a grilling movie a movie that takes place during grilling season where it's cold outside.

Annie: No.

Nikki: It was just such a-

- Annie:** Because you're in short sleeves out there. So you're just like freezing in real life?
- Nikki:** Freezing.
- Annie:** Nikki, you're such a good actress. I never knew.
- Nikki:** Freezing.
- Annie:** No idea you're cold.
- Nikki:** At one point in time, the snow is falling down on top of us. And we're outside and I'm at the grill and I'm like, you know, trying to do the thing but I'm like... And then everybody's like, "Oh, you can't see it. It's fine. It's fine." And I'm like, "Guys, I'm gonna have to go back to that monitor and you're gonna have to play that back for me. If I see that snow, we got to figure something out because we can't open our movie with snow coming down and I'm just outside just grilling without a jacket on.
- Annie:** So the movie came out Saturday night. I don't want to spoil it, but some of our friends have already watched it. So my main question is, do we want to reveal...? No, I don't want to reveal if the villain is male or female, the murderer.
- Nikki:** No, no, I don't want to either.
- Annie:** But that villain is such a bad person.
- Nikki:** So scary.
- Annie:** So scary. I mean, really. Listen, I never guessed anything so this is... I'm not the best line judge of this. I had no idea that the bad person was the bad person.
- Nikki:** Yay. Yay.
- Annie:** I had no clue until you get tied up technically.
- Nikki:** Well, that was also something that the director and I talked about because that was not supposed to be the reveal. We were supposed to kind of the... I said, "What if..." And I can't give away too much. But like what if that car moment at the end of the act before I'm taken or whatever, what if instead of revealing who it is and having this whole scene, what if you don't see their face and then we morph into that next scene, and then that's when we have the reveal of who it is?"

And also that scene in general, I don't know about you, but if you've ever been handcuffed to something, I've never been handcuffed to anything. Like being handcuffed and strapped down, like your body has an immediate like...

Annie: Even though you know you're acting, your body is like, "What?"

Nikki: Even though you know you're acting. Like my whole body just start... which service the scene obviously. Like people kept being like, "Wow, that was so good, Nikki." I'm like, "It's because I was scared."

Annie: Like, "I was not acting but thank you."

Nikki: I was terrified. It's scary.

[00:39:22] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just one more quick break to share about another one of our amazing partners, [Prose](#). Okay, y'all asked me from my InstaStories all the time, "Annie, what are you using on your hair?" And first of all, thank you. And the answer is always the same. It's Prose, the world's most personalized haircare.

Switching to a custom routine from Prose is one of the best things I've done for my hair, and the results I'm seeing just keep getting better. My hair is shinier and thicker and more manageable than it's ever been and I credit my Prose shampoo and conditioner. I got started taking their in-depth hair quiz. You know, we love a quiz. And that's why you can do it too.

Join over 1 million people who've gotten consultations on everything, from the climate, where you live, the issues you have with your hair, your hair type and texture, your eating habits. They analyze 85 personal factors. Who even knew there were 85 things to know about my hair?

My favorite feature is Prose's 'review and refine' tool, which lets me tweak my formulas for any reason. In case I have increased travel like I have coming up this year, that means extra environmental stressors on my hair, or if I get my hair colored and it needs some different support to stay healthy.

Prose is an industry leader in clean and responsible beauty. All their ingredients are sustainably sourced, ethically-gathered, cruelty-free. They're also the first custom beauty brand to go carbon neutral. If you're not 100% positive Prose is the best hair you've had, I love this, they just take the product back no questions asked.

Prose is the healthy hair regimen with your name all over it. Take your free in-depth hair consultation and get 15% off your first order today. Go to prose.com/thatsoundsfun. That's prose.com/thatsoundsfun for your free in-depth hair consultation and 15% off.

And remember all the links to our sponsors, to the AFD Week in Review, our book of the month, tickets for the Here For You tour, the transcript of the shows, and more are all available in the show notes. So be sure to check those out. Just trying to make things a little bit easier for you where we can.

So let's go back and finish up our chat with Nikki.

[00:41:16] <music>

Annie: When you're a main character like in *Curious Caterer* where it's you and Andrew for this whole series, do you get to speak into... like, do you say, "Hey, I think the next one we should do this?" Or is it kind of start becoming your part of the making of it?

Nikki: Yes. This was not a movie wheel that I developed or produced. But I do have the relationship with Hallmark at this point in time where I can get a script and go through it and give all of my notes to the writer who then makes a final pass of the script.

Annie: Got it.

Nikki: And then that's the script that we work off of.

Annie: And Andrew gets to do the same?

Nikki: So this last movie, the Grilling Season, I pulled Andrew into the process and I said, "I've done my parts, why don't you and I do one together?" With Meghan. So I brought Meghan into it. And the three of us sit and like whatever ideas that you have, I'll just put them on a big document and then we'll send them into the writer.

We do that before every single movie, but then, you know, going into it, I'm like, "So before the writer begins to break ground on this, a few things to be mindful of. You know, one, for the next one, we got to move the love story forward. I know the hope is to make 27 of these, which would mean that we have to like really kind of play that love story out but it's also a network about romance. So we need to kind of bump that romance up. We need to move the needle forward on that." There's certain things that I like want to place in the writer's head before he goes into kind of like do the outline of the movie.

- Annie:** Man, you and your ex-husband in the movie have such a healthy co-parenting relationship?
- Nikki:** Don't we?
- Annie:** It's really beautiful. There's a point where you're sitting on the couch together and you're both kind of being interrogated, and y'all are so kind to each other. And your daughter seems to have really...I don't know. I think you're modeling really beautiful co-parenting.
- Nikki:** It's the conscious uncoupling.
- Annie:** Yeah, that's exactly right. I just think in a world where divorce is half of our friends, unfortunately, we don't often see healthy co-parenting on TV that looks like.... I mean, literally when I was watching, I thought, "That looks like this one couple friend of mine and how they parent. I think that looks like my people."
- Nikki:** That's so beautiful.
- Annie:** I think y'all have done a beautiful job about that.
- Nikki:** Thank you.
- Annie:** I loved it.
- Nikki:** Thank you.
- Annie:** Tell me what else is going on. What else? I want people to hear about, like, the hospital in LA and the Alzheimer's stuff. Let's talk about stuff that also is just like what you love besides the acting stuff because I want them to hear.
- Nikki:** I love it so much. It's the work, right? That's my life's work is that. Because I do feel like, you know, sometimes we get very serious in our industry about the movies we do, you know, almost as if they're part of our legacy. I don't believe on my deathbed that I'm gonna be like, "*Curious Caterer-*
- Annie:** Grilling Season.
- Nikki:** Grilling Season. I feel like when we were taking our last breaths in the world, it's who did we love and how are we loved and what did we do to be of service to others. So it's the stuff that like really matters to me. I was actually at Children's Hospital yesterday for a meeting.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nikki: I took over as the president of the Foundation Board of Trustees.

Annie: For the entire Los Angeles Children's Hospital. You are the President of the Board of Trustees.

Nikki: Yes!

Annie: My gosh. Just a tiny side hustle. Just a tiny side hustle.

Nikki: It's just a tiny, small little thing. I asked them like four times if they really thought about it and if they really... I was like, "Are you sure? I don't know how to do spreadsheets or any of that." They're like, "No, we'll take care of all of that. We really would like you to do this." And listen, if that hospital told me to run around the city, you know, 400 times and not have a sip of water, I would do whatever they ask me to do.

Annie: That's where your son was when he's had his heart surgeries. Right?

Nikki: Bennett had three heart surgeries there. But also, you know, the thing about the hospital is CHLA services over 600,000 kids a year and it is number five in terms of top specialty hospitals in the world. So you have kids coming in from all over the country, all over the world for their surgery, because they have the specializations at this hospital don't exist in other children's hospitals.

Also, the thing about it that I feel is the most most most most special, besides the fact that it's just the top of its game in every department, is it is one of only seven safety net hospitals left in the United States of America. That means if your child is in need of a life-saving surgery but you don't have insurance, and you don't have any money to pay for it, we will figure it out for you.

Annie: Wow.

Nikki: We do not turn any child away. That alone, watching parents... I cannot imagine having to choose between not being able to have the people who should be doing surgery on your child. Say you have this special surgery that needs to be done that really can't get done at another hospital, right, the risk is even bigger at another hospital, I can't imagine having to choose between going to children's and going to this other hospital where you would pay less money and not get the service that your child needs and potentially put their life at even greater risk. Or being able to go bankrupt and saving your child's life. Like parents shouldn't have to make that

choice. So at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles fundraising is a big part of what we do. Because of the fact that we will leave no child behind.

Annie: Wow.

Nikki: I can't believe that I get to be a part of this hospital.

Annie: So when you sign on for that, is that like a year commitment or a life commitment?

Nikki: Two years.

Annie: Two years.

Nikki: Yeah.

Annie: Wow. Because meanwhile, you're also doing stuff for the Alzheimer's Foundation.

Nikki: Yes. So, guys, there's-

Annie: Nikki! Girl!

Nikki: So there's the Alzheimer's Association, which I do a lot of work with. And then the other organization that I'm the president of is an organization called Mind What Matters. It was founded by this incredible woman named Elizabeth Humphreys. Her mother was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's. She's still with us, the mom. But Liz started this organization because one day she was looking through Instagram, and she read something about, you know, the things that bring you the most pain are also the things that give you the most purpose sometimes. And she thought, "I have to do something about this." And her organization that she started is specific to caregivers, because it is a \$19 billion industry of unpaid care service.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Nikki: So my mother, who took care of my dad before he went into, you know, a facility, it was all day, all day, every day, all night, every night. I mean, there will be times where he would not sleep for 10 nights in a row.

Annie: Oh, Nikki. Oh, my gosh.

Nikki: And my mother, she didn't get paid for that, right? But that was her J-O-B. She is one of millions of people in this country. And my family is privileged. She could retire and take care of my dad. There are people out there that are working full-time

and taking care of loved ones, families having to come together. "Do you have him on Thursday? Do I have them on Saturday?" If they're lucky.

And so these care grants that we give to people you can write into Mind What Matters and then we will give you a care grant. Because the other thing that happens when you're a caregiver I describe it as sometimes what happens is you morph into one sick person together.

Annie: Oh, sure. Like trauma bonding sort of.

Nikki: It's like the person who actually has the illness, the disease, and then you don't know where that person begins and you end. And it affects your mental, your spiritual, your physical health until you yourself end up becoming sick. So this care grant can help you go to a doctor because it can help you pay for somebody to come in and watch your loved one, so you could go to a doctor, go to a dentist, go work out if you need to, whatever you need to do for your own care so that you can be there for your loved one.

We're having an event in Nashville in April, April 13th. You can go to my Instagram page or you can go to Mind What Matters on Instagram, and you can buy tickets, you can come. It's so much fun. There's music, there's food, there's drinks. It's just such a fun time. So if you're in the area, please buy tickets and come.

Annie: We'll put the link in the show notes. I will be there.

Nikki: Thank you.

Annie: So if anybody wants to come on, come on. We're gonna party. If you want to see what Nikki and I do in public, we'll be over in the corner if you need us.

Nikki: You probably won't talk to us because we'll just be talking to each other the entire time.

Annie: No, I'm just gonna ignore you the whole night because you're the president and I can't take you away from president-ing. You need to keep president-ing. So I'll be there but don't speak to me, Nikki. Don't speak to me.

Nikki: Impossible.

Annie: Okay, what did we not talk about that you want to make sure we talk about?

Nikki: I think that's it. I guess I would just say to people out there who are, you know, whatever it is that you're kind of dealing with in your own life... And Annie, you do

such a beautiful job of talking to people about this. I just think it's so important the work that you do because it's... You know, everybody's struggling with something, and everybody trying to just put one foot in front of the other in some way and get through the day, just don't do it in isolation.

We need God. We need prayer. We need church. We need Sunday school. We need all those things. And to truly be able to walk in the way of Jesus is also to allow people to help you.

Annie: Yes, that's right. That is right.

Nikki: Not just being of service to others, because I know that's the go-to for some of us when we're in pain, "Well, I just help other people and it'll just make my pain go away." It's also allowing people to be there for you when you were in need. So even if it's just one person that you can talk to about something, just reach out. Pry that heart open and allow yourself to be vulnerable, because we are not meant to go through life alone.

Annie: Oh, preach. Okay, Nikki DeLoach. She also preaches, everybody. President of two big things, writing movie, starring in movies, preaching, mother, wife-

Nikki: And the president of your fans club.

Annie: Well, it's mutual. You know that's mutual. If you didn't see *Curious Caterer* this weekend, Hallmark is still showing it. You can find it. And go find *The Gift of Peace*. I think both of those are so... Like, *Curious Caterer* is such a fun watch. It is such a fun watch.

Nikki: Thank you.

Annie: So the last question we always ask, you know, this Nikki. Because the show was called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Nikki: Well, my word for this year is 'pleasure'.

Annie: Oh, I like it. Okay.

Nikki: And the reason I chose pleasure is because I have a tendency, I don't know if anyone out there who's listening if this connects for you, to you know, when I'm experiencing what is supposed to be pleasurable and joyful and fun and all the things, I'm always bracing for the other shoe, or I'm bracing for like, well, what bad is gonna happen now? Or sometimes not even allowing myself to enjoy it because who am I to be able to have fun or enjoy this because there's so much pain in the

world or my friend is going through this, or you know, whatever it is. My word for this year is just pleasure. I want to have fun. I want to dance. I want to laugh a lot.

So I am doing this thing where I am having... I'm just doing it once a month with my girlfriends, and they're coming over to the house once a month, all my girlfriends, and we are just laughing and eating food and hanging out. Except for the months that I'm out of town filming, I have told myself, promised myself that I'm gonna do it every single month. I'm gonna have all of my girlfriends over and we're just going to have ourselves a great time. So that's what I'm doing right now. That is so fun.

Annie: Brilliant. I love it.

Nikki: It gives me joy. For all of us by the way.

Annie: Totally. What a good thing to model too. Because there's just something about like, hey, the first Sunday of the month, y'all come eat dinner with me, and my doors open. And y'all come on and we're gonna watch a movie or we're gonna play a game or whatever. Just kind of putting it on the calendar.

Nikki: That's it

Annie: We have a group here, our text is called Home Girls because we all live here. And it's like once a month we eat dinner. And if you can make it, you can make it. If you can't that month, you're at the next month. But we don't quit meeting. You just come if you can.

Nikki: That's exactly it. My family, we have been so isolated because of COVID and trying to protect Bennett, like nobody came in this house. So to be able to open my doors and to just let people come in, and sit around the kitchen and the fire and all the things it's just making my heart so so so happy.

Annie: Oh, I'm so glad. Great answer. Well done. Thanks for doing this, Nikki.

Nikki: Thank you.

Annie: I love you so much. I'm so grateful to have you on.

Nikki: Oh, Annie, thank you so much for doing this for me and for our movie. I love you. Thank you for being a constant supporter of our network.

Annie: Yes, I just love it.

Nikki: Thank you. Love you, babe.

Annie: Love you too, friends.

[00:55:49] <music>

Annie: Oh, you guys, isn't she just the best? Okay, if you didn't get to see *Curious Caterer: Grilling Season* on Hallmark Movies & Mysteries this weekend, you need to find it. Watch it this coming weekend. You're going to love it. And *The Gift of Peace*. For real you're gonna love that one as well, especially if you have grieved anything. And haven't we all? It is a Christmas movie, but I'm telling you if you watch it this weekend, it will matter to you. It was healing for me. It was really beautiful. So follow Nikki on social media, tell her thanks for being on the show today. Just send her so much love.

Okay, we heard what sounds fun to Nikki and it was a very good answer, and now we get to hear what sounds fun to one of our friends who's listening just like you.

All right. Noah, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Noah: Hey I'm Noah. I'm from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. And what sounds fun to me is eating something deliciously unhealthy, whether that be cooking an elaborate meal at home or going out somewhere with my incredible girlfriend, Sarah.

Annie: Very good. Okay, Sarah and Noah. Sarah is sitting here too, but she's gonna stay quiet. But Sarah, we appreciate you. Noah, listen, I need us to talk more about this. I am a foodie right along with you. Like dream meal, what is the dream meal?

Noah: Dream meal would be authentic pizza in Italy.

Annie: Dude. All day long. All day long. I just want to go from pizza place to pizza place.

Noah: Exactly.

Annie: On your best day, how many slices are you eating? Not behavior-wise, but in like you've made space and you're committed. How many pieces are you doing?

Noah: Well, last Friday, I had eight pieces.

Annie: Oh my guy. Listen-

Noah: That's a typical Friday for me.

Annie: That's so good. Sarah, congratulations! Really well done. What do you have on your pizza?

Noah: Honestly, I like to keep it simple and just enjoy the pizza for what it's were. So cheese.

Annie: Man, you gotta go to Italy. You got to do it. I think that's what they like specialize in is like cheese and tomato sauce and torn-up green leaves.

Noah: Yeah, sounds great. That sounds fun.

Annie: That sounds fun, Noah. Well done, my friend.

Okay, I don't know about y'all but I'm loving hearing from our listening friends all over. Be sure you're subscribed to the AFD Week in Review for updates on how you can share what sounds fun to you in an upcoming episode.

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 will do the same. And today what sounds fun to me is getting ready for my friend Jen, you know her from the Hallmark episodes. This weekend is Jen's Favorite Things Valentine's Party. We do it every year. Everybody brings one product, you bring two of them and we all go home with two new products that are someone else's favorite thing. It's the best. And it's not at Christmas so it's even more fun because you're getting other gifts. It's my favorite party of the year.

And surprise, we have an episode coming for you tomorrow. Yes, tomorrow. Listen, we love a Friday episode. So we're dropping you something special tomorrow with my friend one of my favorite worship leaders, Davy Flowers. It's a good one. Y'all aren't even ready. Okay, we'll see you tomorrow. Y'all have a great Thursday.