

**Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode**  
**Librarian and Author Amanda Jones**

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

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

We would love for you to participate in our discussion.

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

So we are in the middle of summer.

You guys have some favorite things about summer.

I can start.

Well, maybe I can't start.

What do you guys love about summer?

Well, I don't love our current weather, but I do love the fact that when it is warm out, I can go swimming in a lake or at the beach in the ocean.

So I am very much looking forward to going swimming in a couple of weeks.

What about you, Marian?

Yeah.

Well, I love summer.

I have always loved summer.

I think it's the kid in me.

And when I was a school librarian and before that a teacher, I loved summer because I didn't have to go work.

However, what I now love about summer, since I work in a public library and I'm working all the time, I love that the days are longer, that there's more daylight so that when I get out of work, it is not pitch black.

That is my favorite thing.

This summer, notwithstanding, I do love walking out from an over air conditioned building and just feeling almost like I know it's like walking into a sauna, but in a good way and not for very long, but that feeling fully baked before the cold weather comes.

Yeah, that is true.

That is a good feeling.

Well, like a warm hug.

Yeah.

Should we get into our interview?

Yeah.

Yes.

We are thrilled to share our interview today with Amanda Jones.

Amanda Jones has been an educator for 23 years at the same middle school she attended as a child.

She has served as president of the Louisiana Association of School Librarians, and won numerous awards for her work in school libraries, including School Library Journal Librarian of the Year.

A sought-after keynote speaker, Amanda is a frequent volunteer for state and national library associations, as well as founder of the Livingston Parish Library Alliance, and founding member of Louisiana Citizens Against Censorship.

She lives in Livingston Parish, Louisiana.

Amanda's book, *That Librarian, The Fight Against Book Banning in America*, comes out on August 27th, 2024.

I am so happy that we had the opportunity to talk with Amanda.

She is inspirational in her book, but having the opportunity to get to hear it from her and hear some of what she's been doing in the past year since finishing the book is just incredible.

I admire her perseverance and courage, and I am so happy that she's continuing to do this really hard work in her community and to actively prevent bills from being passed in Louisiana that would make life so much worse for librarians, teachers, students, and the community.

It was just wonderful to talk with her.

What did the two of you think?

Yeah, I totally agree.

First of all, I loved her accent.

I love a good Southern accent, so thank you, Amanda, for that.

But I also, I just, it was very encouraging to talk to her.

Given all that she's gone through, the fact that she still has such optimism for libraries and our country, the fact that she was dealing with people who literally were saying things that would have driven a lot of people out of the town, and she loves her community and she's sticking by it.

She's just such a role model in so many ways.

I mean, she loves her community, warts and all, and we all live in communities that have warts.

So she just really inspired me.

Yeah.

I think everyone who believes in freedom, to read what you want and is against book banning, this book and this discussion, it's very eye-opening as to how the fight is being fought.

I highly recommend that everyone read it.

For sure.

Libraries are not going away.

Authors are not going to stop writing books, and publishing companies are not going to stop publishing books.

We're going to keep fighting for freedom to read, and we're just going to keep on doing the good fight.

So come along the ride with us and listen to our wonderful interview with Amanda.

Amanda, thank you so much for joining us on Rogue Librarians today.

Hi, thanks for having me.

We are so excited to talk with you today.

And congratulations on the upcoming release of your book, *That Librarian, The Fight Against Book Banning in America*.

Thank you.

It's very surreal to have actually written a book.

That's wonderful.

Well, we can't wait to hear more about it.

We wanted to ask you a few questions about your background first, though.

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

I think probably one of the most influential books I read growing up was Dr.

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

It was recommended to me by a high school librarian, but I also heard about it on the Oprah Winfrey Show when she had Dr.

Maya Angelou as a guest.

I grew up very privileged, so it opened up my eyes to a world where not everyone grows up with the same happy childhood as I have.

It was eye-opening and it just led to so many other books like Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, where I was trying to read about other cultures and people of different backgrounds that didn't look like me and didn't have the same privilege.

And I just feel like these books made me more empathetic human being.

Absolutely.

That's wonderful choices.

And I remember when I read Maya Angelou's book and how influential it was on me too.

So thank you.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

So from that, how did you decide to become a school librarian?

Well, I was in college to be an elementary education teacher.

And it was during when like the Harry Potter first three books, like really hit big in the United States.

And I guess I had, I've always been a reader, but you know, during high school and college, you kind of get out of it a little bit if you party too much like I did.

And it just reignited that passion I had for reading and literature.

And I had several education classes that, you know, literature classes for my education, my elementary education degree.

And I went straight after reading the first three Harry Potters.

I went straight to the Dean and got special permission to take the graduate courses, the library science graduate courses as an undergraduate.

So I could graduate with all of my certifications.

So I could be a school librarian right out the bat, right when I graduated.

Oh, that's wonderful.

Yeah, I kind of circumvented the whole process.

It was like a weird process I had.

So your book kind of covers things that have been happening in the last couple of years when book bannings have just taken off.

Do you have you had any experience before 2021?

Were you aware of any book challenges in your school or the public library?

Well, we had not had any challenges in our public library.

I did have some parents question the book, *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander.

And it was, I had done a whole lesson on his book.

And then also the lesson pertained to Kadir Nelson's artwork.

And we talked about Caldecott and Newbery Medals.

And some parents were concerned about it, that I was possibly teaching critical race theory or, you know, the Black Lives Matter propaganda.

I don't know where, well, you know, I do know kids are kids and I teach middle school.

So, you know, they go home and say things that aren't always the truth about what's happening at school.

So, but I had a conversation with the parents and I explained and it was fine.

I've never had any actual formal challenges to any books in my school.

Just in the public library is what I've been speaking out against the attacks in our public library.

Well, on that note, would you mind telling our listeners what happened on July 19th, 2022 at your local public library board meeting and why you chose to speak up against censorship at that meeting?

Yes.

So we had, I live in Livingston Parish in Louisiana, and we were parishes, not counties, and a neighboring parish since 2018 had been under attack by an extremist group who had successfully seen the overtaking of their public library board of control with extremists, religious fanatics, and they had cost millions in funding to the public library in Lafayette, and they even have outlawed displays at book displays in the Lafayette Public Library System.

And I saw that that same extremist group was posting in our parish's local Facebook page, saying everyone needed to be at the library board meeting.

And so I looked at the agenda, and our agenda said that book content and signage were going to be on the agenda.

And it was in July right after Pride Month.

So I figured that signage had to do with Pride displays.

I figured content was going to be a targeting of books by the LGBTQIA plus community or BIPOC communities.

So I just knew I needed to go and speak.

And so I went and I gave a very basic censorship speech, you know, it's a speech that that like every librarian would give.

It was, you know, nothing fantastic that I, you know, just a censorship speech.

And I didn't talk about particular books or anything, but apparently that was not the thing to do.

And so even though I spoke and almost 30 other people spoke and said almost the exact same thing as me, I for some reason was singled out and I was targeted after I spoke at that meeting.

I just wanted to say that you know that it was just your position made you an easy target.

You know, there's really no other reason.

They wanted the biggest kerfuffle that they could manage.

And you fit the bill.

They did.

They did.

I, you know, I did mention in my speech, because I wanted the library board to know that I knew what I was talking about, that I was a librarian.

I didn't say I was a school librarian working in our area, but I did mention that I was the current president of the Louisiana Association of School Librarians.

And I did mention that I had won National School Librarian of the Year in 2021.

And I said that not to sound like a pompous jerk, but to like, you know, so they would know I knew what I was talking about when it came to censorship.

And so my theory is, yeah, they tried to, they took the biggest name that spoke to try to silence me, because they thought that if they could silence me, they could silence everybody else.

Well, and if they can cast aspersions on you, they can cast aspersions on the ALA, and the Louisiana Chapter, and all of it.

Oh, yeah.

And just librarians in general, which is definitely a rampant problem in our United States right now.

Yes, it is.

And they have kind of become their little poster child that they like to target.

And it's been two years and they still are targeting me.

And, you know, but they wanted to silence me.

And so I'm very stubborn.

So I'm going to do the exact opposite of what they want.

And I will continue to speak out and they will not silence my voice.

Well, that's good for you.

I was just going to ask you if you would tell our listeners a little bit more about the details of the aftermath of your speaking up and how and why you were attacked on social media specifically.

Yeah.

So I live in a very small town.

We have two red lights.

We're a very small community.

And I had kind of built up a name for myself of being someone who was a community.

I don't want to say leader, but someone, everyone knows I care about my community and the kids in our community.

And I've dedicated 23 years to my school.

I went to my school.

So I've spent more than half my life working at my school and trying to help everyone in our community.

But after I spoke four days later, the extremist group posted a picture of me with a circle around my head that looks like a target.

And said that they identified me, where I worked and insinuated that I was trying to give six-year-olds pornography and erotica.

We don't, I don't even have six-year-olds at my school, so I don't know what that was about.

And then another local yokel, a little keyboard warrior in my town or in my parish, decided to make a meme of me that had my first maiden and last name and said that I advocate the teaching of anal sex to 11-year-olds.

And yes, and I didn't, I don't, the, where they came up with that, I mean, they came up with it out of thin air because I don't do that.

But just the, the conclusions they drew for my censorship speech are wild.

And it was shared hundreds and thousands of times all over my community.

People were saying I was a detriment to children.

People were saying I needed to be fired.

I needed to be slapped.

I needed to be purged.



They started tagging our state library association.

They started coming at me on all social media platforms.

There's no social media platform that I was safe on.

They started tagging and posting on my friends and families pages.

And I received hate emails, even a death threat.

Wow.

I am so sorry that happened to you.

And you are a very brave person to be continuing the good fight even despite all of that.

And this is all the more reason why librarians are so important because we are the people who are trying to teach people how to find the truth.

There is so much garbage out there on the internet and on social media.

And even in some books that people need to know how to find the truth from the fiction and from the propaganda.

So thank you for what you do.

Well and I don't think I am brave.

I just think I was raised to do the right thing.

And I think that I heard author Samira Ahmed once say that you should use your power and privilege for purpose.

And so I think I had a platform already.

And so if I didn't speak out, I would be wasting a platform and wasting the privilege I have.

And you know, sometimes you just get angry and you have enough.

I've had enough.

I've had enough because my story is not unique and it's happening to librarians all across the country, school, public, academic, and it's horrible.

And I don't, I worry about what kind of society we live in where librarians are under attack for simply doing their jobs and the lies and the hate that are being spewed and the fact that people just believe everything they see on social media hook, line and sinker.

And like you said, we are the ones, I teach digital citizenship.

It's like they want to stifle the fact that we were trying to teach children how to navigate online and then they're discrediting us because they want, I feel like they want a dumb dumb down society, which is more easily led.

Oh, I think you're absolutely right.

Yeah, they're not just attacking libraries or attacking schools as well.

And they're trying to dismantle education as we know it.

Yes.

You know, it feels so ironic because I remember when I was in school to become a teacher, I remember our professors talking to us about how important it is to have an educated populace, right?

That democracy is based on having an educated populace.

But today, in this current political climate, it seems that the folks who are attacking you, Amanda, and who are attacking libraries and schools, do not want an educated populace.

They want the opposite of that.

They want followers who will believe anything they say so that they can do whatever they want and the populace will go along with it.

Yeah, and we even see that at the local level.

Like right now, with our Public Library Board of Control, we had a member who had a master's in library science.

They got rid of her because she had a master's in library science, and they installed someone who didn't even graduate from high school because this person has been more easily led to believe the conspiracy theories.

And there seems to be not a value on education right now, and these attacks on libraries and education are all done by the same people.

It's all the same groups and the same people who are targeting both.

So why did you decide to go ahead and tell your story in the form of a book?

Well, so it was accidental.

It was accidental.

I, so I, through this whole process of being attacked and all of this, it's been very stressful and I had to take a leave of absence from work, from panic attacks and ill health.

And while I was out, I just happened to bid on a We Need Diverse Books auction for a literary agent, 30 minutes Zoom because I wanted to learn about publishing.

And I was talking to, I won the auction and I was talking to them and they're like, oh, you're that librarian.

I was like, yeah, that's me.

And then I, the next, like later that evening, next morning, they asked me to sign.

And I was like, oh, well, I've never thought of, I don't want to write a book really.

And they're like, oh, just sign, you know, whatever.

So I did.

And then ironically, the very next day, Anton Mueller, Senior Editor at Bloomsbury contacted me and he said, hey, I was listening to you on the New York Times first person podcast.

Have you ever thought about writing a book?

And I said, well, my therapist has had me writing down my feelings.

And I had come up with if I ever wrote a book, what would my chapter titles be?

And they were really wild.

I was like, he's like, well, have you thought about it?

And I said, well, actually, I just got an agent yesterday.

And so it just kind of snowballed.

And then I signed a contract and then I had to write it.

So yeah, and I realize again, I am very, very privileged.

I know it does not come that easily to other people, to other authors.

And so I thought, well, again, if I'm being given this platform, I need to do something with it.

And I do have something to say.

So I wrote a book and it was very cathartic.

Well, you touched on this a little bit already, but in the book, you discussed how the attacks on your reputation affected you mentally, emotionally and physically.

And they also affected your ability to be present for your husband and daughter and to do your job without mental anguish.

Could you tell us a little bit more about these effects and how you were able to get through that time?

Yes.

The first, because it's been two years.

And so the first, I would say six months, I was completely consumed and obsessed.

I was trying to look and see what these people were posting about me.

I was worrying about it nonstop.

I had to get on anxiety medication.

I had panic attacks for the first time ever in my life.

I thought I was having a heart attack.

I didn't know what was happening.

I lost 50 pounds, chunks of hair.

I became anemic, which led to, I ended up being in and out of the hospital for two months with emergency hysterectomy due to ill health and anemia.

It was a huge physical toll.

People don't realize what mental trauma can cause to you physically.

So I was in intense therapy and anxiety medication.

And I eventually, my therapist made me promise to never look at their posts again.

And so she's like, try it for one week.

And I tried it for one week and it was like a weight just lifted off of me.

And so since she made me promise, I have not, to this day, it's been over a year, looked at any of their posts.

I refuse to look at their posts about me and to care what they have to say about me.

And I just, lots of therapy, meditation, but huge support system with school librarians across the country.

They have helped me, my family has helped me, a lot of talking with my family, therapy sessions with them.

It's been a work in progress.

And I can say, it's been two years and I'm almost 100, back to 100%.

I'm so glad to hear that.

That sounds so awful.

And I'm glad that you had people's support and the help of therapy and meditation to help you get through that.

But I'm so sorry that you had to deal with that.

Well, I, you know, I was going to say I, you know, I've dealt with this for two years and I'll probably deal with it for a few more.

But I, I like to tell people, put it in perspective of the books, the authors and the characters and the people of the books.

I'm trying to protect those people, the marginalized of our society.

They'll have to deal with it for the rest of their lives.

So I can, you know, I can deal with it for another five, ten years.

I could deal with it for the rest of my life if I have to.

But there are people that have it way worse than me.

You also mentioned how hurtful it was to have your friends, colleagues, former students, parents, community members, all of them disparage you online or to just remain silent.

What would have been helpful to hear from them during the time that you were going through the worst of this?

Well, one of the people I talk about in my book, I gave her a name, Katie, and that is not her real name because I wanted to protect her somewhat.

But Katie was my former school board representative.

She was my school board representative at the time, and I considered as friends.

Her daughter is an adult.

I taught her daughter.

She told me I was one of her daughter's favorite teachers.

When I got School Library Journal Librarian of the Year, she stood up in front of the school board and cried and said, I was one of the best things that had ever happened to our community.

Then fast forward a year later when I'm being, my reputation is being smeared all over creation.

She could have stood up for me and she could have said, hey, this is not happening.

I know her and she's very influential in our community and she could have stood up for me and she chose not to.

And that I understand because these people are scary.

But what's hurtful is when those people that you consider your friends like Katie, join in with them.

To the point where Katie is now my state representative for my area and she filed a bill HB 777 this past legislative session that I heard they were dubbing the Amanda Jones bill, which was the bill to put, yeah, oh yeah.

She filed this bill to put librarians that attended American Library Association conferences in prison and to serve two years hard time labor.

Just for attending a conference?

Yes.

If you were reimbursed for anything, a book or a plane ticket or anything by your school or public library, you could have two years hard labor in prison.

We successfully defeated that bill.

But to know that my friend not only was silent and could have spoken up and could have squashed all of this right from the get-go.

But fast forward, she's now filing bills to get at me.

It's so hurtful.

I try to think about what is going through her mind.

But I can't anymore.

I'll continue to protect her and I won't say her real name, but people in my community know.

And it's just things like that, that are very hurtful, you know?

Wow.

I mean, I have no words.

But I, you know, I don't know why it's like they try to hurt me.

And I've done nothing but give a censorship speech.

I don't know why I keep coming under attack.

It's like they it's like they wanted me to roll over and die and shut up.

And I didn't.

So that's my crime.

I refuse to be silent.

And somehow that's criminal to them that I stand up for myself.

And so I've lost a lot of friends.

I can't I can't go shopping in my I can't go grocery shopping.

I can't attend my child's.

She's in high school.

I can't attend her functions without being called names.

In my in my own community, whereas three years ago, I was lauded as like a, you know, community hero and leader.

And now my name is mud.

That is just so awful.

That is awful.

And and, you know, I go back to what Dorothy said at the beginning, you know, clearly with what you've just described, this was always an attack on the ALA and your representation of the ALA.

And you just ended up becoming the scapegoat for it.

I did.

And I, you know, I'm I'm a I'm currently in ALA, the Louisiana Chapter Counselor, so I'm a voting member of ALA.

So, you know, yeah, they're attacking me in ALA.

But we I will say this, though, there is some hope because we had eight anti-library bills in the legislature in Louisiana.

And we successfully killed six in committee.

And one was passed, but it was so watered down that it's like virtually nonexistent.

So for a state that is very anti-library at the moment with an extremist majority in the House and Senate and an extremist governor, I think we did pretty well this past legislative session.

Congratulations for that.

And, you know, and your perseverance.

And it was it was a collected effort.

I mean, it was it was it was we have a coalition and it is there are hundreds of us fighting this in Louisiana.

Hundreds.

Well, that brings me to I was going to ask about the support that you did get from family or friends or former students.

How has the support helped you and other librarians?

So I I do I try not to focus too much on the negative, because I'll say for every death threat I got, I got a thousand positive messages and people all over the country school librarians, citizens, people who are not librarians.

And they have been so overwhelmingly positive and supportive outside of my community.

And I so when I wrote this book, I I wanted people to see I wanted other librarians to see that they're not alone and that there are thousands out there that support us.

And I print I print everything out all of the positives.



And I say I'm having my kind of there's been a lot of negative, but I'm having my it's a wonderful life moment because so many former students who are now adults, because I've been in education 23 years.

So a lot of my students are in their 20s and 30s have contacted me and thanked me and they've shared things.

Remember when we did this in seventh grade and remember when we did this.

And and to me, that's everything because the people that are so negative and are trying to tear down librarians, they don't have people messaging them about what they've meant, like positive stories about how they have changed people's lives.

All they have is negativity and hate.

And so I I wrap my heart around those things or wrap those things around my heart.

And I have all of those letters and I take them out and I look at them and I share them with other librarians to tell them, hey, it's not it's not everybody.

It's just a small.

It feels like it's everybody, but it's a very small, loud minority of people that are attacking.

It just seems like it's so much more.

Right.

I mean, I remember the quote in the article that the Washington Post did.

Gosh, it's probably a year ago now when they talked about the percentage of book bans or challenges and that it was all done by like 11, 11 people.

And so it is good to keep in perspective that it really is a small percentage.

And yet that small percentage of people is causing a lot of consternation for librarians around the country.

Yes, because what they say is so wild.

What they post online is so wild and people tend to believe the fantastical, you know, like, oh, look at this.

And people will take one page of one book out of context and post it and say, this is in the children's area and it's not.

And they'll, you know, and they make up these wild stories and people believe it hook line and sinker.

And so, but really it's a very, very small few that are stirring up this drama.

The problem we have is that the, the average everyday citizen can't discern sometimes what's real and what's fake on social media and on the internet.

And that's where the problem lies.

Definitely.

Right.

Well, we first heard about your experiences when we saw news articles about your defamation lawsuit.

So could you please tell our listeners why you decided to sue Michael Lunsford and Ryan, is it Tames or Thames?

Thames, yeah.

For defamation?

Yes.

You know, as an educator, we teach our children and as a parent, I teach my own child that when someone's bullying you, whether online or in person, that you should speak out and you should seek help.

And I sought help from the Sheriff's Department.

I filed three different police reports and they did nothing.

And so I felt I had no other recourse, but to file a defamation lawsuit to protect my good name.

And because that's what we teach the kids to do, is to stand up for yourself and tell somebody and tell people in authority.

And so that's what I did.

And I filed a defamation lawsuit.

And I did it to stand up for myself.

And I knew going in that defamation cases are very, very hard to win.

So I went in knowing I probably wasn't going to win.

I mean, that's just fact.

But that's not the point.

The point is that I already won by filing a suit and standing up for myself.

And of course, the local judge, she said I was a public figure, and I inserted myself into a controversy, which there was no controversy when I went and spoke.

She said I'm a public figure and that basically, it's their opinion that I give children erotica and that I teach children how to perform anal sex.

And that's their opinion and they're allowed to have it.

And so even though I can prove all four facets of defamation, including malice, I was never even given a chance at a trial.

She dismissed my case.

And so then I appealed.

And at the appellate level, two judges said they tried to get out of it with the technicality.

And one dissented and said, I have every right to a trial.

But it was two to one.

So now we are at the stage where I am filing this week, actually, or next week, actually, I am filing to appeal to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

Wow.

Well, good for you.

Good for you.

Yeah.

Good luck with that.

Yeah.

And again, I don't do I think I'm going to win, though.

But it's not the point.

It's not the point.

The point is to stand up for myself and say that I'm not going to take this lying down.

And the bad thing is I have to pay their court costs if I ultimately lose.

Oh, gosh.

Yeah.

So I'm paying mine and theirs, but I am fortunate to have a GoFundMe, so I'm fine.

And, you know, it is what it is.

Okay.

Listeners, check out the GoFundMe.

Exactly.

I was just thinking that we could put it in our show notes if maybe.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

So what are some of the challenges with suing someone for defamation?

Because you indicated that it's exceedingly hard to prove, even though it sounds like there were four different parts and you proved them all.

But what are the challenges?

And then my follow up question to that would be, and maybe you can't speak on this, but I know that judges are often politically appointed.

And is that the case with the Supreme Court of, or Superior Court, whichever it is, of Louisiana?

So the biggest challenge and the reason why I think that people don't go after defamers more often is it's exceedingly expensive.

I've already spent \$60,000 in two years.

And it's very, very expensive.

And again, like I said, if I ultimately continue to lose and not even get a fair shot, I have to pay theirs as well.

So you know, it's so expensive.

That's the biggest hurdle.

The second, though, but you know, the local judge was elected.

She doesn't want to go against what she perceives her constituents to want.

And that is my hand on a silver platter.

Well, you know, ironically, after my court case was dismissed, some people in that extremist group did post pictures of them together on social media.

And I, you know, and I try to give the judge the benefit of the doubt.

But that is in the back of my head when I, you know, and screenshots live forever.

They removed it.

But I'll just say screenshots live forever.

But, you know, the the thing is, we just have it.

We got a new governor.

And I like to call him Kim Jong Landry and Jeff Landry is a dictator.

And in the past six months, we have seen he's he's now in charge of all of our like political boards.

He's even in charge of our ethics board that is actively investigating him for ethics complaints.

So, you know, he's he's in charge of he has a hand in the Supreme Court of Louisiana.

So do I think I'll get a fair shot?

Ultimately, no, no, but I never thought I was I never thought I was going to get a fair shot.

And again, that's not the point.

And every time I lose, you know, at the first circuit or wherever, they get online and they crow about it and they're like, we won, we won.

And but I'm thinking, but but but have you really like, like, you know, because it's all in public record, what they've said and done to me, it's all in public record, their screenshots, their comments, and that's all I care about that I stood up for myself.

It's in public record that I stood up for myself.

And I can say that I, I practice what I preach.

And that is to don't take things lying down.

And so I didn't.

And yeah, it sucked.

I've lost and yeah, it sucks.

I'm going to spend the hundreds of thousands of dollars, but it'll be, I'll be okay.

Sorry, that was heavy.

No, no, no.

Well, no, I mean, it's, it's adding to a mood we were already feeling.

Right.

And also the truth is heavy.

I mean, well, we wanted to talk a little bit more about what it was like growing up in your small town, which you mentioned in the book was mostly white, conservative and religious.

So could you tell us more about how your eyes were opened to injustices based by people of color and LGBTQ plus individuals?

I love my community and I grew up in a very religious conservative household, but it's, it was the, I was taught God is love and we should love everyone, that kind of religious, not the you're all going to hell religious kind of household.

And so I growing up, my best friend was gay, or well, he still is gay.

He's still my best friend.

So my best friend is gay and he was, you know, he was in my wedding party.

And so I grew up, you know, listening to his perspective on what it's like to be a member of the queer community, the gay community in a small town.

And he had to leave.

Like he had to move to another state to find happiness.

And I have taught several children who grew up to they, as they got older, they took their own lives because they were members of the LGBTQIA plus community and they feel ostracized.

And that changes you as the way you look at things and the kind of person you want to be and the kind of person who wants to advocate for all of your students.

I want to advocate for every community member, everybody.

And growing up, we're still a majority white Christian area.

And it's I never really thought about it growing up until I became a librarian.

And I have several school librarian friends who are very strong black women, who I have learned so much from.

And and I just I learned to listen.

I learned to listen.

It really started with the book Marley Dias Gets It Done and So Can You that I read in 2018.

It went on to in 2020 when we were in quarantine and George Floyd.

And I started looking at the pain that some of my friends were dealing with for being, you know, in marginalized communities.

And it just changed the way I see things.

And I wish I had, I wish my eyes had been opened at a younger age.

Because I write about, I write about in my book, my big shame of the way I voted in the past.

And I wish I had realized things that I realize now at an earlier age.

I have a lot of regrets.

Right.

Well, I completely understand that.

But I also think it's wonderful that you did realize, you know, mistakes you've made in the past and are trying to make it so that other people don't make those same mistakes in the future.

And I think it's really wonderful that you are trying to protect the most vulnerable children in your community and trying to make it so that other kids and adults don't feel ostracized.

And I do try and it's such a fine line because I don't want to come off as white savior vibes.

You know, and it's so hard to balance that and it's very uncomfortable.

And it's uncomfortable to talk and I still get things wrong.

And I'm always worried about saying the wrong thing.

And from a place of ignorance, because I'm always learning, you know, we're always learning and growing.

And it's a very, it's a very hard, it's very hard to navigate.

So I understand why people get uncomfortable and don't want to talk about it and don't want to listen and want to deny.

I mean, I don't understand it, but I'm trying to.

But we have to have these conversations and we have to put ourselves in other people's shoes.

Well, I think that's true.

But I also think, you know, you're an educator.

All all of us are educators as well.

And as an educator, I mean, you already said this, you know, you wanted to be a role model to your students.

You wanted to be a role model to your own offspring.

All of that, you know, plays into the fact that you were willing to look back and evaluate past, you know, what we, you know, you, you called mistakes.

But I mean, I think what you said is so key to be around people who are different than you, who grew up differently than you did, to listen is so incredibly important and to understand that other people have different perspectives.

And then once you start talking and listening and thinking and considering other people's perspectives, I feel like, you know, you, you create this, this circle of trust with those folks where it gives you, I mean, I do it all the time.

I put my foot in my mouth all the time because I also try to speak about things that I haven't lived, because I, I'm not, I didn't grow up that way or, you know, whatever.

But the people that know me and know my heart are really happy to call me out and say, uh, you can't say it that way, you know, and but that's part of the learning process for all of us.



And the more we learn, the better we're going to get at having these conversations and not stepping on each other's toes.

So, um, I just wanted to go further though, and talk about, you know, you discussed how you've educated yourself, you know, I've just waxed poetic about how I've educated myself.

But what recommendations could you give others who, you know, maybe you're like on the verge of thinking, maybe I should consider someone else's perspective.

How can other people start to educate themselves?

And, you know, maybe move their thinking a little bit.

First and foremost, I would say, and this is what I tell my parents, you've got to stop watching that one main news channel, especially if that news channel is just a bunch of talking pundits that aren't really journalists and it's not actual news.

Get off of that.

But I read a variety of news apps, and newspapers, and I tried to read everything I can on topics from all different points of view, left, right, middle of the road.

But pay attention to your local governance.

Watch, because here we have, we are governed by a parish council, which is like our county governance.

Look at their agenda items, watch their meetings, they're almost always streamed online.

Watch these things, go to your school board meetings, or stream them, or look at their agendas.

Same for public library board meetings.

And learn about the attacks that are happening, and then look into why these are happening.

I'll also say, Kelly Jensen of Book Riot puts out a weekly censorship roundup, and she writes heavily about what is happening all across the United States in schools and public libraries.

And when you read the stories, you can see, you read about the attacks, and you learn about the attacks, and you learn why they're happening, and you, I follow people on Twitter, or X, or whatever they're calling it now, from different groups to try to learn more, and understand more.

But just knowledge is power.

So try to learn as much as you can, and stay as aware as you can.

Right.

Those are all great pieces of advice.

Excellent advice.

And while we're talking about the politics, you described how some politicians in Louisiana and other states have used book banning and parents' rights to get elected.

Why do you think those methods have been popular?

And have you continued to see them in political messaging in your state?

Oh yeah, it's constant.

It's constant here and everywhere, really.

So what they'll do is they'll have these dark money groups or these nonprofits or these joyful warrior parental rights groups.

And I say joyful warrior in quotes.

These political groups come in and say, oh, you know, there's porn in the library or whatever.

And they make up this, you know, fake ridiculousness.

And they cause a stir so that the politicians can swoop in and say, well, if you elect to me, I'm going to save the day.

I'm going to protect the children and protect parental rights.

And the irony is that no one was ever harming children and parental rights were never under fire.

Exactly.

So, you know, like nobody's, it's not happening.

It's fake.

And so they use this as the, oh, we're going to save the day.

And then so people vote for them because they're like, oh, you know, like with in Louisiana, our governor was attorney general and he had this protecting innocence report that he put out about porn in the libraries.

But none of the books that he posted in his project were in children's sections.

They were adult books and adult sections.

And he's created this, this, I call it the snitch line where people could call in and report on librarians sneaking kids, illicit books.

And none of that was happening.

But he did it all as a ruse so that people would vote for him.

And he and they did and now he's governor.

And they're trying to file legislation.

And you see that it's not about books and it's not about you look at there.

They're trying to defund schools and libraries.

And they cause fake controversies to do it.

And when we had a local election back in November, almost every person running for any form of office on their flyer said we will stop the woke agenda in the libraries.

There's no agenda.

Like there's no agenda.

Like what are they even talking about?

It's like the truth, truth and sanity have gone out the window.

Well, truth and sanity is our agenda.

So, yeah, yeah.

My favorite.

Well, they're against they're against anything that's the truth or anybody that points out that it's all a farce, which is what they did to me.

I pointed out it's a farce.

So they attacked me left and right.

And my favorite quote about me was Amanda Jones.

This is a legit quote.

Amanda Jones is burning common sense and morals on the altar of wokeism.

So I made a shirt and I wear it around town.

Good for you.

But the irony, yeah.

The irony is I am a Southern Baptist and I hate to admit it, I'm still a registered Republican.

I mean, do I vote that way now?

No.

I mean, but I can't.

I can't vote with, I'm not.

But I am, I'm one of them and they turned on me.

And so now I'm not one of them and I'm proud to not be one of them, if that's the road that they're going to take.

Yeah.

Well, you provided some great suggestions in your book for ways that people can take action against censorship in their communities.

Could you please explain a few ways that you think are most important?

It's very important to follow legislature, the legislature and legislative sessions.

And if you see if you see anybody putting out, like there's a lot of local library alliances and different states like Florida has the Florida Freedom to Read Project and Texas has the Texas Freedom to Read Project.

And you need to, if you have these in your states, follow and keep up to date and sign those petitions.

And when you see these action items like, you know, email your politician that you're against book banning, those work because we sent over 44,000 e-mails to our legislator, legislators this past session.

And they commented in sessions when they killed these bills that they were doing it because they overwhelmingly received e-mails saying that the constituents supported libraries.

So to follow these action items, but also you send, you know, send messages of support to your local teachers and your local librarians.

Please, they mean the world.

They mean the world to me.

And I know they mean the world to other people.

And I'm one of those weirdos that lurks sometimes.

And if I see, I don't do it in my community because I don't want to see what my own haters say about me.

But in other communities, I'll go where there's like library controversies and I'll find the person that's commenting for the librarians and support.

And I'll private message them and say, hey, have you thought about sending them a private e-mail saying you support them because it would mean the world to them.

So if people could do that, it would really help those of us that are fighting this fight.

I completely agree with you because as a public librarian, we're under attack everywhere and largely we're under attack by people who don't use the library.

So walk into your library, go see what is really in your public library.

And I think that you will be pleasantly surprised that as Amanda has been saying, no one is trying to teach your five-year-old how to have anal sex.

It's just not for real.

And if you also look at what your library is offering you, which is a tremendous amount of programming that is to the benefit of everyone in the community.

And then think about, do I really want to defund my library?

Because if I defund my library, all of this is going away.

The Job Corps, for people who are seeking jobs, is going away.

The food pantry to feed people who are having trouble making ends meet, that's going away.

Having an air-conditioned place to be on these ridiculous summer days for people who can't afford electricity in their homes, that'll go away.

The same for heat in the wintertime.

I mean, there's just so much that will just flat out go away.

And that's what happens if you defund your library.

It does.

And it affects the poorest of our communities too.

Yeah.

And I find that a lot of these people that are causing these controversies are people of privilege and they don't have to worry about it.

And they don't seem to care that when we, if our library shut down, it is going to affect the poorest of our communities.

They don't care.

Yeah.

We're supposed to love our neighbor and take care of the stranger amongst us, right?

And take care of the people who are less fortunate than us.

So let's do it.

Let's take care of people.

And the library is one of those places that does that.

Amanda, at the end of the book, you discussed returning to work as your middle school's librarian for the 23-24 school year.

Hopefully that was a better year for you at work.

And we're wondering how the situation was and if the situation with book banning has improved in your community in the past year.

The situation at work was much better.

I came back after a medical leave in a much better place.

And work-wise, it was as if nothing had ever happened.

I was there for the kids.

Same old, same old.

And I will say that when I returned, I found that a lot of my coworkers were a lot more supportive than they had been the previous year.

And I had to have some tough discussions with the administration about what had happened to me and what I wanted to see looking forward.

And they were very supportive of me.

And I'm very appreciative of them.

As far as book banning in our community, no, that is still happening.

I am currently our local Livingston Parish Library Alliance that I am director of.

We are currently gearing up for our next Library Board of Control meeting.

They are going to try to relegate all of the LGBTQIA plus books to a parenting section.

And they are trying to ban the book, I'm Not a Girl.

Oh, for heaven's sake.

So yeah, so we are currently working on that.

And even though I have already told them about Sund versus the city of Wichita Falls, and how we cannot have our own section for the LGBTQ books that has already been ruled unconstitutional, I think they're going to still push it.

And so we're just we're working on that.

And there's a current hostile takeover.

They're trying to hostilely take over our library board of control and install more extremists.

We're trying to fight that.

So far, the past two years, we've been pretty successful, you know, and there's going to be losses.

You know, skirmishes will lose some skirmishes will win some.

But I have confidence that the tide is turning here in my community and that we will win the battle overall.

And it is a battle for our public library and for all of our community members to be able to see themselves on the shelves and feel wanted and a part of our community.

And I think we'll be ultimately successful.

Well, that's very encouraging.

I hope so.

I'd love to hear your optimism.

So, got to be optimistic, you know, and we just recently interviewed the current president, the newly current president of ALA, who was also optimistic.

So that that gives us hope.

Yes.

Cindy, Cindy Hall.

She's amazing.

Yeah, she is so amazing.

And she, she recently appointed me to the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee.

And so, yeah, I'm very excited to help our national organization and help our president as much as I can, because it's not just happening here in my community or in Louisiana.

It's happening everywhere.

And anything I can do to help librarians, I'm here for it.

Awesome.

Wonderful.

Thank you, Amanda.

Could you please tell our listeners where they can find you online and hopefully show some support?

Well, I have a website.

It's called [librarianjones.com](http://librarianjones.com).

And I have a section on my book.

I have a section on Speaking Out, which has all the articles in ways that, you know, has my court motions.

It has everything about, you know, my personal fight.

But it also has some links to censorship tool kits and things like that.



So [librarianjones.com](http://librarianjones.com).

And I'm also on Twitter slash X at [ABMACK33](https://twitter.com/ABMACK33).

Great.

Wonderful.

Well, Amanda, thank you so much for talking with us today.

We really appreciate your sharing your story, and we're so happy that we had the chance to read your book.

And thank you for everything you're doing to stand up to censorship.

Thank you for having me.

It's nice to be able to put the word out, you know, so that the other people can find out what's happening and help join the fight.

Thank you.

That is that is our goal as Rogue Librarians.

So we're in your corner and and you know, we do really admire you.

Thank you so much.

We really enjoy talking with Amanda and highly recommend that you read her book.

You can find her website and social media links in the show notes.

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