

Transcript

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You're listening to the My Simplified Life podcast and this is episode number 245. Welcome to the My Simplified Life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life, and start taking action. I'm your host, Michelle Globovac, author of How to Get on Podcasts, the podcast matchmaker.

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and CEO and founder of the MLG Collective. I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you while taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life. Hey friends, welcome back to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. Today, I have the pleasure of introducing you to author Ava DeLyra. She is the author of Exposure. It comes out today with Zibby Books.

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And it is amazing. It is told in four different character voices, and it goes back in time, it comes forward, and by back, I mean it starts around 2003, and she'll take you to places like Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, some of my favorite cities, and she's addressing some really big, complex topics, like the Me Too movement, before it was Me Too.

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She is talking about different sides of one story and how you as the person who hears one side might automatically jump to a conclusion about the other side and how we stop recognizing who people are, that there is a person on the other side of all of these stories. And as you'll hear me tell Ava, after I finished the book, my thoughts continued around.

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these topics around questioning myself and when I might jump to a conclusion or think that I know all of the facts to a story and it makes you also question possibly some of your own history. So it was extremely fascinating to get to read this book and then so lovely to meet Ava and get to chat with her about writing this book and what it all meant for her. Hi Ava.

02:26

Hello, Michelle. I'm so excited to be talking to you this morning. I am so excited to be talking to you. I loved your book and I cannot wait for everyone else to read it. Can you take a moment to introduce yourself, please? I'm Ava DeLyra. I'm the author of two young adult novels, *Love Letters to the Dead* and *In Search of Us*. And then my adult debut novel, *Exposure*, is out September 10th.

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which will be today. This will air on your pub day. So congratulations. Thank you. In my soul, I'm already on September 10th, so this works perfectly. That is where we are today. So I've totally stalked you. I went on your website. I've been reading about you because I love to see, I'd love to discuss what is real life and author's life that you've put into a book. And yet I could scrape that from your bio.

03:23

Pretty hard giveaway. But for some, you just don't see that. You can't feel it. You don't get those details. But there was a fair amount that I went, oh, oh, I know where Ava got this from. Can you share with the listeners some more? Because they won't know what I'm talking about unless they go and stalk you and then they have to read the book too. But what are some parts that are in the book that are you?

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Okay, maybe I'll give you like a little summary first and then I can Perfect. get to what's real and what's imaginary. So this book has a lot stuffed into it. It begins in 2003 with Noah, who's a black high school senior and Juliet, who's a white college freshmen. They're two lonely souls and they meet, form a connection after a night of drinking, they go home together.

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The book then leaves off there and we move both backwards and forwards in time, getting to know Noah and Juliet and the people they're closest to, as we explore the themes that really shaped their lives, like the intensity of young female friendship, the tension between artistic

ambition and romantic partnership, the effects of race and class and loss and grief. And it's 12 years later.

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when Noah's done the impossible and broken through in Hollywood. His first film, which was a festival darling, is about to be released, and he and his wife, Jessie, who he's been with for years, have just had their first child. And then in the early days of their newborn daughter's life, a new story breaks. Juliet's best friend, Annie, who's back in LA for the first time in 12 years.

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has accused Noah of raping Juliet back when he was in high school. And then, you know, the frenzy ensues as it begins to be adjudicated in the core of public opinion. And so the book is told from both Noah's and Juliet's perspective, as well as Annie's and Jesse's. And, you know, I think at its heart, this is really a book about

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the possibility of empathizing with opposing points of view and holding space for more than one truth at the same time, which I feel like is just so relevant right now in our world. I started this book back in, interestingly, I started really writing it in earnest when I was pregnant with my daughter in 2017, but I got the idea for it in 2016.

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No, you know, eight years later, we're like back in that election cycle and everything. Right. Because you mentioned Obama in it too, and how Noah, a black man, is, you know, watching our first president be a black man, and how relevant that was. And here we are. Yeah. A female now, a black female, despite what some are claiming. Yes, we're there again.

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So to go back to your original question about what's, you know, related to my own life, thank God, not the rape accusation. But yeah, there's a lot of me in this book. All of the characters share a common thread of having lost a parent, and they end up, you know, connecting over that loss in different ways, even across sort of battle lines. They

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I don't want to give too much away, but they find ways to see each other. And I lost my own mother when I was rather young. I had just graduated college, so I was 22. And then as I was writing this book, my father was dying of cancer. It was unclear for a while whether or not he'd make it, but he passed away during this writing process. So there is like...

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there's this running thread in the book, Grief is Like This, and I was really processing my own grief while writing it. So that's definitely related. As I mentioned, I started writing this when I was pregnant with my daughter, who's now six, and then my son, who's two and a half, was also born during that period. And there is a...

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a part of the book that is really intensely about new motherhood. Noah's wife, as he's like off on this press tour, trying to see if he can save his career and his movie. She's left at home alone with their newborn daughter. She's a novelist herself and had a hard-won career and now is just like in this, in the throes of new motherhood alone. And I wrote like some of those scenes, which are quite intense.

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I wrote drafts of them when I had my three month old. I remember the first time I ever left her was to go to a coffee shop when she was around three months old. And I was in this haze of not having slept and just, okay, let me try to do this. And this scene just poured out. So yeah, we actually toyed with cutting it a few times and that was one darling I re-

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clung on to. I was like, no, this is going in. I remember writing this in the copy chat. This has to stay. But yeah, so the experience of brand new motherhood in general, it definitely was related to my own. And you know, what else? There's Noah and Jesse. They're young writers.

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or dreamers to begin with. They moved to LA together after college and after her father has passed away. And they're both, she wants to be a novelist and he wants to be a filmmaker and a screenwriter. And they're both just chipping away at their dreams as they have their day jobs. And it's not like an exact replica of my own life in any way, but my husband and I also were.

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met as we were both, you know, I was writing my first book after work and he had decided to, you know, instead of trying to become, like he had decided to try to become a screenwriter. So we kind of grew up together in that way and I think there is a specific kind of way of loving each other that comes with dreaming together. And so that is definitely in the book

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and Noah is, and they're both writers and they're not the same character, but it's not a coincidence. I love that you say there's a love and a growing up together of that because it is such a unique type of industry, position, aspiration, and to find someone who wants the same thing, you at least know what the other is going through in the trenches.

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Yeah, totally. You do. And you can support each other in a way. We've always, you know, been each other's first readers and editors and all of that. And I love that the book takes place in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York. They're my favorite places. I lived in Chicago for a while, so I was like, yay, we're back. The Museum of Art. Yeah.

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I went to the University of Chicago for college, where Juliet goes and Noah goes. But I haven't been back in many years and I'm going to go during the book tour. So I'm like really excited to see it again because I love Chicago. Yeah, the Art Institute is one of my favorite museums of all time. It's been my favorite place to live so far. The people are just the nicest.

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And there's so much to do and so much history. And yeah, we went back last year. Yeah, we took the kids again, and this time they're old enough to remember it. And they fell in love with Chicago. They're like, can we move here too? We like it here. Yeah, I imagine it must be such a great place for kids because like you said, there's so much to do. Like the museum of science and industry is amazing. The lake is amazing. The riverboat, the architecture. Yeah.

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Yeah, there's so much history. So what happened, you went to the University of Chicago, were you planning on writing? What was your dream or when did this all come to fruition? This is what you were going to do and write novels or did you have a different intention at some point? You know, I've always loved writing. I used to write poetry, like much more. I always wrote poetry in my journal through middle school and high school.

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And I did study it at the University of Chicago. I took a lot of creative writing classes. I had an amazing poetry professor, Chiku Reddy, and he was a big influence on me. But that was sort of like my B thing. I was doing the academic track. I wrote a critical theory paper. And I had planned after graduating to apply to PhD programs, and I was starting to do that.

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that starting that process that summer. And then my mom died suddenly and I just like, totally lost the thread of that academic career and lost interest in it, I guess. Or I just wasn't able to sort of focus on it in the same way. And I moved to Los Angeles at that time. That was where I was born, but we left when I was.

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three years old, so it had this kind of mythology for me of like, oh, there's the spot where my parents lived when they were young and in love, and there's the restaurant they went to, and this is the beach where that photograph is. So it had this kind of magical quality of me almost finding my mom's, like this other version of her. It made me feel close to her in a way.

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but was separate enough that I could tolerate it. Being home where I grew up in Albuquerque was just like too much without her. Anyway, I found the one thing I could still do that was actually the greatest comfort was writing. And during that period of grief, that's where I turned to poetry. And so I ended up applying to MFA programs instead of PhD programs. And I went to the Iowa Writers Workshop, which is...

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amazing, of course. I lived in Kurt Vonnegut's old farmhouse for two years. I read that. That is so cool. Yeah, it was like, it still stays so vivid in my memory after all these years. It was so beautiful. We'd have like fox and deer running through the yard. And yeah, it was just gorgeous. And it was, that was a great experience. And then graduating, I was like, well,

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Either to make a living as a poet, like it's not a likely thing to have happen. And if you do, you know, it is inside of academia, you're going to the only way to do it really is to have a university job. As far as I knew at the time anyway. And I decided I didn't want to go that route. So I went back to LA and thought I would try screenwriting. And I eventually got a job working for the author, Stephen Chbosky.

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who wrote *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I met him as he was starting to work on the movie version of it. So I worked for him for many, like five years, I think. At some point during that time, I gave him, I asked him to read my attempt at a, my first attempt at a screenplay. And he was like, this is great, but I think you should try writing novels.

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And I was like, really? That's going to take so long. Like I'll never become a writer. But I took his advice and, you know, several years later, I had written love letters to the dead and I had the good luck of getting it published. I, it was one of those like, you know, all 10 publishers, you know,

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said no to the book or except for one who said maybe, you know, and I worked with her and went back and did new drafts to try to, you know, informally, I started working with her and eventually we got it to the place where she bought it. Why did he suggest being a novelist versus screenwriting? Because I know I've heard

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Screenwriting is so much easier because obviously it's a lot less writing to do, but I've never actually looked at what it takes to be a screenwriter. So I'm just curious, what was the reasoning behind that advice? I think it was a few things. One, I think he could hear in my young attempts at a screenplay that I really liked writing prose. Like my early on at least. My...

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descriptions, action lines were probably a lot better than my dialogue. And two, he had, in his mind, you know, there are so many screenplays that are written and unproduced. And you really, as the screenwriter, you don't have much control over what happens to the script after you write it. You just, you, whereas with a book.

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if you sell the book, then the book is the book and it comes out. You don't have to wait for somebody to be ready to spend \$10 million to make it. So I think he felt like there was a better chance of actually having like a product that you could put into the world. And then once you do that, I ended up, you know, writing a film adaptation of the book for...

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Fox 2000 that we worked on for quite a while. So I have dabbled in screenwriting as well after the fact, after becoming a novelist. I feel like if you have the book, then it has the potential to be a movie. So it's almost like you get the two for one versus if you just do the movie, it's just the movie. Yeah, which is what Steve was doing at the time as well. So I think he really, he was like, you know, a proponent of that pathway.

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Yeah, it's like double dipping almost. Exactly. You can make it the book, you can make it the movie. You mentioned the places with your mom, and it reminded me of in the book Annie and her mom. And how she was basically in a cult. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I kind of took away that, yeah, she joined a cult basically. And how did that idea come into play for you, where you're like, you know what?

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I'm gonna make her mom be part of a cult. Yes, that is exactly it. And for me, I pictured like Fort Bragg, Northern California, Humboldt County, somewhere up there is where I pictured. Northern California is where I pictured too. I have no idea, honestly. Like there are some magical moments of writing where characters, where something just like comes out where it feels like the characters are talking to you and telling you.

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what happened and who they are and what their past is. And that storyline with Annie was an example of that. As I started writing her that just really early on, like as I was conceiving her, it appeared almost fully formed on the page. And I was like, oh, okay, this is who you are. And it made perfect sense to me. And that relationship because...

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Annie's lost her mother when she was, her father took her away from the commune slash cult when she was a baby and she only knew her, like only saw her mother a couple times a year, didn't really know her and then her mother passed away when she was a teenager. So she was, had always been a motherless girl. So the intensity of her bond with Juliet and Juliet's mother, who is this photographer,

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who Juliet's the photographer's main subject, and then Annie becomes part of that too. I think her being a motherless girl is like a big part of her, the intensity of her relationship with Juliet and Juliet's mom. So that sort of, it clicked into place in a way that I didn't, like my subconscious planned it, but my conscious didn't, if that makes sense. Yeah, I love that.

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Did it feel like, was there any part where you wrote, and then because I'm finding this as I'm writing, that all of a sudden something happens in real life that you wrote and you're like, wait, did I predict that kind of a thing? Really? There's a lot of Hollywood involved, a lot of the Me Too movement. There's a lot of stuff that has happened that is happening. So I'm just wondering if during the writing process you wrote something and then you're

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that just did happen. You know, I did actually start writing this book a little bit before the Me Too movement broke out, which is, I mean, it's better that it's coming out now, I think, because I think we're more in a place now where people are interested in having conversations about the gray areas and the complexities and the nuances, whereas I think...

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you know, there's a place of like women taking back power and voice where it wouldn't have necessarily been appropriate at the very beginning to tell this story, I think. So I did have some moments of like reflection and pause as I was writing, like is this going to be useful? But I've experienced, you know, pretty much everything that the women in the book experience.

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And so in a way it was like my way of processing my own, my own past, my own history, my own experiences, my own dramas. And yeah, I think that...

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I really, my guiding light the whole way through was just this idea.

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empathy and the like way in which both writing and reading is such a great conduit for empathy and for that practice of trying to see a perspective outside of yourself. And that's why I told the book in different perspectives because that was always at the heart of the story and being just interested in, you know, as our social media culture has...

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has taken hold, I became, you know, just very interested in offering, you know, another version of a story where there's time and space to see the human beings behind the headlines. And I think that that, I think that all things can be important. Like, I think that the, like, this isn't necessarily like about me saying

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cancel culture is just awful and has no place because it does have a place sometimes. And it does have positive power. But it is kind of about being like, yes, but can we also take a moment away from the sort of like heightened state that our nervous system can get into when we're coming to these issues in the social media sphere?

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this, you kind of go into this like reactive fight or flight space. And I think it's important to have the balance to that where you can take a step back into reading is definitely a way I slow down my own nervous system to be able to process a story, like stories on a deeper level and think about, you know, the possibility that like, even if you do, and I certainly do have passionately held beliefs that you're not.

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going to let go of, it can only be a benefit to be willing to take into account the other side of a story, I think, and to be willing to humanize the people who might think really differently than you do. Yeah. Especially today. It's so tough. And I do appreciate the way you told both sides of the story because it did. I felt myself wondering, well, did he?

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Sydney, like I can see you offer up a version where you're kind of going, oh, okay, I can see both sides of how they both felt that night and what was happening. And then at the same time, you go, oh, okay, now this is really what I think. And oh, now has that happened to me? That kind of a scenario plays in your head. And it definitely, after I finished the book for days after, I've had these...

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running thoughts go through my mind. So it stuck with me. I didn't put it down, be finished, be like, oh, that was it. There was exposure. It's continued to play in my mind because of the way you portrayed it and you wrote it and you shared these different viewpoints. Thank you. Yeah, that's what I was absolutely hoping for in writing it. I didn't mean it to be a closed loop, but more of like an opening, like a way to start conversations.

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And I think that it touches on more than, you know, only me too. There's so much, you know, in all celebrities, like we can look at what's going on with Blake Lively right now. And two weeks ago, she was, you know, beloved and Ryan Reynolds' wife and so cute and four kids. And today you're like, oh, Lord, you're a hot mess. Stop talking. I've actually have a I have to admit I'm behind, so I won't comment. I'm behind.

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I'm like, every time I don't want to read and I'm like, well, let me just watch this. Oh, OK. I mean, we all love to. It's so addictive to consume, like it to consume the public sphere in that way. I absolutely do it, too. Obviously, that's what this book came out of.

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it's fascinating to watch that. And then I think it's also just really important to remember these stories have real human beings behind them with histories and histories of trauma and deep family histories. And that all plays into it and it's not always visible on the surface.

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And they're all human beings. I think that people forget, especially celebrities. My past life was in corporate aviation, so I met a lot of celebrities. And to meet them in person and talk to them is completely different than any of the characters they play, which is why they're great actors and why they make so much money, because they can act like someone completely different from who they truly are. And I think people forget that.

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I think you're totally right. And I think the pace at which we kind of consume things and judge things and like the pace at which stories are put out, it just can at times have the tendency to like flatten things into two dimensions. Whereas like, you know, this is just like, this book is really just like.

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In some way, you could describe the project of the book as just trying to blow some air back into it so that everything expands back into becoming three-dimensional. And then you can make your own judgments, but nobody can say there weren't two human beings on either side of this thing. Yeah. And the other question that the book had me wondering at the end was, was it worth it?

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And I think that's what we're all left with was, okay, was it worth it? The readers, the listeners will have to decide for themselves, but it's really one of those, hmm, makes you just, now you have to sit with it and ponder. Yeah. I loved it. I thought it was fantastic. It was such a great read. I love the different perspectives, the going back and forth in time. And it...

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It felt like it was still like Obama being elected with Sony years ago. And yet it feels like it should have been yesterday. So I felt like it was yesterday. It was interesting to walk through the recent history of, you know, really like starting around when I became an adult in writing this book. Yeah. It's absolutely crazy. It is fantastic. You are amazing.

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Can you share with everyone where they can find you, where they can buy the book? I have a website, avadelira.com, and then I'm on Instagram as well. So I have links there to order the book, but it's available everywhere. Barnes & Noble, all your local indie book store should have it. And yeah, I am.

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also available to talk to any book clubs. I'm putting that out there because we think this is an interesting book club book. Really it is kind of book that wants to be talked about. And no matter, you know, even if it's a small book club, I'm like super happy to be part of that conversation if anyone is interested. That's amazing. It's definitely gonna spark more conversations. And I think that's the most important kind of book that.

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there can be. So thank you and congratulations. Thank you so much. How exciting to be here on Pub Day. Okay friends, if you are looking for your next great read, I highly recommend Exposure. Ava is incredible. I loved getting to hear the story behind her screenwriting versus writing the novel.

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of hearing how she incorporated her own life and experiences into this incredible book. And I highly recommend, as she did, that you read it with your book club. It is going to spark conversations. It is going to have you all talking in such a good way. And hit her up, ask her to come and be a part of your book club, because that would be amazing to get to talk to Ava during all of this as well. Go find Exposure.

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at any of the bookstores that you love to go to. It is out today. Congratulations to Ava. And remember that there's always two sides to a story and there are human beings that are always involved with every story.