

**In Proximity**  
**NONFICTION Q+A: Kelli Buchanan & Gaby Arvizu**  
**Season 3 Episode 27**  
**Final Transcript**

**Kelli Buchanan:** It was very, very important to us that we were approaching the story in a very different way.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Honestly, as a first-time filmmaker, just have fun!

**Paola Mardo:** We got some listener questions. So I'd love to play some of them.

**Gaby Arvizu:** These questions are fire, yo!

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah, yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

**Gaby Arvizu:** They're fire.

[0:17 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

**Paola Mardo:** You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today is our Nonfiction Q&A. A while back, in, I believe, our first season, I talked to some of my Proximity colleagues about what it's like to work at a production company. You can find that in our podcast feed and in the link in the description below. We've been wanting to bring this back for a while, so I figured, why not do it today? I brought out some of my colleagues in our Nonfiction department to ask them questions about what they do and also answer some listener questions.

But before that, I want to say thank you so much for supporting our show. We're at about 20 or so episodes of In Proximity, original interviews as well as some Prox gems and specials and all the tips and things we sent out over the holidays, and I just want to thank you guys for sticking with us. It was a real transition going from a seasonal audio podcast to a weekly video series. I'm learning a lot. Our podcast production team is learning a lot. We're experimenting, and we're growing, and we're working on more good stuff to come. So thank you so much for your support.

If you really like the show, please help us by doing some of these things that I'm going to say right now. Subscribe to our YouTube channel, Proximity Media. If you haven't already, hit that "Subscribe" button as you're watching this. Like our videos, leave us some comments—nice ones, please—and, you know, hype the videos if you can. And if any episode particularly speaks to you or maybe speaks to someone you know, send a link to your friend. All this really helps the show grow and get out there for more people to discover it. If you listen to the show on an audio

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Thank you so much. And now back to our regularly scheduled program, today is all about nonfiction, and if you don't already know, and you really should, our nonfiction team has been cooking up some amazing projects. They're developing and producing works in film and TV. You may have heard of some of them: Hurricane Katrina: Race Against Time, which was number one on Hulu and won a Critics' Choice Award and was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award. They've also produced documentaries like Stephen Curry: Underrated, Homeroom, and Anthem.

Today, I brought out some of my nonfiction colleagues Kelli Buchanan, who heads the department, and Gaby Arvizu, the creative executive. They're here to talk about what they do and what it's like to work in the nonfiction space and what the day-to-day is like in our Nonfiction department here at Proximity. We also asked for some listener questions, so some of y'all sent us some voice memos. Thank you so much! They were really fun to listen to. We couldn't get to all of them, but we did our best and answered those that we felt were going to be most helpful for our listeners and viewers. We'll save the rest for another episode. So stay tuned, and stick around for this great Nonfiction Q&A with Kelli and Gaby.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[3:21 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Welcome to In Proximity, Kelli and Gaby.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Thanks for having us.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Thanks for having us.

**Kelli Buchanan:** We're excited to be here.

**Paola Mardo:** Excited to talk to you. I have so many questions about what you guys are up to. I know you got a lot cooking that we can't quite talk about right now, but we'll—

**Kelli Buchanan:** No tea is going to be spilled today, unfortunately.

**Paola Mardo:** But we'll talk about things you have done and more. I know who you are, but for our listeners and viewers, if you wouldn't mind, can you please introduce yourselves, maybe, like, your name, where you're from, what you do at Proximity. And you guys are so busy in Nonfiction and running production and development, you got so much going on, how do you

start your day? Like, what is a must-have that you have to do to get your day started before you jump into all the things.

**Kelli Buchanan:** My name's Kelli Dunson Buchanan. I am a child of the world. I grew up all over, lived abroad, lived in many different states across the country, but I'm—technically, I'm from Albany, Georgia. And I run the Nonfiction department here at Proximity. And lately, what I've been doing to get my day started is reading aloud this, this little ring of index cards that I have where I've written out affirmations for myself. And the first thing I say every morning is, "I can do hard things."

**Paola Mardo:** Because you can do hard things.

**Kelli Buchanan:** I can, and I've proven it to myself—

**Paola Mardo:** 100 percent.

**Kelli Buchanan:**—day in and day out, so yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** What about you, Gaby?

**Gaby Arvizu:** My name is Gaby Arvizu. I am a creative executive in the Nonfiction division at Proximity. I'm lucky to be working with Kelli. I was raised in Oakland, California with roots from Mexico. And the first thing that I do at the start of my day, we love coffee at In Proximity, so my cup of coffee is always first and foremost.

**Paola Mardo:** So Nonfiction department, yeah. What's your day-to-day like? And you guys handle production and development. How do you guys balance all of this while collaborating amongst each other. Who wants to go?

**Gaby Arvizu:** How do we balance it?

**Kelli Buchanan:** That's a—that's a really good question.

**Gaby Arvizu:** What does balance even mean?

[LAUGHTER]

**Kelli Buchanan:** We don't know. I think it depends on what we've got going on. I think we are in a very unique position here at Proximity where we handle not only development, but we also handle production, as well. We don't run services, but we're very, very involved with our projects. And so that means, oftentimes, that we can be bootstrapping production, and we're oftentimes in the field. And so it can be a little bit of a—of an interesting dynamic to balance, you know, the part of your brain that's required to thrive in the field where you are basically on alert. And, you know, you're sort of managing a lot of different people, and when you're doing

development work, it's, like, the completely different and opposite side of your brain. And so we're in a very lucky situation where we get to experience both.

But I think it really depends on where the fires are and what needs our immediate attention, and that's really how we decide how we're going to prioritize our bandwidth. You know, we have a very, very small team. This is the team, and our super, super talented—our coordinator, Rhea Tulli, who is—

**Gaby Arvizu:** Shout out, Rhea!

**Kelli Buchanan:** Shout out to Rhea!

**Paola Mardo:** Shout out, Rhea! She may be in the room with us right now.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Shout out!

**Kelli Buchanan:** But, yeah, I think it's, it's on us because we are—we are people who are so passionate about our work that we pour our heart and our soul into our work. And, you know, we are doing our partners a disservice if we can't show up the right way. So I think we try to make a really concerted effort to check in with each other to see where we're at bandwidth-wise and how we want to delegate, how we want to manage those resources for the day or for the week, month, or quarter.

But it really does—it really does vary because production is just a crazy beast in and of itself, and we—I think, on the development side, we are interested in so many different topics and subjects and worlds that it requires a lot of research, and we have to have the capacity to be able to do those deep dives, but we always are carving out the time to do both.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah. I would say, on the day-to-day, we have to juggle quite a bit of things. It's checking in with our crews. We have the opportunity to work with crews that are in the field that are in active production, multiple crews. So we check in with them, make sure the story is—the story that we find out is aligning with what they're capturing in the field and also support them. What's going on? What are some roadblocks? And we have to clear those roadblocks as necessary, of course.

And then there's the other aspect. Some of our projects are a little bit further along, so we have to watch cuts, sometimes over and over and over again and give very—provide notes that make a lot of sense for the director and for the editors. So that requires a really thoughtful response. And since we're not just in development, we're also in production, we're—we try to be as mindful as possible of those notes because we know what they're going through in the field.

**Paola Mardo:** You guys are doing, like, multiple shows, films, different topics, you know what I mean, some more intense than others, maybe, in terms of subject matter. How do you balance that time? Because that is really—or even find the time, you know what I mean, and prioritize? What does that actually look like? Because I'm selfishly asking for myself here, and I want to know the answer.

[LAUGHTER]

**Kelli Buchanan:** That's a good question. I think it really does depend on what is most pressing and who needs our support the most. We found ourselves with this interesting sweet spot of working with directors who are more traditionally a part of the independent filmmaking scene and really helping them be more familiar and become more established in this, the traditional studio system.

But it really just starts with us checking in. We have—we're very, very Type A, and you really do have to be in this field of work. And so we have—all of these sort of protocols are part of our larger process to allow us to sort of check in with the status of all of our projects. And we usually have a check-in at the top of the week: What's needed? What's upcoming? What's pressing?

**Paola Mardo:** In your department, like the three of you guys?

**Kelli Buchanan:** In the department. And so we will prioritize based on what's upcoming. We're really big on reverse engineering. We know what our goal is, and how do we get there with avoiding the most amount of hurdles as possible? I'm a big believer in pursuing the path of least resistance. We will work together. A lot of times, we will sort of divide and conquer, but because it's just the two of us—and I feel like we—our styles are very complementary—we're able to meet our partners where they need to be met. And I think that is just a testament to our ability to adapt and, and read the room.

[10:55 - "In Proximity Theme Stinger" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Both of you have, actually, different paths leading up to this career within the nonfiction space. And there are folks watching—and we'll get to some listener questions, too—people who are paying attention to this will probably be interested in these careers working in documentary and nonfiction. So can you share a little bit about your career story?

**Kelli Buchanan:** For me, moving a lot, I found refuge in movies and television. Like, that was my safe space, and I never really found that it would abandon me. And so, weird story, but I started watching *The L Word*, and one of the characters, one of the main characters was a development executive, and it was the first time that I realized that there were jobs behind the screen. And from that moment on, I was pretty much hell-bent on pursuing becoming a development executive for my career.

And how I discovered docs, I was watching Grey Gardens. I had, like, randomly discovered—

**Gaby Arvizu:** Wow, classic.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah, but it was, like, these two women, Big Edie and Little Edie, and I was just so fascinated. And that was what really opened my purview into documentaries as an option for me to pursue in terms of a career.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that.

**Kelli Buchanan:** And so I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in entertainment. I didn't want to go to college, but my parents laughed in my face. They said, "You're funny. You're going to college. In fact, you're going to Spelman." Spelman was the only school that I applied to, and I have a degree in economics. But as soon as I graduated, I was like, L.A., you know, here I come!

It actually took me a little bit. I ended up working in production in the field, and then, from there, I was working for Tyler Perry's president, and I just knew that there had to be more. Like, I had to find a way to get to L.A., and was introduced to Charles King. And Charles King basically opened up the gates. This is, like, a lot of full-circle moments I do want to get because we're on the In Proximity podcast. Then I start working at the agency that Charles was at. I started working at WME, and one of the first desks that I was on is Ryan Coogler's agent's desk. This is right after Fruitvale Station. He's—I'm helping set meetings for him for Ryan and Sylvester Stallone with Creed.

**Paola Mardo:** Very full-circle! Very full-circle.

**Kelli Buchanan:** 100 percent full-circle. And then I found myself in Unscripted and then went from Unscripted, and I worked my way up to the blue-chip premium doc space that we now operate in here at Proximity.

**Paola Mardo:** Shout out, Craig Kestel.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yes, Craig, CTK!

**Paola Mardo:** There you go. And shout-out Spelman. Hello!

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yes, Spelman.

[13:50 - Juno Arp Stinger by Ken Nana]

**Paola Mardo:** What about you, Gaby?

**Gaby Arvizu:** Wow, we're taking it all the way back. Growing up in the Bay Area, growing up in Oakland, there's just been—it's been such a central part of my identity but also my identity as a storyteller because I grew up around murals, I grew up around spoken word, I grew up around photography. And that was something that I didn't understand that was not something that all people were exposed to. It's something that I just grew up around.

I grew up in the Fruitvale district, and there's just murals everywhere, and they always told a story. So that was always part of my childhood. And then, coming into my teens, I started coming into my voice. And my mentors at the time got me into a program called Youth Radio. And now it's—I think it was most recently called Wire Media, but at the time, Youth Radio did this really cool thing where they would let us DJ Friday nights at the local radio station. And we would get to choose our own playlist and have our own DJ name. I don't remember my DJ name.

**Paola Mardo:** No!

**Gaby Arvizu:** It might've been, actually DJ Ybag, which is Gaby backwards.

**Paola Mardo:** Love it.

**Gaby Arvizu:** And, but we also did commentaries. So we worked in a newsroom as teenagers, and we wrote commentaries that would actually go on National Public Radio. So I just started writing my little heart out. And the first time I heard my voice, I was walking into my art classroom at Oakland High School, and my teacher had NPR on. And I heard my voice, and it was the most—one of the most surreal moments ever. I was like, first, "Oh, I don't like my voice! But, wait, I'm on National Public Radio," and third, "Is my mom going to hear this?"

**Paola Mardo:** Hilarious. What was the story about?

**Gaby Arvizu:** It was about growing up in Oakland. So I really talked about a lot of amazing things but also challenging things growing up in the—in East Oakland. So it was really empowering for me. And after that, I just decided this is what I want to do, so just continued on. I am a product of the Bay in every way, and every institution, educational or community, has really propelled me into storytelling. Went through a really great program at San Francisco State as an undergrad in Broadcasting. And then I wrote for a local newspaper, El Tecolote newspaper in the Mission District and then, of course, getting into City College, and that's where I started to mix my photography—I was a photographer for a while. I was like, I love photography, but how can we add movement? And that's where documentary came in.

Then I went to the Graduate School of Journalism at Berkeley, where I had the chance to meet a lot of colleagues that, till this day, still continue to collaborate with—we collaborated on our student projects, and now we're collaborating together as filmmakers.

**Paola Mardo:** Incredible. Love that. I love that. And as someone who also has produced stories for the radio that have ended up on local NPR stations, I can relate to that feeling of hearing your story for the first time. It's inspiring and just makes you—makes me want to do more of that work.

[17:10 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** But thanks so much for sharing a little bit of you guys' journey. We got some listener questions. So I'd love to play some of them, hear your responses, and maybe you can talk a little bit about, you know, your work at Proximity. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO: QUESTION 1]

**Javion:** Hi Proximity crew. My name is Javion. I am from Greenville, South Carolina. My question for you guys is: how do you determine who you're going to make a documentary about? Whether it's an athlete, a musician, a moment of time, when you guys all sit down in a room, what are the challenges to decide: who are we going to make the story about and why this story needs to be told?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

**Gaby Arvizu:** That's a great question.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah, that's a layered—

**Gaby Arvizu:** Very layered.

**Kelli Buchanan:**—answer.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yes.

**Kelli Buchanan:** I think because Proximity is founded by filmmakers, a lot of our decisions are informed by—our creative decisions in terms of what we're working on is informed by the filmmaker behind the project. If they've got a very strong relationship with the subject, and the access is real, I think that's the first thing we're going to, you know, question because we believe in being able to—I mean, it's the name of the company, you know? Our mission is to bring audiences into closer proximity, right?

So if the access is not there, then it makes telling the story that Proximity would tell quite difficult. I think it's important to consider what this subject has going on in their lives, if they're still alive. What have they accomplished so far, and what is the moment that they're approaching? And is that a moment that feels like it's a generational moment? Is it a moment that feels like they're questioning a lot, and it's something that a wide audience can relate to,

and there's a lot of universal themes that are able to be drawn from this, this journey that they happen to be on.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah. I think, just to echo what Kelli's saying, access is huge, and it's big because what does access give us? It gives us intimacy. It gives us those moments that are able to shed light into a space, into a community, into a person's world that otherwise we wouldn't see. And we've had just the honor of working with filmmakers who has, have this incredible talent of bringing us into those intimate spaces.

We've worked with Peter Nicks, who brought us into a lot of institutions that are really hard to get into. And he just has a flawless track record of getting into those institutions, hospitals, embedded with the Oakland Police Department, into schools. But it's not just the institutions. It's the emotional level, right? And for us, it's really important to do that because we want to tell authentic stories whether it's a high school student, whether it's Steph Curry. It's, it's just really important across the board.

And also, is the story providing a fresh perspective? Sometimes we've heard a story 20, 30, hundreds of times, but there might be one subject that can give us a completely fresh perspective, and it's just—it's important for us to see it in a different light.

**Kelli Buchanan:** I think that's what was so important for us with Hurricane Katrina, the project that we produced with Light Box Entertainment for NatGeo. Since it's been 20 years, there's obviously been so many Katrina pieces that have been put out into the world. And when we decided that this was something that we wanted to put on our nonfiction slate, it was very, very important to us that we were approaching the story in a very different way.

And speaking of, you know, working with directors that are just so skilled at getting that access, Traci Curry, our fearless leader on that project, the way that she was able to approach her subjects and finding these survivors that had such a strong and vivid memory of that storm and the days that followed, it really allowed for us to build out a series that felt deeply propulsive while also being character-driven. And we were able to use archive that had never been seen before. We were able to tell the story and use a different lens to really expose for the audience how human error and subconscious or unconscious bias can really lead to catastrophic events. I mean, it's one of those things where we saw, in this series, how a storm can really escalate to a catastrophe that has generational implications. I mean, New Orleans, in some ways, is still trying to recover from this event that happened 20 years ago.

**Paola Mardo:** Man, I feel like this is just a goldmine of advice for picking subjects and also stories. And I love that you guys touched on how you guys approach finding subjects, both celebrities but also just, like, regular people who may have been part of a big event or big story.

We actually have another question that I think is a good follow-up to this one that sort of touches on this. So let me play that.

[VOICE MEMO: QUESTION 2]

**Ariyana:** Hello. My name is Ariyana, and I'm from Sarasota, Florida. What are some of the obvious code of ethics when making contact with a person or a community for an interview or in-person research? How does one ethically document stories and engage with people when their stories may surround traumatic events?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

**Gaby Arvizu:** Oh, I, I love this question. I love this question for a lot of reasons. First and foremost, I love it because when I was younger, I reported on a traumatic event that happened to me, and I felt like the adults around me did not take the responsibility to protect me and protect my identity. And now, as an adult myself and as a storyteller, I take—I take it very seriously.

So I think, when we're in the field, when we're dealing with victims of trauma, it's really important to—first, don't push people. Meet them where they're at, understand where they're at. And it's really important for us to not just put a camera in someone's faces. We have to meet at a very, like, human level, like connect. It's not just about the story. It's about us connecting and building this relationship where we create a safe space for you to be able to talk.

And the other part is really understanding what makes your, your subject vulnerable, right? There's a lot of different things and—to understand, like, when they're ready to talk about it, when they're not, when they're closing off, when they're disassociating, and really respecting it. And I think people will surprise you sometimes. Like, people will want to talk when they're ready to talk. And sometimes it's sooner; sometimes it's later. But it's really just following your intuition. That's a big code of ethics, and, I mean, there's so many, but that's one of them.

**Kelli Buchanan:** For me, I've been in the field and dealt with victims of trauma on true crime projects, and it's very, very challenging especially if you're an empath and you absorb everything. But I would recommend to Ariyana that you approach your subjects from a very authentic place, and you're transparent about, you know, your motivations and what it is that you're seeking to do, and hopefully it's to give them a platform to share their story.

And if it's not a person who has dealt with a traumatic situation, it's just a community that you're interested about, again, I think it's about being transparent about those motivations. If it's a community that you don't have proximity to, you want to find the path of least resistance. You need to find a liaison. You need to find an advocate who's going to vouch for you that's a part of that community or has more proximity that can make those introductions a little bit easier. And you can sort of gain credibility through that person sort of making those introductions for you.

**Gaby Arvizu:** And just to add to what Kelli is saying, that's why it's really important for us to understand the connection that directors have to their stories, right? It's not just, "Oh, this is,

like, trending. This is what I want to do." It's: what is your connection to the story, and why are you the person to tell it?

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. There's that term, like, "parachuting in."

**Gaby Arvizu:** Right.

**Paola Mardo:** Like, you don't want to be, like, just parachuting into some random community or place without doing any homework or anything like that.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Absolutely.

**Kelli Buchanan:** And people can tell.

**Paola Mardo:** Yes.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Absolutely.

**Kelli Buchanan:** They can tell when you're—you know, you're there to exploit, you want to take and not give. And I think, you know, again, to sort of just echo what Gaby's saying about the connectivity that our filmmakers have with the subject matter is just so important. And I think the passion they have for telling those stories and supporting the subjects of that community, it invigorates us, and it makes us lean in that much more.

And storytelling in this way can be very challenging. There's a lot of people telling you, "No, you can't, and this is why." You have to fight a lot. And so it's easier to sort of stand up for the fight when you're supporting a filmmaker that is going to do it regardless because they're so passionate, and they feel so compelled to tell that story. They feel like it is sort of a divine calling to tell that story. Like, those are the filmmakers that we get really, really excited about.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that. And I think that's key, that this filmmaker—filmmakers that you partner with usually want to tell the story no matter what. And it's, like, amazing if they do it with you guys, with Proximity, but they're going to do it no matter what, anyway. I love that because I think that's—when you have to fight for something so much, you want to make sure, like, the person you're fighting for is, like, in it for the long run.

These are all great tips. Okay. Here's another one. This is, I guess, about filmmakers. There's a question here about first-time filmmakers that I'm going to play. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO: QUESTION 3]

**Stephanie:** My name is Stephanie from Honolulu. What is the documentary landscape for first-time independent filmmakers entering the film circuit, meaning how has it changed, and what are the pitfalls these filmmakers should know or think about?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

**Kelli Buchanan:** I would say, unfortunately, we are in a time where our more established buyers in those institutions are looking for tried and true filmmakers that have been proven. And so it's very challenging. However, in the independent market, there are so many benefactors out there. There's so many programs. There's so many incubators that are set up solely to support storytelling perspectives from first-time filmmakers. So I would encourage Stephanie to figure out where these programs are, if there's local programs, if there's funds that she could be applying to to get grants. You have to be scrappy, and you got to be not only creative with the storytelling but creative with how you're pulling the resources together to actually make the piece.

**Gaby Arvizu:** I think it—I think it also depends on the goals of the filmmaker. Do they want to be on a platform, a major platform, or do they want to be indie? What is—what is their motivation? What is their why, and what is their goal? But honestly, as a first-time filmmaker, just have fun! Just get out there.

**Paola Mardo:** That's good advice.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Pick up a camera.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Just make the thing. Just make it.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Make—and make the thing. And I think, oftentimes, we think of filmmaking as this, like, grand thing, of this huge event, but there's all these events happening in our backyard, right? There's your, you know, cousin's quinceañera. There is your mom getting five kids ready for school. Like, prep the—your mom getting ready for school. There's so many different things around you that you can capture. Capture a slice of life. Just have fun with it because these are the moments that you're going to remember.

**Paola Mardo:** I feel like, on the especially development side, you're always looking for new stories and also new talent. What do you look for when it comes to first-time features or short films of first-time filmmakers? Like, what stands out to you? Like, I'm even thinking about if you guys go to, like, film festivals for example. And, like, you—you know, you guys go watch a bunch of movies. I assume some of them are new filmmakers. Like, what do you look for in those projects or voices?

**Gaby Arvizu:** I think a director with, with a voice, right?

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Or the potential to really develop their own voice, their own perspective and just, like, their own aesthetic, too, right? We see—we see the potential. Even if you just, you know,

went out and bought your first camera for, you know, 400 bucks or whatever, you can tell that there's something there and that they're—their passion, that they're really committed to the craft.

**Kelli Buchanan:** I think it's about—for me, I'm looking at how well they executed in just telling the story. Do I understand what you're trying to say?

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah.

**Kelli Buchanan:** There's been a lot of filmmakers that have had, you know, directorial debuts at festivals, and you can tell they're new filmmakers. And that's fine, but it's about, for me, whether I believe that, with time, you can continue to be that much more surgical with how you're executing your vision. Do I believe that you can truly land the plane?

Sometimes you watch films, and you can tell they had an intention to start. You know, they wanted to land—they went from A, and they wanted to land at B, but maybe they landed at apple, and they can feel a little aimless. And so those are people like, okay, maybe we watch because they've got a very interesting aesthetic, but they maybe need some work on understanding story. And I think story is paramount.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Huge.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah, because some of the other stuff can be rough around the edges, and if you have a strong story, like, that's what's going to transcend and resonate with audiences. So it's, to me, about how compelled I feel to finish the film.

**Paola Mardo:** And do you guys look for talent solely at festivals or—because there's nonfiction stories everywhere, right? On YouTube. Festivals, I think, is just one way. Do you guys keep an eye out in different places? I'm just curious if you have any other places you look and want to share.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah. Absolutely. It's, it's film festivals, but it's also just sometimes we meet people. Sometimes people hit us up. Sometimes people apply to our internship, and we see potential, and we stay in touch with them throughout the years. And we actually see them grow and see them create their own films, eventually. There is many different ways that we cross paths with, with filmmakers, but I think one thing that Kelli and I are really committed to is cultivating these relationships with these storytellers.

**Paola Mardo:** Thank you for sharing. I know that emerging filmmakers who are checking this out will learn a lot from what you guys have shared. Here's another good one. This has to do with the editorial process. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO: QUESTION 4]

**Abigail Anderson:** Hi, In Proximity! My name is Abigail Anderson. I'm from Houston, Texas. My question about documentary filmmaking is: how do you edit it? And more specifically, you have so much footage, so much beautiful footage and so many different parts of your story. How do you edit it all down into the documentary, the feature? Do you have a script that you go by?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

**Paola Mardo:** I feel like this is a podcast episode in and of itself, but let's try.

**Gaby Arvizu:** These questions are fire, yo!

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah, yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

**Gaby Arvizu:** They're fire.

**Kelli Buchanan:** It depends on the material that's being edited because we're very involved with the editorial process. Have some sort of creative North Star that's memorialized in writing that we can refer back to to make sure that we're being true to what our intention was when we set out. So we will do a lot of work with our directors to create beat sheets, treatments, scripts even in post when we're in edit to make sure that these stories are coming together in a way that feel propulsive, that feel interesting and surprising and unique. So there are many ways, but I feel like writing the story down beforehand of what you hope is always going to be helpful to be able to refer back to. And it really just does depend on, like, the type of material that you're editing.

If it's vérité, we will work with that filmmaker to hire the editor. We work with them to make those key creative decisions, but we trust the editor to be able to do, you know, their job. And they bring on their team to help, you know, streamline their process. Sometimes, especially if you're really limited on resources and you have to be very intentional while you're in the field, your best bet is to script as much of what you need out as possible so that you're making sure that you get every beat and that you don't look up in edit, and you're like, "Well, I'm missing a big chunk that's going to be pivotal to telling the story, and now I don't have the resources to go get that." You know, doing a lot of that work in prep will help you in post.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. That's so interesting because it's nonfiction. So, like, scripting before you actually shoot things doesn't sound like a thing you should do, but you're scripting it in a way that still allows for spontaneity, right?

**Kelli Buchanan:** There's so much discovery that's happening in the moment.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Absolutely. I think that's another reason why it's important to build relationships with your subjects because then they'll start telling you what's happening in their lives like, "Oh,

you know, I have this competition," "Oh, I'm going to have dinner with my mom on Thursday." And then you can start to be like, wait, okay, so where does this scene fit in the story. Should I film it? And then you start making those decisions.

And of course, what happens the day of is unknown, but you can at least plan ahead that way. Other—and then, all of a sudden, you have 200 hours of vérité. What do you do? What do you do? You get a really great editor that knows story. And oftentimes, Kelli and I have been in the field. So we'll say, "Hey, I remember that dinner with the mom. That's going to go really well to hit this beat in the story." But also, when you have a really good DP, they get really good cutaways. They get really good shots. And sometimes they get these, like, funny moments, too, that you—you don't know they're funny, but, like, you're like, "Oh, this cut—random cutaway of this is funny. Like, we can put this in to add levity to the story." And just having, having just kind of a buffet of options in your—in the can is always really important.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Having a creative team that you trust, where everyone really understands, like, what the vision is, and, like, having a DP that understands story with your field producers that understand story and your editors that understand story, like, you've got a winning team in that combination. So I do think it's also about just aligning yourself with collaborators that are equally, you know, strong, if not stronger.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah. And just capturing those little moments. Just, like, an example that is—for the Steph Curry documentary, there's this moment where he's at home with his kids, and his little boy is just popping bubble wrap. And our DP needed to capture that, and somehow, when it was playing on the big screen, the audience just burst out laughing.

**Paola Mardo:** So good.

**Gaby Arvizu:** And it's just those little moments that are part of the story that hit different beats, you know, in this case around fatherhood.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Being a superstar and juggling being a dad, too.

**Paola Mardo:** And also just a dad.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Yeah!

**Paola Mardo:** Vérité, you guys mentioned vérité. The film-heads and cinephiles will know what that is, but for those that are still learning about this term, can you kind of—

**Kelli Buchanan:** Do you want to define vérité?

**Paola Mardo:** What is that style of filmmaking?

**Gaby Arvizu:** I mean, there's so many different ways to define it, but I think that the most basic way, it's really just observational filmmaking where you stand back with the camera and just let things unfold naturally, and you follow your subjects without inserting yourself into the story. You don't—you avoid asking your subjects to talk about something specific. They just go on with their life, and you follow them throughout, throughout the day. You take the risk of, how much time am I going to be filming them like a subject, and what am I really going to get out of it?

And then back to the ethics question, your crew's making questions about ethics in real time because you don't know what your subjects are going through that day. You don't know what's going to happen. You have to have a really solid crew that if something prickly comes up, they're going to know how to handle it, and that's always a little bit tricky.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Anything can unfold in the field.

[39:22 - "Prox Recs Theme" with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

**Paola Mardo:** Well, I feel like, honestly, I could sit here with you guys all day. We will have to bring you guys back. But thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge and experience with our show and our audience. Before we go, I wanted to ask you for your Prox Recs, like a book or a movie or anything that sort of, I guess, influenced you or something that you always go back to.

**Gaby Arvizu:** I mean, for me, for the documentaries, like if you're really into documentaries, I suggest, like, you go, like, take it all the way back. Like, watch Paris Is Burning. Watch Hoop Dreams. Watch The Last Dance. And I think, like, most recently, our team has been talking about the Queen of Chess quite a bit. We are also big fans of Searching for Sugar Man.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yep.

**Paola Mardo:** All good recs.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yeah. I mean, I have—I have a handful because we love Fred Chang in this department.

**Gaby Arvizu:** We do.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Invisible Beauty is—Bethann Hardison, her story was just so moving, and the way that he was able to capture her, and she was just so raw. And she's accomplished so much that the rawness and the sort of comfort level she has just being her most authentic self was just so beautiful to see. That movie really stuck with me in a lot of ways.

**Paola Mardo:** Can you share just maybe a one-liner and who she is?

**Kelli Buchanan:** Bethann Hardison is a former model and really famous model agent who's turned into an activist. She's been largely responsible for a lot of the diversity that you see on the runways in fashion shows today. That's primarily because of her activism. She is a juggernaut in the fashion industry. Another film that I just—that has really stayed with me lately is *Come See Me in the Good Light* by Ryan White. That is just such a beautiful, moving story about the testament of love.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that. Thank you two for sharing these recommendations. I feel like we got a wide variety of documentary recs, and *The L Word*, as well, on this show.

**Kelli Buchanan:** I love *The L Word*.

**Paola Mardo:** So thank you very much. I don't usually give recs, but I will just shout out and recommend all your work and specifically your Proximity projects.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Thank you.

**Paola Mardo:** And if you haven't been on our website yet, [proximitymedia.com](http://proximitymedia.com), we have a whole page for each department and specifically their department, as well, if you want to learn more and support our amazing Nonfiction team. Thank you, Kelli; thank you, Gaby, for being In Proximity.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Thanks.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Thank you, Paola.

**Kelli Buchanan:** This was fun.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Let's do it again.

**Kelli Buchanan:** We'll be back once we have more—we have exciting things to come.

**Paola Mardo:** Yes.

**Gaby Arvizu:** We do.

**Kelli Buchanan:** So once those things are public and out in the world, we'd love to come back and talk to you about them.

**Paola Mardo:** Yes. We'll do a round two.

**Kelli Buchanan:** Yes!

**Paola Mardo:** Thank you two.

**Gaby Arvizu:** Let's do it.

[42:24 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

**Paola Mardo:** In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media.

The show is hosted, directed and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian.

Theme song and additional music is by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our co-director and director of photography.

Ken Nana is our sound designer and mix engineer.

Our editors are Patrick Epino, Ken Nana, and Ben Caloza

The production team includes Celine Mendiola, Joy Woo, and Alexandria Santana.

Follow us on social media @proximitymedia.

For transcripts and more information, head to [proximitymedia.com](https://proximitymedia.com).

[VOICEOVER ENDS]