

**In Proximity**  
**Season 3, Episode 39**  
**Andrew Stanton & Kenna Harris**  
**Final Transcript**

**Andrew Stanton:** The Braintrust started because when we made the first three to four films at Pixar, it was one group of people that just kind of moved from one film to the next. And so, we were kind of this band that had a hive mind, just like a garage band. And then we had to split apart because business wise we had to make more films so we said lets get together on each other's pictures. You just need some small circle of ideally peers so they really can give you smart advice and guide you through the land of loss of objectivity. That's like this Faustian bargain you make.

**Kenna Harris:** Take a shot when Andrew says "Faustian bargain."

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** I said it once so far! No, I said it twice, didn't I?

**Paola Mardo:** You said it twice.

**Andrew Stanton:** All right, all right. Two shots. Two shots.

[0:43 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're talking Toy Story 5. The fifth chapter of the beloved Pixar franchise, Toy Story, is in theaters this week, and I got to speak with director and writer Andrew Stanton and co-director and writer Kenna Harris.

Andrew is a Pixar legend. He joined the studio in 1990 as the second animator and ninth employee. Today, as VP of Creative, he oversees all feature and streaming projects at the studio. His credits are stacked. He's written, directed, and produced several Academy Award-winning feature films like Finding Nemo; my favorite, Wall-E; and Toy Story 4. He's also received Oscar noms for Best Original Screenplay for Toy Story, Finding Nemo, Wall-E, and Toy Story 3. Other films on his roster include Finding Dory; A Bug's Life; Monsters, Inc.; Monsters University; Ratatouille, Brave, and Inside Out. Andrew's career has also crossed into live-action where he's written and directed feature films and TV shows like John Carter, Stranger Things, and Better Call Saul.

Andrew's collaborator on this film, Kenna Harris, is a rising star at Pixar. They joined the studio in 2018 as a story artist, then went on to work as a story lead on the Pixar feature Luca before directing their first Pixar short film, Ciao Alberto. Most recently, Kenna served as Story Supervisor on Inside Out 2.

It's been over 30 years since the very first Toy Story movie, and in this chapter, the toys finally meet tech. Woody, voiced by Tom Hanks; Buzz Lightyear, Tim Allen; Jessie, Joan Cusack; and the rest of the gang's jobs are challenged when they come face-to-face with LilyPad, Greta Lee, a brand-new tablet device that arrives with her own ideas about what's best for their kid, Bonnie. If you've ever seen a Toy Story or Pixar film, you know you're in for a great story, memorable characters, and probably a need for a box of tissues.

How do they do that at Pixar? How do they tell such beautiful, fun, and emotionally compelling stories for kids and adults alike? I asked Andrew and Kenna about their storytelling secrets, why they wanted to tackle tech, and how they both collaborated on the film coming from different experiences and even generations, plus how they built their careers as writers and directors at one of the most exciting storytelling studios today. Here's my conversation with Andrew Stanton and Kenna Harris.

[3:19 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Welcome to In Proximity, Andrew Stanton and Kenna Harris. Excited to have you here with us.

**Andrew Stanton:** Hi!

**Kenna Harris:** Hi!

**Paola Mardo:** Hi! You're our first remote recording on our video podcast.

**Andrew Stanton:** Oh no!

**Paola Mardo:** So this is very exciting.

**Andrew Stanton:** So there's nowhere to go but up after us.

**Paola Mardo:** No, exactly. Exactly. You're setting the bar right now.

**Andrew Stanton:** Really low.

**Paola Mardo:** No pressure at all. Before we start—I mean, we're here to talk about your incredible work as the cowriters and directors of Toy Story 5. It's such a legendary franchise and so much to ask you about, but first I want to ask some fun questions. Here we go. Because the film does deal with toys but also, I guess, how technology and the modern world impact the toys and their jobs. So I want to name some jobs in today's modern world, and I want to ask you guys: Which toy do you think would have this job?

**Andrew Stanton:** Oh, wow. Okay.

**Kenna Harris:** That's fun.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Okay, here we go. Barista?

**Andrew Stanton:** Oh, oh. I thought of Dolly right away.

**Kenna Harris:** I thought of Dolly, too. That's so weird!

**Andrew Stanton:** Okay. When Kenna and I sync like that, you got to just go with it.

**Kenna Harris:** Yes!

**Paola Mardo:** I love it. Okay. Engineer?

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, Rex.

**Andrew Stanton:** Rex, Rex. Look at that.

**Paola Mardo:** I like that.

**Andrew Stanton:** Look at that!

**Paola Mardo:** I love that.

**Andrew Stanton:** Have we been working together for years or what?

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Amazing. Okay, this is very modern. Influencer?

**Andrew Stanton:** Oh, Pricklepants.

**Kenna Harris:** That's so funny. But he would be—I think he would be a controversial influencer.

**Andrew Stanton:** Who was on your mind?

**Kenna Harris:** I think Trixie would also be a good influencer.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, you got me. That one, too.

**Kenna Harris:** I think she would be like a streamer. She would be on Twitch, yeah, gaming.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that. Filmmaker?

**Kenna Harris:** Well, that's Slinky.

**Andrew Stanton:** Slinky, all right, yeah. I can see—Slinky's a bit of a grip, but okay.

**Kenna Harris:** He's holding the boom.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah. He'd be a good boom man.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** Podcaster?

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, Hamm.

**Andrew Stanton:** Hamm, yeah.

**Kenna Harris:** He loves to talk.

**Paola Mardo:** I can see that.

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** He'd have an opinion on everything.

**Paola Mardo:** And last one, teacher?

**Kenna Harris:** Aww, Forky.

**Andrew Stanton:** Forky. I like Forky.

**Kenna Harris:** Forky loves questions!

**Andrew Stanton:** Well, Forky has no problem giving you the wrong answer.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah, whether or not he's a good teacher, I don't know.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah.

**Kenna Harris:** But he would be a teacher.

**Paola Mardo:** Do you know what subject he would teach?

**Kenna Harris:** Everything.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yes, he'd be a wiki page.

**Kenna Harris:** It'd be everything, yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** Well, he did come from a classroom. Yeah.

**Kenna Harris:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Perfect. Okay. I'm going to list some modern-day toys now, and we'd love to know what you guys think would be their personalities in the Toy Story world or Toy Story universe.

**Kenna Harris:** Got it.

**Paola Mardo:** Okay. Labubu?

**Kenna Harris:** Labubus are—well, they talk like this. They talk really up high, and then they also are very prissy. They're very—I don't know. They are the influencers of the room, pretty much. Everyone in the toy room would want to impress the Labubu that came in on Bonnie's bag.

**Paola Mardo:** Love that.

**Kenna Harris:** And that's that.

**Andrew Stanton:** Not going to argue. Not going to argue.

**Kenna Harris:** Andrew does not know what a Labubu is.

**Andrew Stanton:** I'm just—I'm just drafting off of Kenna.

**Kenna Harris:** He's just "yes, and"-ing right now.

**Paola Mardo:** What about a PlayStation?

**Andrew Stanton:** The rule we have is it has to have a character to it to be alive.

**Kenna Harris:** Face.

**Andrew Stanton:** Like a—or some sort of facial ability or—that'd be on the cusp. I don't know if it's a character, but if you had to, it would be one boring character.

**Kenna Harris:** Aww, I was going to say he's a bro. I think that PlayStations—

**Andrew Stanton:** That's—that counts, but that would be boring.

**Kenna Harris:** He would—yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Good to know that rule. What about—I mean, would you consider Magna-Tiles a toy?

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, those. They're, like, shapes and they come together?

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, they're like shapes that they—

**Andrew Stanton:** If you put it—like Forky, if you put it together and made a character, then yes. Suddenly, it's a character.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah, made a face or something with it.

**Andrew Stanton:** It would be like a Cheshire Cat kind of thing because it'd be stuck on a wall commenting on everything, right?

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, that would be really cool, though. Yeah, they're like an overlord of the room.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, exactly.

**Paola Mardo:** This was a popular request. Do you know slime, like those slime things that are really into now?

**Andrew Stanton:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Would that be a toy? And if so, what personality would it have?

**Andrew Stanton:** It would be the friend that wouldn't leave.

**Kenna Harris:** Clingy, stage five clinger.

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, clinger.

**Paola Mardo:** Literally.

**Andrew Stanton:** And hard to understand, like, "What'd he say? What'd she say?"

**Kenna Harris:** Trixie would love slime, though. Trixie and slime would be BFFs.

**Andrew Stanton:** You could argue it might be a good pet, as, you know, a little bit more of, like, a sub-toy character.

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, yeah, like their personality, they're just a little—

**Andrew Stanton:** Like, like Sticky Hand is.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah, like Sticky Hand.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** I feel like we're in the writers room, and I'm getting, like, the deep-down, like behind-the-scenes of it.

**Andrew Stanton:** This is not that far off.

**Kenna Harris:** This is the genius. This is the exact vibe.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that.

**Andrew Stanton:** This is where the money goes.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Amazing. And then one last fun question: If you could make a playlist for the Toy Story gang, what songs would you put in there?

**Kenna Harris:** I had a lot of—I made a playlist for Jessie, and it had a lot of Dolly Parton on it and Miley Cyrus.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, I was picturing Hank Williams, like a lot of just long road trip kind of songs like Johnny Cash.

**Kenna Harris:** We know that, like, Rex and the—oh, gosh, what's the short that had the club in the bathroom?

**Andrew Stanton:** Partysaurus Rex.

**Kenna Harris:** Partysaurus Rex! Like, I think you have to have some club bangers.

**Andrew Stanton:** Club music. Yep.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah. And some classical for Pricklepants, obviously, and smooth jazz for—

**Andrew Stanton:** Some Kenny G in there, just some Kenny G slipped in, yeah. Whose—nobody fesses up to who put that on the playlist.

**Kenna Harris:** But it's Buzz! It's Buzz.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** I was going to say Mr. Potato Head, but I think Buzz works, too.

**Kenna Harris:** Oh, it would be Mr. Potato Head! He's classy.

[8:58 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Toy Story 5, there's so much to say about the film. I mean, Andrew, first and foremost, you're a Pixar veteran, second animator and ninth employee of Pixar.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** You joined in 1990, and you've basically had a hand on every single Toy Story film in various capacities, writer, animator, and so forth, but this is your first time directing; is that right? A Toy Story film.

**Andrew Stanton:** First time—a Toy Story film. It's—I can't—I don't—I can't count how many times I've directed now. It's crazy. But it just seems like those lines eventually—enough decades went by that the writing line for Toy Story and directing line, they just naturally crossed over.

**Paola Mardo:** No, I wanted to ask about that because you're so known for being, like, on the writing side of it, and I know for the past decade, you've been doing a lot of live action and TV. When you got the call to write and direct this chapter of Toy Story, I mean, were you excited? Or were you like, "Ooh, that sounds like a big lift"? Or what were you thinking?

**Andrew Stanton:** Well, anything at Pixar is a big lift. So that was a given. I just—I wasn't sure I was ready to go back into what I call "rock time." Animation takes so many years to make something, especially a feature. And it takes, on average, four years, and we tried to do this faster, but I think we only shaved it by six months. Four years gets shorter and shorter the older you get. And I wasn't sure I wanted to be back in the rock time where cities rise and fall and

woods get felled and grow back, and you're still working on the same thing while everybody's moved on to two other pictures.

So I needed—it needed to be an idea that I liked enough. So I agreed upfront to write something and make it as amicable as possible. Like, if they didn't like where I was going, then we could part ways, and nobody would be offended. But I needed to know that there was something I was willing to sit in and battle for four years because it's a long time, and you just know you're going to spend more time with things not working than working. So, like, you have to like the possibility of the idea so much that you're willing to battle it every day. But the biggest incentive was I kind of knew this might be the last one. I didn't even know I'd ever do another one. So I said, "This is really my shot at passing on the knowledge of how I think Toy Story movies should be done right."

There's a tone to them, and there's a feel about them that I don't know if I—even if I had all the time in the world to write a manual I'd get it accurate. But in the middle of practicing it, like actually doing it, I've had to come in on other projects either on the front end or the backend of other Toy Story films, and I just—I just know it intimately, instinctually. It's like—it's like you were raised in your own family business, and you just kind of know without talking about it, why to go left instead of right or why to hold back or why to go take a risk. And—but I really wanted to make sure that I could do it with a team that was going to take advantage of that.

And so Kenna was the first person I brought on board to share that with. Kenna's half my age but older than I was when I worked on Toy Story. And so there's no reason—that's not to say that Kenna was green. You know, it was just like—it was just—made sense to, like, give it to somebody who's going to still be around and keep passing on the knowledge.

**Paola Mardo:** Wow, that's incredible. And Kenna, I know you started at Pixar as a story artist. You wrote and directed Ciao Alberto, the short film. I read that you came on board—I mean, Andrew said he brought you on—but there was, like, a brainstorming session or something that you guys were doing. Can you talk about, I guess from your perspective, maybe that brainstorming session or what even drew you to come on board this project?

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah. I remember that when the brainstorming session happened, like, I was pulled into that, and there had already been light rumors around the halls. Like, Pixar can be very high school-esque at sometimes, and so there was already—

**Andrew Stanton:** Sometimes?

**Kenna Harris:** You said it, not me! But there would be kind of these whispers of like, "Did you hear? Toy Story 5, it's definitely going online!" And I was like, wow, best of luck to whoever's going to be involved with that. And then I got pulled into the brainstorm, and it ended up being—it was like a huge, kind of pie-in-the-sky day. I think, at that time, Andrew hadn't started a draft, necessarily. It was super duper up-in-the-air.

**Andrew Stanton:** No, it was like six or eight months before that.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah, and so it was kind of, again, just people throwing spaghetti at the walls and having fun, you know? It's like making a personal wish list of, like, "What would you want to see in the next Toy Story?" And I didn't really realize at the time that this was a rather fated pairing, but me and Andrew, during the brainstorm, had a lot of just common ideas. Like we both were very drawn to the idea of, like, "Well, what if there's more to Jessie's story? What if she is kind of leading the brigade this time, and what does that look like?" And so then it kind of made sense when he, a year later or a little, you know, six months and change later, he had finished a draft, shared it with me, asked if I wanted to come on as co-director.

And it—I wish I could say—I don't know. I feel like I wasn't intimidated because I've grown up with this series, and I—you know, Andrew knows it so well from one end of the camera, and then I know it so well from the audience's side and perspective, as well as having my own opinions as a filmmaker. So it just felt exciting. It was like, oh, this is a really cool opportunity for the two of us in our two perspectives to combine and to make what I feel is, like, a very nostalgic but also contemporary Toy Story film because I'm so young, and he's so old!

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** Old, yeah. This is a typical day with the two of us.

**Paola Mardo:** Well, I mean, whatever you guys did, it sounds like it's worked out really well, I mean, even the way you guys sort of share ideas even in this interview. How did you guys get—had you worked together before, or was that brainstorming the first time?

**Andrew Stanton:** No. You know, I've had so many pairings that are unique in each of the films I've ever worked on, and it's always kind of a gut instinct. It's kind of a—it's like a garage band chemistry kind of thing. You just kind of—you, you have a few details or you hit it off with somebody in a meeting or in some get-together, and then you just—and I've always trusted my gut, and there's something where they can finish a sentence you're forming in your head before you've said it out loud. And Kenna definitely just had that on this one.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah, it was certainly humbling because I had always seen Andrew in, you know, Braintrusts from afar or, you know, again, we hadn't worked closely together but were always in passing. And so him approaching me despite the fact that we hadn't had serious, you know, kind of like war time together on a film was huge. I was like, "Oh, my god! I can't believe he knows my name, let alone is wanting me to work on the film." And I, I think his gut was correct. We had a really good—yeah, not just chemistry but I think just complementary tastes and complementary working styles.

**Paola Mardo:** I want to ask about that, but you mentioned Braintrusts. We have Creativity, Inc. somewhere up here. But for those who don't know, do you mind explaining what that is?

**Andrew Stanton:** Well, you know, there's no simple answer to it, but the Braintrust started because when we made the first three to four films at Pixar, it was one group of people that just kind of moved from one film to the next. And so we were kind of this band that had a hive mind that we—just like a garage band. And then we had to split apart because, business-wise, we had to make more films. We had to overlap with each other, and we were like, "Well, we're going to have to break up the band, and that's the magic." But economics demanded it, and we didn't mind that some of us would get to helm our own picture, but we didn't trust we would make smart enough choices. So we said, "Let's get together on each other's pictures periodically, like every few months, almost like doctors advising another doctor's patient. And we're not going to be a tribunal. We're not going to be a panel of judges. We're going to just be your peers. We're out here doing—working on our own patients, but we're here to just give you the same perspective that we gave when we were all working together in the same room, the same operating room."

So they really can give you smart advice and guide you through the land of loss of objectivity, which is what happens the minute you work on a long project. No matter what it is, you lose that—that's like this Faustian bargain you make, like, "I want to make something for an audience," whether it's a podcast or a book or a painting. And the Faustian bargain is you will lose all objectivity that you had being the audience member on everybody else's work. And you suddenly, you don't know whether you're making a good idea or a bad idea. You get lost in the woods, and you just need that group of people—ideally, it's two or three. It's not some huge group—that just makes you smarter when you're together. And so that's the thing we try to foster, is that process.

**Kenna Harris:** Take a shot when Andrew says "Faustian bargain."

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** All right. We're—I said it once so far. No, I said it twice, didn't I? All right.

**Paola Mardo:** You said it twice!

**Andrew Stanton:** All right. Two shots. Two shots.

[18:53 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Can you guys talk about how the two of you collaborated both in the writing and directing process? And, and I also find it interesting that you guys are of two different generations. Like, how did that play out in your process?

**Kenna Harris:** I think what's funny about the generations thing is that it didn't necessarily actually come up in any pointed way. Like, a lot of what—a lot of what makes up the bones of Toy Story is, like, a great unifier of generations. So I didn't have to necessarily come in and be

like, "All right, now I'm going to give the fresh perspective." It was like—we were so lockstep about a lot of what the movie needed, about what would be entertaining to everyone.

And, yeah, I mean, at first, I feel like a lot of what I was doing just in the first few months was kind of getting used to, all right, what's it like to be on an Andrew Stanton film? How does Andrew like to work? How can I complement that? I mentioned early on to him that I was interested in writing/directing, and that was something that we worked into the process as the movie was kind of developing further.

**Paola Mardo:** Were you first brought on as a writer then?

**Kenna Harris:** No, I was brought on just as a co-director. And it was in that very—like, very first meeting with Andrew where he was kind of like, "Here's a general vibe of what the film is," and I was like, "That sounds awesome. I just want you to know, like, I so admire the fact that you are, you know, a writer/director. That's something I'm interested in. Would there be room for that in our process for me to write as well?"

And Andrew was like, "We'll see about that."

**Andrew Stanton:** Hey, now!

**Kenna Harris:** No, but I mean in a good way. In a good way, you were like, "Let's"—

**Andrew Stanton:** Did I say "Faustian bargain" in our first meeting?

**Kenna Harris:** No, but you were wearing sunglasses, and I wouldn't have put it past you.

[LAUGHTER]

I remember so vividly, like, you never took them off.

**Andrew Stanton:** Oh, jeez.

**Paola Mardo:** Power moves.

**Andrew Stanton:** We were outside. We were outside, by the way!

**Kenna Harris:** We were outside, and you go—

**Andrew Stanton:** We were outside. That just puts a different picture on this podcast.

**Kenna Harris:** But Andrew can jump in here, but again, it just sort of became—I think what ended up becoming clear was that I had a really good handle on Jessie as a character. So then

it felt very organic for the two of us to just start kind of sharing writing abilities since I understood her well.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah. The thing that I was on Toy Story was I was John Lasseter's conscience, if I had to put a word to it. And I would—and we had kind of had that relationship even prior on commercials. And I just was somebody he could trust in the day-to-day, in the hour-to-hour, to say, like, "I think everybody's right when they're telling you something's off," or, "I think everybody's wrong when somebody's"—you know? So it's like you're this Jiminy Cricket kind of advisor. And, and we just trusted that, and that worked so well that we made it an official title on *A Bug's Life*, and we called it the "cowriter." And the best way we would describe it, it was like you were deputy to the director's sheriff, or you were Robin to their Batman, depending on your analogies.

And I always like that. These projects are so big, and you have to literally be in two places at once. To have somebody that can think like you and compliment you and—is just invaluable. So I—that was the—that was the initial offer, but it was so clear right away that Kenna could write and write well. I said, "As long as you can handle the way I like to write," which is we just agree in the outline or the basic beat stage about what should—we kind of do a quick conference, and then we just go with who has a stronger gut about it. And, like, you run with that, and I'll run with this, but that it all comes back through me to do sort of a final edit pass on because there's a—there's a finetune kind of adjustment that I'm used to doing to anybody's work when I'm called in on a Toy Story movie that I just need to have as insurance that it goes into the pipeline with that consistency.

And invariably, because it worked out so well with us right away, that final editing adjustment got so almost unrequired. Like, it—I could, like, literally look at her pages and—look at their pages and just say, "Comma here, take out that phrase," you know, and send a quick email and not have to, like, grade it like a paper or something like that, which is ideally what you're aiming for, is that you just—with anybody, you just—any other cowriter—you just want to be in this hive mind kind of place where—but we never were territorial. It was—if Kenna said, like, "I have a great idea with this. I really have an instinct," then that's just music to your ears, and I would do the same back, you know? And we'd always—it's like a ball. We're passing it back and forth, so it never went through one person and stayed with one person.

**Kenna Harris:** Yeah. It was all, in part, dictated by—like, we were moving pretty quickly on this movie, yes, in slow motion because it's animation, but at the same time, *Toy Story 5* was a pretty swift production overall. So we, we couldn't dawdle. We had to write at a pretty deliberate pace, but if anything, that just made it more fun. It's like we had to just kind of continuously go with our guts, jump in, figure it out together.

And just to say it upfront, for me, as a first-time feature writer, I was actually stoked about the notes process of our process because, again, I'm a pretty okay writer, I was confident I could do it, but a lot of those first few pages that I would submit to Andrew was me being like, "I think this is how it's done. I don't know. I haven't done it before." So to get a lot of, like, line-by-line kind of

notations from him on how to format, how to make sure that things read quickly, how to make sure that things felt tonally kind of, you know, true to Toy Story, that was so invaluable.

**Paola Mardo:** I mean, I've spoken to a lot of filmmakers on this show, and oftentimes the constraints on a project lead to even more creativity even though it can be very difficult. And it sounds like, for you guys, it was the timing that sort of forced you to work faster but maybe smarter, as well.

**Andrew Stanton:** Yeah, one of the advantages which—having a long project is nothing's precious. You know it's going to come back and get redone again no matter how good you think it is. And so I hold this ethos of, like, how many times at bat can we get? My analogy is you're creating, ideally, a new instrument that's never been invented before to play, and you'd want as much time to practice playing it before you go out into the world and perform. And so anything to make us get another pass at doing something is a good thing.

And so I, I also just believe that, like, if somebody told you—could tell you—give a crystal ball upfront and say, like, "On the 10th try, you're going to nail it," you would not kiss away all the time getting to the 10th try. You'd try to get to the 10th try as soon as you could. So the one thing you can't get back over time is time. You can—if somebody has more confidence in it, they can throw more manpower and they can throw more money at it, but they can't throw you, usually, more time, especially once we have release dates set. So I'm always like, let's use our time wisely. Let's treat our front end of the process as if it's the last six months and try to have an aggressive pace because then you've earned the time to slow down when you really need to.

[CLIP: TOY STORY 5 DIRECTED BY ANDREW STANTON AND KENNA HARRIS, PIXAR ANIMATION STUDIOS, 2026]

**Mrs. Anderson:** There's a package for you!

**Bonnie:** Oh, thank you, thank you!

**Lilypad:** Hi, there. I'm Lilypad. Let's play!

[GASPS]

**Rex:** Extinction, not again!

[CLIP ENDS]

**Paola Mardo:** The film introduces a new character, Lilypad, a tablet device that challenges Woody and the other toys and, I guess, their jobs in the world that they live in in relation to Bonnie. So can you talk a little bit about I guess why you felt technology and something like a tablet device was something important to sort of tackle in this chapter of Toy Story?

**Andrew Stanton:** I had noticed somewhere pre-pandemic, so I'm going to guess around 2017, 2018, that it was much more noticeable in public that younger and younger kids were holding devices. And then the pandemic, I just feel like just aggressively pressed it in that direction, and then it—and it's—and it's kind of cemented ever since. So I don't think it's going away. I remember my parents, who were raised as teenagers in the '50s, talking about the TVs coming into the house and how much—and it just sounded like what this is, where just it changed everything. Everybody—suddenly all the dinners moved from the kitchen into the living room, and everybody was staring at the same screen, and it was going to rot your brain. And they were still talking about by the time, 20 years later, I was watching TV, and it's never left the household.

And so I, I suspected that it's on the same path, if not already there. So that's got to not be a good thing for the toys. Their literal shelf life is cut in half, and—so what does that do to them? And I didn't know, and I thought that was—that's half the fun of being a writer, is, you know, especially with characters you already know, it's kind of like coming into a new season and going, "How would they deal with this?" So that was always on the agenda when I got offered to write something. That was, like, first on the list. And then what was right next to it, which Kenna can attest to from the brainstorming session, was I always thought that we were finally at a place where we could emphasize the main character to be somebody other than Woody. He'd been through enough.

[LAUGHTER]

**Kenna Harris:** Let him rest!

**Andrew Stanton:** And that Jessie had so much to say and to do. And just that slight shift of a different child's bedroom, different path of growth, different parents, different kind of household, different time period, different toy running the room, just all the—that's a subtle enough shift that it's suddenly all interesting again. So it was really that and the impish fun in me wanting 50 Buzz Lightyears and not knowing why at the beginning, which I often start with a grocery list and figure out why later. That, those were the main ingredients, and they've stayed even though we—when Kenna came on, things really improved, and we added so many other great ingredients. But it became the foundation or the base of what we ultimately got together.

And we quickly decided that it wasn't binary. There's not—it's not good or bad. Parents aren't doing this blindly. They're trying—they're trying to navigate it as well. They're trying to figure out what's best for their kid. And so we figured so was this device, and for right or wrong reasons, and, and just leaned into the gray area of it all, leaned into the mess. We're still—you know, it's not something that's easily solved.

**Kenna Harris:** Just all of those things were, yeah, the key ingredients, like Andrew said, and the main puzzles we had were kind of, like, again, what does specifically this challenge for the toys look like because it's not binary? You know, there was maybe, early days in the drafts, just toys and tech both vying for attention, which very quickly felt simple and selfish for both of these

characters to just kind of consistently be going, "Well, no, I want Bonnie!" "I want Bonnie!" And then—so it's that in the one hand, and in the other hand, we were like, "Okay, what are we trying to say with Jessie? What more is there to her story? So how do those two things talk to each other? How does toys versus tech talk to each other? Sorry, how does toys versus tech talk to Jessie and the growth that she needs?"

And it was in the process that we were able to find and specify for ourselves like, "Well, what's interesting to us about tech in kids' lives and how it relates to toys is just how we all are using these devices primarily for connection, and toys are such a key connection-based, you know, object in our childhoods. It's how we connect to our friends. It's how we connect to our imagination. And once we found that, that's when, really, I think the development of the movie started to flourish and started to look like the thing that ended up onscreen today.

**Andrew Stanton:** One of the surprising and really nice things to find out was how little is different between what I cherish and remember from my childhood and what Kenna did, and I—and we, we kind of had that as a confirmation that there's a certain timeless quality to innocence and imagination and play before things like devices come into your life, so whether that's at age, you know, two to five or two to twelve, depending on how long you live in it, that was always accessible probably from the first cave kid and always will be and is a choice. And we just really leaned into that. It's kind of the flip side of the coin of zoning out on a screen.

**Paola Mardo:** I wanted to ask about: What are you guys most excited for folks to see in this new movie? Andrew, you mentioned the 50 Buzz Lightyears, which I did see in the trailer, and I was like, "What is going on?" I don't know what's happening there, but it looks amazing. But, yeah, any fun things you guys are excited about?

**Kenna Harris:** I just want to say that was exactly what we said when Andrew was first pitching and writing the movie. He was like, "50 Buzz Lightyears!" And we were all like, "What is that? What do you mean, guy?" And it turned out really great.

I actually—the thing I'm most excited for is how we're playing with imagination in this film. There are imagination sequences in plenty of the Toy Story films before. We've seen a little bit of Bonnie's before, but we've seen a lot of Andy's, which are these kind of hyper-realistic, hyper-cinematic sequences, which are very cool. But right away, me and Andrew were excited about chasing after something that is very ephemeral and very kind of like, "What does that really look like? Imagine back when you were playing. What did you really see or see in your mind's eye, and how can we translate that into film?" So I'm, I'm excited for folks to see that and to specifically see a young girl's imagination and how that's not just ephemeral but it's, like, chaotic and consistently, just constantly switching on a dime. So, yeah, that's, for me, probably one of the things I'm most stoked for, for people to see.

[34:26 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** You guys have touched on this. Toy Story is so nostalgic and beloved as a franchise. It means so much to different kinds of people, I think, maybe depending on when you—like, how old you were maybe when you first watched it.

**Andrew Stanton:** Right.

**Paola Mardo:** I'm a Millennial, so I definitely watched it very young, and my family—I feel like we grew up with the movies, and there may be a dog named Andy in our family. I'll just say that.

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** Nice.

**Paola Mardo:** Yes, and, you know, I've had family members who had, like, a Woody doll at one point or the Buzz Lightyear doll at one point. So we've just sort of grown up with it. Why do you think, like, people have such a connection and emotional attachment, I guess, to this franchise.

**Andrew Stanton:** I can only guess that—when we wrote the first one, we just went with what we were talking about for free, and before we even knew we were going to get to make a movie, we would—we were all in arrested development talking about our childhoods and how we played and how we imagined and what toys we had. That was like our sports talk. And so I feel like that kind of—that era of innocence in your life is always remembered that fondly, or at least parts of it, you know? We all remember that first toy that gave us comfort or that first toy that we coveted or the first toy that we lost. Like, we don't forget those things.

So it's pretty universal, and it's pretty international, but it's this weird thing that's compounded on top of it now that you couldn't have planned for, which is because it's gone through multi-generations, now you've got parents that were teens or even younger taking—when they saw the first one or the second one, and now they're taking their kids because they want to pass on that fond feeling of just going to the theater to see a Toy Story movie. And that is just the greatest compliment and the greatest gift. And why wouldn't you want to keep passing that on?

**Kenna Harris:** I think, too, I remember—I think I remember having this feeling but not knowing how to word it as a kid, but I grew up loving animation. I was constantly watching VHS's of, you know, Disney princesses and all kinds of fairytale, you know, animated stories. But a lot of those characters and stories are kind of heightened representations of us in our daily—like, I don't truly relate to Ariel except for maybe for having some kind of yearning, but other than that, she is this, like, heightened, exaggerated kind of character.

And Toy Story, I think, makes such an impact because it is a much more honest reflection of who we are as humans in a very, very flawed way. And then each film ends up being doubly redemptive in that way. It just feels so much better to see myself onscreen in Jessie as she's having this—you know, expressing her anxieties or expressing her loneliness and then to see that character be given such an awesome story and life, and it suddenly makes me feel all the

more like, "Wow, that just really applies to me more. It feels much more immersive for me as a moviegoer. And it's just cool because I don't think that was really a thing in animation before Toy Story came onto the scene, and Pixar in general because that kind of became the MO of really reflecting very human stories through all of these nonhuman characters, and it's just—it's awesome. It's, like, shaped how a lot of our animated movies are made.

**Andrew Stanton:** I never thought of this kind of—you're talking about that so well. You realize you do that as a child with your toys. You play out all your issues without knowing it because it's therapy.

**Kenna Harris:** Absolutely.

**Andrew Stanton:** That's fascinating.

**Kenna Harris:** I'm a fascinating person, so...

**Andrew Stanton:** I didn't say you were fascinating. I said the thoughts were fascinating.

[LAUGHTER]

**Kenna Harris:** Thanks, Andrew.

**Paola Mardo:** Well, you hit, hit on something that I did want to ask about. I love how you talked about Pixar films. I mean, Pixar, I guess the simplest way I could say it is Pixar, you guys are just known for really emotional storytelling, too. And maybe it is that fact that, like what you said, even though they are about toys or, you know, various animated characters, it's still very human storytelling. Putting, like, the craft sort of hat back on, how do you do that? Like, what is the secret sauce? How do you guys do this? Andrew, you have a famous TED Talk about storytelling. I don't know, what are some tidbits of advice you could give the writers listening in right now?

**Andrew Stanton:** I mean, I've spent more of my life making inanimate and fantastical characters talk and feel than I have actual human beings speaking. So I don't know if I've been working with a crutch this whole time. I think there's something safer and more immediate for an audience member to project their issues onto an anthropomorphized—something that isn't human or isn't them. It's—I'm guessing, but for some reason, I think it's probably easier for a tough, cold, emotionless dad to soften up seeing a fish father try to find his son in the ocean and let out a little bit of a tear than it is to watch a real dad do that on a movie. I, I just think there's something a little bit—there's some element of escapism that's just built in for already being animated and fantastical.

**Kenna Harris:** I think it's going to take—it's always going to be different every time depending on what you're making, and it's always going to require the work and kind of being willing to, I think, kind of, like, have the hard look in the mirror of, like, "What do I really struggle with? How

am I kind of putting that into these characters?" I think a lot of the emotions that come towards the end of Pixar movies are due to the work up front being done of how—it's, like, Andrew called this—when we're in a Braintrust or in different, you know, parts of the process at work, he'll ask, like—rather, he'll tell, he'll demand, like, "Make me care! Why do I care?" And that's actually a question that needs to be answered immediately in your story. Why am I choosing to spend an hour and a half in this theater? It's probably because I care about a character. And that, I think, is the secret—that's a huge portion of why a movie moment at the end of this film that you're going to remember forever—like, I will remember forever Dory pouring her heart out to Marlin. You know, "When I'm with you, I'm home." As a kid, I remember being like, "Nothing has ever been more emotional than this!" But so much of that, actually, is—like, that's one line, but it's being carried on the shoulders of a movie where these people are working so hard to make you care for Dory and Marlin. But—

**Andrew Stanton:** No, I'm saying, "Make me care," gets misconstrued with answering a philosophy question like, what's—like, "Explain it like on a test." And what I'm really saying is it should be in the bones of the structural engineering of the story. I should be able to stand on a stage and say it like a children's Golden Book and tell you the basic things, even without specifics, without the name of a character, and said, like, "The man stands there, and the boy suddenly looks, and the man's suddenly gone in the grocery store, and he can't find him." And you—you're tugged. Like, like, it's like these basic physics. If you can't find the care in the basic physics, then you're already off on a weak footing.

**Paola Mardo:** Sort of like the first Toy Story film, I feel like when we first meet Woody, and he's like, you know, the king of the room, he's Andy's favorite toy, and he's just a likeable guy. He's voiced by Tom Hanks. He has all these incredibly charming things. And then this new toy comes in.

**Andrew Stanton:** Jealousy.

**Paola Mardo:** And all of a sudden, he's, like, bumped off the bed, and then he's even embarrassed that it's happened. And you start to like, "Oh! Oh, no, that's not good. Oh no! I kind of feel for this guy. Like, wow," you know what I mean? Like, I feel like you guys planted that.

**Andrew Stanton:** And we were self-analysis-ing ourselves because we were learning to write at the same time. We said—we at least understood. I knew that feeling the minute my younger brothers were born, the minute there was a new kid on the playground. So that's what we—we would say that out loud to ourselves, and when we would get lost in the plotting of Toy Story, we would say, "Well, okay," and we would change everything. We'd go, "Okay, I'm, I'm a kid on the playground, and this new kid comes in, and he does this," and we would take us out of all the plot specifics and even the exact world and just go, "What would my emotional reaction be? What would I do?" And that's when you're being—you're finding the universal core of something. So jealousy was always the anchor or the cornerstone of the Toy Story film even when we were wrong on everything else writing it.

**Paola Mardo:** Wow.

**Andrew Stanton:** What I'm proud of with that film is that we never say that word through the entire movie.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah! You don't.

**Andrew Stanton:** So you never have to say—the closest we come to saying it is, "I'm the"—Woody says, "I'm the one who should be strapped to that rocket." And—which I, I'm so proud that we never—everybody walks away getting it, but everybody walks away with their own theme of how they would express it, and to me, that's a stronger win than there's a mantra said again and again by a character.

**Kenna Harris:** "The truth is, Buzz, I'm jealous of you! And I'm really insecure."

[LAUGHTER]

**Andrew Stanton:** Exactly, exactly.

**Kenna Harris:** Little me in the theater like, "Damn, that's so true."

**Andrew Stanton:** We've had such joy making this film. It was—it's hard like all the other films, but in a good way. Every day, we cracked up. Every day, we've been in awe of what we see on the screen, and it all seemed to have made it onto the screen. So—and, and everybody seems to feel it's worthy of the canon, so I'm so glad because we just want this world to just be as enjoyable as it was the first time you entered it.

**Kenna Harris:** Ditto. This was such a special crew, and I think that Toy Story 5, lots of prestige, lots of pressure coming to, you know, like making this next installment of the franchise. But my personal rule kind of for myself for years now is I—the thing I'm going to remember looking back on each of these processes is who I made this with, and it's who I was, you know, yeah, on the endless road trip with. And that was what really set Toy Story 5 apart, more than all of the, again, like, the amazing things that make this series great, the years worth of history. The thing that I will be just so happy and, like, smile back on constantly was getting to work with Andrew, getting to work with Lindsey Collins, getting to work with this amazing, amazing crew because it was—yeah, it just was a really unique and wonderful experience.

[45:51 - Prox Recs Theme by Ken Nana and Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** I do have one last special segment for you guys.

**Andrew Stanton:** Okay.

**Paola Mardo:** We call it Prox Recs. So it's our Prox recommendation segment, and this is where we ask you, our guests, to recommend something for the audience. Ideally, or usually it's

about what we talked about. It could be your recommendation for writing or directing, like absolutely your process. It could be a book, movie, podcast, anything, TED Talk, hint, hint.

**Kenna Harris:** Andrew, go first.

**Andrew Stanton:** I just read this book, and I read it before it was announced as the Pulitzer Prize, so I can brag on that. It's called—it's a book called *Angel Down* by Daniel Kraus, and it is a great, great book. It's actually a singular sentence through the entire book, but it's done in a way that is so engrossing. It takes place in World War I—I don't think I'm giving too much away when they—because it's in the title. But these American soldiers find an angel that's been shot down, and it's so good.

**Kenna Harris:** My Prox Rec is that if you have a movie in your heart that you want to make, a book, a show, but you're scared about not knowing how to write a movie or a book or a show, I don't care, do it anyways, and do it right now! The best experiences I've had as a director, as a writer, very recently from this movie, have been, you know, me seeing that the door is closed on a certain path and realizing, like, well, the only way that I'm going to get this into the movie is by going through it on my own and by trying to roll up my sleeves and write it.

We had a moment early on in the movie where I had a huge pitch for the structure of the film, and I was like, "Dang, I don't think I can actually verbally just pitch this to Andrew. I'm going to need to write it." And so I wrote it on a Saturday, and I had never really, like, heavily outlined a film before, but I was like, "I got to start somewhere." And then I submitted it to Andrew, and I went, "Hey, I might not know what I'm doing, but I wrote all this." And he was like, "Dude, way to go! That was the way to sell the idea."

So, anyways, the Prox Rec is DIY. You got to do it yourself. That is the best way you're going to learn, and I'll bet what you learn is that you actually know way more about writing stories than you originally anticipated.

**Paola Mardo:** Both great Recs. Thank you very much, Kenna. Thank you, Andrew. Congratulations on your film, and thanks for being In Proximity with me today.

**Andrew Stanton:** Thanks. This was a pleasure.

**Kenna Harris:** This was awesome. Thank you so much.

[48:38 - In Proximity Theme Music 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]