Love What You Love Podcast
Episode 20: Documentary Filmmaking with Brittany App
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Hey, I'm Julie Rose. Welcome to *Love What You Love*. I'm an author, creator, and enthusiast, and I've always been fascinated by the things that people are super into, because they're always a unique expression of curiosity, and joy, and wonder. So every week I'll introduce you to another fascinating human who's into really interesting stuff.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! First, are you registered to vote? And have you made your plan to vote? Do you know what your state's options are? Go to Vote.org for all the information you'll need to be an active participant in our democracy.

I know I keep talking about the weather, but y'all, we have had blue skies, and fluffy clouds, and soft breezes, and the slanting autumn light is making the afternoons golden, and the leaves are just starting to put on their annual show. Isn't it so human to take something as simple as clean air for granted? Speaking of things we take for granted – stick with me here – let's meet this week's guest.

Brittany App is a documentary filmmaker who is passionate about the natural world. Her film, *Where There Once Was Water*, is an independent, feature-length documentary film exploring California's current water crisis and discussing solutions for a more sustainable future. Brittany is also a photographer, a farmer in California's remote Carrizo Plain, and dog mom to Luna.

In this conversation, we talk about filmmaking, Semester At Sea, bicycling across the United States, finding out what lights you up, living off grid, and so much more. Find out why Brittany loves documentary filmmaking and is passionate about water, and why you should get passionate too.

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

Brittany: Good morning. You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Julie: I'm so glad you're here!

Brittany: Me too!

Julie: It's funny because we were talking before we started recording about coffee and getting going for the day, and I just feel like we're going to have a really good, energetic conversation today.

Brittany: We are.

Julie: You are a landscape photographer, you're also a documentary photographer, and a documentary filmmaker, so I want to understand where you got started with those things, how they fed into each other, and is this what you do for a living?

Brittany: My love for photography actually started way back in high school, which is pretty fun. I took it initially as a… what are the classes called where you get to choose your alternative classes?

Julie: Electives?

Brittany: Electives! There it is! [laughs]

Julie: Yeah! That's the one. [laughs]

Brittany: Electives. I was interested way back, and then when I was in junior college, taking all of the art classes I possibly could, trying to figure out what sort of creative thing I wanted to do with my life, I was having a bit of an existential crisis about it all because I just couldn't quite land on one. And my stepmother said, "Brittany, darling, the camera. It's in your hand all the time. It's like a permanent attachment to your arm. It's a thing that people do." And I went, "Oh my gosh, you're right." So it literally had to be pointed out to me because it had become such a part of my life that I, kind of, didn't put it together that it was also a thing I could potentially do for money, as a career.

At that point I decided to start taking as many business classes as I could; international business, small business management, and that's part of the reason I chose to go the community college route, because I just wanted to pick and choose and, kind of, build my own education. Then I started interning for a couple of wedding and portrait photographers because I knew that I wanted to do that as an art but also as a business. So I thought, if I can start out doing weddings and portraits I could build a business out of this with the eventual goal of doing more commercial, and documentary, and landscape, and travel, and wildlife photography.

So it has been, I guess, 20 years. In January of 2021 I will have been in business for myself for 20 years! That's kind of crazy, actually, to think about. I started my business in January of 2001.

Julie: Was it wedding and portraiture to start?

Brittany: It was sooo many weddings. I think one year I did… It was, like, 50-some weddings. And it was back in the days when I was shooting film, so… That just gives away my age a little bit, which is fine. [laughs] But yeah, it was crazy. It was lots and lots of weddings, and lots of portraits. And I love working with people, so that was a good fit. I'm the oldest of seven kids, so I had plenty of practice growing up being bossy in a, hopefully, fun-most-of-the-time sort of way, so that helps with wedding photography.

So yeah, over the years I've just constantly been seeking out work that lights me up, and that brings me joy, and it has landed me – long story short – where I am today, which is… Well, *today* is a little weird because we're in the middle of a pandemic and I don't have any work. But you know, the broader sense of today is that most of my work these days is for commercial clients, large events, or universities. I do a lot of landscape and wildlife photography, and I do a lot of work with ranchers and in the agricultural sphere.

I love being outdoors, and I love telling stories. So, the camera's a great medium for that, and also film, obviously. When you can't say everything with visuals and you need to add some words, that's where film comes in!

Julie: You have created a documentary.

Brittany: *Where There Once Was Water*.

Julie: Tell me about this documentary, and what prompted it, and where you are with it.

Brittany: It's been a gigantic project. It's been the most fulfilling project of my career so far, for sure. I came to the issue of water back in 2008. I was hired to work as the shipboard photographer for Semester At Sea. In short, that is a university program that is on a ship that circumnavigates the globe every semester with about 600 undergraduates on board and a full crew to staff the ship. So these students, through all sorts of different universities, get to study within ten different countries as they sail around the world on

their floating campus. It's the coolest thing ever. And I got to sail as the shipboard photographer.

I was sent into port with the students on the various service projects that were connected to the courses they were taking. So, we would do a build day for Habitat for Humanity in South Africa, or we would go repaint an orphanage in a small village in India, or we'd go to a homestay, or we'd go out to the Amazon and rebuild a school in a remote little Amazon town. It was just, like… Who gets to do that? And how else would I have had the opportunity? It was amazing. And through all of those experiences, it was the first time in my life where I'd really been able to see, and feel, and be present to how a lack of access to fresh water affects a person's entire life.

Over and over again I saw, you know… The moment that broke me was when I saw a woman my mother's age, crouching down in a dirt road, in a city in India, doing her family's laundry in this puddle of mud that was, maybe, two inches deep. Because that was it. That was the only option. That was the only water, that was the only place to "wash" the clothes. On top of everything else I'd seen up to that point, it just broke me into pieces. Through the research that followed, I found that most often water is the woman's responsibility, or the little girl's responsibility.

In a lot of developing countries around the world, little girls don't get to go to school because they spend their days hauling water. Sometimes that means five miles across the desert, with no shoes, to the water hole, and that's the only spot, and the water is probably not safe but that's the only water. Then she carries it back on her head, or on her back, and that's her day.

And I came back from this semester, and I remember sitting on my brother's back porch, and I was staying with them for a little while because, you know, to be able to do this it was like, "Okay, move out of the house, put everything in storage," go live on a ship for four months, come back, "Hey bro! Can I stay in the spare bedroom for a couple of months while I figure out my life?" So I was there, figuring out my life, sitting on my brother's back porch, drinking a glass of wine. I had just taken a shower and I thought, "This doesn't feel good. Who am I to sit here with a glass of wine that took how many gallons of water to produce, and to have just taken a nice warm shower in how many fresh gallons of water, that those little girls in India and Africa will never, ever see in their entire life? What the hell??"

So, that's how I came to water, and I decided at that point, I'm a storyteller, I'm a kooky person, if I do something that's genuinely a little bit crazy and I can tell the story of it as I go, I could probably raise a bunch of money, and then I could donate it to a nonprofit that's working in water access in third-world countries, and that's at least a start. And so, I decided to ride a bicycle across the United States of America. I had a kooky friend who said he wanted to join me, so we loaded our bikes and we pedaled for three months, and we raised $15,000, and we donated it.

Julie: Oh my god!

Brittany: Yeah, isn't that cool? And we donated it to WaterAid, which works in water access and sanitation globally. That was a very long answer to your short question, but that's how… I feel it's an important part of, like, what brought me to where I am today, which is making this documentary film about water. Why, of all the things that I could have chosen, did I choose this gigantic, expansive, complex, crazy-making, magical topic

that is water? It's because it's everything! It's life. You can't do life without water, and so many of us take it for granted because we've never had to think twice about it.

Julie: The documentary is focused on California's water crisis, is that right?

Brittany: It is, because it felt far too big to try and make a film about global water issues. It also felt way too big to try and make a film about California water issues, but I'm trying anyway. [laughs]

Julie: Good.

Brittany: So yeah, and this is where I've always lived, this is where I grew up, so it's the story that's appropriate for me to tell. I wanted to tell a hopeful story because I feel like we get enough doom and gloom. So, it really has been just this crazy, mind and heart-expanding project to dive in and try to comprehend what is really going on in the state of California around the issues of water. And I tell you what, we could make 500 different films about it, I bet.

Julie: Because it's that complex, or because there's that many points of view?

Brittany: No, it's just a huge issue. It's a huge issue, and it affects every piece of life, right? So, do we want to talk about water access? Because that is happening here in the United States also. There are people living without access to clean running water, and it's happening right here in California, and it's happening in Navajo Nation, and it's happening in Alabama… It's just crazy. So that could be its own thing.

Do we want to talk about water rights? Do we want to talk about the groundwater that's disappearing? Do we want to talk about water pollution? The politics of water? Water Barons? I cast the net way too wide, and reeled myself in multiple times, and have landed on a film that I feel really good about and that I'm almost done with, which feels really, really good. [laughs]

Julie: Nice! Did you do it all yourself?

Brittany: I have an editor. Bless his heart. I would not be able to do this without him. He is actually working away as we speak on the final, like, mega-chunk of edit notes. So, he's been an absolutely gigantic part of this project. As far as directing and producing it, that has been me. And I have a composer who is working on an original score for the film as well, which is super exciting. And I should name drop both of these men because they're amazing.

Julie: Yes, please.

Brittany: My editor is Garrett Russell, he's up in Oregon. And the composer is Brandon Maahs, and he's in Texas. We're aiming to have the film out in the world for the 2021 film festival circuit, whatever that ends up looking like.

Julie: So, what did you… I mean, without spoiling the whole movie, what did you land on in terms of where you wanted to focus?

Brittany: Yeah, that's a great question. I decided that it made the most sense to ask the question, "Where does most of our water go here in California? What uses the most water?" Here, and also globally, 70-80% of our water is used to grow food. That's huge. We have to eat, right? So it's not like we can just stop growing food. Then it led me to ask, "How can we grow food in ways that use less water or that require less water?"

So I very happily went down the rabbit hole of agriculture, and specifically regenerative agriculture, which is a word that is getting more common these days. Holistic land management, biodynamics, all these different forms of agriculture that focus on growing food and simultaneously growing soil. And what was really interesting was that, you know, I set out to make this film about water, and in equal parts I am making a film about soil.

Julie: Ah, okay.

Brittany: Fascinating. If the soil is dead, it's dirt and it can't hold water. If the soil is alive, it's this *incredible,* complex web of microscopic life, and it can act like a sponge, and it can hold onto water for months, and nourish everything in the soil, and everything that tries to grow from the soil. So if we destroy our soil, we destroy the ability of the land to hold water, and ultimately we destroy ourselves, right? Everything's connected. It's been a fascinating journey.

Julie: I'm curious also about… I mean, California has often been described as America's breadbasket, America's fruit bowl, so what impact does the demand and the industrial agriculture have on water use and soil development?

Brittany: Well, it's huge. We grow a ton of food, and most of it we grow in a "normal" way. We're all accustomed to seeing food grown in a certain way, and that doesn't necessary mean it's the right way. But it's how we've been doing it, how farmers, and ranchers, and most of us know or are aware of how food is grown. A lot of it involves a lot of pesticides, and fertilizers, and add this, and add that, and add this and that to the soil, which is really destroying the soil. And all of these real heavy till applications are also breaking up any life that would be trying to evolve in that soil and just blowing it away in the breeze.

So, I'm trying not to point fingers because I don't know more than someone who's been farming their whole life. I don't know more than someone who's been ranching their whole life. And we are all doing what we are doing, I imagine, for good reason, or we wouldn't be doing it. But my film, I think, offers up some ideas for how this could look, and how it already does look for some farmers and ranchers, and the immense amounts of hope that are there because water is the big issue here in California and we don't have enough water to grow food the way we're growing it.

We are over pumping our aquifers, we are demanding more out of our rivers than they can give, and that just won't last forever. That's just a fact. You can't keep pulling water out of the ground because eventually it will all be gone. And yes, it gets recharged a little bit, but it doesn't get recharged nearly as fast as we're pumping it out. And when you pump out aquifers the way we're doing it, they actually collapse upon themselves and cannot be filled to the point that they were.

So, we're just kind of digging our own grave. Wells are digging deeper and deeper, and someday you can't dig it deeper anymore, so we have to learn a new way. We're going to *have* to do this differently. We can keep going until we just can't, or we could start right now practicing these new methods, which might actually be old methods that are waking up again.

Julie: So your film will have some ideas for people who are involved in agriculture, but will it also have suggestions, ideas, for regular consumers?

Brittany: Yeah! Because consumers buy food from people who grow food, so guess who's responsible, ultimately, for how food is grown? It's those of us who buy the food.

Julie: Who would you say… I mean, I know you don't want to, like, point fingers, and maybe this is a spoiler for the movie, but it there are particular kind of crop that is particularly pernicious, or the worst offender in terms of crops?

Brittany: I don't know that that's… The right crops for the right location, right? So, we grow almost all of the world's almonds here in California. And it takes a lot of water to grow almonds. Does that mean that almonds are evil? No. Could we be doing it better? Yes. Does one person own almost all of the almonds in California? Yes. Should we maybe ask about how that person is interacting with the state's water? We should ask that question. Is that my film? No. Does that film exist already? Yes.

So, if folks are interested in that particular rabbit hole, there's a film called *Water & Power*, and I would highly recommend it. Again, this kind of circles back to how many different films could we make about water. There's a lot of dairy here in California, a lot of mega dairy farms. There's obviously a lot of wineries and a lot of wine grapes being grown. There's a ton of almond trees that are irrigated heavily in the desert and pull water from elsewhere. But the almonds are really happy here so long as they have water. Here's where we are, and here's what we've got, and how long will this last, and how can we do it better?

The other piece of the film that I think is really important, that is not necessary agriculture but it's all connected, is the idea of biodiversity and ecological health as a whole. So, the salmon having the ability to do what they need to do is really important to the health of a watershed as a whole. So if we build all these mega dams and we block the salmon from spawning in their ancient spawning routes, then they can't nourish the watersheds like nature designed them to do, and then the whole watershed is compromised.

So I spent quite a bit of time in the film talking with the Chief of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe up in northern California, Chief Caleen Sisk, and she's basically dedicated her life to restoring the salmons runs. As an Indigenous woman, she understands better than most of us that everything is connected. If we kill off a keystone species, the ripple effects of that are going to be terrible. I mean, that's an understatement. And the trees. Trees are super important for the watershed. So even though I say I've been reeling it in, I don't know that I've really reeled it in. I have trees, and fish, and farming, and everything's connected, and the water is magic, and water is life.

Julie: I want to switch gears just a little bit and find out… So you started out with still photography. Was it this project that got you into film? Had you always been interested in film? And what new skills did you have to learn in order to make this documentary happen?

Brittany: Yeah, it is this project that has turned me into a filmmaker. It was during the drought in 2014, and I remember just feeling really frustrated because I was noticing everything changing. I was noticing our lakes drying up. I had done this big bike ride to raise money for people who don't even have water, and then I'm here in California and I'm like, "We're acting like everything is fine. Everything is not fine. The lake is not a lake right now!" And I was sitting on a porch… Things happen on porches for me, Julie.

So I was sitting on my porch, and I looked across the street, and my neighbor was power washing his boat in the driveway. And I was like, "Okay. That's it. That's it! There's

got to be a thing… Maybe this is the next big project around water." So I decided to start photographing all of the disappearing bodies of water in California, whether they were natural or manmade. So I locally, and then I started traveling the state, and it became a very apocalyptic-looking photography series very quickly.

Then at some point, I think I was talking to a friend about the project, and she said, "Well, how are you going to photograph disappearing groundwater, my sweet Brittany? Tell me how that's going to go." And that was the wakeup call that I realized, "Oh. I have no idea. Maybe we need to talk about that. Does this need to be a film? Oh gosh. I don't know anything about making a film. But I care about this so let's think about this for a moment."

So I decided that I would start to approach the project as both photo and potential documentary, and if I was enjoying the process, and enjoying exploring that medium, which is similar but different… It's like photography on steroids that are on steroids.

Julie: [laughs] Okay. How so? How do you mean that?

Brittany: There's just a lot more you have to think about, and there's a lot more gear required because now you're thinking about the image but you're also thinking about the sound. You can't just run around like a spazzy photographer. You have to hold still! [laughs]

Julie: Which must be hard. [laughs]

Brittany: That was the hardest part for me to learn! Like, "Oh man! I gotta put my camera on a tripod *all the time*? I can't just run around like a spaz? Okay." So, after a couple months of adding on this video piece, I was enjoying it and I thought, "Okay, I'll do a Kickstarter. If the Kickstarter is successful I will make a film. I will do my darndest to make this a film." And the Kickstarter was quite successful, and so here we are five years later, and I am still making a film. It's almost done now. To all my Kickstarter backers, I promise you, I know I said it would take me two-and-a-half years, that was a big, fat, cute, naïve lie. [laughs] *Now* it'll happen.

Julie: So, has it been the filming that's taken so long? Has it been the editing process?

Brittany: Everything. Everything. I mean, I had no idea. I've talked to plenty of filmmakers who tell me they spent eight, or nine, or ten years making a doc, and it's genuinely a labor of love. It is a passion project. I did have a good chunk of money from my Kickstarter. I haven't made any money off of this thing, nor did I intend to. That was not why I was doing this. This is definitely a passion project. The money has covered travel costs, it has covered the need to pay my editor, and licensing some footage that I wasn't able to film myself, all the things that come up that you don't realize come up when you don't know what you're doing and you do it anyway.

Julie: Were you like this as a kid? Or was there something when you were an adult that went, "Oh, I just gotta go do stuff."

Brittany: I have always been the curious, insatiable child, adult, whatever. That's just… Need to learn. Need to go, need to try a thing, "Okay, now I'll try this, now I'll try that," I want to do this, go here, try this. It really is what keeps my heart beating is to continue feeding my curiosities, and there's a lot them, and they're weird. They don't necessarily connect with each other, and that's fun.

Julie: So doing this documentary and becoming a filmmaker, has it branched off into other curiosities or other interests that you hadn't anticipated?

Brittany: I did end up getting to be a part of a really cool project in the California Delta. It was a photo and video project, and I believe it came about because of my film. Someone that I knew through one of the groups I had worked with on the film saw the trailer for the film, and then was talking to a friend who was doing all of this great habitat restoration work and also large-scale agriculture and said, "The world needs to know what you're doing, and I know just the gal to tell that story!" So, it was a really cool opportunity that would not have come about had I not pursued this passion project.

There's a farmer up in the delta who… His name is Dino Cortopassi, and he's doing some really amazing habitat restoration for the sandhill cranes and other migrating waterfowl that travel along the Pacific Flyway, and they've lost a lot of their resting grounds in that area to agriculture. So, he farms rice and leaves 5% of the crop standing in the field specifically as food for the sandhill cranes. And they show up, not kidding, by the *thousands*, every year, and just hang out, and dance, and feast, and do what they do, which is all kinds of greatness. I mean, the sandhill cranes, if you've never seen them, Lodi and the surrounding farm fields, it's amazing to see these birds.

He's also built a 750-acre habitat for all of the different migrating waterfowl. He manages it strategically so that all four seasons of the year it's available for wildlife in some capacity. So, I was connected with them, and that was just one of the most beautiful commercial projects that I've worked on.

The film has also opened up a lot of doors for me in agriculture, and ranching, and farming because my curiosities have been piqued there, but also because I'm just making myself more available to tell those stories, and to learn. There's always something to learn from a rancher, or a farmer, and oh my gosh, it's so fun to be out and about. Again, the eternal curiosity, right?

Julie: Yeah! So what's the most surprising thing you've learned from a rancher or a farmer?

Brittany: For sure, the most surprising throughout digging and digging over the course of my film was… I made the assumption early on – and I'll just go ahead and admit it – that cows were less good, you know… like, "Cows are bad, right? Should we really be eating cows, raising cows, whatever? Cows are evil." That was my assumption going into it, and that came from a lot of different beliefs that I held leading into the project. But I try to challenge myself as a storyteller, "Are you sure, Brittany? Have you looked at all the different ways to manage cattle? What about grass-fed cows that are just wandering? What about the difference between that and feedlot where they're all crammed together, and polluting the water, and pumped full of antibiotics?"

Are all cows bad? Are cows bad? Or is it the way we are managing them that's bad? Or, not ideal. I try not to go good/bad. Like, 'could be better', right? So, I found a group called the Savory Institute. What the Savory Institute is doing… and I am paraphrasing, so please go visit their website and learn more directly from them. But basically, their goal worldwide is to reverse desertification and heal the soil through managing large herds of animals, whether it's cows, or sheep, or chickens even, in a way that mimics the behavior of ancient grazing herds.

So, before we privatized, and fenced, and built, and did all of the things that we have done, there were these giant herds of animals roaming across the Plains, right? And this isn't applicable everywhere, but in a dry, arid grassland environment, there were

large herds of animals who would eat just a bit, stomp just a bit, pee and poop just a bit, wander through, trample the grass. That is what kept the soil vibrant, alive, and able to support life and hold water. Now that we don't have that we need to do our best to mimic that. The best tool is these large herds of cattle!

It turns out, cows can really be good guys if we just let them, right? If we manage them in a way where we're not overgrazing, and we're not confining them to just this one area all the time where they destroy the soil, but we strategically move them throughout the landscape so they graze just enough to stimulate life in that soil before you move them on to the next plot. There's a lot of different names for that, but holistic plant grazing is one term, regenerative agriculture is another term; biodynamics incorporates grazing herds.

It has literally become one of my favorite fascinations. I want to do, like, a mini-scale version of it here on my 2.5 acres. That was the biggest and most pleasant surprise for me, and really I think that's where our greatest hope lies, is in using modern-day livestock and managing them on the landscape in a way that heals the soil, grows the soil, allows the soil to hold water, and then we won't be seeing the same issues we are. We won't have to water as much because the soil will already have the water in it. It's all connected.

Julie: So this is obviously an important message for people to get. What is the process for getting your documentary out in the world? I understand you're going to be submitting it to film festivals and things like that, but what's your process or your plan?

Brittany: Well, my plan is to finish the film first, and then initially I would like to run it on the film festival circuit, and that's about a year. So, the film can travel around to different film festivals for about a year, and then, because this is my first time, I don't really know. If I'm being honest about it, I don't know. I have some friends who have self-distributed their film and really had a great experience with that. I have friends who have ultimately tried to and gotten their film picked up by Netflix or another large distributor and been really happy with that. So, I don't know yet what will be the best approach, all things 2020 considered.

If we can't have in-person screenings, then it should be available widely in a digital format. I want everyone to be able to see it. I would love for it to be used as an educational tool if it's appropriate for school audiences. It'll be an interesting journey, because like I said, I'm not about to pretend like I know what I'm doing, but I'm really good at learning as I go.

Julie: You're insatiably curious, so beyond finishing off the film, and getting it distributed, and getting it in front of people, what is next after that?

Brittany: So, I just purchased a tiny little home, off grid, out in the Carrizo Plains, which is in eastern San Luis Obispo County in California, and right next door to the amazing Carrizo Plains National Monument, which is a quarter of a million acres. This area is the largest preserved grassland in the state of California. We have herds of pronghorn out here! Just running by my fence. And we've got big herds of tule elk, and we have all kinds of endangered species that don't have a lot of places left, but they have here. And there's a whole lot of nothing. The closest town is over an hour away, and I am building a very humble, very little homestead out here. That is my current curiosity.

So, I am raising ducks. They are the cutest. They just started laying eggs. And I just found my next dog companion for this next chapter of life. She's amazing. Her name is

Luna. She is a Great Pyrenees, and she's a rescue dog, and we found each other right when we needed each other. She is my livestock guardian dog, so she protects the ducks because there are a lot of coyotes out here. And, I plan to have… I'm thinking about pygmy goats because they're…

Julie: Oh, keep thinking because they are so cute!

Brittany: They are so cute! I mean, your podcast is all about Love What You Love, right? So if I'm a photographer, and a filmmaker, and I'm starting a farm, well then, a requirement is you need to be photogenic. [laughs] So the pygmy goats, not only do they bring me a ton of joy because they're the cutest, silliest little goats, but they're also really great mothers, and they're great dairy goats, and you can breed them. I am trying to build a homestead that supports itself. I'm not just getting an animal because it's fun, right? I'm like, "What is your purpose? Where do you fit into the farm?"

This is my current curiosity and I'm building the farm from mostly reclaimed materials. I have been scouring Craigslist for free fencing, and free pavers, free gates, rocks, sand, whatever building supplies I can find for free, which, believe it or not, is a lot if you're patient and you have a truck. And I have both of those things.

Julie: If a listener to the podcast wanted to… I mean, there's so many questions. If they wanted to get involved in photography, or filmmaking, and if they want to make an impact in terms of the water crisis, how would you suggest they get involved with those things?

Brittany: Well, for photo or filmmaking, if it's something you're interested in, I say: start shooting. And if all you have is your phone, shoot with your phone. Ask yourself, you know, what really lights you up, and then go do that. I think more than anything that's what our world needs right now. That's one of my favorite quotes. The world needs all of us alive, and awake, and pursuing what lights us up. That elevates the energy across the board and allows us to really make ourselves available to be of service, because if it's something we truly love, it's like a gift. It never feels like work.

When it comes to water, the first thing I like to say to people is: when you turn on your faucet, where does that water come from? Do you know where it comes from? Do you know what watershed you live it? Do you know the journey that water takes to get to your faucet? Do you even think about your water? Because most of us don't, and most days even I don't. It's easy for me to, "Oh yeah. Faucet. On. Good." Another piece of this homestead puzzle that I think is strange beautiful because of what I do in the world is that the Carrizo Plain has a soda lake, which means there is no outlet for the water. So this whole area is an alkali sink.

The ground water here… I do have a well, and there is plenty of water, but it is all super, super alkaline, meaning very salty. So, I can't drink it, and I can't really water the garden with it. I can shower with it but it feels like showering in the ocean. And I can wash my dishes with it but they all have this white film, right? So, I haul drinking water from town. So now, like the little girls that initially brought me into the water space… I have a truck so much life is much easier than the little girls in Africa who are carrying it on their head. But any time I go to town I'm taking a bunch of huge 5-gallon jugs, and I'm filling them up with water that has been purified, and bringing it out here for my cooking and my drinking water.

Part of the reason our water cycle is broken is because our relationship with water is broken. The first step is to create a relationship with water, or if you have one already,

to heal it. I mean, we all have a relationship with water because we can't live without it, but start a conversation with that water, in a way. Where did you come from? How did you get here? What did it take to get you here? Did it take power, energy? How was that power made? Where does that power come from?

And knowing what watershed you live in is really important because it's a more appropriate sense of place than the lines we've drawn, like counties, and cities, and things. Everyone lives in a watershed, and everyone who lives in that watershed is all, kind of, in a lifeboat together. The health of your watershed depends on those of you living within that watershed.

To quickly define watershed, it's basically… If you think of, like, a bowl, the surface of the Earth is a whole bunch of bowls. Some of those bowls… not very many, but some of them like mine, they don't drain anywhere, and then you get a salt lake. But most watersheds drain to a common outlet. So, all of the rain that falls from ridgeline, down to the river mouth, and out to wherever it drains, that's a watershed.

Julie: If you know what your watershed it, what do you do then? What do you do with that information?

Brittany: Get to know your watershed. Once you know what it is, spend more time there, and spend more time caring about what the water looks like, and where it comes from, and where it goes, and what might be contributing to its health or lack thereof. Once you know your watershed, you can be an active participant in your watershed. What you choose to… Even if you've got neighbors right next to you, and you've got two tomato plants in your backyard and that's it, what you choose to spray on your tomatoes, or not, affects your watershed. What you choose to wash your car with in the driveway, or not, affects your watershed, because all the water that everyone uses, and everything that everyone sprays, is all draining to the same point, and you're all buddies in the same lifeboat.

So, your boat might sink, or it might float, and it all depends on how you all behave. You can just change your own behaviors, you could be vocal, you could get involved in local government, you could do coastal cleanup days. We all have a different role to play, and it comes back to what lights you up. Once you have the knowledge, you get to choose what you do with it.

Julie: This has been fascinating. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me.

Brittany: Oh my gosh, you're so welcome!

Her passion and energy is infectious, right? I hope she's inspired you to take action and to go out and find the things that light you up, and then go do them. You can find Brittany on Instagram @BrittanyApp, and her website is WhereThereOnceWasWater.com. I'll put links to Brittany's socials and her favorite nonprofits in the show notes.

Just a reminder that you can find the podcast on Instagram @LoveWhatYouLovePod, on Twitter, @WhatYouLovePod, and the website is LoveWhatYouLovePod.com. If you'd like to support the podcast – and I would be so grateful if you did - leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts – even if that's not where you listen – is a great way to do that. Or you can also spread the love and share about the podcast on social media. I'm so grateful to everyone who has rated, reviewed, and socialed already.

Zeke Rodrigues Thomas at Mindjam Media provided amazing editing assistance. You can find Zeke at MindjamMedia.com. Big thanks to Emily White, as always, for the fantastic transcripts. They're easy to read, and she adds links and other goodies. So if the show notes on the website or on your podcast app aren't really cutting it, check out the transcripts on the website.

Go out there, figure out what lights you up, and love the hell out of whatever is it that you love. You need it, and we need it. Thanks for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

Find Brittany on Instagram and WhereThereOnceWasWater.com

Brittany's favorite nonprofits:

CalClimateAg.org

DIGDEEP.org

FriendsoftheRiver.org

IENEarth.org

OAEC.org

Savory.global

TreePeople.org

TreeSisters.org

YisraelFamilyFarm.net

My favorite nonprofits:

Vote.org

VoteFwd.org

Additional editing by Mindjam Media

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: HireEmilyWhite@gmail.com