



Jenifer Daniels: "Hustle"

Season 4: Episode 2

Intro:

Welcome to Stayin' Alive in Technology, a series of conversations with Silicon Valley veterans touching on war stories from the past and practical advice for today. And now, here's your host, Melinda Byerley, founding partner of Fiddlehead.

[Melinda Byerley:](#)

Welcome back to Stayin' Alive in Tech. Here we are on episode two of the season and I'm—I would say excited, but I think it's going to be more intense than that, to introduce Jenifer Daniels to you. Jenifer Daniels designs, builds, and invests in innovation. She is a serial entrepreneur and she founded Colorstock, the first diverse stock photo marketplace, and she founded Detroit Human Capital, an investment vehicle for Detroit's people, places, and purpose. Jenifer advises ThePLUG: smart reporting on the black innovation economy, and manages an angel investment portfolio of underrepresented startup founders.

[Melinda Byerley:](#)

She had delivered talks at TEDx Charlotte, CUNY, the IABC World Conference, Charlotte Startup Weekend and Net Impact. Jenifer's words and her photos have been featured in the New York Times, Mashable, HuffPost Live, BBC Essence, Sirius XM, Belt Magazine Publishing, and Detroit Stock City. Jenifer believes in the collective impact of communities as a New Leaders Council fellow alum, and Impact100 Metro Detroit giving circle member.

[Melinda Byerley:](#)

I invited Jenifer Daniels onto this podcast because I wanted to meet her. I have been following her on Twitter for quite some time, and she has a voice that inspires me, that lifts me up, that enrages me as an educator. She educates me about the truth of the way things are done in America that I feel was hidden from me. She's a remarkable Twitter follow. You should follow her, but her story about Colorstock is the one I brought her here to talk about because she recognized that we didn't have representation in the stock photos that we use on the internet and other places of people of color, and she set out to fix it.

[Melinda Byerley:](#)



But Colorstock doesn't exist anymore. It wasn't sold. She didn't get a big payout. And in fact, what happened to her is something that happens to people all the time—especially who are marginalized—and it's because when they refuse to play ball the way that the world wants them to, they're essentially ground down. And I'm giving away the story, because I think that Jenifer is going to tell it in a lot better way than I could, but it's a remarkable story. She is a remarkable person, a fast thinker, quick talker, light years ahead of the rest of us in terms of where the future is going. And I think she's going to blow you away.

Melinda Byerley:

There's a reason I picked Pink's song "Hustle" for her episode theme. Its energy, to me, describes her sheer perseverance, and her commitment to her goal. Her unwillingness to sort of be rolled over by the machine of media and publishing is something that I deeply admire. And as a result, I think you will enjoy this episode as much as I do.

Melinda Byerley:

Jenifer, welcome to the podcast.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, thank you for having me.

Melinda Byerley:

So Jenifer, I'd like you to tell our audience a little bit about where you grew up and what you wanted to be when you were a little kid.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, wow. So I am born, raised, and educated in Detroit. And when I was younger, I wanted to be an archeologist. I had no idea how to do it. (Laughs) What do you go to school for, to be an archeologist? I didn't know. But it just sounded cool. I think it was something that I saw watching PBS. And I just knew that if that was a dream that I had, that I could achieve it, even if I didn't know how I was going to get there.

Melinda Byerley:

I always like to ask people what stopped them. Or does archeology have any role in your life now?



Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, the interesting part is that it does. It's so funny because now I can't not watch PBS. Everything is so interesting to me. But I'll tell you what stopped me, actually, was access. So clearly I'm not going to throw a rock and hit an archeologist in Detroit.

Melinda Byerley:

I don't know, maybe there are, like dinosaur pools outside of Detroit. You never know.

Jenifer Daniels:

I would not be surprised.

Melinda Byerley:

The glaciers went through there, right?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. Well, yeah, that's how we got the Great Lakes. But yeah, I think it was opportunity. Just at the time that I grew up, I grew up in the '80s. And so obviously, most major and urban cities were dealing with the crack epidemic and just things of that sort. And I just didn't have an opportunity to know how you become an archeologist. So I didn't know that you had to double down on science and double down on math. So that's really all it was. It was just the lack of representation. But it has not changed my thirst or desire or hunger to learn about the world and to learn and to learn about the past. And if anything, I think I'm immersed more now than I was when I was younger. So, I consider myself a couch archeologist.

Melinda Byerley:

That's amazing. And that's what this podcast is all about really, is trying to understand the past and how it affects where we're going in the future.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah.

Melinda Byerley:



So this is great. So when did you first ... So, we're about the same age, and I grew up in the Midwest too, in the '80s. Obviously, very different experience. But we're of the same time, at least.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

When did you first become aware of technology? Did you have a computer? Another way to think about this too is, if you remember the first time you put your hands on a computer.

Jenifer Daniels:

Absolutely, I do. My mother is also a hidden figure. She was a part of the wave of women in the '70s that learned COBOL.

Melinda Byerley:

Oh, wow.

Jenifer Daniels:

So she went to, yeah. So she went to work for EDS, or actually, it wasn't even EDS at the time, I think it might have been GM. But eventually, around the '80s, EDS and GM had a lot of contract merging. And so she played in both of those spaces for a very long time. So, she was a part of a group of women who literally answered an ad in a newspaper, looking for people to be programmers. And I don't even know if she knew what that meant. But she realized that college was not for her at that time. And so she had to work, obviously, she had to eat and pay her bills. 19 years old, and she answered an ad and became a programmer, and she knew COBOL and all of that stuff.

Jenifer Daniels:

And this was when computers were an entire room. The entire storage room was the computer bank. And I remember she brought back a poster that she made at work, that she'd coded using the COBOL, and the big dot matrix printer with the green and the white striped paper that you had to perforate on the edge. Oh my God, I love that stuff. And she typed out young, gifted, and black for me. And all the letters, every letter contained the actual letter, the words. So the Y in young was all Ys and so on and so forth. And I just



thought that was the neatest thing ever. So she taped it on my wall. And that was my introduction to computers and technology. And then also—

Melinda Byerley:

Wow.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. So also during the '80s, that's when Take Your Daughter to Work Day started. So that was one of the first times that I spent all day at work with my mom. We would go in there on the weekend and run in, because she left something or whatever. But I spent the whole day at work. And it was so interesting, because it was really stuffy then. She worked at a time when women had to wear—

Melinda Byerley:

She had to wear pantyhose.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yep, pantyhose. Blue suit, gray suit, black suit, skirts. And I was like, "Gosh, I don't want to work there. This is boring. Nothing fun happening in here." I didn't know any better. But yeah, so it's I've always been around technology. When she was able to first bring a laptop home, that was exciting to me. We had a laptop in her house and this was, now this was maybe early '90s. So I've always been around technology, and I've always had a strong, female archetype around what it looks like to be someone in technology. So that was helpful. At least it definitely gave me the thought that I could do this at some point in time. I just didn't want to do what she was doing.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. I think we rebel. My mom was a nurse, and I was definitely ... I think she wanted me to be a doctor. And I was like, "Uh, after hearing you complain about it all day, why would I want to do that?" (Laughs)

Jenifer Daniels:

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. I was like, "No, it's boring up in the there." I was like, "Nobody talks to anybody. You're all in cubicles. You have to wear suit every day. This sucks."



Melinda Byerley:

Wearing a suit all day does suck. I think your childhood self was very wise.

Jenifer Daniels:

(Laughs) Absolutely.

Melinda Byerley:

So you eventually majored in sports and entertainment and event management—

Jenifer Daniels:

I did.

Melinda Byerley:

So I'd be curious to hear how you picked that major.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, okay. So I am an NBA head. I love everything about the National Basketball Association. And that was more so my dad's influence, where at first it was just like, "Hey, what are you watching on television?" And then it was the understanding of the game. And then it was understanding that there was economics behind sports. So that's why I wanted to study it when I went to school. I had this grandiose dream that I was going to become the Commissioner of the NBA. And I said, "So well, in order for that to happen, I need to go to school for sports management." So that's how I ended up on that path.

Melinda Byerley:

You're still an NBA head, is you said?

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh my gosh, absolutely. Oh my God. I've been like, I am the biggest Pistons fan. I don't care if we're winning or losing. I have a personalized Pistons jersey that says, "Yo Mama" on the back. Because when I go to the game, you're going to get cussed out, I'm going to yell, I'm going to lose my voice. I'm going to tell my own team how trash they are, but it's because I love them and I want to see them do better. (Laughs)



Melinda Byerley:

That is fandom. That's the real deal.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

I'm a Green Bay Packers fan. So I know about holding through ups and downs, man.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. You can't just jump on when it's good. We know pain and suffering.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, you got to hold your team down forever. I will hold all Detroit sports teams now and forever. This has been the losingest period in Detroit sports history. But it doesn't matter because I have nostalgia. I have the Red Wings, winning, I have the Tigers winning in '84. I got the two back-to-back Pistons wins. I have the one or two times the Lions went to the playoffs. (Laughs) I have that and I'll take that with me. Because I have to.

Melinda Byerley:

How did studying sports event marketing management, how did it shape the way you think about the world and what you do now? And we're going to get into what you do now. I have to say I was a theater major, and there were things I learned in theater school that I still carry with me.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah. So some of the biggest things that I think I carry with me from that degree program really became life lessons. And the biggest one is the reminder that I belong anywhere I show up. Because especially one, as a woman, but then two, as a black woman, a lot of times you enter the space and you're the only person in that space. And it was clearly no different getting a sports management degree. I went to class and it was two



ladies. Two 17, 18-year-old ladies that signed up for this degree program, and so I'm used to being the other in the space. But it also helped me deal with imposter syndrome, because I knew that I knew my stuff. And I knew that other people could tell that I knew my stuff. And so it's the same philosophy that I take into any room that I walk in today. I'm supposed to be there because I am there.

Melinda Byerley:

I'm used to this. It doesn't affect me. Whether I'm in the room or not.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

Oh, sorry whether people like me are in the room or not. I have worth or value.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct, correct.

Melinda Byerley:

How did you get your first job after college?

Jenifer Daniels:

Actually, my first job was in college. Because again, just to being a go-getter, and feeling like I belong there. The first job I actually had was in sports and it was while I was in college. I went to school in Providence, Rhode Island, and the local hockey team was the minor league hockey team for the Boston Bruins. It was the P-Bruins. And the P-Bruins marketing director came to class one day and spoke. And I had wore my suit, and I remember I said I didn't like to see my mother wear her suit.

Melinda Byerley:

"Here I am."

Jenifer Daniels:



But I wore my suit because I knew that it meant business. So I knew, "Hey, if I wear a suit, that means business." So I wore my suit to his presentation, so I'm already looking like an eyeball because I'm the only one that's dressed up. And I have my resume printed out. And—

Melinda Byerley:

Wow.

Jenifer Daniels:

When he was done and he was talking to everybody and he's like, "So hey, when you graduate," I was like, 'pow-pow' and pulled out that resume.

Melinda Byerley:

"Why wait until I graduate. How about now?"

Jenifer Daniels:

I was like, "Dude, I'm ready." Especially because the school I went to, I went to Johnson & Wales, our curriculum is flipped. So we were taking majors courses the minute we walked into the classroom. So I was like, No, "I'm ready for this. I've taken Intro. I've taken Food and Beverage Cost Control. I've taken Marketing, I could do this." So I gave him my resume and he was like, "You're hired." Just simply off of the strength that I was prepared for that moment.

Melinda Byerley:

Nice.

Jenifer Daniels:

So that was my first job. So I was doing marketing coordination, 19, 20-years-old for the P-Bruins. And then after that, that set me up for the next job, which was marketing for the Family Circle Cup. It's an all-women's tennis tournament that takes place in South Carolina at that time; it was in Hilton Head, and then it moved to Charleston, but that was my senior year of school. So I already had professional experiences. So by the time I got out of college, I had already, I was working on a year and a half of entry level work experience. So I didn't have to go get an entry-level job when I left college because I'd already done that work. So when I was done with college, I returned back to, I returned to Michigan, and then



started working on the event side for a chamber of commerce in the western part of the state. In Kalamazoo, actually.

Melinda Byerley:

At Kalamazoo. I have—

Jenifer Daniels:

Kalamazoo.

Melinda Byerley:

I've actually been there and I can spell it. From the song.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

I'm sure everybody sings it to you too, lots of snow in the winter.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes, absolutely.

Melinda Byerley:

So let's jump ahead a little bit to Colorstock.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

What was Colorstock and how did you come to the decision that you wanted to make?

Jenifer Daniels:



Yeah. So Colorstock was born from a pain point that I had in communications, in working at marketing for quite a few years at that time. And the interesting thing is that the idea for Colorstock came long before the name, and long before the concept. I want to say in the early 2000s, a lot of my work was extremely focused on visual storytelling. Specifically, in communications and visual storytelling for an urban university in Detroit. And I would get pictures back from our photographers and I'm like, "Who are these kids? They go to Wayne State? That's not what Wayne State looks like. And I don't understand why you keep taking these pictures over and over again."

Jenifer Daniels:

So I started doing work. I started curating image catalogs and visual storytelling before I even had language to articulate what that was. And so when I started doing that work. I just assumed that, hey, if I do it, and then I share with my peers and my colleagues that this is how you curate a diverse imagery, that people would just think that that was the greatest idea, and they would just mimic what it was I was doing. But that didn't happen.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so around 2010, 2011, 2012, that's when we started to have conversations in the tech space around diversity. But it was more focused on hiring, and pipeline, and things of that nature. And as a marketer, as a communications person, it's always my job to show up and then articulate the narrative. Whatever the business ethos is, whatever the ethos is of a brand, it's my job to tell that story—whether in words or in pictures. And I will constantly go back into rooms with leadership to say, "What it is we say we do, or who we are, that's not reflective in these images. That's not reflective in this story. And so we need to do some work to change that."

Jenifer Daniels:

And so when tech was having this awakening, I was certainly sure that their storytelling would be one place that they could tackle this, because that's low hanging fruit. And they just did not. So I started watching Adobe, and Shutterstock, and all of the big boys to say, "Okay, if we're having this reckoning around what diversity looks like, certainly this should up in these images." It's work that I've been doing for the last five, six, seven years, why is it not work that they're doing? And they were not answering that. They did not rise to the challenge to fix that issue. So—

Melinda Byerley:

And to be specific. These are stock photo images, that are—



Jenifer Daniels:

Yes, that's photo images.

Melinda Byerley:

Largely white people and probably largely male, but I don't know. Tell me.

Jenifer Daniels:

Very much so. Yeah. So the images that we were seeing at the time, I refer to them as "male and pale." Male and pale. And then when women were there, the women were extremely stereotypical, like who takes a ... A man can be in a stock photo, and he can have his arms folded, and he's at a meeting, and you're like, "Wow, that guy is in charge." If you put a woman in that same space it's, "Who's this mean, crazy lady in here with her arms folded? Who does she think she is?" And that's just what the imagery produces, right? And so that's just women.

Jenifer Daniels:

So when I started to look at that problem, I would say, "Okay well, if I'm not being represented as a black woman, then I know my Chinese friend Andrew is not being represented. And I know my Latino friend Jackie is not being represented. So what happens to them? I'm feeling left out but, how do they feel?" And so that's when I went back. (Laughs) So remember, I said I never wanted to do anything with technology, even though I showed up to my mom's job and even though I had a computer—

Melinda Byerley:

And a suit by this time.

Jenifer Daniels:

And suit. Right, and a suit. Several. Because I do wear a suit well. But I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is a problem technology can help me fix." So now Jenifer, you need to go back into the crevices of your mind and figure out how you can use technology to help you solve this problem. Put your technology brand together, put your marketing brand together and hack stock photos. Can you do it? Are you up to the challenge? And at first, I said, "No," because I questioned my own ability to execute something that I felt was massive, because it's a bigger leap than ... Anyone can basically set up a web page, right? But I needed to convince



people to trust me enough to utilize their likeness and their imagery to allow other people to tell a story using their likeness and their imagery. And that's—

Melinda Byerley:

I want to drill into this question. Because there's two of them.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

The first part is stepping back for just a moment and underscoring the point, as a fellow marketer. When we're watching commercials or whatever, with people who are not marketers, I always tell them, "If the ad doesn't look like you, you're probably not the target." Because that is a standard in advertising, that whoever you're targeting should be in the image.

Jenifer Daniels:

Mmm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

And it blows my mind—

Jenifer Daniels:

Yep, yep.

Melinda Byerley:

... that companies were selecting imagery with no people of color, a few women in many cases. And I remember too, you'd Google "executive" and all the pictures would be men.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:



White men. As you said, male and pale. And so that blows my mind. And then going into this idea, that you didn't know how to get people to trust you with the image, could you say more about that? Are you referring to the subjects of the picture?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes, absolutely. So to the first part of your thought is, yeah as a marketer, as a communicator, as someone who's done PR, you have your audiences or your stakeholders. Whatever language you use to tell the narrative or to decide who it is you're talking to. But once you laser focus in on who your audience is, every campaign is built around that audience.

Melinda Byerley:

Right.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so that was the thing that I'm like, "Okay, what is it that you all are not seeing? This is prescriptive. We do this every day that we show up and we come to work." So PR and marketing people, I think, we almost did ourselves a disservice for so many years of being so overprescribed in this space and just going through the motions of what it is that we do. I like to say too, when I talk, that we were in the bottle, so we couldn't read the label. So that's the first thing. Now the second part, how do you convince people? So that's the other hardest part. Because again, these are the same audiences that you've been ignoring.

Melinda Byerley:

Right.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so now I had to convince people who had been ignored for years to let me use their likeness and imagery. And—

Melinda Byerley:

So these would be photographers and models of existing photographs—

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.



Melinda Byerley:

... Or convincing people to let you photograph them?

Jenifer Daniels:

Convincing people to let them photograph—

Melinda Byerley:

Models in particular?

Jenifer Daniels:

Models in particular. And that was harder. That was the hardest part of launching Colorstock.

Melinda Byerley:

Give me an example.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, I will absolutely give you one. Okay. So someone that we know that we have in common—a common person that we know that's also based on the West Coast, they're in Oakland—launched a bail fund project a couple of years ago. Where they would take your spare change and turn it into collective dollars to help get people out of jail. There was an image that he purchased from Colorstock, that you could clearly see who the person was in the image. Even though the person had signed off on their photo being taken, you could clearly see who the person was. But that person and a few of their representatives saw that image and associated it with the narrative of that singular person. And they were highly upset. And they were like, "Well, I've never been to jail. So why would you use my picture for—

Melinda Byerley:

You're saying I'm a criminal, you're essentially saying I'm a criminal.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct, correct. And so that's an example. And that's a challenge, a lesson learned in running Colorstock, but that's a really good example. Any brand that buys an image can



associate it with whatever narrative they want to associate it with. And for that person, and then that person's loved ones, if they know who the person is, you have to think about that. There's a fine line that you have to walk with it.

Jenifer Daniels:

The other thing too, about convincing the photographers to get on board, was that again, these were photographers that none of the big guys had ever reached out to because they didn't have that network. So they didn't even know how to find photographers of color, because these photographers of color were not submitting stock photos to the big boys, to Adobe and Shutterstock. So they didn't even know where to find them. So that was another thing for me to convince a photographer. That one, I'm going to pay you for your work—go figure, a big stretch.

Melinda Byerley:

Crazy.

Jenifer Daniels:

Two, it's not going to be pennies on the dollar.

Melinda Byerley:

Mmm-hmm. Market rate.

Jenifer Daniels:

Three, correct—Market rate, and actually over. Over market rate. You'll get paid first, before I get paid or the company gets paid, and that it's something that you can rely on for continuous monies in the background. Like passive income.

Melinda Byerley:

Like royalties, yeah. Essentially, any other creative person is recognized.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct. And so now I'm entering a space and introducing language into a space of neophytes, essentially. Of people who have never earned royalties for their work. Or who, prior to that, had been told that their work wasn't good enough anyway.



Melinda Byerley:

Wow.

Jenifer Daniels:

So it was a lot of convincing on both parts. So what I found out with Colorstock was that I was building more than a technical tool, and that I relied heavily on my PR & marketing background to even educate and market to the first stakeholder, which was the photographer, and then the second stakeholder, which were the subjects, the models in the photography.

Melinda Byerley:

And based on my theater background, I was telling you on the pre-call, for the audience who doesn't know this, photographing black people and people of color in general is not the same as photographing white people.

Jenifer Daniels:

No.

Melinda Byerley:

So do you want to talk about that, Jenifer?

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, yeah. So lighting—

Melinda Byerley:

You can't just hire a white photographer and be like, "Go, here's your model."

Jenifer Daniels:

No. Absolutely not. It's a couple of things. Part of it is your lived experience. And so when a woman shoots a woman, it comes from a different place. It comes from a lived experience. So a woman is going to assure another woman, for example, that I'm going to get your best angles. We're not going to—

Melinda Byerley:



Focus on your cleavage.

Jenifer Daniels:

Right. Yeah! Or no turkey neck, or just those things that we might be like, "I don't know about that." But the same goes for a person of color, a black person, an indigenous person. There are stories that are behind that. So for example, Colorstock, we used to have a very good collection of indigenous people, where it was the most respectful collection I think out of all the pictures that I remember. These were the ones that really struck me because not only were they well lit, they told the stories of native peoples and indigenous people at their ceremonial powwow.

Jenifer Daniels:

And a Native American person knew what angles to shoot and what pieces of the dance that they should focus on. Because it was celebratory. You could tell that the imagery was shot by someone who looked like them. Because there was reverence and respect in the picture. Because pictures are stories, they're stories without words. And if you take a picture, let's take the Redskins, for example, it's very clear to us through the Washington Redskins imagery that it is not done out of respect. It was mocking. It was mocking to use the imagery of a Native American person because they used a slur and a derogatory term. And so that's a totally different set of imagery. So it's the—

Melinda Byerley:

And even the technical part of it.

Jenifer Daniels:

Right.

Melinda Byerley:

Just literally technically, if photographs are capturing light, dark skin reflects light differently than light skin.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct.

Melinda Byerley:



Just from a technical basis, you have to know what you're doing.

Jenifer Daniels:

Exactly right. So when you're dealing with those two prongs of the philosophy and the technicality of it, that changes how imagery of people of color should be distributed. So yeah. So lighting, we need the golden hour. We need the golden hour as a photographer to light people of color, because it can bring up the yellows and the reds of our skin tone and really reflect it. And so I think that was another challenge when it came to why Adobe and Shutterstock were not showcasing these images. Because anyone that's curating imagery is going to look for the best image.

Melinda Byerley:

Sure.

Jenifer Daniels:

And if you constantly receive images that are poorly lit, or the color exposure is off, you're going to throw those out too. So I'm sure it was twofold. I don't work at Adobe, so I couldn't tell you why they chose not to do it. It could have been a plethora of reasons, from the technical way the photo looked to them, just not knowing anyone, or just not even caring to make their photography more inclusive. And so—

Melinda Byerley:

And then it becomes a recurring cycle because if all that's ever downloaded are images of white people, you look at what's sold and there you go. And if the image is bad, it just becomes blah, blah, blah, blah, yeah.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. And it's a cycle. I'm so glad you brought that up too, because that's the other thing that I heard over and over again—when I was launching Colorstock—is, "well, the data tells us ..." And it's like, "But you have bad data." If you put bad data in, you're going to get bad data out. And so, sure, you can totally tell me that, "Oh, pictures of people of color don't sell." Right. Because you keep putting up crappy images of people of color or stereotypical images of people of color when you do put them up. And so, of course that's not going to sell. I remember looking—

Melinda Byerley:



How do you seek out customers who are actively looking for those things?

Jenifer Daniels:

Exactly.

Melinda Byerley:

Have you actually gone to beauty brands or gone to people who are seeking out people of color and saying, "We have this." Or, "what images do you need?"

Jenifer Daniels:

Right.

Melinda Byerley:

It's a new market opportunity. What's wrong with you?

Jenifer Daniels:

(Laughs) Silly of me. Silly of me to think that after all of this schooling, and education, and marketing, that someone would figure that out also, right? So just say, "Hmm, let's find a new market, let's cater to that new market, let's make money on that new market." So it was a bunch of stuff. And so that's when I knew. I was like, "So, it's not a money thing," because you know there's money there, so it's not money. You just don't want to do it. And that's what finally led me to pull the trigger.

Jenifer Daniels:

So while Colorstock was percolating in the back of my mind for years, I finally put all the pieces together and said, "Alrighty. I think I can fix this. I actually do think I can do it. I do know enough about this stuff. And then what I don't know, I can learn it." So when I pulled the trigger, it was 2015, and I launched Colorstock officially.

Melinda Byerley:

So did you code it yourself? How did you find people to help you build the site? Or you may have done it yourself.

Jenifer Daniels:



Yeah, yeah. So I cheated.

Melinda Byerley:

That's not cheating.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. No, it's not. It's called being smart.

Melinda Byerley:

That's right.

Jenifer Daniels:

Working smart, not hard. Yeah. So I chose Shopify as the host for the site. Because again, by this time now, I'm heavy into tech.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. Why would you repo the commerce site?

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Exactly. So I'm heavy into tech now and I'm heavy into minimum viable product. And so now I know that okay, I don't need to build out an e-commerce site. That's silly. I'll find an e-commerce site, I'll find a template and then I'll hack that template. So yes, I coded a lot of what people saw in Colorstock and then the rest I paid someone else to do. (Laughs)

Melinda Byerley:

I was thinking about was how much what you described is what we call the cold marketplace problem, or cold start problem. You're building a marketplace for buyers and sellers—not unlike eBay, Etsy, or Airbnb—you're building a marketplace. And how do you decide which side to focus on? I mean, so, as an example, you probably know this, but for the audience, at eBay, for example, there was a big discussion: Do you market to sellers or do market to buyers? And ultimately they landed on the philosophy that you market to buyers because if you create a demand, then the supply will follow.

Jenifer Daniels:



Yeah. Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

How did you tackle that? Did you go after the buyers? You had to find supply and you had the buyer problem. So you really did have a cold start. How did you know where to begin?

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh. I don't think I did, to be honest with you. I think I just pulled the trigger. I definitely marketed to the buyer, I'll say that. Because I put my buyer's hat on; I realized that I was my own target market.

Melinda Byerley:

Okay.

Jenifer Daniels:

So I said if nothing else, I'm going to make this as seamless as possible for the buyer. And so that's why I picked Shopify, because Shopify was designed for the buyer. Now, it made it cumbersome on the back end, for the—

Melinda Byerley:

Merchant.

Jenifer Daniels:

... photo.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah, for the merchant. So the merchant didn't interface with the site at all.

Melinda Byerley:

And you didn't have anywhere near the plugins stuff that they have now.



Jenifer Daniels:

No, no. I didn't.

Melinda Byerley:

It was pretty primitive back then.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah. No, it was. It was literally ... (Laughs)

Melinda Byerley:

You must have been early in Shopify.

Jenifer Daniels:

I was. I'm thinking about it now, I'm like, "Oh my God, I didn't even run a script to put the images in there." It was literally me uploading images and naming them. I think back, and I'm like, "Oh my God, why did I do that?"

Melinda Byerley:

"I did that?"

Jenifer Daniels:

That sounds nuts to make. But I think—

Melinda Byerley:

It's a technical like, 'walking uphill both ways in the summer.'

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, my gosh. I think I loaded up like, 1,500 photos over the period of 18 months. That sounds nuts.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah.



Jenifer Daniels:

(Laughs) When I think about it. Oh, my gosh.

Melinda Byerley:

But I don't think you had gigabit ethernet at that point.

Jenifer Daniels:

No. Actually I did. We were in Charlotte and I did. But it did not take long, but like I said, I actually started to run the time in my hand. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I have expended entirely too much time working in this business and not on it." (Laughs) But yeah, I did—

Melinda Byerley:

That's a good learning. I say that all the time. Yeah. So you're uploading images. And how did you fund the business?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. So I found them by using my whisper network. And I think that's the other interesting thing. And I'm going to tell you, to be honest with you, it's why I love being black. I'll just tell you that. I really do. Because we have countercultures. And we have subcultures that are just not visible to everyone in America. Because in America the philosophy is mainstream, mainstream culture. But subculture and counterculture is where a lot of people of color live. We live in the margins.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so all I literally had to do was tap into my network. That's it. It was not a heavy lift, as one would imagine. But it started with one photographer first, a photographer that I knew, that I was extremely friendly with. And I was like, "Hey, remember those pictures you took at this event I had?" I was like, "That was the perfect audience. Send me those shots you have. I got a good deal on you. I'm going to load these. Here's what I'm trying to build. I want your extra sight or extra images. I want you to look in your back catalog too, of photos that you've taken, and just send me anything that looks like this."

Jenifer Daniels:

And he sent over about 100 photos. And then I found a student who was Asian American, or Indian American, who was also just doing photography for fun. And I said, "All right,



here's what we're going to do. You want to make some money on your photography? I can't pay you up front, but you're definitely going to get paid first." So those two photographers ... Oh, and one more. Another gentleman that I knew who was a professional photographer. I knew that just in the 30 years of him taking photos, I knew that he had a pile of photos that he wasn't doing anything with on storage. So those—

Melinda Byerley:

They weren't being monetized, yeah.

Jenifer Daniels:

No. Not at all. Because that's the beauty of photography; photographers are storytellers and so they're going to take hundreds of photos for that one shot, but they don't do anything else with the other 99 photos. So that's what I found out as I was doing my work, that I wanted the other 99 photos. Because those were stock photo quality. So while you shoot for the one photo that gets on the magazine, the other 99 shots are very comparable to ... or not even comparable. They're actually a step above stock photos. Most stock photos back in the day were ridiculously cheesy and pretty terrible. So I knew if I could get into that sweet spot of very good photos, photos that looked really nice, that if a nonprofit or small business owner bought them, it would look like they spent a lot of money.

Jenifer Daniels:

So those three photographers were our founding photographers, and they gave me access to their back catalog on the promise that if I did a good job, they'd get money. They literally went on the strength of my social capital that I had obtained with these folks and they trusted me enough to give me their photos. And so when we launched Colorstock, those were the three photographers that launched with us.

Jenifer Daniels:

Once people started hearing about Colorstock, people were in my inbox saying, "Hey, this person, this person." Or it was the photographer themselves. And so it literally started like that. I never had to advertise for photographers. Never. I actually never had to advertise that I was even selling stock photos either. Because I knew that I was solving a problem that people wanted solved. I didn't spend one dime on advertising to obtain photos or to sell them.

Melinda Byerley:



Oh, I love this story. How many times do I tell founders that, "Look I'm a good marketer, but if you don't have a great product I can't help you".

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

That's the paradox. If you've built something that is really amazing, you probably don't need me.

Jenifer Daniels:

Nope. Nope.

Melinda Byerley:

Or I can help you shape it. But I can't save you if it's bad. And I just want to underscore that and frame it, tattoo it.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh. I say that all the time. And especially what I do today, I tell people that all the time. I'm like, "The best marketing is your product." Just period, point blank. Because I get, oh my gosh, I hear (and I know we're going to get to that), but I hear pitches of people selling the wildest stuff. And I'm just like, "Oh, no, honey." (Laughs)

Melinda Byerley:

And if you're not making ... the money is the value. People are like, "What should I charge? "

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

How much value are they getting?

Jenifer Daniels:



Right. Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

How are you doing with this episode? It's a little intense, isn't it? Well, one of the ways that you can help improve things in Silicon Valley, is to support podcasts like this. I'm a woman. Yes, I'm a white woman. But we try to have guests of color, we have a strong representation from lots of people, from lots of diverse backgrounds. And there are costs to creating a podcast, from hosting, to social media, to all of the work that we do to get this done. So, if you'd like to show your support for a recording that's trying to get the word out about diverse voices, we'd love to have your support. You can refer companies to us to advertise. Think about all of the people that are listening to this type of episode, you're going to want to reach them. And if nothing else, please share this episode and others that you've listened to on social media because you know how the algorithm works. And when you share, more people get to hear this incredible story. Thanks.

Melinda Byerley:

So I was going to ask you if you raised money, and it sounds like you didn't have to raise funds.

Jenifer Daniels:

I did not. I bootstrapped. I bootstrapped.

Melinda Byerley:

Amazing.

Jenifer Daniels:

I never raised, yeah. I never raised a dollar for Colorstock, I bootstrapped. And that's another reason why I chose a third party tool, the e-commerce tool, because I knew that hey, if this doesn't work, what did I lose? \$1,000? I'm counting in my head because I want to reflect on it, but yeah, the monthly fee and then the scan for the site. A couple of hundred dollars. It's that. And I had a full-fledged running business that was bringing in, at the date we launched ... Colorstock made money the day we launched.

Melinda Byerley:



There you go, founders. I mean, there's your Holy Grail.: If you're bringing in cash or people are signing up the moment that you get there, that's the moment you know you have the seed. This takes me to the next question, which is, it checks all my boxes. (Laughs) I'm excited ... and yet the site is shut down. And—

Jenifer Daniels:

It is.

Melinda Byerley:

... I want to talk about that. Why did it shut down? Well, first, let's talk about that.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

Why did you decide to shut it down?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. So that was hard. And it's funny, because I've said to other people that I'm at peace with my decision now, but I was not when it was time to make that decision. So 2015 we launched, like I said, we were making money every month. A couple of the months, I was even the highest selling photographer. Because in that process, I learned how to shoot photos because I knew I needed things quickly. But I'm also a business person, and I was running my reports and we started to hit a plateau. And we started to hit a plateau around the same point in time that ... It was really weird. We hit the plateau at the same time—I could not stop the media coverage.

Jenifer Daniels:

Colorstock was in something—and I was doing an interview like once a week, just talking about it and introducing more audiences to it—but that was also the problem, is that I built a business that I could not defend. And that's another thing that we talk about when you build a tech business. You have to build something that's almost impossible to duplicate for it to become the unicorn. And that was the lesson that I had not learned at the time. I just thought that if I build it, they will come, it's great. It solves a problem, I'm golden. I was not



anticipating the big boys who had ignored the problem for a long time to squash me like a bug. (Laughs)

Melinda Byerley:

The minute they saw the press you were getting, they came after you.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. The minute they saw the press, that's when they came after me. So first, they tried to offer me a "partnership agreement." And I wish you could see my air quotes, but they tried to offer a partnership agreement where I would lose the value of my brand by putting my photos on their websites. So now—

Melinda Byerley:

So what they're suggesting is first, just to underscore for people who don't know this business, what they were proposing was, "Hi, Jenifer, we're going to take all your photos. We're going to give you some money for them. And good luck."

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. Yeah, basically. So Adobe, Shutterstock, and some of those big boys, they make money on volume. So it's not about the quality of photos at this time now, it's about the volume. And let's say a photo costs \$1. So the same way we were talking about royalties earlier, most of these big boys pay people 30 cents or less for their own work, and they keep 70 and 80 cents for markup, overhead, and to run their business. And so now you're the content creator and you've been told that you can only make 30 cents on the dollar to what it is you've made, or less.

Melinda Byerley:

And they would have paid you something, but your creators, would they have continued to be paid? Because as you said, they put their trust in you.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct. No. So that was the other thing. I'm like, "No, I'm building this." Colorstock, it was more than just having diverse stock photos. It was paying content creators their value, the value of their work. To demonstrate to them that yes, you can be a creative and actually make a living being a creative. So, you want me to take images that (technically) the



copyright belongs to someone else, put them on your website, and then you give me the company 30 cents of that, and what do I do? So I now give the photographer 15 cents of the 30 cents that you gave? No, we're not going to do that. And so I politely declined every time they reached out. And then they got more aggressive.

Melinda Byerley:

This was like a mob shake down.

Jenifer Daniels:

It's funny because I felt like that was what was happening to me at the time.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. Like, "Yeah, we're going to give you a little something and if not, we're just going to crush you." I mean, keep going.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. And that's what happened. And they worked—

Melinda Byerley:

So what did they do next? After they offered you this, what was the next aggressive tactic?

Jenifer Daniels:

Okay. So the next aggressive tactic was, I started to see job postings on their websites for them hiring diverse marketing candidates and stuff to help them curate their catalog. And I was like, "Oh, okay." Yeah. I was like, "I see. Why couldn't you have given me the job?" You have not called me to say, "Hey, we love what you're doing over there. Let's do an acquire, we get your IP and we get you and you help us build this thing. And we help you because you have a great job at a great company," and blah, blah, blah.

Melinda Byerley:

And great network. And holy crap. How do you justify that when you're talking about seeking people with experience, when you're the first person to do it?

Jenifer Daniels:



Do it. Right. Who will do it, if not me? And the other funny part about that too, was there were other competitors that started coming out at the time. And I didn't see them as competition, I saw them as other people that I hung out with on Twitter who were trying to solve the problem and hopefully—cross our fingers—maybe one of us could actually fix it. Let's try it together. If we can't, whatever. But yeah, they attacked me like a straight up business shark. And so it did feel like a mob shakedown, but to them, it was just business. It's business, honey. And so that was next.

Jenifer Daniels:

So then it was, "Well, we're looking for a person to help us diversify our catalog." And I went, "Okay, well, that's interesting, you could have given me that offer." And then you started to see entire projects. So when I knew it was coming to an end, was the Lean In Photo Project that Adobe did with ... What's her name, the lady who did—

Melinda Byerley:

Sheryl Sandberg.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. Well, that was it. When they announced that they were going to do this project with Sheryl Sandberg, lovely woman. I don't know her, but she's not a photographer. And we know Facebook has their issues.

Melinda Byerley:

And she's a white woman.

Jenifer Daniels:

Correct. And they're going to work with her to create and curate these special collections. I was like, "Well, you know what?" So while this was happening, we—

Melinda Byerley:

I just want the audience to know that I'm sitting here with my hand over my eyes.

Jenifer Daniels:

(Laughs)



Melinda Byerley:

And I took my glasses off and I'm just like, "insert head desk gif." Okay, keep going.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes. So, Colorstock was getting press and then I was starting to feel the pressure. Because okay, I'm like, "I need to grow this business, because I'm not going to be able to compete with these folks if I can't grow this business." AI is coming into the conversation. So now we have tools that could help me identify objects in the photos, identify photos now by color. So if someone just says, "I want a stock photo with something that's blue in it." So there's all of this technology that's coming out also at the same time, that could help make my job so much easier to find, curate, and get these pictures out. But I still I built a tool on a third party e-commerce system that I had to take off, but in order to take it off of the third party e-commerce system, I had to build my own. And that's cost-prohibitive.

Jenifer Daniels:

So now I'm in this, "what comes first; the chicken or the egg?" Do I need to sell more pictures to make more money to build a bigger thing? But I need to build a bigger things so that I can sell more pictures and make more money. So Adobe—

Melinda Byerley:

All I have is a stream of expletives.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh my gosh.

Melinda Byerley:

They're not workplace-friendly, they're not kid-friendly. And again, I am not asking, this is not asking you for comment on a man of color, but I think about how Tristan Walker's outcome is so very different from yours. And you don't have to comment, that's not the position I want to put you in. I'm just for the audience, Tristan Walker started a beauty, a personal care line for black men, for men of color. And eventually the company was acquired by Procter and Gamble, and he made a lot of money. And now he's an entrepreneur, and an entrepreneur in residence, and is a venture capitalist. And the two trajectories here—this is just hitting me for the first time—are so different, that I can't help think about it. And sorry, Jenifer, you don't have to comment on that. But just for the



audience who doesn't know, it's mind blowing that these two outcomes are so different. Okay.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

Keep going.

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh. Alrighty. So these are the factors that are taking place and they're all happening at the same time.

Melinda Byerley:

The mob shakedown that's happening to you.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. Yeah. And so now I am ... On top of being an entrepreneur, I'm a mom and a wife. And I've been bootstrapping this company—not to the detriment of anyone in this house, I will say that—but no one was rich. And so I had to look at my family one day after running a report, and I just had to be honest to say, "If I continue to pour money into this dream, something's going to give. And because I'm bootstrapping, it's going to be my household. And I'm not willing to sacrifice for the greater good if I don't have people to share it with. If I don't have my husband and I don't have my children."

Jenifer Daniels:

And so it all hit me one day where I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to lose this dream because," for a multitude of reasons. But the biggest one was, to be honest with you, was just that I was not willing to do the unthinkable for growth. I wasn't willing to do it. I think I'd had two conversations with VC, and the VC model is ten times, ten times scale. And in order to get to 10 times scale, the product would be degraded, I would lose all of that social capital that I had built up with the photographers. And I was extremely worried about a big company getting ahold of images of people and then using them in a nefarious way.

Melinda Byerley:



Like we talked about earlier. Whether it's licensing to companies who would misuse them, whether they'd get used in AI in ways that are hurtful. Yeah.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah. And it's funny too, because I think what was, oh, you know what it was? It was the election. And Jeb was running. Do you remember that, when Jeb—

Melinda Byerley:

Jeb, exclamation point.

Jenifer Daniels:

When they put his face on a black guy's body from a stock photo they had got. And I was like, "Ew." That was one of the ones where I was like, "Ooh, I don't want that. I don't want that to happen." And so I made the decision to close it down in late 2017. But I also knew that because of the social capital that I had built, on top of launching this movement—because to me, it was bigger than just stock photos, it was a movement—I was starting to see things happen. What I didn't realize was that my intent was to change the narrative. To change the face of stock photos. That was our tagline and that was also my mission. And I saw that it was happening. I didn't necessarily care for the way that it was happening, but at least I could see movement.

Jenifer Daniels:

And then being in this space, and being a mom, and a woman of color launching a tech company who, for all intents and purposes, I did not have a computer science degree. I was inspiring other black and brown women to launch their tech businesses. And so when I took a step back, I said, "Jenifer, you did what you said you were going to do. It's time. You feel comfortable in closing it down." So even though the idea was around mid to late 2017, I still gave grace, I still allowed for six months, more runway time of running the business, so that I could have some heart-to-heart conversations with the photographers, to let them know that this is what was coming.

Melinda Byerley:

The income stream was going to go down. Yep.

Jenifer Daniels:



Yeah. That this was what was coming, that I would not even ... Because again, like I said, I was not doing any marketing, paid marketing, should I say. I lived the brand values every day. So people knew this was what I was doing. So I stopped talking about Colorstock, to be honest with you. It was almost like mourning the loss of a child or a loved one. So I kind of stopped talking about it. And that demonstrated to me that a lot of our sales were based off of my visibility. And so the sales started to go down. I worked with my photographers to let them know that hey, if this is the space you still want to be in, here are the other places that are still taking photos, here are places that I recommend, they're good people, they'll take care of you. And if not, thank you for the ride. We had a great time. But this is what I have to do.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so we officially closed in March 2018. And it was crazy, because oh my gosh, I'm going to start getting emotional. It was crazy because it was almost like, you know how you watch TV shows and it's like some of them do a really good job ending the series? It reminded me of the Fresh Prince episode where Will was just standing in the empty living room and was just looking around and reflecting on his time living with his family, and how everybody was moving on, and then he flipped the light switch off and walked out. That's how I felt when I turned off our e-commerce platform, I literally pressed a button. And I was like, oh my God, it's over. It's over. But damn, I did that. I built something. I built something from nothing and people paid for pictures. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that I had built something that people gave me money and support. And that's a little different than consulting. It's almost like, oh, yeah, I give you this, it's an even exchange. But—

Melinda Byerley:

You created value.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, I created value. I created value for people. And every now and again, I'll see an image. And actually, people still email me or DM me and say, "Do you still have some pictures left?" And I'll sell them a picture here or there. But because I'm honest and ethical, I will say, "Make sure you copyright, you mention the photographer." And the photographer will magically get money in their PayPal account from me. And they're like, "Where did this \$20 come from?" Because I'm still that type of person. And I built too much social capital with them where it doesn't matter if Colorstock isn't a thing anymore. If I pull a picture back out of the archives, and I sold it on your behalf, because someone begged me to, you're still going to get paid for it. And that would never happen at a big boy. And so yeah, I did that.



Melinda Byerley:

This isn't about my emotions, but just know that I have all the feels right now. And people who know me on Twitter, I'm angry. I'm angry. How many photos, when you shut down, how many photos did you have in your library?

Jenifer Daniels:

I think we were maybe a little shy of 1,,750.

Melinda Byerley:

1750 images, and they're on a server somewhere, they're stored.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah. They're on a server—

Melinda Byerley:

On ice as it were, in the freezer.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yes. (Laughs) They're on ice in the freezer. It's crazy because when you think about the big boys, they have millions of photos. But how I would explain it to people is that it was a library. And a library has tens of thousands of books, but they only circulate 5% of their collection. And so I'm like, "Well, I don't need those duds. I don't need the 95%. I need the—

Melinda Byerley:

I don't need the long tail.

Jenifer Daniels:

"I need the top 5%." Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

I don't need the long tail. You went after the highest quality and curation.

Jenifer Daniels:



Correct. Highly-curated, highly-curated photos.

Melinda Byerley:

So, premium.

Jenifer Daniels:

Premium photos. I think my eyeball touched just about every photo, if not every last one. Just about every one.

Melinda Byerley:

And still no offer of a job from any of these companies?

Jenifer Daniels:

Nope. (Laughs).

Melinda Byerley:

No. If you work for Adobe or Shutterstock or iStock Photo, I hope you're paying attention.

Jenifer Daniels:

I hope you are too, because guess what? I still own my IP. (Laughs) That was another thing. I sourced and received my own trademark. Like, "Hello people," the stuff that I know about intellectual property. For two seconds I entertained going to school and going to get a law degree in intellectual property. Because it's like, I had to learn all these things in order to execute this thing seamlessly and to not get sued, to be frank with you. To not be sued. And yeah, so it's like—

Melinda Byerley:

And it's the most important tool the creator has. I saw people imitating a Timeshare CMO design and our language—it's been a fascinating process to watch people I actually know, people I physically know in the real world, taking stuff I did.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yep, yep. Yeah, I saw it. I had it. So when I talked about some of the other competitors, some of them were really bad knockoffs. Some of them even attempted to use the name.



And then I figured out ... I started to see a pattern. Because we were hopping at one point in time, where it was just Colorstock all day and night. Where if you were a photographer and you were chosen, you joined the collective. And so I would get request to join the collective and they'd fill out all of their paperwork and they were approved, and then they would receive the welcome packet, and then I would never receive their pictures. And then I noticed that I was like, "Oh, they're trying to get my welcome packet so that they can see my internal work so that they can copy my internal work." Now, I can't prove that Adobe did that. I can't prove—

Melinda Byerley:

No. No, of course but it's—

Jenifer Daniels:

I'm not gonna accuse them. But—

Melinda Byerley:

People will do this. I mean, in that sense, people have done it to other competitors too. I mean, in that sense, I believe that it happened because it's not unique.

Jenifer Daniels:

Exactly, exactly. Right. So it's not a leap. It's not a leap. I think about the Coming to America movie all the time with McDowell's and McDonald's. (Laughs) It's not a leap. It's not a leap for me to think that they did that. Because the internal ... now they didn't know the inner workings of my business, but they knew enough. They knew what I was looking for, because it had scripts in it or treatments. And so I could see that. I could see that in imagery that, "Oh, wait a minute, they're following my treatment. Ah, that's what happened." That's what happened with those five random requests to join, and never ... Why would you do all of that, to never send imagery that you're going to make money off? It's no sweat off my back. And so I wasn't paying attention to it at the time. And then it was only in hindsight that I was like, "Oh, they just wanted some IP, and they got it by getting my photographers' packet."

Melinda Byerley:

So today is June 26th. And I was looking it up on the calendar and we are exactly one month and one day after the death of George Floyd. And we're six weeks after the death of Breonna Taylor. And so one of the things I want to talk about is just what's happened in the



last few weeks in terms of the rise in protests. Because we record living history, too. So we've recorded people talking about their past. But I think there's real power in putting down our perceptions of the present, so that when people look back and we look back, we can think about it.

Melinda Byerley:

And I want to talk about your work with Wayne State's innovation studio and how that comes together. How has the last month of protests and discussion altered, or not altered, your trajectory? And I will opine for just a moment ... my observation as a white woman is that I hear a lot of black folks saying, "Same shit, different day." Everybody is waking up, and I think it was Will Smith who said, "It's always been there. You're just seeing it." And so is it same old, same old, or is there something different about what's going on right now?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. So this is interesting, because I kind of feel like I live in this bubble of social justice and social activism. And I answered the question on Twitter the other day where someone said, what job would you have if you weren't doing what it is you're doing now? And I responded that every job that I've ever had, it's always had a social justice lens, or tinge, or just ethos to it, hence me launching Colorstock. But what I do today at my alma mater, which is Wayne State, is that I help young people scratch these ideas out in their head also. The things that I did for myself when I figured out how to launch a tech startup, I'm helping young people do. I'm helping them figure out how to take this idea in their head and turn it into something.

Jenifer Daniels:

And because Wayne State is located in Detroit, and because Detroit has always been this hub for social justice, the appetite is so strong at Wayne State to do this kind of work that yeah, it doesn't even seem like anything different is happening for us. What it seems like for us is, "Oh, you guys are catching up to the stuff that we've already been doing."

Melinda Byerley:

Like, welcome to the party, jump on in, the water is warm.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, exactly. And we already have solutions that we've been working on for years to solve the problem. Matter of fact, the challenge on campus this year, the innovation challenge on



campus this year was all about social justice and ... Oh, my gosh, it's terrible because the week before we were going to have this culminating conference was when coronavirus sent everyone packing inside. So I hate that we didn't have the opportunity to have this conversation in a public place, because people would have been able to see, here are the works that the things that we're already doing to tackle this. For example, the Detroit Justice Center is a nonprofit solely focused on a just society for Detroit. And they're not the only ones that are doing this work.

Jenifer Daniels:

So yeah, for me, it just feels like a reckoning actually, of the things that we already knew to be true, and the work that we were already doing, and the lives that we were already living. So, I think I'm coming from this place of ... I don't want to say I told you so. I don't want to come from that place, but I'm definitely offering suggestions—

Melinda Byerley:

Well, I do say this to my fellow white people, it's not about us inventing solutions. Black people—

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh, my gosh, absolutely not.

Melinda Byerley:

Black people, indigenous people, people of color, they know this problem better than we do. That's the problem, actually.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

The problem is that we are last to the party. And when you show up late to the party, you don't change the vibe, you have to absorb what's there.

Jenifer Daniels:

Exactly.



Melinda Byerley:

So if people who are of good intent or good heart, as I say, want to help the work that you're doing at Wayne State, do you need help? Do you want help? What kinds of help do you need? Do you need financial help? Do you need mentorship for folks, support? What does the university and you need to make your work more effective?

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. So I'm glad you said that. The university absolutely needs—when I talk about the university, I'm always coming from the lens of the people that attend the university, not the administration and not the governing body. The students at Wayne State University need jobs, they need to be hired, they need for you to not see them as "the diversity hire," they need you to see them as whole people that bring additional assets. And so I personally, and the studio personally, we may not need something, but it's the people. It's the students who are coming to say, "Ms. Daniels, I have this great idea. How do I take it to the next level?" Or, "I want to do this type of work, but I think I want to do it at a company. How do I go about doing that?"

Jenifer Daniels:

And so the students need you to open the doors. They need you to see how a liberal arts degree for example, can expand the work that you're doing in tech. They need you to allow them to show up in a space and be comfortable when they're there. Because you can open the door, but they're not stupid, they know when they come in what the vibe is like and if they're not wanted. And so the students of this city, most of them are Detroiters, or Michiganders. Some of them are not. We have a large population of foreign students who come here, because even if they're getting an electrical engineering degree, they're building things to make the world better. To make a more just society.

Jenifer Daniels:

And so that would be my ask, that if a student with a resume pops across your desk and it says Wayne State University on it, know that you're getting more than just what's on paper. They're going to have a whole 'nother experience of life that you can never even write on a resume.

Melinda Byerley:



Does Wayne State and or the Innovation Group have a site where you can—I think of my alma mater—you can contact the career services center and they will give you resumes of students? Is there a place where they can go to reach out directly and recruit directly?

Jenifer Daniels:

Absolutely. It's our career services department. I'm pretty sure it's just careerservices.wayne.edu.

Melinda Byerley:

And we'll put that in the show notes for folks and there'll be links on the page. So, if you're listening to this, check the notes on this episode or check the episode page on our site. We will put a link to that career services site.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah. And sign up. I think right now all universities are utilizing this central tech tool called Handshake and it's a great way to just start to have some introductory conversation with students. So the students are encouraged to put their resumes on that site. They are searchable. You can start to weed through for criteria. But yeah, just know that when you hire a Warrior—we're the Warriors—when you hire a Warrior, yes, that's exactly what you're getting. You're literally getting a warrior. Our tagline right now is "Warrior Strong." Because that's what we do, literally. We build them, man, we build them tough.

Melinda Byerley:

I have a couple of more questions to help us close out.

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

I want to ask you the same question for two different sides. Because, again, as a white woman, I have found so much power listening to black women and women of color. Because, and I say this for my audience, their experience of sexism is informed by their experience with racism and vice versa. And the way that my trans women sisters and trans women brothers experience gender differently, in my personal experience, I have found black women have a lot to teach me about my own sexism, about the sexism I experience



in my own life. So, I want to ask you first, I'm going to ask you to give advice to folks who are people of color, but I'm going to first start by asking, and this is just one question, we won't go crazy. But what do you wish white people understand that you're tired of explaining? Let's use the scalable platform to make sure a bunch of people hear the same thing so you don't have to keep repeating yourself.

Jenifer Daniels:

Whoo.

Melinda Byerley:

Which thing? We could sit here for an hour.

Jenifer Daniels:

That's hard. What thing.

Melinda Byerley:

You can pick more than one. But...

Jenifer Daniels:

Oh. If I hear, "We'll beat them at the ballot," one more time, I will pick up a ballot and beat someone with it. (Laughs) Because as we saw this week in Kentucky, we saw black women standing outside of a convention center beating on the doors to vote. And the problem is not, it was not that they showed up late, it was not that they waited to the last minute.

Jenifer Daniels:

There were there for hours. It was because their rights have been systemically eroded. So I don't want to hear that anymore. If you want to be an ally, that's one of the first places that we can start, is by making sure that everyone has access to the vote. And your relatives who are racist are going to tell you that it's a rigged game, but we know better than that. And so if you don't want to get into the mud with anything else, because I get it. Because we're in the mud every day and you will come out filthy if you're in the mud. But if you don't want to get into all that other stuff, if you don't think you have the gumption to show up to march, I get it, that's fine, you can ensure that everyone has access to vote. That's low-hanging fruit. And if this country is the land of the free and the home of the brave, it's time for everybody to be brave so that we can all be free.



Melinda Byerley:

I can't add anything to that. So let's flip it around and say now you're talking to black, indigenous people, other people of color starting companies and working technology. What advice do you have for them?

Jenifer Daniels:

Mmm. Two things. And it's funny because it's going to sound counterproductive. The first one is, "Don't give up." But then the second one is, "Every battle is not yours to fight." And that sounds contradictory. But I think if you can take one of those two lanes, you can apply it to whatever it is you're dealing with at that moment, and then it will help you make a decision about how to proceed. So, if every battle is not yours, some of these conversations, you don't necessarily even need to be in, divert your energy someplace else. And then that's when you get into the "don't give up."

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah, that's—

Jenifer Daniels:

Because you'll need it.

Melinda Byerley:

That's true, man. You got to know when you can fight it too. I mean, Sun Tzu says in The Art of War, "You don't pick a fight you don't know that you can win."

Jenifer Daniels:

Yeah, yeah. But all fights are winnable. And that's the interesting thing about it. It's just how you approach it. We had, quick story, we had an incident here, where a neighborhood CDC group wanted to rally around preventing a developer from coming into a certain part of the city and gentrifying the neighborhood. And they did not give up and because they pressed on, they found out that the developer,—oh, just because the person started running their mouth—they found out that the developer had 55 properties in the neighborhood that they were not aware of. They researched the 55 properties, they found out that that developer was delinquent on taxes and had a significant amount of fines. And so if they would have kept fighting the developer the way they started fighting the battle, they would have lost that one. Because the developer has lawyers, and they didn't have lawyers. They



switched the battle ground. And they put the developer on their turf. And when they found out that the developer was not paying taxes and had fines, they beat him that way.

Melinda Byerley:

What keeps you going? You talked about not giving up. When times are hard, how do you care for yourself?

Jenifer Daniels:

So definitely, for me, self-care is important. Having a medical professional assist me on my path was the best thing that I can do. Going to therapy has tremendously helped me, and it's grounded me and centered me into being thoughtful and making the right decision about how I continue to move forward. Because I made it very clear to my therapist that I was in a fight, and that every day that I wake up, I'm going to do what is right—simply because it's the nature of my being. But therapy helped me to, again, pick my battles very wisely, and respond in a different way so that I would not lose myself in the process.

Melinda Byerley:

What is the best advice you were ever given?

Jenifer Daniels:

Ooh, my grandmother used to tell me, "Closed mouths don't get fed." Best advice. Best advice. It taught me to ask for what it is I wanted and needed. Because if I did not, no one was going to do it on my behalf.

Melinda Byerley:

Jenifer, I want to thank you for taking the time to explore this experience with me because I know as somebody who shut down my own company, although under nowhere near the stress that you went through, I know what it feels like to lose a part of yourself when you shut your company down. And so it's an act of courage to tell this story in a public space where people can hear it and learn from it. So I want to thank you for that courage. And thank you for the hard work that you're doing to help us build a better society and a more just society. I really do appreciate your time. And I know our audience does too.

Jenifer Daniels:



Oh, thank you so much. It was a privilege to be asked. So I'm appreciative of that. Thank you.

Melinda Byerley:

Where can people find you, when they want to talk to you?

Jenifer Daniels:

(Laughs) In the matrix.

Melinda Byerley:

If you want to talk to them.

Jenifer Daniels:

In the matrix. I stay on Twitter. So my name on Twitter is @jentrification with a 'J.' And so I'm making the internet a better place.

Melinda Byerley:

Indeed.

Jenifer Daniels:

So you can reach me there.

Melinda Byerley:

That's how I met Jenifer, on Twitter, I was following her on Twitter. So I recommend that.

Jenifer Daniels:

Absolutely. That's literally where I'm at all the time. I have not made it a habit to blog. But I do still take pictures and I do continue to tell stories with my pictures. And so you can see that imagery at jeniferdaniels.com. And Jenifer has one N. Or jentrification.com, also. They both go to the same place. But yeah, those are the two spaces that I'm at. So my imagery and my storytelling through imagery. Most of it is about Detroit, but I love to travel. So I love urban environments. And so that's usually what I'm talking about in both places.

Melinda Byerley:



Thanks again for joining us, Jenifer.

Jenifer Daniels:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

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