

## **Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode**

**Author K.A. Cobell**

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Welcome to a special episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books.

We are your hosts, Marion, Dorothy, and Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians.

We would love for you to participate in our discussion.

Please visit [theroguelibrarians.com](http://theroguelibrarians.com) or follow us on Instagram or Facebook at Rogue Librarians Pod.

Today, we are so excited to share our interview with K.A. Cobell.

K.A. is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation.

She currently lives in the Pacific Northwest where she spends her time writing books, chasing her kids through the never-ending rain, and scouring the inlet beaches for sand dollars and hermit crabs.

Looking for Smoke is her debut novel.

Looking for Smoke has received several pieces of advanced praise, including a starred publisher's weekly review, which said that Cobell, quote, delivers a gut punch of an ending in this timely debut thriller that is by turns spine-tingling and emotionally raw, end quote.

In Kirkus Reviews, the reviewer writes, quote, throughout the author is reverent in small and distinct ways toward Blackfeet tribal customs and craft, which contributes to building a rich setting.

The novel skillfully raises awareness of the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women while offering up an unflinching thriller that's full of clever misdirection, end quote.

We absolutely loved reading Looking for Smoke, and it was so much fun to be able to talk with KA about her book.

First of all, we just absolutely love this book.

It is wonderful if you are someone who likes mysteries and thrillers and really detailed rich characters.

I think you would love it.

And I loved learning so much more about her background and how she developed the characters and came up with the plot lines.

So it was a really enriching conversation for me.

What did the two of you think?

Oh, I completely agree.

I feel like, you know, it's not necessarily the kind of book that I would have sought out to read, you know, but I'm so glad that I read it.

And having read it, I think it's going to remain one of my favorite books.

I just felt so connected in so many ways to the different things that the characters were dealing with.

And it's just so beautifully written.

And I just I felt I felt very connected to this book.

Yeah, I loved hearing about her journey in writing.

You know, just it's so emotionally rich in each of the characters is so distinct.

And it was so much fun to hear her talk about that.

It really was.

And besides that, I mean, it's just such a well crafted thriller.

It will leave you guessing to the end.

Yeah, definitely.

Before we start, we want to issue a trigger warning.

As we've mentioned, this powerful novel discusses the missing and murdered Indigenous women movement.

It reflects the real and often overlooked murders of American Indian and Alaska Native women.

You can find out more about this issue by visiting the resources on KA.

Cobell's website.

That's KA.

cobell.com, which is also listed in our show notes.

Without further ado, here is our interview with K.A. Cobell about Looking for Smoke.

K.A., thanks so much for joining us on Rogue Librarians.

Thank you for having me.

I'm so excited to talk to you all.

We are so excited to talk to you.

We loved your book, it was incredible, and we can't wait to discuss it.

Congratulations on the upcoming June 4th release of your novel, Looking for Smoke.

Thank you.

Yeah, June 4th, that's really coming up.

It's kind of hard to wrap my head around, but yeah, it's coming soon.

Yeah, we wanted to talk about the book in a lot of detail, but before we do that, we have a couple of questions about your background first.

So what was one of the most influential books that you read when you were growing up and why?

To be honest, I don't remember a lot of the books I read when I was younger.

I don't feel like any of them influenced me a whole lot, but then when I got older, I want to say it was the dystopian boom that really got me back into reading.

There was just something about those worlds that sucked me in, and it was like an awakening of reading is awesome.

Yeah, did you have a favorite dystopian?

I think it was the Hunger Games that me and my older siblings, we were reading out loud because we only had one copy and we all just wanted to see what was happening.

So we were just like took turns reading chapters out loud.

And after that, I just could not get enough of them.

I was finding other series and just like inhaling all of them.

That's amazing.

I love that image of your family sitting around reading out loud.

I had a family, a friend that I went to high school with and she was telling me that her family did the same when the seventh Harry Potter book finally came out, the last one in the series and they were on vacation and they read it out loud in the car because they didn't dare let anybody read it alone because they wouldn't be able to keep it secret and they all wanted to know what was gonna happen at the same time.

Yeah, I mean, good memories right there.

Just a book so good.

You cannot wait until your sibling finishes.

Exactly, exactly.

So did those books influence you to become a writer or how did you become a writer?

Yeah, no, that is exactly right.

It was divergent.

When I read Divergent, that was this moment where I thought I could do this.

I could try doing this.

And I started just writing for fun after that.

And I just got hooked.

There's just something about it.

Just like when you are reading and you get lost in a world, when I'm writing, I can get lost in it and it's just fun.

That's wonderful.

It's very inspirational too.

Yes.

I didn't go to school for it or anything.

It was just, just when I was reading it, I just wanted to try.

I love that it was divergent because she was so young too when she published that.

She was still in college, I think.

Yeah.

Oh, wow.

Yeah.

That is very impressive.

So would you mind giving our listeners an introduction to Looking for Smoke?

Yeah, of course.

So Looking for Smoke is a young adult thriller and it follows four Blackfeet teens as they're grappling with the murder of a classmate.

And because each of them were in the last group to see her alive, they all become suspects.

And if they want to clear their names, they're gonna have to trust each other, even though one of them could be the murderer.

So we've got this group coming together.

They have secrets.

They're trying to figure out who they can trust and how they can help each other.

So what inspired you to write this book?

It really started because I wanted to write Blackfeet teenagers into a book.

I had never really seen that growing up.

There were a few Native American characters here and there, but I don't think I ever saw a Blackfeet character.

And so I was brainstorming ideas with my dad, just trying to come up with a story.

And we were talking about how I usually write thrillers.

And my dad is actually the first one who said, you should write about MMIW.

And it took me a little while to gather the courage to go for it because obviously it's a sensitive issue and I didn't want to have anything come across like I was trivializing the real cases or sensationalizing that pain.

But in the end, I knew I just had to try because I felt like this was a story that needed to be told.

Yeah, I mean, as I was reading it, I will admit it made me wonder if you had pulled any of what ends up happening in the book from true stories that have happened, true cases that are still left unsolved.

So I was just curious about that.

But we noticed as we were reading that your website provides several resources about the missing and murdered indigenous women, and as you called it, the MMIW movement.

Would you mind telling our listeners a little bit more about this very pressing issue?

And clearly it was so important that you said your dad suggested that you write about it, which I think is pretty awesome.

Yeah, yeah, so it is a prevalent problem in the US that a lot of people don't actually know about yet.

So that was one of the main reasons that we thought I should write about it, to shine a light on this crisis that real families and real communities are dealing with, which is where Native women are the victims of violent crime far more often than any other group.

Like there are some statistics that would shock a lot of people in that, like four in five Native women have experienced violence and the murder rate of Native women is three times more than that of white women.

And in some locations, it's 10 times the national average, which is huge.

So there's a large outcry about murder cases that are going unsolved and girls and women are going missing and they're not being found.

And I just wanted to try to help spread awareness of that and just show people what's happening who may not know.

Yeah, you also have this excellent educator's guide on your website, which gives people a lot more information on this crisis.

So in the guide, the crisis is described as a complex issue.

Some possible explanations include, and I'm quoting here, a lack of resources and funding, gaps in communication and coordination between intergovernmental agencies and the pipeline of vulnerability.

So I kind of have two questions here.

First, what is the pipeline of vulnerability?

So that has been described to me as basically starting in a place of vulnerability, like people who are experiencing poverty, people who are coming out of the foster care system, people lacking resources or

family, people who are isolated emotionally or physically, just starting from that place where you're already vulnerable.

And I think poverty is probably the biggest factor there.

That probably answers what my second question was, because the other two or three things mentioned there, the funding and the communication, they kind of speak to why the cases don't get solved.

But I was thinking about what accounts for the large number of cases for the Native Americans and Alaska Natives, Indigenous women, compared to other groups.

So I'm pretty sure you just answered that.

Yeah, starting from a place of vulnerability makes a lot of sense.

Yeah, and I mean, there's also the belief that the violence is just adding to the long history of government policies, like a forced removal, land seizures and violence against natives.

And it's just continuing to be a problem.

Yeah, I can imagine.

I still have not brought myself to watch Killers of the Flower Moon because I know the story and I just, I know I will be gutted when I watch it.

Yeah, it's a hard watch, but it's really good.

Yeah, it took me years to watch Schindler's List.

So I will get to it.

Mentally and emotionally prepare yourself.

Exactly.

Well, your novel, Looking for Smoke, is a young adult thriller.

And your website mentioned that it was originally pitched as One of Us is Lying meets Sadie.

I haven't read Sadie, but I could immediately see some parallels to One of Us is Lying in terms of your writing the novel from the perspectives of four characters who are at the heart of the mystery in short alternating chapters.

And your book was so gripping, all of us found it incredibly hard to put down.

What were some of the techniques you used to make us want to keep reading?

Oh, yeah.

Oh, where to start?

Well, I will say I was definitely inspired by *One of Us is Lying*.

When I read that book, I just was obsessed with how the multiple characters had so many secrets they were keeping from each other.

It just automatically ups the tension so much that I wanted to write something like that.

Some of the techniques, I guess, would be changing POVs right when you're in the middle of a revelation.

Just as a light bulb is forming with one character or when someone is starting to look pretty shady, you switch and then you take it from another point of view.

It just keeps you wanting to read because that's how I felt in *One of Us is Lying*.

So I tried to replicate that and just having all the characters doubt each other at every turn and having some say the opposite thing than what's in their head, it's awesome.

Yeah, yes, I have been known to flip ahead to the next time that person is speaking when that happens because I'm like, wait, no, you cannot leave me there.

I get it.

I get it.

There were so many good cliffhangers.

Oh, so many.

Yeah.

I thought, as you said, you were able to explore their thoughts in so much detail.

So, we knew much more than the other characters, and that added so much to the experience of wanting to know what's going to happen next because the other characters were still in the dark.

You did it so well.

Oh, thank you.

That means a lot.

Yeah.



It's the ultimate goal.

So to hear that someone thinks I pulled it off, that's awesome.

Yeah.

I think you absolutely pulled it off.

As we mentioned, you know, writing the story from multiple characters' perspectives meant that you had to choose who these particular characters were going to be.

So we're curious if you can talk about how you did choose the characters you chose and also how did you choose to include the unknown voice that pops in from time to time as well as the transcripts from a podcast at one point and a 911 call at one point.

Well, all the main characters, the four main POVs, they came to me pretty suddenly and pretty wholly.

I just had a really good picture of who they were and what they'd be struggling with.

But the unknown POV, that took a little longer to materialize.

It actually started where I just thought I was going to have some podcast episodes interspersed.

I wanted to do that as a way to create a degree of separation between these fictional cases and the real-life statistics and the reality of MMIW that I was bringing in.

It was just a strategy that I came up with.

But as I started getting into it, I had the idea to make those sections come from an actual mystery person who was using the media as a way to keep tabs on the investigation, like with the podcasts and the transcripts and a radio segment.

I just thought it would be a cool way to add to the intrigue.

Well, it definitely was.

And I can tell you that I did not guess who the unknown voice was until the very end.

So that was great.

It was great that you were able to keep me in suspense for that long.

I love to hear it.

I like to think, you know, I grew up with murder she wrote and I always figured it out.

So I had no idea until the very end.

I'm so glad to hear that.

Yeah, your red herrings were excellent in this book.

I mean, there were so many times when I thought someone else was going to be, you know, the person behind it.

And yeah, yeah, for sure.

Yeah, I liked that it was not just the reader who was not sure, but like every character had reasons to suspect some other character at one point or another.

So everyone is, you know, it really helped you feel this sort of hopelessness of ever figuring it out.

Because, you know, there were so many secrets and there were so many things going on, you know, in people's private lives that it was, you know, it was hard to tell, you know, who could be and why.

Yeah, we talked a little bit about how you chose the people.

How was it writing about the process through unreliable narrators?

Like, how do you choose which details to reveal and when?

You know, is that all mapped out ahead of time?

How does that work?

I wish I mapped it out ahead of time.

But it is just a tricky process trying to figure out.

But it's also fun.

And the secret to making unreliable narrators is that all the characters have their own truth.

And that is where I write from.

Like, if they're lying, they believe the lie or they truly believe the lie is justified.

And it's fun to play with that and to get in their heads thinking, like, where is their thought process different than these people around them?

And why do they not trust them to agree with them?

Why do they feel the need to hide it?

And it's fun.

Yeah, it's like it's kind of like doing a puzzle.

Yeah, it is.

And I'm trying to figure it all out as I go.

Just trying to come from what do other people not understand about them?

And trying to write from that, like, I understand it.

I'm with them there.

Even if it might be something I don't agree with, I am putting myself there so I can write their truth.

Your novel explores Mara's identity and her struggles with feeling like she doesn't belong on the Blackfeet reservation since she just moved there recently.

Your author's note mentioned your original doubts that you couldn't tell the story.

How did you overcome your doubts?

And why did you decide to make figuring out her identity a part of Mara's character arc?

Well, like I said in my author's note, my dad is the one who's always there to give me pep talks and help me sit in my identity.

I get my confidence from him.

And I think, you know, I still doubt myself sometimes.

I'm sure most people do, but I'm working on it.

And I think part of that is how Mara's arc came to be, because I didn't necessarily plan that.

I just wanted her to be the new girl so that readers could be looking in all of this just like she's looking into it, a bit of an outside person trying to understand it.

And I think her journey with her identity just naturally came out as I was writing it.

And I don't know, I think it did come from me a little bit.

Have you lived on a reservation at any point?

Just curious.

I have not lived in Browning.

That's the town in the Blackfeet Reservation that my family is from.

My older siblings were born there.

But by the time I came around, we were already moving around a lot.

But my dad went back after I was already out of high school.

So he lives there now, and I visit him pretty much every summer.

And it's wonderful that your dad believes in you, and that was really helpful for you.

Yeah, it felt very authentic to me, even from the very first scene with the drums and the festival that they were at.

Not that I would know, but it really felt to me like you spend time there.

Thank you.

Thank you for saying that.

That means a lot, because I did try to put myself and my experiences in the book, even though I haven't experienced all the things.

I tried to write from all the things that I know and I feel.

At one point in the book, the character Eli tells a story to his young sibling at bedtime.

And I thought that was a particularly touching scene between the siblings.

I mean, it demonstrated their closeness, but it also felt like it was conveying a message to the readers about oral storytelling.

So I was just wondering if that was something that was important to you to include in the book, to have that tradition be part of the story.

Yeah, so that's just going off of what I just said or writing from the things I know.

Some of my earliest memories of stories are from my dad telling me these nappy stories.

And he'd tell them to us at night or when we were out camping, he would just tell them from memory of how they were told to him, these stories that are passed down.

Nappy stories are about how the Blackfeet saw the world and how they believed that creator made the earth.

So I think those stories are like my earliest memory I have of connecting to our culture.

And it's pretty special that my dad would tell them to me.

And now I'm a storyteller just in a different way.

Yeah, I mean, I thought it was very rich and many years ago, I used to teach second grade and part of the curriculum was teaching about particular Native American tribes.

And I always tried my best to do justice to the reality of who each of the individual tribes were that we studied and that kind of thing.

But one of my very favorite things that I learned about the Native American tribes that we discussed was just the beautiful tradition of oral storytelling.

And like Knots on a Counting Rope was one of my favorite books that I used to use that you would keep telling the story and keep the knots coming.

And by the time you had a certain number, then the story was committed to memory and how special that was.

So I've always thought that was a particularly beautiful part of the culture.

So I loved it that it was included in the story.

Yeah.

I'm curious about also some of the Blackfeet expressions that you carry throughout the story, particularly the words, and I'm sure I'm not going to say it right, but in it, an A's that comes up a lot when the characters are dialoguing.

Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Yeah.

Yeah.

You said it pretty much spot on.

Those are just sounds from what we would call a res accent when you're being funny or telling a joke.

You say A's at the end, like A's kind of all smug like you're saying something real funny.

It's sometimes used as if you're saying, right, or you know what I mean?

Like you just say it like in it, like, isn't it like, it's, yeah.

And sometimes it's even almost like a punctuation mark in itself.

Like it just sort of hangs at the end of a sentence, just like, you know?

Yeah, I could definitely hear it.

Yeah, I don't have the accent because I didn't live there like I said, but I've heard it so much that like I can always have it in my head, but I can't, I can't speak it very well.

Well, names were an important bit as well.

We had Little Bro, which was, you know, Brody was also his name, so I loved that sort of shortening.

Anyway, they have great significance for some of the characters.

You also mentioned in your author's note that you honored your family by including some of their names, like First Kill.

We had Eli First Kill and Looking for Smoke, of course.

I don't want to spoil anything, but that was a name.

Why are names significant to you and to other members of the Blackfeet Nation?

How do they get those special names?

Yeah, so it used to be in the past that Blackfeet used to only have one name.

They didn't have last names, it was just they had their one unique name and it connected them in a way to the natural world or even to a supernatural ally.

Or sometimes it was given to them like in honor of a great feat.

Like a lot of the warriors, they might have had one name, but then if they did something really respectable, then significant members in the community may have given them a new name in honor of that.

And now these days, we have our legal American names, but then we're also given a Blackfeet name by an elder or a prominent member of the community.

And it's done usually in like a special ceremony or something.

And it's, it feels like more than a name.

It's almost like a sacred possession.

Like it's given to us.

It's ours.

If that makes sense.

It does, and it's a connection to, you know, to everything, to nature.

And I also, I mean, in regards to honoring my family names, I think there's just something really powerful in knowing where I come from and being able to honor the names of my ancestors who survived.

Like, they went through so much and I can use their name because I'm here and I know it.

How difficult is it to, you know, if you're not getting family stories, how hard is it to trace, you know, back with Native Americans lineage?

Well, we reach a limit on how far back we can go.

We do go pretty far, like I have several generations.

Like I said in my author's note, I did use the name of my fifth great grandfather, which is pretty far back.

But after that, we hit a wall.

The four main characters, Mara, Lauren, Brody, and Eli, struggle with their feelings of loyalty to their family members.

Additionally, several of their families, Lauren's, Brody's and Eli's, have been ripped apart by death, divorce, abandonment, and addiction.

Why did you make the choice to include their complicated feelings about their family members?

Yeah, they're all struggling with a lot, aren't they?

They are.

Well, I should say first that the secret, well, for me, the secret to writing multiple points of view is that each character needs to have enough going on in their life that the whole story could be about them if I wanted it to be.

So I wanted to give each of them baggage and trials.

They need complex lives and relationships so that they have a reason to be in the story just to make them feel fully realized.

So that's my motivation in giving them all these trials.

And I also think it's just a good way to touch readers, you know?

Any number of things that you give to these characters as a weight to carry, readers are going to relate to that.

There's always going to be someone going through something similar, and maybe someone will be able to relate to these characters.

Yeah, that's wonderful.

I think it's so important for people to be able to see themselves and characters and to experience this kind of pain is something that I'm sure a lot of people have had to deal with.

So I thought you made the characters very relatable and very sympathetic.

Yeah, and like I was saying before, I was trying to write what I know and what I felt.

And in my own family, we've experienced divorce and tragic deaths, addiction.

I am connected to people who have gone through all these things, and I've gone through some of these things.

So just coming from a place where I've felt this, I see you.

Yeah, especially these days, being post-COVID, if you can call it that, and how everyone is doing post-lockdown and things like that.

I just think that that particular event in our history, in the history of the world, because it affected everybody, has really kind of opened the window into seeing more traumas and talking about more traumas that people are experiencing.

So I do think your character is exceedingly relatable.

So I personally really connected with a lot of them.

But on that note, our next question is about the main characters, just sort of a follow up.

You have them, having gone through so much, as you said, they've witnessed and experienced multiple traumas and tragedies, not just what their backstory is, but in the story itself.

There's some discussion of seeking mental health treatment, but it seems that at least a couple of the characters have rejected offers to talk to therapists or social workers.

We were wondering, do you think there is a stigma against mental health treatment specifically on the Blackfeet reservation, or is it more that there's a lack of accessibility to these resources?



And I guess the follow-up to that is, why did you decide to include a discussion of mental health in the story?

Yeah, to answer the first question, I would say it's both.

I think like a lot of other communities and people, there's always a little bit of fear of appearing weak or labeled as crazy if you want to get mental health to open yourself up to that.

But also, I think the Indian Health Service on the reservation is definitely overloaded with people who are needing help, and there's not enough to go around always.

Yeah, so that is a part of it.

And I think the reason I wanted to include the discussions of mental health in the book is because it is just a reality for so many of us.

But what I've experienced myself and what I've seen is that a lot of times we think we're fine.

We think we can carry ourselves and we can push through it, and we don't need help.

We're fine, but we're not.

We just can't see it until we're out of it.

I think a lot of people must experience that, and I wanted to show that.

And I wanted to also show the angry side of grief, because that's something else that is so real and valid and something I've seen and experienced.

It's another way of grieving.

Mm-hmm.

Really one of the themes in the novel is resilience, the resilience of the Blackfeet people and of the different characters.

Where do you think this resilience comes from, and why is it hopeful?

And then maybe just another thought on that.

The women are, I think, particularly resilient, and I wonder whether their role is changing, maybe, in Blackfeet society?

Well, the really short and simple answer of why we're so resilient is just that we're survivors.

I mean, the Blackfeet people have been through so much.

From, you know, when the settlers were coming in, three-fifths of us died from smallpox.

And then many more were massacred by US armies, and there was something called the starvation winter, when all the buffalo had been wiped out and the Blackfeet were struggling with having anything to eat.

And I think it was a quarter of them, after all that, a quarter of them starved to death.

And then, you know, being forced onto reservations and just losing everything, being forced into boarding schools to assimilate.

There's just like so many things that I could make a list of things that they were suffering through.

But I mean, they survived.

And I think the tenacity and the determination that they had is what got them through all of that.

And now we're still here and we're growing and we're laughing and we're teaching.

And I think it's hopeful because we've come through so much and we know we will keep coming through.

Beautifully said.

Yes.

Oh, and about the women.

Native women are strong women.

I think they're pillars in their communities.

They uplift each other and their families and everyone around them.

The Native women are just so strong.

You have explained the characters' emotions already to some extent, but we just wanted to comment that you portray their complex emotions in such beautiful and devastating ways.

So what was the writing process like while you were portraying how they were feeling, especially in certain intense moments?

Did you find it challenging to write certain scenes?

This is definitely the most emotional book I've written.

And, you know, like I've said, I think a lot of it is because I put so much of myself into it.

I felt with these characters, I felt all the weight they were holding.

And I haven't gone through all the same things they have, like I said, but I've experienced loss and betrayal and, you know, struggles with mental health.

And to write these scenes, I just tried to sit with the characters in those feelings.

Like they're a real person.

It sounds kind of funny, but like I sat with them.

I just, I tied in the heartache that I've known and drew from that.

And I don't think it was more challenging necessarily.

I think I write better when I'm coming from that place.

I guess I'm a feeler when I write.

I just feel it.

Well, that comes across so well.

I feel those feelings too.

And I feel like I understand them so well in your writing.

And I could just imagine if I were trying to write one of those scenes, that I would need days to recover afterwards.

But did you find that you needed to take some time to yourself after writing some of it?

Or were you able to just keep going?

No, I don't think I did.

I think it just pours out of me.

And then I don't know if it's therapeutic exactly, but it just, I guess a little bit, I just feel good getting it out there.

Sure.

That makes so much sense.

Yeah, it definitely does.

Well, I know I keep saying this over and over again, but your book really touched me and just very deeply.

The characters, the story, everything.

And I think part of it, because you said before that you, you know, you hope that other readers will connect with it.

And I just absolutely did.

I found so many of the feelings, the issues that were encountered to be completely universal.

And, you know, some examples are feeling like you're an outsider.

I think that is so common to people.

And, you know, questioning your identity, and that could be a whole dissertation.

Substance abuse, you know, family loyalties, justice.

Is justice being served?

What is justice?

Distrust of law enforcement seems to be something that, you know, we talk about it now in our society much more, but I think that's something that's been going on for centuries.

Power, abuse, patriarchy, guilt, you know, all these things are just so universal.

And yet you've written these things so beautifully.

And, you know, the way you wrote it, because you are Blackfeet, you've portrayed so beautifully the Native perspective.

And I'm just wondering, can you comment, you know, because I saw your story to be, you know, both a window into what it would be like to be each of these characters, to be Native American, to grow up in the town on the reservation, or not, or part of your life.

And at the same time, feeling like all of these feelings were universal, you know, definitely there are mirrors that I could see myself in.

And so it just feels like, you know, this is Librarian speak, but it's very true.

It feels like, you know, stories have this incredible ability to be both windows and mirrors and also just great connectors of people to make us all realize how similar we are in so many ways while still celebrating our differences.

So I just wanted to know if you could comment on that.

Yeah, I mean, I think that's exactly why we love to read, right?

Like these worlds that we're open up to, they might seem so different from ours, but we still find the ways we connect.

Like we still see a piece of ourselves somehow.

I think all my favorite books have been the ones that I connected with the most emotionally.

You know, I saw myself or I felt myself fighting with them.

Like, I think that, I mean, that's why I love to read.

I see myself and I learn more, the window and the mirror.

Absolutely.

It just, you know, I just was thinking again, as you said that, about, you know, kind of our first question to you at the beginning of our interview, when you said, you know, there weren't a lot of books that you read as a child growing up that had Native characters.

And yet, you know, obviously you found books that made you feel connected to other people and it connected those experiences.

And, you know, and I imagine that there are just so many people who've grown up, you know, not finding characters like themselves in the books they read growing up.

But, you know, there's still been that great connection experience.

And how cool it is to have a book like this for me, personally, to experience, you know, what it's like to have Blackfeet characters because that's not how I grew up.

And yet, all of these wonderful connections.

I wish the world were more into connecting rather than, you know, othering people.

Yeah.

Yeah, it is really special to me that I can have this out there because another huge part of being Blackfeet is that I feel such pride about the things I grew up with, like the things I've seen, the powwows I've gone to, just, you know, the special stories from my dad.

Like, they're so cool, and I'm so proud of them.

And this is like a way to say, look, everyone see how cool this is.

Like, this is who we are.

And I think that's pretty special.

I could definitely would spend more time there on the reservation with the Blackfeet people, if you choose to write more about them.

Well, we'll see.

So we're going to zoom back out of the book a little bit here.

And a question we ask most of the people we interview, are you more of a plotter or a pantser?

And assuming you know what those words mean.

I am somewhere in between, what do we call that?

A pantser.

Yeah, I wish I could plan it all out better, but I basically start with some of the main beats, and I have to find my way in between them.

I will do the inciting incident, the midpoint twist in the climax.

That's pretty much where I start from, and then I just find my way as I write.

Let the characters tell their story.

Yeah, exactly.

I think that's where a lot of the magic comes from.

I'm always amazed when I write, which is sadly not very often, but how you get something on a particular day that you maybe would not have gotten on another day or another location, and then there it is.

You don't know where it came from.

Yeah, that's exactly what happens sometimes.

It's very cool.

Sometimes it's frustrating, but usually it's cool.

Yeah.

Very cool.

Can you tell us at all what you're working on next?

Well, I have two separate rough drafts right now that I need to be editing, but they both are thrillers and they both explore MMIW a little more.

And one of them may or may not continue Lauren's story.

We'll see.

Exciting.

Excellent.

Well, we can't wait for those books to come out too.

Yeah, we'll see when, but I still got a lot of work to do.

Yeah, well, keep us posted.

We were also wondering if you have any recommendations for books that you especially like by other Native authors?

Yes.

Well, as a fellow thriller writer, of course, I always say Angeline Bulley.

I can't recommend her books enough, but also I just wrote a book called *The Truth According to Ember* by Danica Nava, and it was really good.

It's the first Native rom-com from a traditional publisher.

So it's really good.

She is exploring her identity, and it leans into how it's been harder for her to get a job because of her identity, and she's trying to pull herself out of poverty, and she gets herself into a little bit of a mess with lying on a job application.

And it's just fun.

Yeah.

Well, we need those lighter books sometimes.

Yeah.

Yeah, it had me laughing, so I recommend it.

Wonderful.

Thank you.

All right.

So last but not least, could you please tell our listeners where they can find you online?

Yeah.

So I'm at KA underscore Cobell on Instagram and Twitter and TikTok, but I'm not really that active on TikTok.

I haven't figured that one out yet.

And my website is kacobell.com.

thank you so much for talking with us today.

It was such a pleasure.

Yeah, thank you so much for having me.

I'm just so glad that you liked my book, and I hope other people do too.

We hope so too.

I think it's a no-brainer.

I think people are going to love this book.

Thank you so much.

Thanks for having me.

Yeah, well, best wishes to you, and we look forward to hearing about your next books.

We really enjoy talking with K.A.

You can find K.A.'s website and social media links in our show notes.

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