

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 53: Podcasting with Alie Ward

November 30, 2021

Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week, I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! I freakin' love podcasts. I love them! I subscribe to way too many to keep up with. I'm always on the lookout for new ones, and then back in January 2020, I got back into podcasting myself after ten years focusing on historical fiction. I love sharing wonder and love through this podcast. Did I mention I love podcasts?

So here's the cool thing; this week's guest hosts one of my very favorite podcasts. Alie Ward is an Emmy Award-winning science communicator. She's a writer, producer, and correspondent on, honestly, too many dang shows to list here, but I will in the show notes. Her passion project is her comedic science show *Ologies*, named one of *Time Magazine's* top 50 podcasts.

It was so fun to geek out with Alie about podcasting. In this episode, we talk: releasing perfectionism, West Coast versus East Coast podcasts, strategic chardonnay at an Emmy Awards after party, why failure isn't to be feared, finding your authentic voice, and so much more.

Also, a quick note on the audio. Alie and I both had our video on, and apparently my 2400 modem, or whatever it is I have with Comcast, just absolutely had heartburn. So, the audio on this episode is not, shall we say, up to my standards. That said, I really hope you enjoy the chat as much as I did and don't even notice.

So find out why Alie loves podcasting and why you might learn to love it too.

Julie: Hello, Alie! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Alie: Oh, it's a pleasure! I know you so much from... I feel like we're almost meeting IRL, even though it's on video. But yeah, I feel like we're old internet pals who are hanging out for the first time.

Julie: Yeah, I'm so excited! So, you are the host of *Ologies*. *Ologies* is always at the top of the science podcast charts. You're just badass in all sorts of ways. So, why podcasting? Like, I know you've got a broadcasting career, I know you have a past writing career... probably still a writing career too. So why podcasting? How did you come to it? What inspired you? Why did you go down that road?

Alie: Oh, I wanted nothing to do with podcasting for a long time. Podcasting seemed like a pain in the ass; I wanted nothing to do with it. I remember listening to NPR and thinking, "God, it's got to be the biggest pain in the ass to create radio stories. What if the audio's bad or whatever?" And then I was asked to start a comedy podcast years ago and was like, "Why not?" That ended up being fun. It wasn't a huge success, but it kind of got me into it.

And then when it came time to do *Ologies*, some other podcasting networks were like, "Hey, if you have any ideas for something science, we don't have a lot on our science roster." And I had wanted to do something with ologies for 20 years. I thought maybe an illustrated book or... I pitched it as a TV show to my producer of the TV show I work

on, at the Emmys, right after we won an Emmy, and everyone was chardonnay-buzzed. And I was like, "If I'm ever going to sell a TV show... What about this thing called *Ologies*?" [laughs] The producer was like, "That doesn't sound like a good show." And I was like, "Aww!"

Then when it came time to do it as a podcast, I was like, "Well, I could do long-form. I could do interviews..." So it was mostly because no one wanted to buy it as a TV show, was why it's a podcast.

Julie: Yeah!

Alie: That was a great decision. I'm so glad it's a podcast and not a TV show.

Julie: Yeah. My gosh, so many questions. So, at the Emmys, they said, "No, I'll pass," which was stupid. But like, what pushed you over the edge? How long was it between that conversation and you actually starting the podcast?

Alie: Oh, probably about three years. And I remember thinking I wanted to do a science podcast, and I had a whole document of maybe what it would be called. And... Do you want me to look it up?

Julie: Yeah, totally.

Alie: All my dead ideas. Like, "Ward's Corner" or something... like "Ward's Science Corner." I had this idea of all these different... Like, how could I do... Yeah, science podcast ideas. It's from way back. Science Corner with Alie Ward; Okay But Why?; Cocktail Party Science; You Can Science Also; Creepy Science with Alie Ward. These were all things that I was like, "Maybe I'll do it this way."

And so finally I was like, "You know, I've wanted to do *Ologies* as a TV show or an illustrated book forever. What if I just do that?" So I started to think about the people that I could interview, and then I started realizing, "Oh, this is the show." I have a list here of people that I could interview, and I think I started being like, "Oh, nidology is bird nests. I know someone who knows someone at a bird lab that I could maybe talk to." So then I started thinking I could really do this.

Julie: What did it take for you to get it up and going? Because you weren't super interested in podcasts, so what got you going to do it?

Alie: Oh, it was a horror show. It was the hardest thing I have ever worked on. I decided, "I'm going to do *Ologies*. I'm going to make it an interview-based show." Because I thought that NPR shows seem really hard to produce, and it seems like you definitely need more than one person with a laptop to make it. I was like, "I can't do that. That's over my pay grade," right?

So, my friend Matt Mira, he has been on a bunch of podcasts forever, and I think it was him who said that there are East Coast podcasts, which are NPR, there are soundbites, there are music beds, it's edited, people speak professionally. And then there are West Coast podcasts where you set up two people in the room and they talk about, like, sandwiches and farting.

Julie: [laughs] That's on our agenda for later.

Alie: *Sandwiches and Farting with Julie and Alie*. [laughs] A truly West Coast podcast.

So I thought, "I'll do a West Coast podcast of science." And then I started recording and I soon realized there was a lot of stuff that went over my head in the interviews and

possibly the audience's head. So I thought, "I can't make an East Coast podcast, so I'll do some kind of hybrid." And between the first episode I ever recorded, which was with Lila Higgins... She was my first test subject. She was amazing to come in and let me practice on her. And it was almost a year before I released it because I was trying to figure out, "How do I stop and explain things? How do I go look things up? How do I pick up the pace if this story is too detailed or whatever?"

It took me, like, a year before I realized, "Okay, asides. Maybe I'll do an aside..." and explain what a chinchilla is, or what this place looks like. So, I worked on it for about a year, and in the meantime, I got the Instagram handle, I told everyone I was working on it. I got questions from Twitter and Facebook. And then I got a message from someone saying, "Hey, I just heard this other sci-commer wants to start a podcast about ologies." And he has this huge following, he mentioned it offhand in another podcast, and I was like, "Fuck! No!! I've been wanting to do this for 20 years!" I'd been actively editing episode one for a year.

So, that night, in the midst of a panic attack, I put up the teaser for it, a teaser trailer just to, like, pee on the idea, to make it known that I've been working on it. I already had the artwork I had designed. I wrote to the guy and I was like, "Hey. I understand that you mentioned... Just so you know, I've been working on this for a year. Here's the artwork, here's everything." And so he was like, "Oh, no worries. I'm not going to do it." So yeah, then I had to just put it up.

The network that I was with at the time put up the uncut version on accident instead of the edited version that I'd been working on for a year, and that was another panic attack. I worked so hard on the format! So, we took it down and re-uploaded it, and it worked.

Julie: Oh shit...

Alie: Yeah, it was like a beautiful pearl necklace of panic attacks. [laughs] It all worked out.

Julie: Exactly. So, why ologies and why science? You have a lot of focus on science, technology, innovation. What's that about? Did you want to be a scientist growing up? Where's that coming from?

Alie: You know, I got a microscope when I was a kid for, like, I think a Christmas present, and that's when I really started to care about science because I realized there was a lot more things of interest than I was ever attuned to. I think once I started swabbing windowsills and stuff and looking at things, I realized, "Oh, there's all these alive things, and dead things, and how does the world work?"

So, that got me really interested, so I always studied science and art at the same time. And there was something about science that just gave me an appreciation of life on Earth, and perspective, and it made nothing boring, you know? Once you start to realize, like, "I'm sitting on a blanket. What are the fibers made out of? Why do the fibers twist the way they do?" There's science in everything, and that's when I... I think it gave me such a calmer appreciation for things that I wanted to spread that because I thought that if you appreciate things, if you know the context behind things, it becomes a richer experience. So, I kind of wanted to make it pop-cultural, or pop science, that way people could just go down wormholes and appreciate things more, you know?

Julie: Yeah, totally. That's kind of the heart and soul behind *Ologies* is the sense of wonder; the sense of joy in the world.

Alie: Mm-hmm. And the people who do it. I started to see that there were so many people who were comedians who had podcasts, and they would have on actors, or other comedians, or musicians. And we know so much about those people but what about the folks who are doing research, or who are studying tiny snails on islands? Why do they do it? Who are they? What's their story? So, I kind of wanted to make scientists... give them the rockstar treatment that so many people in media get and make people realize that people all around them have such great stories.

Julie: Yeah, and it's one of the things that drew me so much to *Ologies*, that I didn't give a crap about, you know, X, Y, or Z. You know, I'd look at it come down on Tuesday and I'm like, "I don't know..." So I listen and I'm like, "I'm so glad I listened to that because that was so interesting!" It opens your world up.

Alie: I think that's the thing. I love hearing when people are like, "I don't know why I listened to this episode. I did not think I would care," and then those sometimes are the episodes that people end up liking the most because they just had no reason to care about it. And then by the end of it, they want to know everything about squid, or they want to know everything about mountaintops, or ferns, or whatever. There's so many *Ologies* left to explore that it's kind of cool just to try to make anything interesting.

Week to week, sometimes I think, "Why did I set up for myself a weekly schedule where I try to make the most, sometimes, opaque information interesting while you're commuting?" Sometimes you feel like, "I hope people care about this." But you know, the ologists are always so engaging and wonderful that it's always really easy to fall in love with them.

Julie: Yeah, how do you manage a weekly schedule on top of other work? I have a day job and I do this every other week, and it's just about the limit for me. So how do you even do it?

Alie: Poorly. [laughs]

Julie: Lies! Come on. [laughs]

Alie: You know, when I started I didn't know how many episodes I would do. I didn't know how many people would listen. So, I didn't have a ton of foresight in terms of putting up, like, 52 episodes a year. [laughs] Especially since it took me a year to make Episode One!

Julie: You're like, "Oh shit. What have I done?!" [laughs]

Alie: Yeah! Like, I need 50 years to make a year's worth of content on that schedule. But luckily, just like anything, the more you do it the easier it becomes; the faster you get and the more you can trust your instincts. So, that's helpful.

And then you get to a certain point where you say, "Okay, I know the rhythms of it, I know how to make decisions. Now I have to make sure that I don't get myself in a rut and the audience doesn't get bored, so now I have to shake it up a tiny bit if I can." So you know, the big thing is just trying to release it into the ether knowing it's not perfect. That's the hardest thing. I know I could work on every episode for a year and I just have to say, like, "All right. Off you fly." And I hope it's as good. Releasing perfectionism is a good idea whenever you're starting any creative endeavor.

Julie: Yeah, for sure. And ongoing. It's a constant battle.

Alie: Yeah, especially because you care about it. You want it to be the best it can be. They always say that perfection is the enemy of progress.

Yeah, are you sleeping less? Have you found that it gets easier or harder for you?

Julie: It's getting easier... I think. [laughs]

Alie: Do you have any advice for people who would start a podcast?

Julie: I was going to ask you at the end, so... You don't get to jump on that question. [laughs]

Alie: [laughs] Interviewing an interviewer!

Julie: [laughs] That's actually one of my questions for you. Not that this has gone off track, but what do you do when an interview, kind of, goes off track?

Alie: You know, I think that one thing I learned is you can never go wrong with total honesty. Like, the longer you think about how to do something, or how to manipulate something, sometimes the worse it gets. So, if an interview is seeming like maybe it's dull, or sometimes it can seem less interesting if you feel like the person you're interviewing is feeling like they have to be super professional or inauthentic. And you know, sometimes just relating to someone from person to person can really help the interview take a much more natural course.

So, I think asking really doofy questions sometimes helps. I feel like I have the responsibility to ask the questions that are in my head, even if they're embarrassing questions, because the listener's going to have them. And if I don't ask them, the listener's going to be like, "Why did you ask that??" So, if I try to make myself seem cool, I do a disservice to the listener *and* to the science, and I've learned over time... So many times, I'm so glad that I asked the question that I was embarrassed to ask, or made an admission that was, perhaps, vulnerable because it ends up taking the conversation in a much more authentic direction.

So that's good. It's embarrassing as fuck. [laughs] But there's so, so many times that I'm like, "If I don't ask this..." I'm a proxy for the listeners, so I have to just, like, be this weird funnel where... Imagine everyone's question coming into this, like, point of a funnel, and it's got to come through me. So it's like, "All right, well, you have a responsibility." This kind of curiosity is going to gush out because it's being funneled through you.

Julie: Yeah, totally. So the person that you pitched the podcast to at the Emmys, what do they think now?

Alie: Oh, they've asked me for advice on how to start a podcast! [laughs] Literally, they're like, "I'm thinking of starting a podcast. I'd love to pick your brain over coffee." Oh, would you! Which is really funny. But you know, the thing about it is, if I had to have done *Ologies* as a TV show, A: I don't have creative control over everything. I'd have a way smaller timeframe to discuss the information. And I would've gotten, essentially, way less creative control. So it ended up being such a good thing that it was a podcast because it can be an hour and 40 minutes, it can be a 15-minute episode. I can swear in ways I could never if it was a TV show. I can talk about things that would not be TV-friendly.

And I think the cool thing about that is, I didn't really trust my own voice as much before I started this podcast. And it's really allowed me to go with my gut more creatively and

realize, "I don't have to change myself to fit into TV." I can just be myself and that's enough. So, I think that whenever people ask for advice on starting a podcast or anything creative, it's like, if you have people whose careers you really like, or you like what they make, a lot of times we want to fit ourselves a little bit more into that kind of dialect or whatever that they're doing. But really, the best thing you can do is just come to it as authentically as possible because you'll enjoy it more, you'll feel more fulfilled, and no one can be you, so you might as well be, you know? That's been a huge confidence booster to me, where I didn't get that from anything else I was working on, which is cool.

Julie: So how do you feel that doing this over the course of four years has changed you as a person?

Alie: You know, that's such a good question, and it's such a thoughtful question. I think I definitely have learned to trust my own instincts and to trust... Usually, the first thing that comes into my mind is the question to ask or the joke to make. And it has also given me a lot of agency I didn't feel I had over my career. I think a lot of times, especially when you work in TV, or for media, whatever, you're waiting to see if you get renewed, and you're waiting to see if they cast you in something, or if they replace you, or whatever.

And this is really, like, the first time in my life I've been like, "I'm the boss in charge of my own work," and I get to give people raises if I want, I get to give away money to charity in ways that I couldn't afford before. And it's really given me a sense of, "It's okay to be the boss," you know, in a way that is... It's been empowering that way. So, I hate being a boss. I'm very bad at it. I feel like I'm really bad at managerial stuff, you know. But it's been cool to, I guess, feel like I'm not at the mercy of a network executive to tell me that I don't have a job.

Julie: Has it had negative effects in any way? Like lack of sleep or...?

Alie: Julie, look at my hair right now! Look at my hair!

Julie: [laughs]

Alie: My hair is like, "Put me on the mic. Let me tell my story. She never gets blowouts anymore." I'm so tired. I've been so tired since 2017. Like, there's *Before Ologies* and *After Ologies*, there's... it's like a crater impact. I've been running, running, running since I started this. I'm definitely more tired. I definitely sleep less. But I also, on top of that... It has gotten me so many other opportunities that I've been able to take. So, there are so many opportunities I would not have if it were not for this podcast. From working with Netflix and being a consulting producer on some shows for HBO, and Amazon, and... Yeah, getting to really have some great opportunities I love to do.

But it's hard to say no to jobs when... I was a waitress in my 30s, which is good money if you can get it, but I'm always very, very grateful and appreciative for getting to do this job that I've always wanted to do. So I'm always like, "If an opportunity comes, take it." So, I'm having to be a little bit more mindful of my actual bandwidth. [laughs]

Julie: It's not infinite.

Alie: Exactly. It's not infinite. If I'm like, "If I want to do it, I can do it!" That's not always the case. We're not always used to having more opportunities than we're able to do, which is such a great problem to have, you know? And I always just want to keep doing more and more with it. I always want to be putting out better social media content, and start

a TikTok account, and have spinoff shows, and maybe have guests who are amazing produce podcasts of their own, and make a network, and all of these things. And it's hard to know, "Okay, which ones can I reasonably do?" A great problem to have.

Julie: So, I wanted to ask you about some of those interviews. Maybe not what's your favorite, but what was your most memorable interview so far?

Alie: Oh my gosh. You know, I have to say, Dr. Merlin Tuttle. He is someone who I wanted to interview before the podcast ever started. Like, if you were to do a deep, deep dive on my Instagram, before Episode One ever dropped, it was like, "Chiropterology's a word! Look at this guy! He seems amazing." And he also was just so welcoming. This was pre-pandemic so I went to his house and we just sat there for hours. And he is someone who is also so wonderful. He follows up with me a lot. He sends me emails just to be like, "How you doing?" And he's just so... He has such a pure love and passion for what he does. He's someone I'm really honored to know.

And that's the other thing about this. I feel like over the course of however-many episodes, 200 episodes or something, it's like I've gotten to make 200 new friends, which is amazing. I'm always on text with a couple of them every day, you know, just because they've become friends in my life. That's been a real gift. Being able to be in the orbit of some of these people I've really admired for so long.

Julie: And Merlin, just for folks who maybe haven't heard that, that's the Bats episode, yeah?

Alie: Yes. That's Chiropterology. Dr. Merlin Tuttle. He's amazing. He has a big push broom mustache. He's also an incredible photographer and such an adventurer; he leads bat expeditions to go marvel at them all over the world. He's just great.

But yeah, it's funny. Cole Imperi is someone who's a good friend of mine, and I was just hanging out with Victor, her husband, who's in town right now. And they're moving to LA, which I'm thrilled about. And Dr. Sarah McAnulty is someone who's become a close friend. Dr. Raven Baxter just moved to LA so it's really exciting to get to hang out with her in person. Shane Campbell-Staton. There's so many people who I'm just, like... It's such an honor to be their friend.

Julie: Which one of those guests would help you bury a body?

Alie: Oh! Good question. I think they would... It's really more which one of them would help me dig up a body and make sure that it's, you know, properly reinterred. I think probably... Well, Taphologist Robyn Lacy could definitely help me reinter a body in the proper place. She's a taphologist who studies burials and gravestones. So I think I would be more likely to reinter a body in a respectful way with an archaeologist, which is wonderful. You know what I mean?

Although, if it were something like a dead praying mantis... I would have to say Lila Higgins if it were an insect funeral, which I've had. She'd be up for it. I had a praying mantis named Mirabel and we had an open casket funeral. Lila was there. In all black.

Julie: [laughs] Wait, wait. This is recently. This isn't when you were a kid.

Alie: No, I was a grown-ass adult. It was, like, 2015 I think. 2014. My pet praying mantis died, so... I mean, if you're ever going to have an open-casket funeral, have it for a bug. It was wonderful. We listened to Bauhaus and stuff. Dressed in all black. Pillbox hats were worn. Someone could probably play Taps or something.

Julie: That's amazing. So, you've covered 200-ish ologies. What's your list? There's got to be almost an infinite list.

Alie: It better be infinite. I literally had a nightmare, like maybe a month or two ago, that I had gotten to the end of the list. Like, there were a couple left, but they were ones that I was like, "I don't know..." Like, I know that metrology, the study of measurement, will end up being interesting, but I'm always afraid that it's going to be the driest episode. So, I had a dream that I got to the bottom of the cereal box and there were just crumbs.

But no, it's an ever-evolving list. And people are using more ology words, new ones every day, so I think I should be good. But if I look back on my old 2016 list of things I wanted to do... which by the way, I just looked back at that list, and one of the ideas was Firehose of Science with Alie Ward. So that list didn't make it.

Yeah, my very first list, there's so many that we haven't done. Timbrology is the study of postage stamps. Tsiology is tea. Latrinology is the study of bathroom wall writings. There's coprology, porn. There's so many that we haven't ever done that I'm like, "I'm good for a while."

Julie: Yeah. Do you have a holy grail?

Alie: Oh my god... Augh, like my *ultimate* ultimate?

Julie: Mm-hmm.

Alie: That's a good question... I'm really excited about gastroenterology, to be honest. [laughs]

Julie: As one usually is, right?

Alie: Everyone's got gut problems of some kind, so I'm like, "Gastroenterology's going to be interesting." We have one coming out about ADHD, which is really exciting, with Dr. Russell Barkley, who's kind of, like, *the dude* when it comes to ADHD. We already recorded that, and that's great. That's coming out in January. It's going to be after the holidays. There's so many that I want to do. But when I finally do gastroenterology, I'm going to be stoked.

Julie: Okay, so you get permission to ask one question of one of these people, who would you pick and what would your question be?

Alie: Okay.

Julie: Charles Darwin. Jacques Cousteau. Marie Curie. Or Carl Sagan.

Alie: Oh my god! Oh wow.

Julie: [laughs]

Alie: I think I would want to ask Carl Sagan if he still thinks that one of Mars's moons is an extra storage shed for aliens. That would be one of my biggest questions. Because that was one of my favorite things I ever read. Like, "Wait a second! Sagan thought one of Mars's moons was maybe a storage shed? That's amazing!" But yeah, I would ask Carl Sagan... I would ask Carl Sagan, if he had to live on another planet, which one would he pick.

Julie: Now, is there someone that I didn't list that would be, like, "I would do anything to interview this person."?

Alie: You know, I would love to interview Jane Goodall at some point. I think she would be wonderful. She has such an interesting backstory to how she became a primatologist. So yeah, I have already done primatology, so what I need to do is I need another ology that would cover Jane Goodall's work, and then we're off to the races because I would love to interview her. I hope I would get to do it in person and not long distance. That would be, like, a holy grail for me, for sure.

And also to do an episode about the holy grail, side note, would also be amazing.
[laughs]

Julie: Yes! Grailology? Something like that?

Alie: It's gotta be in there.

Julie: Something. Yeah. So, if the multiverse theory is correct, what are the other Alies doing podcasts on?

Alie: Oh my gosh. Okay... You know what? We can look straight up at this document. [laughs] They're doing The Cephalopodcast, which was another one that I was going to do. They decided to go with Firehose of Science. There's someone out there, there's another Alie doing *Firehose of Science* that's trying to do a five-minute podcast where she recaps all of the science of the week.

There was another podcast I really wanted to do, and I always wanted to do, based on an article I used to do for a section at the *LA Times*, and it was called Karma Watch, and it was ways to volunteer. I've always wanted to do, like, kind of a long-form interview about people who volunteer different places, why they decided to do it, what they get out of it; just illuminating that volunteering, obviously is good for the community and good for other people, but it's a really great way to connect with your own compass of what you think is important. So, I think I'd probably be doing a karma watch podcast, which I also pitched as a TV show and got shot down.

Julie: No!

Alie: And then! I lost an Emmy this past year to Mike Rowe because he has a show all about volunteer work, and I was like, "Dang it!" He's doing good work also. But yeah, I would probably do something on that.

Julie: You spend a lot of time and lose a lot of sleep over it, but was there a moment early on where you're just like, "Wow. This is... I love this. I really actually do love this."? What was that moment?

Alie: So many times. I remember one moment I had real, like, chills recently. I was interviewing the rodentologist, Urban Rodentology, about sewer rats, Dr. Bobby Corrigan. And just having the best time talking to him, and just thinking, like, "I get to sit here for my job and I get to talk to the world expert in sewer rats, who is just a delightful person, who cares so much about ecology, and urban ecology." What a life that I get to do this, that I get all these insights and have these great, intimate conversations with people who know so much and know so much about such specific fields.

And then on top of that, I oftentimes completely forget that the people who listen to the podcast get to know these people and their stories too. I feel like sometimes I get... I'm so grateful for getting the experience, and I'm like, "Oh..." It's also weird that there's someone who's on a train in Philadelphia learning about this too. It's like,

“Bonus!” That’s awesome too. But yeah, I remember a moment when I was interviewing him, just thinking, like, “What is life? This rules.”

Julie: It’s surprising how many of the episodes you actually get some really great life advice. What’s the top bits of advice and information that you’ve applied to your own life?

Alie: Oh man. I have gotten so much of it. I think that the biggest thing I’ve really taken away from so many of the ologists is just how much passion fuels what they do and how much they have appreciated getting to, kind of, go down a career path that had, kind of, some twists and turns along the way. It’s pretty rare that I talk to someone that’s just, like, “I knew this from the get-go and I got here.” There are a lot of people who are animal biologists who started off in veterinary school and they were like, “I was devastated when I didn’t make the cut,” because veterinary school can be really competitive, or “I did and I realized I didn’t like it.”

So, I think it’s been really affirming to hear how much life is a bunch of little detours until you get to where you want to be. Getting to where you want to be is oftentimes the result of a lot of small and sometimes difficult decisions or realizations. So, that’s been super affirming for sure. And the idea that... just swear if you want to swear. [laughs] I have really, really struggled with whether or not to keep swearing in this podcast, and at some point, I was like, “Well, it feels authentic. I’m going to do it.” And ultimately I’m glad I did.

Julie: Yeah, you just feel like you’re listening to your pal talking to somebody and learning all sorts of stuff.

Alie: I hope so. I just feel like, the idea that you’re going to tune in and that it’s not being super censored is like, “Okay, you never know what’s going to happen.” So, I’m glad I just stuck with that instinct.

Julie: I mean, you’ve got to do a ton of research for the different asides. Do you get caught up in rabbit holes all the time?

Alie: Oh my god, so much! It’s so difficult. And I think that’s one reason why I could spend a year on every episode. There’s just so many rabbit warrens, and catacombs, and... I think that there’s so much backstory to everything. Sometimes it’s tough to know when to cut it off and be like, “Okay, this is too much of a tangent.” But you know, anything that can give more context to it is really hard not to put in, and I’m naturally really curious anyway, and so... Yeah, I can get down a real chasm of googling.

Julie: So what’s, kind of, the most disturbing thing that you’ve learned in one of your rabbit holes?

Alie: Oh man, you know, doing the Taphology episode recently about gravestones, I was like, “I gotta extricate myself,” because I was like, “Okay, if this is how graves work, then what’s a mausoleum like?” And then before I know it, I’ve accidentally tripped upon a whole article about abandoned mausoleums that people are looting. And I’m like, “Oh no! What... Don’t click on it!” So yeah, the taphology was hard in a lot of ways, where I was like, “Oh man...” That was a tough one. That one stuck with me a little bit too much.

But the recent episode I did on pain, too, was really interesting. There’s so many studies that I just wanted to read. When it comes to something that you know will have a lot of meaning in people’s lives, or that they might struggle with, psychological or medical, either way, you really want to do it justice, and try to get as much information,

and make sure the information is really well-vetted, and people know when they're listening that it's not flimflam and that there are all of these studies. I love reading studies, so I can get down a real National Institutes of Health hole here.

Julie: What's, like, the most delightful thing that you've found in one of your rabbit holes?

Alie: Oh gosh... You know, I think that the Fearology episode with Mary Poffenroth still really sticks with me because it's a lot about the amygdala, and the limbic system, and anxiety, and fear, and how much anxiety is typically fear, and what those sources of anxiety are. And just knowing that a lot of anxiety is about either not being in control or not being good enough, not being enough. It's really made me take a step back from when I'm feeling anxious and asking myself, "Okay, am I anxious because I'm afraid I'm about to blow this? Am I anxious because there are too many unknowns right now?" So, that one really... I still hear people weekly...

Oh, and the death and dying episode with Cole was giant, too. Her huge message is, you know, dying is sad and a tragedy, but it's an even bigger tragedy to live your life inauthentically and to get to the end of your life having so many things undiscovered or so many regrets. So, I think that has changed the way that I live a lot. It's not, "Am I doing a good job?" But it's, "Am I living authentically?" that I ask myself now, which is really living.

Julie: From that Fearology episode, I made a little sign I put up over my desk that says, "90% of fears are fictional," from that episode. It was so helpful. So many good bits of life advice that come out of this show.

Alie: Yeah, it's been a whacky year, that's for sure. Very busy in a huge global crisis. It's been a whacky year, but it's been cool to also, as things change in the world or as new stuff comes up, to get to chase some of the ologies and the questions that we have as life evolves in different directions.

Julie: I'm sure you've got a schedule planned out and you have interviews scheduled ahead of time. Is it just, like, "Oh shit, I've got to talk to this person *today*," and, "Guess what you're doing tonight, Jarrett, until 1am."?

Alie: 1am is very generous. Usually, it's just a bit later. But yeah, I have a chalkboard that I'm constantly shuffling things around, so... Yeah, even just today we changed the order of things. This morning, this week's episode was going to be raccoons and now it's going to be about TikTok because it's a bit of a less complicated episode and, you know, I have a friend whose cat is getting put down tomorrow so I'm like, "I'm going to be on deck for that, so let's try and do a little bit shorter episode." So, constantly shifting, and if something comes up then, great, let's throw in a coronasode if we have new information that we need to learn about boosters, things like that.

And you know, with a lot of social movements too, it's been great to be able to talk to people who have much better insight and have stories that need to be told, and to be able to take the platform I have and be able to amplify stories and perspectives that I don't have and that we all can learn. So, it's been really great that it's so elastic like that. Again, with a TV show, I would never have the artistic and editorial freedom to do any of that. It's really been just such a... Really, making *Ologies* is the best thing I have ever done in my life. Like, without a doubt, hands down, the best turn that my life has ever taken.

I think back to that year of me fretting, and handwringing, and you know, it all started when it started, and it happened in the way it happened, and it's all good. But there are so many ideas that we have for creative things that we're so afraid to fail on that we just keep them in the back of the drawer not knowing that you are going to stumble along the way. That's just part of learning how to do anything. There are *going* to be mistakes. There are going to be episodes, or things that you write, or whatever you're working on that aren't perfect, but they're never going to get better unless you do them.

So, one big piece of advice that I learned from innovators when I do my *Innovation Nation* episodes, is just to start sooner rather than later, fail a lot, failure is part of success. You are going to fail in a lot of little ways, maybe some big ways, but you are never going to overthink or pre-think yourself out of failure. It's going to happen, so it's really more about what you learn, and how you pick yourself up, and how you keep going, and how you iterate to make things better along the way. Failure is not a zero-sum game like that. It's really a process.

But yeah, hands down, *Ologies* has changed my life, and I've gotten to help people in my life in ways I never would have been able to. So if anyone has an idea, it's always worth exploring.

Julie: If you could go back in time and talk to little Alie and tell her about this, what do you think she would say?

Alie: You know, she'd probably be like, "What's a podcast?" She'd be like, "Why is your hair so messy?" No, she wouldn't say that because my hair's always been messy. But you know, I think that I have had so many fears that I would not make it, or that I would fail, or that I wouldn't have a voice... That was a big thing for me. I realized... In my 20s I got mugged, and at the time I was working in TV, and I would have auditions to go play someone who was a victim of some crime, and I just felt like... not getting to write my own stuff, I felt like I just didn't have a voice.

So, the biggest thing for me was really wanting to do something where it was my voice. Knowing that I get to do something that's so purely my voice is, like, "Ah!" Definitely, my stomach would've been in fewer knots for several decades, wondering if I was ever going to get to do something like that. So, it's really super affirming. Just showing up as who you are is really the best advice I could give myself. I hope that people who listen to *Ologies*, I hope it makes them ask themselves, like, "What's my 'toads'? What's my 'podcast'?" Hopefully, it makes them think, like, "What really lights me up?" I hope that's what people get out of it.

Julie: Yeah, totally. Just to wrap up, if someone wanted to get into podcasting or just finding their authentic voice, what advice would you give somebody?

Alie: That's such a good question. I think when it comes to making your own podcast, I think it's a really good idea to think, "Okay, what could I do so many episodes on and still get excited about?" And not what you think will be successful, but what you think you would really put yourself into is a great way to approach it. And also think, like, "What are the listeners getting out of this? What am I getting out of this and what are the listeners getting out of it?" And I think as soon as you start to think of, "Who's voice am I putting on?" that's when you can tell yourself, like, "Okay, pump the brakes." Like, "How would I be presenting this information to my best friend?" Probably pretty different.

Granted, not everyone is going to want to have a foul-mouthed science podcast like me, but asking yourself how much are you pre-editing yourself before you even get a chance to show up for it. I think people don't realize how wonderful, and charming, and interesting they are *as they are*. A lot of people think, "I have to speak like other people I've heard speaking on this topic," or, "I have to put my own experiences away."

What's really interesting about a lot of science is, like, the questions that scientists ask are really informed by their own experience. And that's another reason why it's so important to have a diversity of perspectives in science, because different people ask different questions and different researchers have different questions. So, I think showing up as you are brings more value to the table than people realize.

Julie: Well, thank you for showing up as you are, because *Ologies* is just a delight and I just love it so much, as you can probably tell and I've said a million times. Thank you, Alie, so much for joining me today. You've been so generous with your time and I really appreciate it.

Alie: Oh, it's great, great, great to be here. Thanks for making a podcast about people who love what they love! It's the best! It's the best thing ever! So, thanks for having me on. It's quite an honor. And it's great to see your face. [laughs]

You can find Alie on Instagram and Twitter [@AlieWard](#) and [@Ologies](#). I'll include links to everything in the show notes and I'll share some of my favorite podcasts in the show notes, too. Also, today is Giving Tuesday, and in addition to the link to Alie's favorite nonprofit, the International Myeloma Foundation, we've got a link in the show notes to over 100 nonprofits supported by *Ologies* in honor of her guests. I'll also include links to my favorite nonprofits too, that way you'll have a lot to choose from on this Giving Tuesday and throughout the year. Huge thanks to Alie for sharing her passion with us today.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription magician and proprietress of The Wordary. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

Find Alie on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [AlieWard.com](#)

Find *Ologies* on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [AlieWard.com/Ologies](#)

Alie's Favorite Nonprofits:

[International Myeloma Foundation](#)

[Over 100 nonprofits](#) supported by *Ologies*, in honor of her guests

My Favorite Podcasts (right now):

[Completely Arbitrary](#)

[Ear Biscuits](#)

[Echoes of India: A History Podcast](#)

[Fall of Civilizations Podcast](#)

[Ologies](#)

[The Anthropocene Reviewed](#)

[The British History Podcast](#)

[The History of English](#)

[The Lubber's Hole](#)

My Favorite Nonprofits:

[Humane Society of Silicon Valley](#)

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

[Town Cats of Morgan Hill](#)

[World Central Kitchen](#)

We're on [Patreon](#)

Hang out with me on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

Check out my books at [JulieKRose.com](#)

LWYL Music: [Inspiring Hope by Pink-Sounds](#)

Transcribed by Emily White: [Emily@TheWordary.com](#)