

EPISODE 1A: INCITING INCIDENT

JANIELLE: The “Hero’s Journey” is a classic story structure that a bunch of stories follow from all across the world, throughout a billion time periods. Joseph Campbell coined the term for it. It’s when a hero needs something, they face adversity, and then they triumph over their adversity. So yeah, you know the story, First you meet your hero in their ordinary world, and then they receive “a call to adventure”. Capital C, Capital A. I’m Janielle Kastner, and I am not a hero. I am a regular human woman who didn’t know the story of why her dad wasn’t in her life, who finally got his email address, and decided to reach out, and start an adventure, maybe? And then he died before she could send him anything. (With a few, kind of... story-ish, on-the-nose details in there: He was declared dead on my birthday, and then I found out that none of his friends knew I existed. Check out the prologue for if you haven’t already, it has all the details and context that you need.) After my dad’s death, I didn’t know who I was anymore, and I didn’t know why I didn’t know who I was anymore. But in that pit of grief, I felt something. If not a capital-C “call to adventure,” a call to *something*. I might be a regular person, but I am a regular person who writes and loves stories. Maybe I could finally figure out my own story, and the story of my elusive Dad Character. Maybe I could find a narrative resolution, if not an emotional one. Maybe I could just decide to become a hero. Which begs a question: Can a hero (capital-C) call *themselves* on an adventure? Can I just decide to start my hero’s journey? Can I just extend myself the same dignity, and care, and attention that I would to any of my protagonists? And if I know what I want (a meaningful resolution, to reckon with my Dad Character, and to finally know my own story), can I just reverse engineer my story back from there? And can I make something, something meaningful, or maybe even beautiful, out of a whole bunch of nothing, and an ordinary senseless loss? I don’t know. But I want to try. And we’ve got to start somewhere. Welcome to my Untitled Dad Project. Chapter 1: Inciting Incident.

[INTRO MUSIC]

JANIELLE: Apparently one of the things that happens next to the hero is they quote “meet a mentor,” who is someone who offers practical advice, wisdom, sometimes weapons, is often a wise, old wizard... I have a director, Carson McCain.

CARSON: Uh, I’m Carson, I am not a wizard, but I am here to help. And right now, “helping” means asking good questions. So first off, Janielle, how do we want to start this thing?

JANIELLE: That is a good question. I want to start with my interview with Robert McKee, because I more or less asked him the exact same question, which is: How do I start this thing? And Robert was the first big-deal person who agreed to talk to me about this project. He’s a noted screenwriting teacher and wrote the book on story. He literally wrote a giant, canonical book called *Story*. And I was very nervous, so I thought I could start by charming him with some great warm up questions.

JANIELLE: Just to get started, I’d love to hear, sort of, what are some of your favorite stories that you’re consuming right now?

ROBERT: Oh, let’s not bother with that. Let’s talk about what you’re writing, and um, cause I think, I think that’s the subject matter of this, and I want to, you know, be of help if I can, to help you advance uh, this project and get it to a, you know, a really, you know, excellent level.

JANIELLE: Well, wonderful!

ROBERT: So you tell, you tell me where you are with this project...

JANIELLE: Yeah of course. So, ummm -- “

JANIELLE: Nope. No charming my new best friend/maybe future screenwriting mentor. Ugh, that's fine. Straight to the work.

JANIELLE: --So uh, in lieu of a grieving process, I'm working on a creative process. A narrative quest to figure out how to tell my own story, and I'm using the lens of storytelling to investigate grief, and how do we investigate moments in our life that change our plot, if that makes sense. So--

ROBERT: It does. It's very interesting, this approach. It's, it's, it's, if you'll excuse me, but it's very mechanical, what you're doing. It-it isn't, it isn't, uh, at all emotional.

JANIELLE: I think the, uh, the journey to try to make something. The journey to--

ROBERT: You know, you know, I'm gonna, I-I'm gonna--

JANIELLE: --honor the creative process, *that* I'm thinking is very process heavy--

ROBERT: Jan--

JANIELLE: --very methodological--

ROBERT: Jan, I'm gonna-I'm gonna stop you for a moment, and I'm going to ask you, in my presence at least, not to use two different words: Narrative, and journey.

JANIELLE: Okay.

ROBERT: Both of those words are empty, banal, academic, superficial words. "Narrative" is, I know, uh, it sounds like it has, you know, intellectual weight, but it's really a--a hollow word. Um, "story" is real word. But "narrative," you see, anything is a narrative. All stories are narratives, but not all narratives are stories. Um, autoparts going down an assembly line, eventually becoming a car, is a narrative, but it sure isn't a story. "Story" implies conflict, it implies desire, it implies, um, very powerful values, a dynamic positive and negative charges of life. A narrative is bland, boring, it's "and then and then and then and then..." And so, if what you want to create is a narrative of "and then and then and then and then," I'm not your guy. If you want to tell the story of this experience in some fashion, I am your guy. "Journey" is another non-word. Uh, life is not a journey. Life is an intense struggle uphill, battling forces of antagonisms, trying to get out of life something that lets you die with a sense of not having wasted your time. What you're talking about is not a journey. It's a struggle, I'm presuming, of you trying to cope with the fact that you were raised without a father, and, therefore, much of your life was, was-was never available to you. The whole father daughter relationship was taken away from you, and anybody with a background in psychology know that's a, that's a recipe for neurosis. And so um to call that a journey is-is to, is to deny what actually happened, what you actually went through.

JANIELLE: Wonderful...uh absolutely. Great...

JANIELLE: This was not wonderful or great. Those are just the word sounds I happened to make while I was scrolling through my phone trying to replace the words "narrative" and "journey" in all of my follow-up questions.

CARSON: How did you feel like the interview was going at this point?

JANIELLE: Oh I thought, "Oh, I am very bad at this. I'm not Terry Gross. I always secretly thought I might be Terry Gross, and I am not. But listening back, I don't think I

have anything to be embarrassed about. He's making a really important point. I have a narrative. I know what happened in order. What I really want is a story.

ROBERT: So we're going to tell a story. We're going to tell *the* story. Okay. Who is the protagonist, who is the central character of the story you're going to tell? Is it you, or your father?

JANIELLE: Uh, it's Jan character. Yeah.

ROBERT: So then we have to figure out, what was the inciting incident? What is the first major event in this, in this story? It's the event that radically throws life out of balance. Was it that, the being born without a father to help raise you? Was it the realization that indeed you had a father out there in the world, he sent you birthday cards? Was it, um, looking forward to meeting your father and then learning that he's, that he's passed away? And any of those things that I just mentioned, and many more I'm presuming, could easily be seen as the event, the inciting incident, the starting event of this story. And you have to make a decision as to what that is.

JANIELLE: If you think about, like um, what is the word you used, "dis-disrupting the norm"? Is that what you said?

ROBERT: Upsetting balance.

JANIELLE: Upsetting balance. So there was, uh, a really steady balance between Jan and Mom character. Of like, it's the two of us against the world, there is stasis, there is home here, and that whole stasis was built upon never acknowledging the fact that there was even need for a dad character. "There's no lack here. Let's um, we're walking on a tight rope. No time to look down. Let's keep going."

ROBERT: Mhmm, mhmm.

JANIELLE: Uh, so the first moment, I used to think that the first moment of sort of upsetting that was, um, when Mom saw Dad in court, and Mom got email, and got the email address, and Dad said, "Yeah, I Google her." That was the first time that Jan character realized, "Oh! He Googles me, he cares even a little bit." And then Jan, me, I decided to draft an email reaching out to him. I thought that was going to be the inciting incident to an interesting story.

ROBERT: So this is when you were 26? So there's 26 years behind that moment of living a lie.

JANIELLE: Yeah, but a really cozy one.

ROBERT: And... Well yeah, fine. But, a lie nonetheless.

JANIELLE: Hm.

ROBERT: Um, your mother was receiving child support, was she not?

JANIELLE: Uh, no. Spotty.

ROBERT: Ah, spotty.

JANIELLE: More-more not than was, yeah.

ROBERT: I understand, but he-but he had a-a court order to-to support you, which he--

JANIELLE: Yeah, correct.

ROBERT: Which he at many times, apparently, just did not, not um uh, write the check. But nonetheless, did she ever tell you that? That she was getting child support?

JANIELLE: She wouldn't talk to me about it, but I would hear her on the phone talking with her, like, church friends, asking for prayer. So I-I got like secondhand insight into her struggle.

ROBERT: Ah, see that's, see now it's becoming interesting.

JANIELLE: Hmm, tell me how.

ROBERT: Well, because here you have a child who-who was being lied to, and knows other kids have fathers, and she doesn't. And she's picked it up somehow, I'm presuming, I'm just filling in here, but has picked it up somehow from her mother that it's inappropriate to ask about this. She doesn't want to talk about it, so, right? And, but you know, because you go to school, that-that most kids have two parents. You don't. And, um, and she's built this uh, two-uh, two-against-the-world narrative, uh, for the two of you and down deep in your heart you know that-that you're being lied to.

CARSON: This is an interesting point about your story. We're confronted with the idea that your mom may have hid a piece of your childhood from you, or as Robert says "lied to you." Had that ever occurred to you before?

JANIELLE: No, that had never occurred to me before, and it felt true when he said it. This is kind of the first new piece of information about my story. I didn't think I was being lied to, I thought I was pretending. And pretending is to live a lie. This isn't how I thought about it, but when he said it, it felt true. And I don't think my mom's a liar. I do not think

my mom's a liar. But I was living a lie. So... That's just, a new dissonance I didn't know was living inside my story.

ROBERT: So even though your parent is lying to you, and deep in your heart you know that you're being lied to, deep in your heart you can compare your life to the lives of the other kids in school, and whatnot, and you know there's a component missing, but you also understand that your mother doesn't want to talk about it. So you-you have to live the lie with her. And, um, and she must be right, or you-or, you understand? And-and-and so you have to swallow, you have to prevent yourself from asking the obvious questions. And she doesn't want to talk about it. Um, that becomes psychologically fascinating.

JANIELLE: I-I asked my mom when I was young, I said, "What do I tell my friends when they ask why I only have a mommy, and not a mommy and a daddy?" And she got a kind of embarrassed look on her face and she said, just tell them it's not your story to tell.

ROBERT: What does that mean?

JANIELLE: I grew up in a really religious context, so the idea of an unmarried woman-I think, uh, I-I-I-I presume into the mom character, that I-

ROBERT: That it's a sin.

JANIELLE: --That the idea that people would assume she was divorced as opposed to an unmarried woman might be kind of an attractive assumption.

ROBERT: Mhmm. What denomination?

JANIELLE: Uh, Non-denomination, which is actually a denomination, uh--

ROBERT: Yeah, uh huh.

JANIELLE: --Like an offshoot of charismatic, kind of splitting the difference between Assemblies of God and Baptist.

ROBERT: It was a Christian, or--?

JANIELLE: Christian, yeah.

ROBERT: Yeah. But-but sort of generalized somehow?

JANIELLE: Uh, generalized in that they-they, Non-denoms choose not to have like a larger congregational authority?

ROBERT: Uh-huh.

JANIELLE: So like, which has all the traps you would imagine. You know. Individual people can be prophets, etc. So um, it can be, uh, pretty localized if that makes sense.

ROBERT: Sure it does. And um, you know, we have a name for that, if-you know, which is, uh, you know, a cult. And so in that society then, you-you, perhaps, is another pressure not to ask questions.

CARSON: I'm having a really hard time being your director and not your friend right now, because it hurts me to hear him speak so insensitively about things that I know are important to you, like your mom, and like your childhood. It is hard to hear somebody be so brutal to you.

JANIELLE: Yeah I can see that. Well, right off the bat, I don't think my mom is, like, a malicious liar. That would be a cool story. I don't think I was raised in a cult. That would also be a really interesting story. It was just, like, run-of-the-mill, just as toxic as any religious environment, community. Um. But as for the brutality... It-it kind of hurt, but it-it was brutality that felt like it was pulling me closer to my story and closer to my truth. Maybe he got details off, and maybe he was a little, um, what would be the word? Too um...

CARSON: Glib?

JANIELLE: Maybe he was comfortable being super glib about stuff that needs more context. But-the gesture of his brutality was pulling me closer to something I knew was true about my story, what is becoming true about my story, and in that way it hurt good. Hurt so good.

[MUSIC]

CARSON: So Janielle, we're going to take a break really fast.

JANIELLE: Is it a break that will make me money, so I can keep making art?

CARSON: I think it might be.

JANIELLE: Alright, let's go to an ad.

[AD BREAK]

CARSON: Picking back up on with our interview with Robert, he was asking you some questions (in a way that I might find rude, but ultimately might actually be really helpful).

ROBERT: What I mean-The reason I'm asking these questions is because I'm trying to figure out what story to tell. You could tell a journalistic story about your-your-your father's life, and your investigation of that, and piecing it together, and coming up with-with the story of this guy's life, if it's interesting, I don't know. Um, or you can tell the story about your own life, and I think, you know, you made the right choice. But then, once you decide, "Okay, I'm the protagonist. This is autobiographical," uh, then you have to figure out: What is the inciting incident?

JANIELLE: What's interesting about the inciting incident, um... It's interesting to me that you pulled out the themes of, sort of, like, what you're calling a lie, that I'm afraid to call a lie, so that probably means that's exactly what it is.

ROBERT: Of course.

JANIELLE: Uh, and the idea of not asking questions. If that's sort of like the early theme, the early stasis, the early norm, then what's actually the inciting incident, what breaks that, is the sudden death of my father, which um, which the, uh, the-the gaping hole that that left in my heart--

ROBERT: Mhmm

JANIELLE: --sort of completely calls bullshit on the lie that um, my life was fine, dads don't matter.

ROBERT: It wasn't, but it wasn't fine.

JANIELLE: Yeah, exactly.

ROBERT: Cause you were living, yeah exactly, you were living a lie.

JANIELLE: I'm realizing that my dad's death is the inciting incident, but not for the reason you think. My dad died. That didn't actually change my stasis. I didn't have a dad. He died. I will continue to not have a dad. What changed my stasis was, when I got that email? That feeling in my gut? "Oh no, he's died. Oh no, this hurts. Oh no, he's mattered. Him not being here has mattered the whole time." The life I built where it didn't matter that I didn't have a dad? That's a lie. It matters. It's mattered this whole time. And now he's gone. So that's the inciting incident.

ROBERT: Tell me something about your mother: this religious group that she was involved with, did she find them before or after she conceived you?

JANIELLE: Ha, it's very cinematic, Robert. She was pregnant and crying in the car, not knowing what to do, 'cause she was alone. And she turned on the radio, and an ad for this church came on the radio. So she drove to that church, walked in, and someone put their hands on her belly and prayed over her future baby and said, "You were given this daugh--you were given this daughter for a reason."

ROBERT: Because they knew they had--

JANIELLE: You can't write this stuff!

ROBERT: --No, you can't write this stuff.--

JANIELLE: It's so on the nose!

ROBERT: --They put their hands on her belly, yeah I know, and they prayed for her, because they knew they had a victim.

JANIELLE: It was, it's so heavy-handed, honestly, but it's what I've got--

ROBERT: I know.

JANIELLE: --The raw material.

ROBERT: I know and she walked right in, and she's the perfect convert. Pregnant, unwed-unwed mother. Why didn't your mother choose to have an abortion?

JANIELLE: Um. She said that she knew that I was given to her as a gift.

ROBERT: So she rationalized it with some sort of supernatural event?

JANIELLE: Sure, that's the unromantic way of saying it, would be that. Exactly, yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT: Yeah. Yeah.

JANIELLE: I can hear in my voice how back-footed I was here. I just, uh, felt paralyzed, didn't know how to talk to him about this, 'cause he's talking about these events *very* differently (much more cynically) than my mom talks about them, so like... Which is true? And I'm paralyzed. Which I think this is a perfect example of how a story isn't *what* happens, it's *how* it happens. Like, an event happened: my mom walked into a church, her pregnant belly is prayed over. For Robert, that's about how religious institutions prey upon vulnerable victims, and how we rationalize scary things with the supernatural events. For my mom, it's about how miracles are real, and whatever darkness you're facing will turn into light, and meaning, and purpose. The point isn't figuring out which

one's true. The point is: What's *my* story? They've each got their version of a story. I need to figure out mine.

[MUSIC]

JANIELLE: If we think about the inciting incident as the-the death. The sudden death. Jan no longer has a lie to explain who her dad is or what he doesn't mean to her, because, all of a sudden, he does.

ROBERT: Mhmm.

JANIELLE: What do, how do we think about the climax? What-What's the next significant sort of--?

ROBERT: Well the, the, the-The object of desire then, out of this experience your father dying, you decide that you're going to cope by creating a work of art based on this experience, right?

JANIELLE: Mhmm, mhmm.

ROBERT: Okay, so this work of art has to have content, it has to be about something. So what is it about? Why can't you just shrug off the death of your father? You didn't know the guy, he had no real part in your life. Why am I so upset about the death of a man I didn't even know? And then, you would then go back to your entire childhood, and the story then would be - the-the story within the story - would be your quest to figure out what, in fact, your childhood was about. But the first thing you have to do is build up pages, and pages, and pages, and pages of content. And I say "pages of content," because if you don't write it down, you will not know it. If you just talk about it

and think about it, that's one thing. But you don't know you know anything until you can write it down.

JANIELLE: I think I believe that. It hurts so much when it comes out, when I write it, but once it's out there on the page, it can't hurt me anymore. I own it. I made it. It might have ripped my heart out to get it there, but there's my heart. I can see it. It's on the page. It can't hurt me. The more honest I am about the things that scare me, the more the things that scare me get put in a place where they can't hurt me anymore. So yeah, I need to write it all down.

[MUSIC]

JANIELLE: At this point of the interview, Robert asked me if I had any dad surrogates, any dad character substitutes, and I described Val. He was the father of this big family at my church, he was the dad of one of my friends, and he would always invite my mom and I over for holidays, and he meant a lot to me.

JANIELLE: And then um, uh, and then he, uh, died a couple months after my dad did.

ROBERT: Jesus.

JANIELLE: Yeah, no, it's--Robert, it's so - it's so heavy handed, and um--

ROBERT: The way-the way you keep this from being melodrama is, um-uh.. Something is melodramatic when the motivation doesn't match the action. Nothing is, in itself, melodramatic. Human beings are capable of anything, anything you can imagine them doing, or happening to them, has already been done, and done in ways you can't imagine. And none of it is melodrama. It's just human.

[MUSIC]

CARSON Uh, now feels like a good time to take a break for an ad.

JANIELLE: I'm feeling it, let's do it.

[AD BREAK]

CARSON: At this point, let's break down with Robert all the components that make up a good story, and apply them to your story.

JANIELLE: Let's do it.

ROBERT: Who is the protagonist of this story?

JANIELLE: That would be me, who we were gonna call "Jan character" but really quickly abandoned. So we'll just call her me.

ROBERT: What event radically upset the balance of this person's life?

JANIELLE: The death of my father, when I realized his death mattered, which means... the life I built before? Where he didn't matter? Isn't real anymore.

ROBERT: What do they want consciously? In other words, what do they think they want to put their life back into balance? Like-like for example, you think that what you want is to complete a work of art based on this experience.

JANIELLE: That would be correct.

ROBERT: That's what you consciously want. But a really good story asks: What does this character really want *subconsciously*? Okay? It could well be that what you really want is to-is to somehow knit yourself back together as a human being, um, and get, you know, honest about how much damage has been done to you in your life, and-and to somehow repair that damage.

JANIELLE: That doesn't sound not true.

ROBERT: As they pursue those desires, what is stopping them from getting it? What are the forces of antagonism?

JANIELLE: The forces of antagonism standing in my way of making art, and knitting myself back together, and finding resolution? Are endless.

ROBERT: And when is they, you know, when do you finally make the-the crisis decision, and the character gets, finally, what the character wants. Um. OR, and--

JANIELLE: Or I don't get what I want.

ROBERT: --OR the character doesn't get what the character wants--

JAN: Yeah.

ROBERT: --Only to discover that they really now understand in a way they never understood before. And that is what they wanted.

JANIELLE: I don't know about that. I still want a resolution. I still want a meaningful end to this story. I'm not ready to give up on that yet. I want a resolution.

CARSON: Something I want you to consider-

JANIELLE: Ok

CARSON: Is there a world in which there is emotional resolution and not narrative resolution?

JANIELLE: Is there a world in which we feel good even if we don't know if Adnan did it?

CARSON: Yes.

JANIELLE: I don't think so.

CARSON: Why not?

JANIELLE: I think I'll know my story by the end of this, or I won't. And if I don't know my story by the end of this, if I haven't decided what my story is by the end of this, I will have conned you in an elaborate way, and made you feel good, and manipulated you into letting me off the fucking hook. I think those are our options. I might be a tragedy. Like, I might be a fucking tragedy. She missed her shot. She didn't send the email. Cautionary tale to estranged daughters everywhere, you know? That could be... That's still a resolution. It's a sad one. Hm. I also reserve the right to change my mind.

CARSON: Of course.

JANIELLE: I just don't... Don't let me convince you that, because I've put a good sound cue somewhere, that we've arrived. Promise?

CARSON: I think that's my whole job.

JANIELLE: I think it is! I think that is your job.

ROBERT: I think we're having a-a-a-I think-I hope this is a useful conversation. And the key to it is this: When I first read about the material that you were working with, my fear was sentimentality.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

ROBERT: Or as you were saying melodrama. That you weren't going to really create something of substance. And I think the quest here for you, the struggle, is to, um, is to get to the truth, and when you finally see what flawed people your parents were, and then you just-but you still love them.-Or not (laughs), or you decide to turn against those sons of bitches, and, I mean--

JANIELLE: Yeah.

ROBERT: Every-every-every moment is a fork in the road, and you have a choice which way to go, right?

JANIELLE: Yeah.

ROBERT: And they're all human, they're all possible, and-and if you write it well, we'll get it. We'll get whatever choice you make. Whatever, you know, path you take, we'll go: "Ah well, you know, that makes sense."

JANIELLE: Yeah, as an artist, I find that I'm - I really love even, like, even the sons of bitches that I write. Sometimes I like writing for them the most.

ROBERT: Hmm.

JANIELLE: They're so interesting and dynamic, and I-I-I am capable of loving people that I've created on the page in a way that, uh, it is much harder to love them in real life.

ROBERT: Oh, how true, how true. One of my-one of my ex-wives yelled at me one day and she said-she said, "You treat people like characters!" I said, "You should be so lucky I treat you like a character. I like characters. I don't necessarily like human beings."

And so, uh, I understand that you could love fictional character in ways you could, you know, you could never really care about a person. Really great characters teach you enormously about what it is to be a human being.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

ROBERT: So you love them for their exposing their humanity, their uniqueness to you, so that you have a greater understanding of-of-of what, you know, people are, and who you are. Um, it sounds to me just talking to you, you know, that you're pretty well adjusted.

JANIELLE: I like to think so. Or, at least, self aware about how I messed up.

ROBERT: Well, what did you mess up?

JANIELLE: Oh, um. Hmm. I think I have been afraid to dig where there is pain, because there have been much more interesting wells to play in my whole life. Creatively, emotionally, psychologically, all these different things. And um, and now I'm facing the consequences, which is this undercurrent of pain that I have never dealt with and all of

a sudden it just like, whatever, popped a pipe? Uh-uh busted a pipe? It found its way in. And here I am. Dealing with it.

ROBERT: Well as-as we said earlier, from a child's point of view, your parents have to be perfect. If they're not perfect, your life is in jeopardy. Therefore, a child rationalizes. Real fast. In order to idealize their parents. When you discover that your parents are not ideals or anything like that, naturally there's pain, and, and uh, I presume your mother's still with us, right?

JANIELLE: Yeah, yeah she is. She's a gem, yeah.

ROBERT: Okay. Whatever comes out of this project, she's gonna take personally.

JANIELLE: I know, Robert, I don't know what to do.

ROBERT: And--

JANIELLE: I gotta to be brave, I guess. Honest.

ROBERT: You gotta be brave, and uh, but there's a choice just to keep your mouth shut, which is what most people do.

JANIELLE: And I have for 28 years, and uh, I think enough is enough. I think it's my story to tell now.

ROBERT: Well, it was a pleasure talking to you.

JANIELLE: It was a pleasure talking with you. I, uh, I so appreciate your insight and for entering into this meta story, kind of, mind-fuck with me. Um. You were very gracious, and I appreciate it.

ROBERT: Well it's quite alright cause it was a pleasure to be able to talk to you to figure out, you know, what out of all of this is really worth telling.

JANIELLE: Thank you. Thank you so much for your time.

CARSON: What about this Robert interview is useful to your story?

JANIELLE: This was tremendously useful. I like what I said to Robert, and listening back to me closing out my interview with Robert, I was like, "Thank you for being so gracious with me." And he was not gracious. I used the word gracious, because that's the word I came up with for this other thing, which is, "Thank you for taking this seriously. Thank you for actually looking at this with me. Thank you for not bullshitting me. Thank you for thinking that there is a story here, and it's worth digging, even if it's painful, and clumsy, and awkward, and we step on each others toes." That's what I meant when I said "gracious." So what I have here is an invitation, uh, into a beginning. Where do I start with this story? The inciting incident. Realizing your dad's death mattered broke your stasis. I have been invited to go backwards and examine that stasis. I have been invited to consider that, wherever I pretend, I am living a lie. That's how big the stakes are. I don't advocate that, uh, you replace your therapist with a screenwriter. Definitely don't do that. But there is something really useful with how high the stakes are. Yeah, to pretend is to lie. So all in all, my uh, (laughs) my most embarrassing first interview was extraordinarily useful, and that being said I think I have gotten better at interviewing people since this.

CARSON: So how do we activate this for Jan Character?

JANIELLE: I think, if I'm going to figure out where Jan character is heading, I need to figure out where she came from. I need to go talk to my mom.

MOM: When you were born, somebody told me at church, a woman says, "I see a halo over her head."

JANIELLE: I need to have the experience of not keeping my mouth shut.

JANIELLE: How did it feel that that dad never came?

MOM: How did it feel?

JANIELLE: And actually asking the obvious questions that I've swallowed back?

JANIELLE: Do you remember me ever asking about why I didn't have a dad?

JANIELLE: And seeing if I can let the pain in, and let the pain be pain without hiding it or dancing around it.

MOM: It was very hard. It was really hard.

JANIELLE: Yeah. We need to talk to my mom.

[MUSIC]

JANIELLE: The next part of Chapter 1 is in your feed right now. In case you missed it, you can listen immediately to "Chapter 1 Part B: Inciting Incident."

JANIELLE: We'd also love to hear how "Inciting Incident" is relevant in *your* life, what are the events that have disrupted your stasis, and how are you deciding what to do next? Let us know at @untitleddadproject on social or email us

untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io. We think your story matters, and we'd love to hear about it.

JANIELLE: A quick correction from last week's prologue episode: In the facts about Jan Character's life, I said that "more often than not, Dad Character didn't show up to court" (regarding all that child support stuff), and it turns out that's not true. I did the math, and sat down, and figured out that he showed up more often than he didn't, which is maybe an important distinction, maybe not. I'm just realizing I'm probably going to get a lot of the facts about my own life wrong, and I appreciate you bearing with me. I'm going to try my best to get as much of it right as I can.

JANIELLE: Untitled Dad Project is co-hosted by me, Janielle "Jan" Kastner and Carson "Cat" McCain. If this project resonates with you at all, or you're interested in learning more, please head over to Apple Podcasts and leave us some stars and write a review, preferably a nice one, a neutral one would be great. This helps SO MUCH, more than you would think, especially here at the beginning of our podcast's life. Untitled Dad Project is a spoke media production, and we're produced by Carson McCain, with Associate Producer Kelly Kolff, and our "sweet baby intern" Lauren Floyd.

JANIELLE: Special thanks to Robert McKee -- who is a fount of information, and whose deep baritone words have rung in my mind for four years. More of his resources are at mckeestory.com (that's M-C-K-E-E Story dot com), including his books on story and info on his famous story seminars.

JANIELLE: This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, and our head of post production is Will Short.

JANIELLE: The music you heard at the end of today's episode is "Flora vs. Fauna" composed by Rat Rios; we turned it into our theme. She's making an original song for each of our episodes. Make sure you check them out, and check her out @ratrios on Instagram and Rat Rios on SoundCloud.

JANIELLE: Our stellar mountain artwork you see everywhere is by @kevincraftco. Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds.

JANIELLE: Thank you for listening. It means the world.