

# Really Specific Stories: Arlill Rodriguez

Duration: 47:23

## SPEAKERS

Martin Feld, Arlill Rodriguez

### **Martin Feld** 00:21

Thank you so much for joining *Really Specific Stories*, Arlill; it's great to have you on the show.

### **Arlill Rodriguez** 00:26

Oh, it's great to be here, thank you so much for inviting me.

### **Martin Feld** 00:28

Now, for the first question on each of these podcast episodes, I'm going to pose to you: how did you first get into podcasts?

### **Arlill Rodriguez** 00:36

Do you mean like into sort of producing podcasts or just podcasts in general—like just the world of podcasts?

### **Martin Feld** 00:41

The world of podcasts, your first experience with the medium...

### **Arlill Rodriguez** 00:44

OK, so I believe in the early tw... like, the early 2000s, there was a video game website called *GamesRadar*. And I was very, I was a huge fan of the writers on that website; and then I found out that they have podcasts of their own; and then I decided to check it out. It ensnared me into the formatting in terms of like the, the dynamic, the group dynamic. I'm sure if you went back to listen to them, they're kind of rough, because it is something from like, 10 years ago, but at the time, especially in high school when I, I socialised (well enough), but I think, like especially like, outside of school, I didn't have that much going on. So this... the podcast is called *TalkRadar*. It got me through a lot of really, uh... it got me through a lot, (I'll put it, I'll put it that way). But I did know, I think, about *The Ricky Gervais Podcast*—I did know about that one. And I remember these other podcasts that have also been or were around for like a long time, [unintelligible muffling on recording], I think that was that had a 15-year run or something like that. But, but I think that

*TalkRadar* was the first time I got like, enveloped, like really got involved in the world of podcasts, like like how its structured, how it's... just everything about it. So, so that was the first time.

**Martin Feld** 01:55

What was it about the content or the hosts of these early shows that pulled you in at this time?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 02:02

One thing that I did appreciate, and it was something that, it's something I, I find challenging for my own show, (because most of the time I'm alone in it), but the group dynamic just felt so natural. And I think it makes sense because everybody had worked with each other at that point about like, two years or three years. Although I think the first episode I listened to was in 2010, so the *TalkRadar* podcast started in 2008, and then I jumped in an episode called *Epic Honor*, which was about some *Medal of Honor* reboot game and then like *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, and just the dynamic and just how, but not just how vulgar it was—it was very vulgar—but also how intelligent everybody sounded, at least at first impression. Everyone sounded like they were using like very sophisticated vocabulary, but they would also say like, 'Hey, go fuck yourself', or like something like that very flippantly. And I think, if I remember correctly, everyone would always get drunk just so that you have like a more loose tone. But then again, that's but then that came at a detriment because I think every episode would be like three hours long, so it'd be like a nightmare to edit.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 03:04

And I think from what I remember, they also didn't they weren't paid to do this. It was just something they just did on their part-time. So they were doing absurd amount of hours out there. I don't know if any of this was like on the clock or was like overtime but no, is this just a side thing? It was really popular but they, I don't think they ever got paid—or as per my knowledge that did not get paid. Don't quote me on that' I, I'm just thinking, remembering from what they talked about when they did their like retrospectives or like, looking back on the *TalkRadar* format show. And that was definitely something that pulled me in originally. Although it's funny, because now I'm almost 30 and now I'm actually kind of like moving away from the more vulgar kind of podcasts. I'm actually trying to, like, what's the word? Not, like, be more sensitive, but like, I'm trying to diversify my palate a bit. And like, like, it started off with a bunch of like, white dudes, who are all like video game editors, and now it's definitely like, like listening to [unintelligible muffling on recording], led by, like queer people and trans people. So it's, it's an interesting journey in terms of my consumption of podcasts.

**Martin Feld** 04:06

I'm really interested, very, very interested in that transition in the content that you like. Before we burrow down into that, I think it's really cool that you remember so specifically what the episode was that drew you in... that's, that's great. It obviously had such a profound effect on you or pulled you in, and the fact that they were two or maybe even three hours long. These game podcasts,

this kind of game chat, how were you listening to it, or in what time or context were you listening to it (given that they were so long)? And can you tell me a little bit about that gaming interest that you have as well?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 04:41

Oh, definitely. So I remember that, that I had an MP3 player, but I think at the time everyone had the iPhone, they had like an iPod, but my family just couldn't afford it. So I think I downloaded the MP3 file from their website and I must have heard it like during dinner—not to throw anybody under the bus—I just wasn't very sociable when I was back home. I was sociable enough in high school, but like when I was back home dinners were a little awkward. So I think I just liked a lot of my free time, probably I would probably also listen to it when I was like, doing homework, which is not advised, because that can be distracting. But also, and this is still something I do to this day, it's become like, a favourite podcast will be like white noise to me. So I actually use this to go to sleep.

**Martin Feld** 05:21

Oh really? It lulls you into sleep?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 05:23

It does, and I know it doesn't for other people, but for some reason, I think I'm just so used to it or like, er to different podcasts—not, not *TalkRadar*— but like, there would be one of those podcasts I was listening to, like, well sleeping. Even though I wasn't like absorbing anything, it was just something to, to, like calm my brain and get me ready for the next day. And then in terms of video gaming, it's just something I've always loved from like, since I was probably like two years old, like my father got me a Genesis when I was like two years old. So it's like, I wouldn't have known how to use it really.

**Martin Feld** 05:53

Mmm...

**Arlill Rodriguez** 05:54

But it, it was something like, it would be like a permanent equipment—I'm suddenly talking in video-game terms—it's like, it's like something that's permanently equipped to my arsenal! Like it's never left my... it's never left on me. I, I really love video games, always have loved video games, and I've actually produced several podcasts about video games. So it's definitely something that still to this day, it means so much to me.

**Martin Feld** 06:16

And this is something that you do for leisure, gaming, still to this day? And, and how does, how has that kind of grown up or shifted alongside of your podcast listening?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 06:26

So here's my, here's my rule, if, if a game makes me cry, it's going to be covered on the podcast. Um... so...

**Martin Feld** 06:33

Hmmm...

**Arlill Rodriguez** 06:33

...or like if there's like some sort of extreme emotional effect that that I don't... not like it's not to be unexpected, but if the, like, restrictions or maybe not even like the difference in terms of like watching a movie where you're seeing everything play out in front of you to a game where you're making the events happen, maybe not necessarily you're making the dialogue, but you're moving the character, you're involved in the story, and that makes it more it makes it more involved, and it makes them more effective. And so, when I want to cover a game, I want to cover something that I really care about, and I don't... at the same time, I also don't want to cover anything that's boring to me, not because it's bad, but just because my tastes are different from other people. But I know people can be very sensitive about like, if you say, 'Oh, this game is terrible'. And it's like, it's just not for me. I don't like that genre, or you know it's, so it's like, I try not to put that so much in consideration. In a lot of my games, at least the games that I cover on the podcast before, like usually had something to do with existentialism, which I think in high school I was super into in college. Thankfully, I'm a little happier now. So I haven't been having those types of thoughts. But I'll watch a movie and maybe like also like, feature existentialism and all this, like, I appreciate that, I'm not like, ruminating in the darkness of it all, like I did when I was younger.

**Martin Feld** 07:51

Well on to that shift in your tastes or what you like to listen to and produce, you said that you moved away from some of that earlier content. Can you tell me the story of that shift and how you came to listen to new things and produce your own show?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 08:05

One thing that I've been noticing, as I've been listening to more and more podcasts, is I do like a dynamic. There's something very beautiful about a group dynamic. I mean, the interview we're doing right now is one person and the other person, I say something, you, you respond to it. And there's something that, like, the group format of the podcast, *TalkRadar*, that's something I really appreciated and it was something I want to replicate on my own show. And my brother is actually off-screen right now, he was actually originally the co-host on the on *Random Chatterings* until it was he was too busy with schoolwork and he couldn't keep up with it anymore. But I wanted to do something similar, like when I wanted to start my own podcast was I wanted to have a group dynamic, but then doing it just over, over time, I just started noticing that, 'Oh, maybe there's some way I can kind of bring that group dynamic, even when I'm recording by myself', or at the

very least, I want to make sure that when I'm talking to my audience, that they're informed and then that they're not lost in terms of the subject matter because I usually want my podcast to cater to a general audience.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 09:04

So then, in terms of like the consumption, I think I just started noticing that I really love analytical podcasts. I love podcasts that cut straight to the point; I don't like podcasts—again, not because they're bad, I just, it's just not for me—where everyone is like (which is funny because I love to *TalkRadar* so much), but people will interrupt each other or maybe when somebody would make a point and then they would make a flippant remark. Or I think there's one podcast I listened to where everyone was joking all the time. It's like, 'Get to the fucking point about the case', or whatever or, or get to the episode like you're talking about an episode of television, just get to it. It's, it's me. I'm very weird about that. I really love analytical podcasts, podcasts that break down television or video games, or like a recent one that I can definitely recommend: *Maintenance Phase* is about health trends, or like some, or debunking health myths, but it's also like, in terms of that podcast, I really hope it gets their names right. Aubrey Gordon and Michael Hobbes are the two hosts. One person does all the research and then they tell the story to the other person, and it's something that feels so natural. But it also creates this great dynamic, not just because they've known each other for so long, they're friendly, but also because you kind of feel the same way too, or like, and it's funny because like, I would make fun of my mom for reacting to soap operas, and I'm also reacting, like, 'WHAT?! That's crazy!', or like, 'WHAT?! That's unbelievable!', and I'm like alone in my home office. But no one can hear what I'm saying!

**Arlill Rodriguez** 10:22

But I want to react that strongly, because like some, that's part of what's so engaging about those types of podcasts is that engagement or the way of finding engagement with the audience, even in a way where it, like again, it's like finding a way for the audience to kind of like follow you along the journey, like the thing that you're listening to, and how you're kind of learning as you go along. It's, it's just I think that's what the transition came from, and I think when I wanted to cover more, or listen to more serious shows—because sometimes my own podcast would veer into serious material—and then it's like, how do we probably introduce this information? And something I don't think about, but maybe I should think about, is that I record for like a while, but then realise, 'Oh, oh shoot, I have to source that, I have to source that, source that, source that and then that's where a lot of the additional extra work comes in (when I post the episode on the website) is I make sure I have my sources for everything. And then if something ends up being debunked, or like, 'Oh, I misremembered that', I just delete it from the show. And I think that's some kind of responsibility that I do appreciate and I want to bring into my own show. And it's like, again, other shows where it's like, they just record and it's a video podcast that's four hours long. It's like, there's no editing here, there's no cuts, there's like always breathing, it drives me, argh, it drives

me up a wall. It's like I can't, it's like you could definitely cut this and could be like tighter... ergh, then I'm getting into something else, so I'll calm down.

**Martin Feld 11:43**

No need to calm down, I love the passion! When it comes to your—no, seriously—uh, when it comes to your own editing process then, I'm interested in that, because as a listener, you're consuming this stuff, you've said that you love, analytical conversation, really digging into a topic. When you adapt that taste or that passion for that kind of content to your own creative process, what's the editing process that you undergo from recording through to publication? Can you tell me about that?

**Arlill Rodriguez 12:12**

Definitely! So, it's something that I'm still kind of figuring out even now. I've kind of, it's interesting, because I think for a long time, I hated writing essays in college, but learning those skills, those analytical skills did help in terms of making producing better podcasts because now I have a structure of like: what's my thesis? What's the what's the bigger point I want to make about this game? And also, because it's a game, and you can't actually watch me play it because it's just audio, how do I make sure that the audience can visualise whatever it is, like everything that I'm describing, or maybe just focus on the story, and then very briefly touch on the gameplay because it is something that, in my opinion, needs to be mentioned. But it's also like, trying to consider like the, like the... kind of think of it like, like the 3x structure of a story, like you'd have your beginning, your middle and your end, or you also have your climax, the big moment. So it's kind of like a taking some like, some of the things I've learned from writing essays and also from writing screenplays. And how do I, like, bring everybody on this narrative journey about, about the game or movie or TV show that I might be talking about? And also how to keep people engaged in the material that I'm discussing? And I do think of that very carefully. And now because I've done (I think) 150 podcasts. I've produced 150 podcasts... I've gotten a lot better at recognising, 'Oh, shoot, I messed up there...um, OK let's de-dum... [trails off]'. You know, 'Cut that, this is for future me, so skip this'. And it's like, I can kind of notice, like, on the sound waves, when there's the gap, or like, 'OK, then it comes back'. Again, I don't wanna get too technical, but, but again, it's like, finding a way to keep people engaged, but also within, like the editing. I know, before when you were, we were starting our Zoom call, that you were mentioning, 'I want to get rid of the uhs, the ums, the lip smacks'—I always do that.

**Arlill Rodriguez 13:52**

There's been a few times, I've actually had a chance to edit on another person's show, and basically took the same, the same approach of: this a good interview here, but I got to cut out a lot of the fat. Um, I gotta, we gotta make it like more concise, and also the audio is a little a little off, so I'm gonna try to polish it up as much as possible. And I think just, it's just something that I've just gotten better at and better at. It's, it's... hard for me to explain it in the short amount of

time because it is something that I've like been honing for over 10 years—almost 10 years—that, I think the best way I can put it is just practice... just doing it over and over and over again. I get more familiar with it, I started to be more I can identify when I make those bad takes or when I want to go back on multiple takes and see which one fits better. Then it comes to like, like, oh, there should, we probably should include a content warning for this episode because it's kind of dark. And then I'll make notes during in like, in the in the uh... in the timeline of where one (if there's a resource we need to look up) and then where, you know, like some something that could that should be flagged in terms of content warnings that we can include at the beginning of the show. So, like I can go on and on about this, so I'm just I'm trying not to get caught off guard or like going on uh, too in another direction, so yeah...

**Martin Feld** 15:02

You can go on as long as you like because this episode is about you, so don't worry about that! I'm here to listen and so are the listeners. There's so much that you said there, which is great, about how thorough you are in the process, both because that's what you want to put out, but I think I'm getting from you that you want to put out a certain quality or smoothness in terms of listening experience for your listeners. What comes to mind for me is that idea of work and leisure: you're putting a lot of work into this, but it's also about something that you're doing for fun, like gaming, or the creative process of the podcast itself. What can you tell me about that balance for you and how it feels to be working on something that you enjoy?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 15:43

It's, that's um, a very good question. And it's something that I've kind of wrestled with even recently, I actually was on unofficial... unofficial hiatus. When the podcast was I think was at its, like—I don't want to say zenith—but like we were like firing on all cylinders, and I was interviewing people all the time. I had interviews scheduled every other week. It was because like, I wanted to find something to fill in the time during my last semester of college, which I remember really fondly. It was definitely the only semester that I remember fondly. There's just numerous things that happened, just things like life changes, and when I finally got a routine that was working well for me, I did think like, 'No, no, I really do love doing this!' And I kind of have to keep reminding myself that I love doing this, but it's also kind of like, right now I do have a full-time job, like a full daytime job, so I can't really make money from the podcast. And I'm thinking about transitioning, maybe into doing that, but I don't know yet. It's still too early. And I think my audience is a bit small to take a leap like that.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 16:41

But it was something that because it would always be about something that I enjoyed so much, or it's like, I just want to do an episode about this Brazilian film that for some reason, everyone in my class was kind of like, 'Eh, it was OK', but I hated it! I just wanted to talk about it so badly. And sometimes it's just, it is just a passion about the subject matter that it's enough of a reason to

want to produce something. And also like, again, have that special—I won't say unique—but you know, like a different flavour out there for like, what other podcasts does covers this 1968 like Brazilian film, and it's so you know, it's like going through the narrative journey, like I hated this movie so much, but then I watched it again, it's actually there's some good stuff here! You know, like that kind of thing? And I think just in at the time, it was just so much fun. Like just, put it simply, it was just so much fun, that it didn't feel like work. It was a lot of time dedicated to it, and I think I remember when my friends would ask me about it or like ask about a new episode. I was like, 'Oh, I've edited it for like 10 hours or 20 hours'. It's like holy crap. That is it is a lot of effort and put it into something that in the early days, I didn't even like host... I didn't have the episode hosted like on iTunes at the time. (It's Apple Podcasts now.) It would be like a download link that you would have to click on my website to download link. And it's like, there's no way anyone's listened to the show. But I just wanted to get it out there so bad. And that's one thing that like even they talk about with streaming, it's like it's not about you. I'm super into VTubers, but I don't want to get into that too much.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 18:04

But anyway, it's not about like, 'I'm bad at streaming; I don't know how to do it'. Well that's because you haven't started you got to keep doing it and they will get better at it. And I think some of the reasons why I've been taking so many hiatuses is because I've been trying to find, again, like the how do you balance the work and leisure? And I'm trying to think of ways where like, OK, maybe I'm working on one episode, but that still means I can still talk to my friends about some really fun stuff. Like, I think we have an episode that's about the 10th anniversary that's in the in the in the back-burner. I have an episode recorded, um, with a VTuber, actually, an independent VTuber. And it's like, I want to remind myself why I loved doing this so much, but also want to like keep moving the bar like raising the bar. Like, if I've been doing this for 10 years, there should be 10 years of expectation with every episode that people listen to. And when I hear from people like professionals saying, 'Oh my God, this was so... this is so professionally produced'. Like, those were the times I pat myself on the back. And it took me years to get to the point where I was comfortable with doing that, because of my own insecurity. I would always doubt myself or like, 'Oh, I'm in this private university, I don't deserve to be here'. But with my podcast, it's one of the things like 'Oh, no, I'm really fuckin' good at doing this'. And that might sound a little arrogant. But I mean, I guess the bigger point is: I know I'm going to doing this. I do love doing this. Let's see if we can find a way so that we can keep doing this where it's still fun, but it's still like we're starting to raise the quality, raise the bar, with every every subsequent episode.

**Martin Feld** 19:27

I have like five questions that I want to ask you all at once, but I have to choose, because you've said so much that's really, really intriguing. But I'll pick on that word 'professional' that you just said then because that's super-interesting. You said you've been doing this for 10 years, you've gotten very good at it. And I don't think that's arrogant to say, that comes with practice. You've



classed other people as professional, saying that your work sounded professional. So how do you class yourself, if you don't mind my asking? If you don't call yourself professional, what do you think that word means and how do you consider your own work?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 19:59

That's a really good question. I think because I don't, like I don't monetise the show or I don't have sponsors, I think that's one of the things that's keeping me from saying: 'I'm a professional podcaster'. But I don't want to even say like, I'm a hobbyist anymore because this is I've far beyond the hobbyist like I've actually been paid, like, uh, I can say, I edited the second season of *Bookish* with Sonya Walger. It was, um like a producer, like got in touch with me. And they said, 'Hey, can you actually help us edit the second season?' And so I've, I've done a podcast professionally, or at least I edited a podcast with like, big-time guests. Like if you looked up the listing of the celebrities that were on that show, uh, but I mean, also Sonya Walger's a celebrity but also but like, that is a proof of, like (endemic is a long word).

**Arlill Rodriguez** 20:44

That is proof of my, of the professionalism that I tried to in terms of my quality, maybe not in terms of, I guess, right now, it's like, I guess again, I'm not making money from it right now, I am actually losing money. Everything I invest into it, like this microphone is an expense, and also like getting a new computer and hosting things. Right now I'm using up a lot of change to create clips that I want to post on the Instagram and TikTok, It's, it's, I'm losing money on this, and then it's just the, that's just the bare-bones reality of it, which is why I think I do wrestle with the idea of like, even though the work is professional, I'm still unsure if... when I'll feel more comfortable. Like, will it... when that happens, and I actually am able to fund my operation. And then I can... it's definitely something I've been thinking about for a long time, like wrestling with the idea of it. Because I definitely don't think I'm an amateur, especially with 10 years of experience, I wouldn't call myself an amateur. And there's been a few times I've actually tried to like apply to other podcasts, like professional ones. But then it's also like the industry at the time of this recording is kind of exploitive. There's been many stories about some professional creators that weren't, that were like underpaid for some of the some of the like, I'm trying to think off the top of my head. Like, *The Daily* is the biggest example I can think of, or like the host of *The Daily* was sexually harassing some employees at the company. And it's like, I do want to work in this industry, but not if it's at the expense of my own livelihood, or like saying it might be a bit flippant, but just like I don't want to do it at the expense of my mental health. I guess that's the better way to put it.

**Martin Feld** 22:17

I think you've said very fairly that you're not an amateur; you've been practising for ages, and the fact that you didn't put your earlier podcast material directly onto iTunes (or now Apple Podcasts) is interesting. What can you tell me about the audience that you did or have accumulated over

time and how you've interacted with them, and why you kind of made that decision to just go for direct with Web, through your website?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 22:42

Mm-hmmm... so originally, it's actually kind of funny because I actually do have some of those early podcasts, I'm always wrestling if I should just pull them because like they are awkward, and they're not edited. I just... someone will really wanted me to post them and I should have probably known better. I probably will just disappear or I don't know where they went... But anyway, so originally the podcast, even the name, it was just like, I just recorded something like with the [unintelligible muffling on recording],, and one that I mentioned earlier, because it had a feature where you could record your voice. And I just decided I'll just record myself talking about things. And I think the only episode of that that made it to the orig-... to the current run of *Random Chatterings*, as I think of it now, is the very first episode. And it's... a part of me is like, 'I kind of wish I could pull that episode', 'cause it is weird—because it's unfiltered. It is that unfiltered show and the one that I felt uncomfortable... with every subsequent episode, every subsequent episode has been edited to Hell and back but that's the one episode that is unfiltered teenage me at his most raw. And I... originally the audience was just like some friends of mine who says like, they really want to hear me talk about shit. Okay, well, don't share it with them. Like through like, it's not Amazon... AIM? Do you know what this is?

**Martin Feld** 22:47

AIM? Which one's that?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 23:22

Instant Messenger? Oh! AOL Instant Messenger!

**Martin Feld** 23:58

Oh, AOL. OK, yes, I'm with you.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 24:00

So it was like some, I think, some old um, instant messaging program. And so then some people would just hear it, and it's like, 'Oh my God! I can't wait for your next recording!' And so then I just started getting in the habit of doing more. But then in 2012, which is, I think we're two months away from the 10th anniversary of the podcast. That's the first time I actually decided that I'm actually gonna try to upload these and see what reaction I get. And I think what you were talking earlier about the audience, it's something I've curated by myself. It's something that I've kind of thought about with every episode. I actually don't know what my audience is like. I get, I get some idea like in terms of statistics and certain demographics, but I rarely get comments on episodes so I don't get feedback. I get feedback from my friends, which I value very much, but I don't get feedback from like strangers. There might be some nice reviews on the i-... on the Apple

Podcasts. Other people, like what did someone think about this particular episode? It's harder for me to gauge like, what did I do wrong? Or was I too excited during this episode, or did I talk too much about game mechanics in this podcast?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 25:01

So, I think I've kind of just curated my own audience in terms of my own interests or what things I felt like stuff that people would be interested in listening to. But now in terms of like, my, my, my gender identity, now, it's even more curated, like I want my show to be a leftist, progressive podcast. And if there's people that don't fall into there, or if they're people that like support the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, I don't want them to listen to my show. And I've thought about whether I want to actually record an episode with that opening. But I think once you hear me rant about leftist things, I think they'll get the impression and they'll probably stop listening. But so again, it's like, that's kind of a decision I've made on my own about: who do I actually want to listen to the show? And what's the show that not only do I want to listen to but do I want others to listen to? So it's, it's interesting, because even though we have been doing this for a long time, the lack of feedback has been tricky... has been a tricky thing to work through. And it's, it's something that I... I do think about when I'm in the middle of editing, but it's something that I do acknowledge that I kind of wish I had some feedback on like, 'Oh, maybe this music', or you know, like, maybe, 'The background music was too loud'. I kind of have to make those decisions myself. So, that's kind of the tricky thing of doing a self-produced podcast, is basically curating like, not just for what I want to listen to, but what would others want to listen to?

**Martin Feld** 26:21

When you think about your content, what is some of the favourite stuff that you've produced? Or how would you define the work that you put out?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 26:29

Oh, that's a big, big question. So there's one episode which in hindsight, it's very difficult to listen to. It was one of the first podcasts I produced. It's called 'Undertale'. It's about the indie game from 2015. But because there was a rule, or there was like, some kind of like, nice... how to explain this? There was, like the game developer didn't want people to like, know what was going... like, what they were going to get into once they started playing it. So I wanted to take that into account when I recorded the podcast. But at the same time, I also didn't realise or I guess, I hadn't put to words like the mental health challenges that I had been struggling with. And that was one of the more difficult recordings I've ever done, because even though it was months after, like, I think, something that happened in April of 2016, which I did talk about on the podcast, recording me in October, and trying to get myself back into the mindset was incredibly difficult. And there's not often that I do leave pauses, but there's a lot of pauses I leave in for dramatic effect. But also because it feels more authentic.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 27:33

That is something I do think about, is: when is that OK to do, like to have those gaps, where you still feel like you can edit the show, so it's, so it's listenable, but also like, you can be honest about who you are as a person. And I think that was a very big episode in terms of my development, just not even I guess, as a storyteller, because it is something that I, I, it was a very difficult thing to recall. And now I think to this day, it is the most downloaded podcast we've ever rec-... we've ever produced. And I want to record a retrospective, because it is a really important milestone. But when I remember, 'Oh, that was in 2016!', that was one of the most tumultuous political years in the in the US, this is going to be a lot more difficult than I expected. And also going back and listening to that episode, the... the original episode is like, this is heavy, this is really heavy. How do I talk about this? Like, how do I do a retrospective about something that I do care about, but also puts me back in that mindset of, of where I was at in April 2016? It's definitely even though it's a short episode, 30 minutes, half of the episode is about me talking about, like the silver lining in terms of like, what I was at, mentally at the time, and like how this video game pulled me out of it. Didn't do it completely, and I think I still need to look for more resources to help me out but it was a big starting point for that.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 28:54

And then it's like, I'm wondering, like, how many people listened to that episode and maybe had their own...? Again, I don't know, because no one has left comments on the episode. But it's still, it's still to this day, the most downloaded one, so I do wonder how much of an effect it did have on other people. And I kind of wish in hindsight that maybe I left some resources, like if you needed help, this and that, but again, you won't know this when when you're producing it the first time. And it's also like, I think that retrospective is shelved at the moment because there's other stuff I want to cover. But there's a lot of meat in, in, in, that t-bone steak. I can think of... the crab and the crab legs! I'm trying to come up with a metaphor! There's a lot there! And I feel like it would be interesting for me to produce, like an hour, 90-minute podcast about a 30-minute podcast. It's like, how does that work? And how do we keep people?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 29:41

Again, like, how do we like, keep people interested in this and, yeah... no, it was like a milestone and there's been a couple of other episodes. I'll mention them super-quickly. This is the actual name of the episode... um, I was in my experimental phase! Um, 'Let's Talk About... Virginity'. I talked about that on the podcast! That's an interesting one! Um, wish we had time to talk about that one... Uh, 'Let's Talk About... Procrastination'! That was one that meant a lot to me, even though it's a 12-minute episode, because procrastination (to this day) is still something I wrestle with. And procrastination almost like, got me to flunk out of college on two different occasions. So going back again to that mindset of like, where I was, in terms of how did I help myself, and I think, like, not feeling like I'm a motivational speaker, like this is not meant to be like I'm trying to this is how everyone should deal with this. And again, if I knew more about asexuality in the

virginity episode, I would have brought it up for sure. But in the procrastination one, it's like the lesson I had to learn. And I think when the editing process was like, I, I want to be, I want to share what works for me, but I acknowledge that this might not work for everybody. So there's a lot of other episodes I could mention, but those are definitely the top three. One because, well, just because like I was so experimental in those days, when it's like, 'I'll just do a podcast about anything'. So I was like, I want to talk about my virginity. It's, it's a very raw topic for many people—still to this day! But I felt like it's time for me to talk about this, because it's still, it was something I was wrestling with, even when I recorded that episode. So yeah, uh, I guess my top three: 'Undertale', 'Let's Talk About... Virginity' and 'Let's Talk About... Procrastination'.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 31:17

No, thank you for sharing so much detail there, because I know a lot of it is personal. And this kind of brings the question of what podcasting is often for, for different people, that's what you've sparked in my mind here. There's the archive aspect, there's the personal aspect that you're putting in, there's entertainment linked to games. What would you say that you get out of producing and listening to podcasts? And how do you think about the material that you've amassed?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 31:45

That's a really good question. One thing I've kind of thought about in terms of my, my current media diet in terms of the shows I do like to listen to is like, what's gonna, what's something that I don't know that much about, but I would like to inform myself? One of my favourite podcasts, and if they're listening, I don't know if they are, but if they are, Bob Mackey and Henry Gilbert from *Talking Simpsons*, you guys are my heroes! You guys are my, my heroes. I've been, I am listening to their podcasts, I think almost... so it's only 2015, so it's been like seven years, and I've been supporting them financially on Patreon. I think they've nailed the concept of what a analytical podcast is. Again, like, like introducing the history in the beginning. So for an example from a *Talking Simpsons* episode, so it's about covering an episode of *The Simpsons*, but also setting up the context of when this episode released in terms of historically like what was going on historically in the world. And then they also talk about the writers, the directors, they talk about the animation, they also talk about the jokes that they think work and those that don't. It's so well-produced. That is like, I want to make a podcast as good as them. I think that is the... when I'm saying I'm raising the bar, it's because I'm chasing after Bob and Henry, I want to produce a podcast as good as what they are producing.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 32:52

And that's also kind of come into mind in terms of the rest of the podcasts I listen to, it's like, I want to learn more about the world around me, I feel like a kind of, not like I'm, I'm in a bubble—some might argue that, but in terms of like a leftist bubble or progressive bubble, but like, it's

honestly like, especially when I decided that I, uh, so, that I'm trans... I haven't actually, like, transitioned yet, but I fall into the gender-queer, uh, category...

**Arlill Rodriguez** 33:20

And I'm non-binary, I'm sort of thinking about, like, what that really meant, or like this, I don't know that much about trans people. And I think only like four years ago, I actually worked with trans people, for the first time ever met a trans person in person. And that made me realise, I don't know anything about this community, I need to learn more. And then at the same time, it was also like, while I was listening to these podcasts, oh, I'll definitely recommend one: *Gender Reveal*. It's a great podcast hosted by Tuck Woodstock, where they interview a trans person, like a very, like a very influential person, or it's like someone who's like in different industries, and getting a perspective, I think for the first time I heard an episode with the latine trans person, it's like, I didn't know—it's gonna sound ignorant when they say it out loud—but I didn't know that there would be or like, again, and it's like, because the Spanish language is already like a binary, the binary is developed. It's like embedded in the language, so I didn't know that could be an in-between and again, and when I when it came out to my mom, I had the same difficulties like well, how do I express this to her? And it's one of those things where, by listening to so many podcasts about the trans experience.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 33:21

I started reconsidering like myself, and then it's like, I think I was making, would make fun of myself and say, 'I'm just a boring cis white...;', no I'm not white, I'm latine, but like, I would always joke to myself that I'm a boring cis dude. And then I'd think about like, actually, maybe I'm not! Maybe there's more to me than than meets the eye. And I have podcasts to think about that. Even in *Talking Simpsons* when they started becoming more leftist or their their their perspective on leftist ideas were becoming more prominent on the show, that's when I started reconsidering my own like place and like what do I think politically or like what actually matters? Or I think there's some reason, and I don't say this out of malice, some of the 2016 stuff that I recorded, I was definitely centrist at the time, like, I would still be, like, outraged at Trump, but I would also still, 'Well... you know that you know...?', and I'm not 100 per cent proud of those episodes, but it's more of because like, I've grown so much, not just in terms of my producing the podcast, but also how much I've learned as a person, or I've tried to learn as a person. And it's still something that I'm still learning even to this day, there's still so much I don't know about many things. And it's still something that I can thank podcasts for, for introducing me to different spectrums of thought that I wouldn't have had access to. And at the same time, it's so much more consumable, like, there's definitely great books about trans people out there, but if you just listen to a podcast, it's you can kind of, in my opinion, you can consume the information more easily. But again, that's, that's my opinion. That's how it works for me, it's different for everybody, so but... yeah.

**Martin Feld** 33:21

Mm-hmmm...

**Martin Feld** 35:58

I really appreciate the level of personal detail that you're giving here, because there may be someone who's listening who's had their own kind of questions or has been unsure about their identity or a transition in their life, whether it's related to gender or not, so it's potentially very powerful for people. You mentioned that you had that transition in your political thought from being centrist to in a different position now. When you think about, um, trans status or transitioning, how's that influenced your own podcasting and consumption in a way? And how do you feel that you've changed in how you produce and share thoughts with people?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 36:34

I think one thing I've kind of kept in mind, and I think this kind of goes back into this whole thing about audience curation. It's like, 'Oh, some of the stuff that I've talked about earlier episodes is kind of upsetting, or it's very dark'. And you might not know that if you just click on the podcast, and I think the very first time I had a content warning was for the best of 2018 episode, which one of the books I covered was—I don't remember what it was called—but I think it's the one that was written by Patton Oswalt's unfortunately deceased wife, I think about the East Area Rapist, I think those, the golden, the Golden State killer. And I realised that the material that we were covering... because that's just that's just what the book is about, it was about those horrible murders, I realised that it wouldn't be right for me to just have to spring that onto someone. And I started thinking about more people that were also being like, like in terms of like, again, curation, it's like, one point, I thought something that like someone produced or something that like someone posted on YouTube, I didn't give much thought to, it's like, 'Oh, that's the funniest thing ever!' And then someone comments like, 'Actually, that's kind of problematic', or 'That's really, that's actually kind of hurtful'. And that's the stuff I've kind of been thinking about too.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 37:39

It's like, if someone's listening to my podcast, I want to make sure that they're having... that they're prepared to listen to something that might be potentially heavy to listen to. And a part of that is that though I'm happier in my life than I was before, there's still stuff that happens all the time. I mentioned the *Roe v. Wade* stuff, I'm mentioning... there's also the anti-trans bills that are being passed in the US and also the horrible amounts of anti-trans candidates in the US right now. It's just, it's... there's a lot of uncertainty and a lot of like malaise that comes to existence, or just like me existing as a person and just imagining that, like, I can't even like, as much as I would like to dress in a skirt, or like put on make-up, some people would be so violently opposed to that, like, literally, they would probably try to threaten my life. And it's like, this is the reality that we're currently in right now. And everything feels so hopeless. And so I think that's something that I, I want to acknowledge that that is what is going on right now, but there is still hope.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 38:32

And at the same time, I also know that I interact with... I follow a lot of trans people on Twitter, and even sometimes they're like, 'Oh, I don't know, I can't take much more of this', or it's just like, 'I need to, I need to get away from Twitter, this is too much for me!'. And uh, this is something we thankfully have not brought up. I didn't want to bring this up, really, because I hate social media. I hate that I have to interact with social media. I hate that I, like when I have to promote my episodes that I have to go on Twitter or Instagram. Like I have more fun with my personal Instagram, because I can't just post about some recent VTuber merchandise that I purchased. But then it's like I'm promoting myself, also with those clips that I mentioned earlier. It's like, 'Oh, there's so much more work to this. It's like, I have to think of the hashtags!' And I want to get to that too much, but anyway!

**Arlill Rodriguez** 39:13

So thinking about like, the scope of social media and how like it has done like a lot of... it has affected people in some ways positively that just maybe people they wouldn't have met otherwise, because of social media, but then it's like, but my but... some people's, I think that people have become more negative on social media or just in general, that there's some negativity, in terms of... any negativity seems to be things that get more attention. And it's stuff that I'm just, I'm just just not I just can't, it's not healthy for me to absorb that all the time. So, again, terms of in terms of the, the people that I interact with on social media, and, and again, the idea that like, we're not perfect people, and this was something that took me a very long time to learn about and to, like, get used to, it's like, I'm not perfect, I'll make mistakes. It's OK to make mistakes. And I wanted to keep that in mind even when I making my show, like if I make a mistake, or if I, if I didn't source something, or someone says, 'Oh, that was kind of, I don't like how that came off', or you know, it's like, I need to take responsibility and make me pull the content down or like maybe like re-upload the episode, you know, again, take accountability for what I'm doing, and not double down.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 40:19

If someone says, 'Your tweet sucked', and I was like, 'I'm gonna keep it up anyway!' It's like, No, I, I don't want to, I don't want to, I don't want to make the Internet a more difficult place for other people to exist in. I want people to feel comfortable, I want people to feel safe. Because then again, going back to the most recent episode that we produced, the *Animal Crossing* episode, where I did come out publicly—part of the episode was about how the game that even though many people had stopped playing it, myself included, it was important, like, utterly important, when it came out, just around the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020, like it couldn't have released at a better time, it kept people connected. And even though again, people aren't playing it as much anymore, there's still people that do, and it means so much to them. So I think, again, when I, when I edited that episode, I wanted to give someone a little bit of hope. And it's like this is, could be our potential reality, where we can actually be whoever we want to be... be



comfortable with who we are. And we can interact, or we can exist amongst other people, that we don't feel like we're being judged, and we don't feel like we're being persecuted.

**Martin Feld** 41:22

Now, I've listened to that episode, and I thought it was...

**Arlill Rodriguez** 41:24

Oh thank you!

**Martin Feld** 41:25

... uh, really, really interesting, the point that you were making. It was really about character customisation, wasn't it?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 41:31

That's right!

**Martin Feld** 41:31

I think that's the point you were making.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 41:32

That's right!

**Martin Feld** 41:33

So that gave you a kind of sense of encouragement?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 41:37

It did! It was one thing that... where I kind of felt more comfortable, because then I was like, my character is gonna, is being the self that I want to be. And my, when I talk to some of my queer friends about like, what kind of stuff do I want to wear or like what kind of stuff would I look good in? And it's like, 'You just get a Pinterest, just save a bunch of stuff and see what works!' And I think, it also with that episode, like how a video game company, well it is a large video game company, and they're not without their faults—the Japanese-American company, Nintendo—I think it is, it made so... it meant so much to people that they had an option where, again, it's like, yes, you start with the male-female binary, but then in terms of your like, tops, bottoms, and all that stuff, it's like, customisable, like you can do whatever you want with it, you can look however you want. The game's not going to say, 'Oh, no, you can't, because you're you're the male avatar, you can't wear this!' So, it's like that was so freeing, and it ended up being freeing in, for my personal life as well, which I didn't expect when I recorded the episode, I thought it was just (or when I was producing it) that was actually that was that was actually despite its length was actually in the works for a year...

**Martin Feld** 42:40

Wow.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 42:41

...which is incredible to admit, but it's one of those things! It's like, I want to make sure I get this right, and I want to make sure that I'm getting the right message across. And my brother, who, he actually edited my script (in like, before we posted because I wanted to make sure am I saying the right thing right now about what I want to want to talk about?). And when he when they went to the final edit, and he's like, 'Oh, this is good', then then I felt more comfortable releasing the episode.

**Martin Feld** 43:02

Thank you for sharing that, because I'm not sure that many people would really consider the fact that someone would spend a year refining a script to get the message right, so that's really fascinating. And it links back to what we were talking before about that element of work...

**Arlill Rodriguez** 43:15

Oh yeah!

**Martin Feld** 43:16

...alongside the enjoyment of what you're producing and consuming. I want to touch on that social media question as well, because you said *Animal Crossing* essentially brought people together or people were talking about it, you kind of have this thing about having to do social media, but enjoying other aspects on it. I discovered you and your content through Twitter, which of course is a version of social media and seeing you a#pos a follower (at least at some time) of the *Naked Tech Podcast*, which is co-hosted and produced in Australia. When you think about that kind of discovery element and being connected to different tech and media podcasts, how do you kind of see yourself, I suppose, fitting into that international web of people? And what have you discovered from shows like *Naked Tech Podcast* or even other tech- or media-related programs that you've followed?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 44:07

I think one thing that I've learned is that there's just so much different perspectives out there, in there's many different ways that people not only approach tech, or the tech industry or social media in general, there's just so many different ways that people interpret it. And also, I met some of my closest friends on social media, so I do acknowledge how important it is. And it is again, it's like able to open yourself up to different perspectives that you wouldn't have listened to otherwise or wouldn't have been aware of otherwise. So despite what I said earlier about hating it, I definitely can acknowledge the positives about it and in terms of how being able to connect with so many other people or like having those people want to be like, 'Hey you do you want to be on

my show?' or or vice versa and getting to listen to their perspectives about life and where they're coming from means so much to me and I think one of my best friends (or one of my best podcast friends), we met through social media just because he had 'random' in the name of his podcast, and then we just decided to just do a crossover together. And then now we're like, seven years in, six years in! And we're like, we couldn't be closer. So, yeah...

**Martin Feld** 45:11

That's fantastic. Now, is there anything about your general experience in the medium of podcasting or interaction with technology, anything personally, that you'd like to address or share with listeners that I haven't asked you about?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 45:24

I guess, maybe like, swearing can be a good thing.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 45:28

Know your audience and if there's kids listening, make sure they're not in the room. And I actually yeah, I can touch on this really quickly. I think when I was in high school, I wasn't, I was actually more timid about swearing, and now it's something I do almost every day, sometimes almost to a detriment, not to the show, but like, in like, like, my real life, like, so that's one thing I've been trying to tone down—not even on my show, but also in my real life. But it is something that I, I love that in podcast, there isn't an FCC, or some similar to an FCC, you can pretty much produce wherever you want. That also has, there's the opposite effect of that for like, you know, I don't get into too much. But yeah, like you can produce what you want to produce, you want to put your stamp out there. And this is what you want the world to know about, and this is what you want to share to the world. And, and I also feel like with the swearing, it actually, it has a flow to it! Like I do think in like to myself, 'Oh, maybe this point that I made wouldn't have made wouldn't have been made as well if I didn't put the swear here!' So I actually do think about that, because that's just that my brain is like podcast brain, podcasting brain all the time and said, 'Ooh, this could sound good', or 'Oh, maybe this we can redo that take and maybe maybe that's too strong!' It's again, that's just my brain. That's how my brain is!

**Martin Feld** 45:28

Mm-hmmm!

**Martin Feld** 46:42

So the message is swearing can be useful when placed for emphasis or in the right area?

**Arlill Rodriguez** 46:48

Yes, but don't overdo it and know where... and know and know your limits.

**Martin Feld** 46:53

Perfect. Well, I think this has been a really fun conversation and I really appreciate all that you've given and all that you've shared with people. Thank you so much for joining *Really Specific Stories*, Arlill; it's been great to have you on.

**Arlill Rodriguez** 47:06

Thank you so much, Martin. It's been a... it's been my pleasure as well.