



# Alyssa Nixon-Lloyd

Transcript

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Podcraft Productions

## Varnya (intro):

You know those people who seem to be the glue that keep communities together? Maybe you've been living somewhere and you have a group of friends. Then, one of the friends leaves and the group collapses. It dissolves and you realize, "Ah! She was the glue." I think Alyssa Nixon-Lloyd may be one of those people.

Alyssa grew up in rural WA, moved to Perth for her career. Now, she's just moved back to rural WA, to Albany. She has an interesting take on how we can all contribute to making our communities feel more connected.

I talked with Alyssa just after she'd moved back to Albany, and began by asking her, how being more open with others manifests in her day-to-day life.

## Alyssa:

That's an interesting one. It's about accepting other people's reactions and understanding that maybe that person hasn't had the background that you have, and hasn't gone through the life experiences that you had. Therefore, they might react differently.

This is really a challenging question. I've noticed myself, particularly working in the corporate sector for a very long time, and having such time pressure on me...I don't know if you've noticed but in Perth, there are a lot more people that are living rough and are homeless.

I found that such a confronting issue. I would walk past people whose lives are so different to mine on the way to work every day. It's a real challenge when they interact with you and how do you respond to that?

Maybe you don't have the training, or you haven't been exposed to that, you don't really know how best to respond. I've had a couple of interactions last year that really challenged me to think, "Am I really doing the right thing here? Am I treating this person respectfully?"

That's really challenging. That has made me think, I personally had changed. I was probably just focused on getting to work and rather than taking the time to know this person asking me, "Can I borrow your phone?" "Where are you going to?"

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The challenge is, how do you take the time out of your busy day, so to speak, to give this person the respect, and help them? That's something I've been challenged with.

I think on a different level, it's in the workplace connecting with people, having that small talk -- I think small talk is really important -- and getting to know people. Then, you can ask them...If you just ask them about their weekend and what their family situation is, how are your kids? You can then build that relationship up.

People over a six-month period, you get to know them. It adds a lot of value if you are in a workplace where people know your family background or know your history. Then, there's a better understanding between people.

**Varnya:**

Sounds like you're talking to me about two things. You're talking about being curious?

**Alyssa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Varnya:**

About being genuinely curious about other people's experiences and their perspectives...

**Alyssa:**

Yeah.

**Varnya:**

Also that old chestnut empathy. Putting yourself in that person's shoes or trying to somehow.

**Alyssa:**

I think the curiosity thing is a big thing for me, because I'm genuinely curious about other people's...not to their lives, so to speak, but, what's going on with them? I think it's an interest in the world around you. Rather than just being interested in yourself, it's interest in other people, and that's always been something I have had.

**Varnya:**

Do you think that's innate or do you think that was encouraged in your upbringing?

**Alyssa:**

It was encouraged in my upbringing. My mum and dad have... I had a very alternative upbringing, but I think...

**Varnya:**

[laughs] You say that with a smile...

[crosstalk]

**Alyssa:**

Yeah.

[laughter]

For me, probably the things that my...My parents always encouraged service to the community. From a very young age, going out and helping. I remember, we'd be going out, there was a "Cleanup Australia Day," and going out, collecting rubbish or going to doing things that might be other people would think a bit weird or a bit off. Not off, but a bit alternative.

For example, I used to play in a musical group when I was quite young called "Musica Magica." The man that started Musica Magica, Duncan Merrily, is an amazing man. He was 70 and he learned the violin.

[laughter]

Just started learning the violin at the age of 70.

**Varnya:**

[laughs] That's fantastic.

**Alyssa:**



I know, and he realized that he was like, "I'm only going to get better if I play with other people." This 70-year-old man in the community down in Manjimup.

There was another music teacher. There was a music teacher called Alexander Brayla. He had all these young kids learning. Those were 10-, 11-, 12-year-olds. There's a 70-year-old playing violin and there's 10, 11, 12. What a disparate group of musicians.

### **Varnya:**

[laughs]

### **Alyssa:**

I'm sure we weren't amazing, but we'd go and do these performances, like the old people homes or go and do these little concerts, really random thing to do. But in a country town, there weren't other opportunities for music. You were just brought up to accept it as it was.

I think the experiences of doing things, which are probably not mainstream experiences, has made me quite accepting then just...and then moving into a very mainstream university degree, working life. You can then understand that everyone has all these really interesting stories behind them and it's just accepting that.

### **Varnya:**

Let's cycle back to that idea of city versus country because I find that interesting. I wonder because cities are so full of people. There's so many people. I'm always wondering whether are we meant to be in such confined quarters with so many people?

Is there a tuning out that happens of other individuals? Because the mass of people is almost too much for us to bear. Whereas in a smaller setting, perhaps you don't have as much tuning out because there's not as much to deal with.

### **Alyssa:**

That's interesting. I think that I would agree with that. I was reading "Sapiens," which is the book that was published a year or two ago. It was saying that there's actually a really small number of how many individuals that you can try and understand where they fit in your life.



Therefore, after that, maybe it becomes that just you can't relate, and so I would agree that cities are...They're fantastic but then at the same time, they reduce the individual to just another person.

### **Varnya:**

Yeah, maybe in a city setting, it's a matter of discovering people as individuals and I guess this is something that Befriend is trying to do. It's a matter of finding pockets of community within that big setting.

### **Alyssa:**

I live in Fremantle. The street that I live on has an amazing sense of community. There are four or five houses where they're basically like family. They all know each other. They have these Christmas get-togethers, and then the street organizes a big street-long garage sale every year. It's a really nice street. You feel quite comfortable when you know who's who.

That has been developed through these individuals just constantly making that effort to create that family feel. It's not something that just happens. It's something that you need to do.

For me, that's something that I've just learned as I grow up. No one else is going to do this for you. If you want to change your community, you have to do it.

It's funny the first story that sprung to mind when I was thinking of this was when I was at uni. This is going back to a story about having time. I used to live in West Perth and catch the bus down to UWA, the 103. There was a lady that lived in the Wandana flats. I never realized then but she was doing artwork for people with disabilities and things like that. It was a fantastic program run down in Fremantle.

She used to catch the bus to Fremantle, not every day, but quite often, I would see her, chat about her artwork, and then catch the bus back. We used to chat every single morning until the bus came in. It was really nice. I used to really enjoy seeing her and I heard a lot about her life story.

Over the course of maybe two years, I'd see her maybe not every week, but every couple of weeks, we catch the bus together and wait for the bus together. I really enjoyed chatting to her and I think she enjoyed chatting to me. It was just like a really nice connection. Sometimes, we would see each other on the bus back because I used to go down to Fremantle quite a bit.



It was like I had a friend that I met through the bus, and we'd see each other and be like, "Oh, where are you going?"

If I hadn't spoken to her, I'd just be sitting on the bench next to her for maybe 10 minutes or so for a very long time. I really enjoyed chatting to her. It was good.

### **Varnya:**

What stops people, do you think, from making that sort of connection? Say you're at the bus stop every day or every second day, and there's the same person there every day. You see each other every single day. People might not strike up any sort of connection. What do you think are the barriers to that sort of thing?

### **Alyssa:**

It's interesting because I think she made the first connection. From memory, I think she was the one that had a chat with me first. When someone talks to you, you think, "Oh, should I just shut the conversation down and just answer with a one- or two-word answer?" I didn't but maybe it was because I didn't feel threatened in any way by her. That's probably part of it.

Going back to where I live in Fremantle, there's a man that I often will catch the bus with. I will see him on the train and things like that. I know he lives on the same street. He often has his earphones on and just probably doesn't want to connect.

How much do you want to let other people into your lives if you're going to be seeing them very often? You've got to also have some self-preservation. You know what I mean?

### **Varnya:**

For sure.

### **Alyssa:**

That's a fine line. It's allowing the interactions to happen because they will happen in a city, and they will happen in the county. It's just being open to them too. Maybe they won't come your way necessarily...You just need to see where they take you.

## Varnya:

Are there any capacities, or abilities, or tendencies within yourself that you've tried to develop in terms of it being a conscious choice to be that open person?

## Alyssa:

It very much depends on how you are feeling yourself. A couple of years ago, maybe I was incredibly stressed with work, quite stressed or whatever it might have been and I didn't have that additional energy. I'd given enough to my job or whatever. I didn't have anything else to give to random people.

Then I was reading the book, "Pachinko." It's about a lady in Korea who moves to Japan and then back to Korea. The central character in the book, she has such a tough time, the physical work and the emotional distress that she goes through but her capacity to just keep going.

Reading the book, it made me go, "OK, you can probably toughen up a little bit." If this is what people have gone through in the past when we think we've probably had enough, we can probably go a bit more.

Then I started playing a lot more music recently. That's about a year and a half ago. I started playing a bit more music. That's been good because it's expanded my social network as well. There's connection with people and also doing something that I love and improving it. That's been good.

For me, the conscious effort was trying to forgive yourself for maybe you're not feeling so great or whatever it might be. You might be getting angry or responding to things in a way that you would rather not, but letting yourself go, "Well, that's OK. You've done that, but today's another day or tomorrow's another day. You can always get better."

As a friend or as an individual, them being there to support people through that and being understanding that, "OK, well, maybe..."

I've had friends that maybe you invite them to a thing. Let's say I did a dinner party, whatever. Then because of how they're feeling at the time they're like, "Oh look, I'm just not feeling like it tonight. I just can't make it," and understanding that because that is a very real thing to people.

Then just making sure I'm following up and touching base and then doing something in a sense that is gentle for that person, like I would like to do something really fun.

## Varnya:

Maybe not a dinner party. Maybe something a little more intimate.

## Alyssa:

Yeah, or just during the day or whatever it might be. I guess going back to the work that the Befriend does, the success is facilitating and in such a way that is very non-threatening for people. It is accepting.

On a bit of a totally different note, there's a lot of bluegrass jams that I have been taught to play as I play fiddle in a bluegrass band. There are some great jam groups that are happening around Fremantle at the moment. They've ballooned in the last year.

This one man, Tom Frank, who's doing an amazing job, which is organizing all these jams. People love it. People come down with a ukulele, or their spoons, or their washboard.

It's amazing that there's such an appetite for it because it's non-threatening. Maybe you can't play it, but you can sing along or just sit and have a coffee and not join in. It's not very technical. It's really fun.

What's been amazing is people are loving it. People want an outlet like that, same as they want to be in the Befriend events. It's so good. It's just so...

## Varnya:

Maybe sometimes it's good to hang that yearning for social connection on something else, something else as a conduit, or hobby, or interest.

## Alyssa:

Yeah. Sports are really good, having a sporting team. 200 years ago, a lot of people went to church quite religiously, one might say...

[laughter]

If you went in a rural setting or on your Sunday, you would do your weekly pilgrimage to the epicenter of the community, that was an opportunity to catch up and see people. I'm



not saying that religion is good or bad, but that mechanism for social connection has been reduced. What are we replacing it with is the question.

### **Varnya:**

For people who are keen to become an unofficial community connector or just someone who facilitates community engagement within their own little circle, can you think of one piece of advice that you would give them?

### **Alyssa:**

It's about removing...Often, when you are given an opportunity, you might think of, "What would people think?" or like, "Oh, is this a bit weird?" It's ignoring all of that and just thinking about it from another person's perspective.

For example, sometimes I've been involved in groups where I'm like, "Oh, I don't really feel like going to this thing." Then I think, "Well, other people are expecting me to be there. Other people are expecting me to pull my weight."

I know that once I go, I'll have fun or I don't. It's about putting your own needs, just considering your own needs and then considering other people's needs, and thinking, "If I'm not going to do this, what am I going to do? Just sit around on Facebook? That's pretty pathetic." It's about considering other people as well as yourself and putting yourself out there.

### **Varnya (extro):**

Alyssa Nixon-Lloyd chatting with me about the way she tries to create connections in her life. I'm Varnya Bromilow, and you've been listening to the Connected Us podcast.

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