

S2E13- MAX KRINGEN

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SPEAKERS

Max Kringen, Elle Billing

E Elle Billing 00:00

Hi, my name is Elle Billing. I am a chronically ill queer femme, and I'm tired. I'm here this episode and every episode to dig at the roots of our collective fatigue, explore ways to direct our care and compassionate and sustainable ways, and harness creative expression to heal ourselves and our world. And welcome to Hoorf: Radical care in a late capitalist heckscape. My guest today is Max Kringen. Max Kringen is the founder and owner of Tellwell Story Co., the creative studio that specializes in branding, design and web services. Over the past decade, Max has led the company from its inception to a successful and respected firm working with a diverse range of clients from small nonprofits to Fortune 100 companies across the country. His entrepreneurial spirit and passion for storytelling have been the driving force behind Tellwell's growth and success. Max's approach to business is characterized by a deep commitment to his team and clients, valuing relationships and the power of storytelling in creating impactful and meaningful connections. Under his leadership, Tellwell has become known for its story focused, empowering and service oriented approach, prioritizing content first consistency, user centric design, and integrated creativity. Max's vision for Tellwell is not just about business success, but also about making a positive difference in the world through the art of storytelling. I'm excited to have Max on the podcast today. Welcome. Hi, Max. Welcome to Hoorf.

M Max Kringen 01:49

Hi, Elle. Thanks for having me.

E Elle Billing 01:52

I'm so excited to see you. It's great to have you here. I recorded on your podcast last week. And then I said, Hey, you want to be on my podcast? And you said, Heck yeah. That's basically how the conversation went. So we have now seen each other twice in two weeks after not seeing each other for almost 20 years. So life is good. Life.

M

Max Kringen 02:10

Life is really good. It is so fun to like, see you, catch up a little bit. It's actually been really fun to almost catch up with you through your podcast, because I would say, like, I've learned so-- it feels like-- I've learned so much about your life over the last 20 years, just by the work that you've been doing on your podcast.

E

Elle Billing 02:31

Oh, well, thank you. It's, it's certainly been, like a lot has happened in 20 years. So we went to high school together. We were in different years. But we have known each other since elementary school, essentially.

M

Max Kringen 02:43

Yep.

E

Elle Billing 02:44

Went to the same school. I graduated, and my sister graduated and you graduated. And then I just disappeared.

M

Max Kringen 02:51

You really did.

E

Elle Billing 02:52

Yeah. And like the last time you saw me, I was either probably engaged to or almost married to my high school sweetheart. And things are very different now.

M

Max Kringen 03:03

Very, very different now

E

Elle Billing 03:04


very different now.


M


Max Kringen 03:05


And that's what I kind of love about this story of even how we came back together. Because I


think we will talk about it at some point. But the podcasts that you came on was one that we create here at Tellwell, which is Pride Stories, which is sharing stories of LGBTQIA-plus peoples, and I was like so surprised and so delighted when I saw a Danielle "Elle" Billing and I was like, wait, I --


 Elle Billing 03:38
I know them


 Max Kringen 03:40
I know them! Okay, let me like read through this real quick. I was like, ah, oh, oh, this is gonna be so fun. And so that was that was a really fun moment. But but we never got to connect through our, our queer journeys. Really?


 03:57
No,

 Elle Billing 03:57
No, not at all. I mean, you can tell the story on my podcast that you told on yours, too. When we get a little bit further down -- or right now! -- about my sister. I actually talked to her about that on the phone today.

 Max Kringen 04:07
Did she remember it?

 Elle Billing 04:09
Kind of?

 Max Kringen 04:09
Or did she just have so many coming out conversations with all of her friends. She didn't know

 Elle Billing 04:14
we have so many queer friends. She and I have fielded many of those conversations. Hm, I wonder why?

M Max Kringen 04:24
Comfortability. Yeah, you're you're you're very welcoming, though. And your sister has always been very welcoming.

E Elle Billing 04:30
She's, She said too, I just was standing in front of so many closets, waiting, just protecting people. Like at some point, you have to open the door and say, Can somebody come out? I'm just there's just too many to keep track. That's what she said today. Like when we were on the phone. She's like, is that really this? Just like is that really the story Max tells people?

M Max Kringen 04:51
Honestly, I think that was maybe the first time that I've told that story like i i would say, Katie and my circles don't really like-- there. What's the over-- diagram?

E Elle Billing 05:02
don't overlap like a Venn diagram.

M Max Kringen 05:04
they don't overlap a ton anymore? Like they definitely used to. But, you know, in the 20 years that we've been out of school, now, not so much.

E Elle Billing 05:13
I guess you have to tell the story. Now we've like teased it. We can get to the questions in a minute.

M Max Kringen 05:18
Yeah, I feel like if I don't get it perfect, now, you're gonna be like, wasn't factually accurate, but

E Elle Billing 05:23
I wasn't there.

M Max Kringen 05:25

M Max Kringen 05:25

So I remember like I was, I was driving home, and I had Katie on the phone. And we were talking about, like, a relationship thing. I've been talking about a girl thing. And, and I finally just, like, came out, and I was like, and I'm gay. And she's like, Well, yeah, duh. And, but not in like a minimizing way. But just like, I'm very, very ready for you to come out. And that is going to butcher the story. I should just, like, grab that section and like, bring it back. Because now I'm trying desperately to remember it. And --

E Elle Billing 06:00

you had said that you were talking about girl stuff. And then she was like, Max, honey. You know, you're gay. Right?

M Max Kringen 06:08

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 06:08

like in a very in a very Katie-like loving but very factual like. We need to talk about this, like, because the reason you're having girl problems, that's a very Katie thing.

M Max Kringen 06:19

Like, what's funny is I remember, like the where I was. Because I was on like, a 42nd Street in Fargo.

E Elle Billing 06:28

Oh, yeah,

M Max Kringen 06:28

like driving my my car that I had in college, which was like, a Pontiac Grand Prix. And it was silver. And I remember this, like, I don't know why, like I can remember, like, all of the things around it. But like the actual conversation seems--What just happened? There was just a noise in the bathroom. And I was like, what? Nan has coming through the door. She misses me.

E Elle Billing 06:55

She probably does. I don't know. I mean, why wouldn't she?

M Max Kringen 06:59
Why wouldn't she? Absolutely.

E Elle Billing 07:00
After we recorded your podcast, I told my dad about it. And he was like, oh, yeah, Max used to come over all the time. He was always so much fun.

M Max Kringen 07:08
Oh, that's so sweet.

E Elle Billing 07:09
Yeah,

M Max Kringen 07:09
that's so sweet.

E Elle Billing 07:10
And then he asked about your parents? And he's like, Oh, I should catch up with them.

M Max Kringen 07:14
Yeah, but isn't that the Midwest thing to do is like, how are you? How are your parents?

E Elle Billing 07:18
How are your parents?

M Max Kringen 07:21
And it's just like, Oh, they're, they're the same as they always have been. It was very sweet. We actually just got off the phone with with Jon. And I got a call from like, the Department of Health for the State of North Dakota. And she's like, Hi. So we're doing this program, um, you had applied for this program. It was like another benefit that we can offer here at Tellwell. We had applied for this program. And but Jon was like the the person, like the contact person, because he's our Controller here at Tellwell, after he retired. And she's like, Yeah, he hung up,

and well, he said, Please take me off your list. This is spam. And take me off your list and never call again. And I was like, oh my god, I'm so sorry. And she's like, it's fine. I feel like my dad would have done the same thing. And I was like, Oh, so that's how John is?

E

Elle Billing 08:18

Yeah, yeah. I live with my parents, right. And I screen calls for them a lot. And I am. I think I'm the Jon in that scenario. When people ask for my parents, I'm like, Are you scamming seniors for money? Because that I will not abide that. Like, because there have been times where, yes, they are scammers, and they are being really terrible. And I'm like, Excuse me, excuse me. Like, do you enjoy your life? Like, are you happy with your life right now? Do you really like calling people and threatening them? Like, are you okay with this? This guy's like, Honey, Honey, get a hold of yourself. And I'm like, Did you just call me honey?

M

Max Kringen 09:00

Oh, hell know.

E

Elle Billing 09:01

He's like we were told that that helps calm people down. I was like, No, it fills me with rage when strange men call me honey.

M

Max Kringen 09:10

Whoever gave you that information was was very mistaken. You know, that makes those tick tock videos make a whole lot more sense. Like when they catch the scammers and then they like zoom in on them, and I don't know how they have access to their cameras anyway. Doesn't matter anyway so so

E

Elle Billing 09:26

so anyway, that's that's how life is. It's what happens when you put two speech kids in front of a microphone

M

Max Kringen 09:35

so I know we had mentioned like it talking about speech a little bit and I just had this like, wild - it feels wild to me that I'm gonna go and do it because I've said no for so many years.

E

Elle Billing 09:49

Are you judging this weekend?

M Max Kringen 09:50
I'm -- are you judging?!

E Elle Billing 09:53
Yeah, I've been judging, judging all season.

M Max Kringen 09:56
Oh my god. So I'm going to judge regional speech.

E Elle Billing 10:01
Okay, so we'll get to catch up. We don't have to like, worry about getting coffee. We could just go eat doughnuts in the judges lounge

M Max Kringen 10:07
God, not good doughnuts, like really not, like stale doughnuts.

E Elle Billing 10:12
They might be good. It might be Sandy's.

M Max Kringen 10:15
I was gonna say when I first started judging speech like, well, it would have been right after I graduated. So like 15, 17 years ago,

E Elle Billing 10:24
but one of the tournament managers is our old coach.

M Max Kringen 10:28
Yes, yes. Anyway, I'm very excited. And okay, well, there we go.

—

E

Elle Billing 10:33

So we were speech kids together. That's how we know each other.

M

Max Kringen 10:35

Yeah. Lots of time in the speech bus. Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 10:38

So we reconnected for your podcast, as you mentioned, which is Pride Stories. And like you said, during the process, we realized, like we hadn't ever shared our coming out stories, which is why you were so excited to have me on your podcast. And then, yeah, we talked a lot about the 90s and early 2000s, in small town, North Dakota. And you know, neither of us came out in high school, I started to when I was 19, but like, didn't come out to the rest of my family till I was like, 31 and divorced. But you have, I mean, Pride Stories is a project of Tellwell, which is your business? So can you share a bit about like that podcast, but like, also your story? And why Tellwell decided to do pride stories in our community?

M

Max Kringen 11:22

Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 11:23

And why that's important to you.

M

Max Kringen 11:24

Yeah. So So Tell, Tellwell, has been, we've called ourselves a story based marketing agency, almost since the beginning. Way before, like, marketing agencies and creative studios started talking about story and sharing your story and all that jazz. Like, I don't want to say like, before it was cool. But we've really been talking about the power of story to connect communities for a long time. And I think one of the things that happened was, as we've as we've had different people here at Tellwell, we've had kind of different, like, ebbs and flows. And, you know, I would say, early on, we were very afraid of like, some of our more conservative clients being like, Oh, well, wait a second. We don't want to work with those homos. And unfortunately, we are in Fargo. And I shouldn't say unfortunately, I love Fargo

E

Elle Billing 12:24

there is at least the benefit that Fargo is a slightly more liberal pocket than the rest of the state.

M Max Kringen 12:28
Absolutely.

E Elle Billing 12:29
But it's still but it's still North Dakota,

M Max Kringen 12:32
Right. And a lot of the businesses, the folks that we rely on to do work with a lot of those business leaders are fairly conservative,

E Elle Billing 12:40
Like Doug Bergum

M Max Kringen 12:42
like Doug Bergum.

E Elle Billing 12:43
I mean, the governor -- like for people who don't know who that is, the governor of the state of North Dakota got his start as a business person in Fargo. And he owns a lot of stuff in town.

M Max Kringen 12:54
And you know, really, Doug and Kilbourne Group is how we started with video at Tellwell which is now like, some of the most amazing work that we do and like, what's so frustrating, side tangent, what's so frustrating to me about,

E Elle Billing 13:10
sorry, I shouldn't like risk your client relationships by calling out the governor.

M Max Kringen 13:16
They're not a client anymore. And that's okay. But like, one thing that's so frustrating is I remember when there was a, there was an event about healthcare technology. And at the time, I worked at a tech startup downtown Fargo. And so I was sitting in the crowd. And he, on the

stage in front of everybody was like, you know, one of the reasons that we need to be more open to gay marriage is because there's a whole segment of the population of really talented people that don't feel comfortable working here. And so we are missing out on like the ability to make our community more rich, as well as losing out on really significant talent that could be coming to our state and to our town. And I was like, YEAH DOUG! like, that was so empowering. And I was just like, holy shit, like this wildly successful person is saying this in front of a room of conservative, like North Dakotans, and Midwesterners, and like good for you, and thank you for doing that. And so it is like a really, I have a really hard time with the chasm that has happened between like, Doug, the the objective business person who recognized like the value of our LGBTQIA plus like brothers and sisters and others to what it is today, which is like a shell of that, and I don't mean this like

E

Elle Billing 14:50

the compromises he had to make to stay, to get into and to stay in office.

M

Max Kringen 14:54

Yeah. And this might be naive of me, but I really do believe that that, like, first person is still in there, and I hope, I hope because of like, frankly, the interactions that I've had with his, with his staff and his chief of staff is one of my friends from college and, and I know he doesn't have those beliefs. And so it's really hard for me to like bridge that. But yeah, as we kind of come back to Pride Stories, we were really struggling for a while about like, how do we, how do we carve out our identity and talk about what we believe in, especially when, you know, some of our creatives were on the more, I would say, like religious side, but like, not necessarily spiritual, religious. And so I struggled with that for a while. And what's interesting, it wasn't until three years ago, almost four years ago, my now business partner Duncan, shared a video from the Trevor Project. And the Trevor Project has this like, basically coming out stories. And it's a beautiful series. And he's like, why don't we do this. And Duncan, for for understanding, is straight. He's married, he has a seven month old baby, a beautiful baby boy. And it just boggled my mind that like this straight Bro-y kind of bro-y, guy is coming in and saying, like, we should do this. And so we started to dig into it a little bit more. And like, then I finally got to meet like, some of the rest of his family. And he started to share about like that relationship. And you know, he has a twin brother, they look identical. They're not quite identical, because his twin brother is gay. He's married to a lovely gentleman, and his sibling is queer. And so like, he comes from this very open and welcoming family, which was so great. And we released those over the next year. And the thing that I realized, as they were coming out, was, while they were incredible, and beautiful, and we won all kinds of awards for them, which was great. As much as anything, they were incredibly well received by the community, and the community was so excited about them. And that's really what told us like, double down on that, like, tell people what you believe in. And those folks that don't want to associate with you, let them go their own way. But there's going to be a whole lot more people that probably come your way, because you're being your more authentic self.

E

Elle Billing 17:45

Yes. Like, the people who don't want to do business with you, because you're making pride story videos, you don't want their business anyway.

M Max Kringen 17:53
Exactly.

E Elle Billing 17:54
You don't want to have to tiptoe around them.

M Max Kringen 17:56
You know, it's challenging, because we were working with a podcast editor pretty recently, and we were going to move our podcast, they were going to edit our Pride Stories podcast. And we got this very strange message back that was like, Hey, um, so we don't have capacity anymore. Sorry. We're like, Oh, okay. That's weird. But then I saw them advertising for like, for business on their LinkedIn. So I just reached out. And they're like, actually, it just doesn't align with my religious values. My good Christian values of, and I was like, oh, okay, just say that. Just say that then say the first time. Right? Don't Don't lie about it. Because I feel like that is maybe you know, explicitly written Yeah. Like, do not lie

E Elle Billing 18:47
do not lie

M Max Kringen 18:47
do not pass go. But beyond that, so pride stories, the podcast actually came from a bit of a realization it was one of those like, midnight realizations where you kind of sit up and you're like,

E Elle Billing 19:01
I have those all the time

M Max Kringen 19:04
they're either the worst or the best, especially if you can remember them the next day

E Elle Billing 19:07
That's why I keep a notebook next to my bed

M

Max Kringen 19:09

smart. I don't know what happened to it because sometimes I like also keep like my glass of water there and I just like weighing and you know that then you're really up so. But what I realized and this is this is no criticism to the original project, but like it was a lot of cis white men and women talking about their gay stories, their lesbian stories.

E

Elle Billing 19:33

Yep.

M

Max Kringen 19:34

And so there was very little actual representation of who I lovingly refer to as the alphabet mafia. Right. So So Pride Stories the podcast is ,as much as anything, a way to like, bring down the production time just a little bit, to get as many more stories as we can. So that's where pride stories the podcast came from. And, again, thank you for being on it.

E

Elle Billing 20:03

Yeah, you're welcome. I, you just you put out a call with-- I don't even know if it was on Instagram or your personal Facebook or what?

M

Max Kringen 20:09

Probably both?

E

Elle Billing 20:10

Yeah, probably both. I was like, oh, I should do that. And you know, having also having my own podcast too, like one of the things that I also like about doing a podcast versus some other form of media is that you can reach other people who you may not be able to get to come into a studio. You know, I have, I have a friend in Michigan who is professor of social work, and they are chronically ill, they're immunocompromised now, they now have long COVID. And they've been able to maintain their, their teaching duties, because they can work remotely, they don't have to go into, into the office anymore. And the isolation is really difficult for them emotionally, but they're also able to keep themselves safe. Yeah, you know, and so being able to do remote recording, like we're doing right now, opens up a level of accessibility, that I think a lot of people don't necessarily think about, too.

M

Max Kringen 21:08

Yeah

reun.

E

Elle Billing 21:09

And that was something we were that was something we were talking about before we hit record too, is that I'm, I'm trying to set up a, an appointment with a woman who is blind. And the software that I use-- that we're using right now to record-- isn't accessible to the accessibility software that a lot of blind people use for accessing computer software. None of the buttons are labeled for screen readers. And so we need to find an alternative for recording. And I think that is really frustrating.

M

Max Kringen 21:36

It's frustrating, because there's ways-- not terribly difficult ways-- to fix those things. One of my leadership coaches recently, she was a designer on the original Google Maps. And she's incredible, just like a badass, like design leader manager. And I was sharing with her a little bit of frustration because like we had a client that was being particularly difficult about -- and Forgive me, because this was like, frankly, before I understood, how some of these like screen readers worked, and and what that accessibility looks like. But I was getting a little bit frustrated because it was compromising our design, right, compromising our color palette. I say that now dripping with sarcasm in a client was like we were getting frustrated with a client because they were doing that. And what she said to me was Max, when you design for accessibility, everybody wins.

E

Elle Billing 22:44

Yes.

M

Max Kringen 22:45

Right. And it's not just the people who have, you know, if you think about the bell curve, it's not just the people on one or the other. But like, everybody actually wins with that. And whether that be proper contrast, proper sizing, alt tags on your photos, right? Like there is a business benefit to having alt tags on your photos, in addition to empowering people with visual impairments to understand what the, what that page is, and like what the purpose of it is, and those types of things.

E

Elle Billing 23:20

Yeah, it's good for your SEO

M

Max Kringen 23:21

it's good for SEO, right? Like there's a business case to also be accessible. And it shouldn't just be when people are being sued, that they're thinking about accessibility and making their

stories accessible to as wide of an audience as they can

E

Elle Billing 23:37

Right. You know, I worked at a school for the deaf and blind and so accessib--. We talked about accessibility of our stuff all the time, you know, captions on videos, verbal descriptions on videos, making sure that our bulletin boards had Braille descriptions of what was visually on the bulletin board and things like that. Interpreters available at all events. And so accessibility was just built into everything. But I had a hard time starting out with visual descriptions of my photos, I just didn't know where to start. I was like, how do you describe a photo? I don't know. That's why I'm using Instagram because I'm a visual artist, like, I don't know how --? So I hired somebody for a while to do my descriptions for me just to get over that hump, because I just didn't know I was like, I'll hire somebody to do it. Then I'll have like a bank of descriptions and that'll, like, at least get my momentum going. And it was another disabled person that I hired to do it. And I think the key there is like, Tellwell did pride stories, the video series and pride stories, the podcast, and, you know, you lead with your heart and you lead with your ethics because you're gay, Duncan has gay and queer family members. And it's because that sensibility is already built into your company because you have diverse members of your business. And when you have people who are disabled, who work in a business, or in a school, or in a system, accessibility is more at the forefront. Or that type of diversity is already like part of the thinking of the organization because the people who are doing it are there. And when you have a startup, one of the problems of startup culture is, I mean, things that they ran into with like Lyft And Uber is that there were no disabled people who worked for the startup. And so the inaccessibility of people's individual cars versus, you know, taxis or municipal transportation or things like that. No one was thinking about, well, what happens if there's a wheelchair user who wants to use Uber? Because, well, no one thinks about those things if they don't have to.

M

Max Kringen 25:44

So So break that down, like where that actually like, gets to the foundation of that, is leading with empathy. Right, and when you've experienced those types of things, and those types of, you know, whether you've been discriminated against because of ability, or discriminated against because of who you love, or discriminated against, because of your gender. When you get to experience those, suddenly, it doesn't matter necessarily what the other-ism is. Because you've experienced it in any way, in my case, like, I am a I'm a cisgender, white man, I can code switch like that, right? Like I can get up in front of that group of conservative North Dakotans and be like, well, Hi, friends, my name is Max. And I love tater tot hot dish, and like get the crowd going here

E

Elle Billing 26:41

tater tot hoddish is really good

M

Max Kringen 26:44

finding delicious. But like I have that ability to do it. And so I actually see it as a -- not just an

triggin delicious. But like, I have that ability to do it. And so I actually see it as, as a, not just an opportunity, but like an obligation to bring other folks along with me. Right. And so I think about my stories, the podcast, even more specifically, one of the things I've I've really struggled with, is trying to share the stories of like our transgender brothers and sisters. Because I would say like, in a very similar way to how maybe like a straight person can't put themselves in the place of a gay person to be like, I just don't understand that you can be attracted to dudes, or I just cannot understand how you would be attracted to women. I was struggling with that. And what I found so fascinating, is, you know, I'm 10, 12 interviews into pride stories, the podcast, and throughout that, I think I've had four or so folks that identify as transgender, and I get it now. Right, like, but but it is through that opening of a dialogue and saying, like, Hey, let me invite you into this conversation, invite you into sharing your story. And I think that there needs to be more of that. In I don't know how we force that upon people to like, especially people that haven't gotten to experience discrimination in various ways, how we encourage them to invite those conversations, but it's really important.

E

Elle Billing 28:19

So what does it mean to you to tell a story well?

M

Max Kringen 28:24

as I think about telling the story, I actually sometimes reframe it. And I oftentimes talk about sharing a story versus versus telling the story.

E

Elle Billing 28:33

Tell Well, sounds better as the brand name.

M

Max Kringen 28:36

It does, it does.

E

Elle Billing 28:38

It just rolls off the tongue, but no. Yeah. So sharing your story well.

M

Max Kringen 28:41

ShareWell, no, but but I love to share stories, because stories have this ability to connect seemingly disparate people. And one of the things that you're always trying to do with in story, if you think about like almost any of the major storytelling frameworks, one of the primary ones that we use is the hero's journey, where, where you always want to position yourself as the guide to let whoever you're talking to be the hero, and you're trying to help them get to their heroic ending. And so what we love to do is we really love to position nonprofits, small

businesses, big businesses, as the guide, so that way, whoever they're serving can be positioned as as the hero. I think one of the most interesting things about how to tell a story well, is there are there kind of three main things that you really have to identify: what is the problem? Right, and, and, and we'd like to go a little bit deeper. We like to talk about like, what is the external problem? Like what is the overt problem? What is the internal problem? And then what's the philosophical problem that happens with it? And so if you think about that, if we use the example. We'll do this. We'll just do this in real time. If you think about one of your students, what is the external problem of one of your students who might be deaf?

E Elle Billing 30:10

They're behind in reading. I was-- the one that that's the one that I ran into the most often probably, at least, or the parents would identify immediately. They're behind in reading,

M Max Kringen 30:20

they're behind in reading. The internal challenge is, how does it make them feel?

E Elle Billing 30:25

Exactly. Yes.

M Max Kringen 30:26

And so how did it make them feel?

E Elle Billing 30:28

Sometimes helpless, frustrated. Sometimes they lacked confidence, lack motivation]

M Max Kringen 30:32

they felt behind Yeah, yeah, absolutely. The philosophical challenge is, it's just plain wrong, that they feel like that, because in this case, Ms Billing is here to teach you how to read. Right? And so, so, really identifying,

E Elle Billing 30:52

and sorry, and philosophically, there's nothing inherently wrong with them. And we don't need to like base base our judgments of kids on their academic proficiency. Like, I just gotta jump in. I just gotta jump

M Max Kringen 31:04
Amen.

E Elle Billing 31:07
Sorry,

M Max Kringen 31:08
very true. Very true. And then really, we go into

E Elle Billing 31:13
You can tell why I burned out.

M Max Kringen 31:17
Well, I mean, I

E Elle Billing 31:18
Lots of late nights philosophizing.

M Max Kringen 31:20
That's a really good point, though. And it's not really one that we run into in the work that we do. Right? Like we, as we try to take a big story and boil it down. I used to, like use the analogy of like, take Coca Cola and get rid of all the water, what are you left with: just the syrupy goodness. Which also like the syrup of Coca Cola? I can't imagine actually is good at all. Anyway,

E Elle Billing 31:45
I used to change. I used to change out the syrup on the pop machines at work. And it's like,

M Max Kringen 31:52
at the DQ?

E Elle Billing 31:53
Yeah. at the DQ

M Max Kringen 31:55
Yeah. But when you do that part of what our response is not our responsibility, but part of what we have to do in that is we have to boil the story down in a way that ignites new conversation, right? The what we're trying to do is we're trying to be step one of inviting somebody into a story. And so so a lot of times like, like, even what you just said about like, there's nothing inherently wrong. And we shouldn't be passing judgment on children because of their lack of ability to read. right? and 100% Agree,

E Elle Billing 32:34
when I went to grad school, like the entire thrust of my master's program was we shouldn't be using a deficit model. And the way we approach bilingual deaf education and teaching kids to read, like, we need to base it on their strengths.

M Max Kringen 32:48
Yes, absolutely. And part of the challenge that we sometimes run into is we don't get to go as deep in the story as we want to. So

E Elle Billing 32:58
because marketing doesn't, you don't have that much time.

M Max Kringen 33:01
Time and you're getting what five? I think the the latest statistic is the average person gets gets inundated with 5000 marketing messages on a daily basis. You know, like, even as we're in this call right now, in this like, safe space, like there are a dozen logos in front of me at different times. Right?

E Elle Billing 33:22
Yeah, like if I look at my computer right now, there's the one for Zencaster. There's Google. There's Google Chrome. There's the one for Windows.

M Max Kringen 33:32
All those are messages to

E

Elle Billing 33:33

Intel. Yeah. Yep. Whatever my water bottle is. It's not a Stanley Cup. That conversation on another episode. Is is a cheap TJ Maxx knockoff.

M

Max Kringen 33:42

Mine is a ball mason jar. So yeah, how rustic? Oh, rustic. But But yeah, so. So story is really, story is the way that we, we remember things too. There's a god, I should really remember what the actual study is. But the average person won't remember stats, but they can remember stories and they can remember how they felt. And part of the way that we do that is through a tool called Narrative transportation. Narrative transportation very simply is like, how do you get people to visualize themselves in that setting? So what's funny is, as we talked about-- if we want to bring it all the way back to that story about with Katie --is I was transported back to where I was, like, the vehicle I was in the street.

E

Elle Billing 34:40

Forty- second street. probably driving past target.

M

Max Kringen 34:42

Yes, yes.Target on 42nd Street. I was in my little like, Grand Prix. I can see like the red letters on the

E

Elle Billing 34:54

I had a Grand Prix, like I know exactly what the dash looks like.

M

Max Kringen 34:59

And I remember Remember, it was like early winter. So like what you're doing right there because you can visualize yourself in this exact setting right now. by doing that you are going to better remember my, my story about Katie, right? And it's probably why it stuck in the first place. In addition to you know,

E

Elle Billing 35:21

it's my sister and I know how she talks. And she often makes the joke that like, the reason mom thought she was gay in high school and had no idea that I was queer was because my sister was the one standing in front of the closet door protecting it until I was ready to come out.

M Max Kringen 35:38
She's good people.

E Elle Billing 35:38
She's great people.

M Max Kringen 35:40
So that's why I love story.

E Elle Billing 35:43
Yeah, it's good. Well, I have one question left. And so when I usually ask first, but I saved it to the end, because we just hopped right in there. How have you received care this week?

M Max Kringen 35:55
Huh? That is a really good question. I. And, you know, I was thinking about that. And I was struggling with it as as I read it. Because as a good Midwesterner, we don't focus on, on care of ourselves, we focus on care of others. You know, I think one thing that I have done this week, as we came off of a holiday weekend, oftentimes I would play the role of family therapist a little bit. I have a brother and a sister in law and nieces and nephews and my parents, and I made the purposeful decision as we were going into that brunch time, like, Take three breaths. You don't need to fix anybody. In this time. You don't need to justify to anybody else. And you don't need to interpret anybody's conversation for each other. Because I know that's one like pattern that I get into quite a bit is I'm like, Well, maybe they didn't mean this, here's what they were actually saying. But they just don't have the words for it. And I

E Elle Billing 37:02
you're the family translator.

M Max Kringen 37:04
Yeah. And I, I spent a lot of time and energy in that space. And, and it's one that I oftentimes don't mind being in because like, it's something that I'm not bad at doing. And I've done a lot of work for, for my work here at Tellwell. And leading a team of 15 is like, you have to figure out how lots of different people talking and try to translate back and forth with what that is. But what I realized was I was taking my work home. And rather than playing that role, to just like, pause, and say, You know what, literally, everybody here is a grown adult, and they have the ability to do it themselves. And so that's how I show my self care.

E Elle Billing 37:50
That is fabulous. I love that for you.

M Max Kringen 37:54
Thanks.

E Elle Billing 37:56
That can be really hard to do when it's the thing we've done our whole lives.

M Max Kringen 38:00
It really is. Yeah. And I think one thing that I've always found fascinating, is, I've been told many a time that I get away with stuff that nobody else does. Whether that's like, what I -- like the conversations that I can have with people. My father says that to me all the time about my mother, like, I could never say that to your mother.

E Elle Billing 38:25
Yeah, just I can just see Jon saying that. and it being true.

M Max Kringen 38:32
But here's, here's where I think it comes from, is I've never been really afraid of sharing. I'm gonna say truths. But maybe more objective truths than subjective. Right? Like, like, if you want to have an opinion about something, you can have an opinion about something, but I encourage you and challenge you to back it up. And if you can't, then then I just don't have as much respect for you. It's funny, because with my parents living in Fargo, now, I get to have dinner with them, probably two or three nights a week. And that's so fun. And what's also interesting is just how different our minds were. And like our different lived experiences, and I don't know if you watched the LSU-Iowa game just last night a couple nights ago.

E Elle Billing 39:29
Dad and I watched part of it. Yeah.

M Max Kringen 39:30
Okay. was really interesting. Taking some of the commentary that they were kind of resharing

that they had read on Twitter that they had heard on SportsCenter or some of those different things, and, and really challenging them to say like, actually, what you're sharing back is kind of implicit bias or it's like, you know, it's what is the word for where it's like, racism, kind of like microaggressions

E Elle Billing 40:04

Oh, yes.

M Max Kringen 40:05

And, and my, my mom was so funny because she's just like, she's just like, No, no, that's not that's not true. And I was like, but it is like if you look at this Iowa team, this much whiter team, you wouldn't say the same things about them? Well, they, they're nice. And I was like, Ah, okay, cool. Let's unpack that a little bit. And what what I do appreciate about my parents, and my relationship with them in the relationship that we've built, is that they always come around to it. So I love that about them because my mom was like, shut up. I know, you're right. Okay, fine, we can move on. I have learned that I might be a little racist, and I will work on it.

E Elle Billing 40:53

Yeah, that is one of the things about having, I think adult relationships with our parents. Because they're in proximity. I've been able to have a lot of that too. I make commentary on the TV a lot. And sometimes my parents are like, can we just watched the show, okay. That's not how I watch TV. But okay. I will take notes and get back to you after. I take you to school. I'm gonna take you to school when this is done.

M Max Kringen 41:22

I love it.

E Elle Billing 41:23

Well, thanks for being here. I really appreciate the time you took. It's great to have you on the podcast, Max.

M Max Kringen 41:28

Oh, well, thank you. Thank you for not just inviting me on. But thanks for the work that you're doing in this podcast. I think these are really important conversations. And I think more than that, they are creating that space, to share story. And when we create that space, to share story, really beautiful things can happen and really beautiful things can change. So thanks for making space for those stories.

E

Elle Billing 41:53

Well, thank you. And thank you for doing the same with pride stories. Thank you for joining us on this episode of Hoorf. To view the complete show notes and all the links mentioned in today's episode, or to get a full transcript of the episode, visit [Hoorf podcast.com](https://hoorfpodcast.com) that's H O O R F podcast.com. Before you go, make sure you subscribe to the podcast so you can receive new episodes right when they're released. And if you're enjoying our podcast, I'd love to have you leave us a review in Apple podcasts. Reviews are one of the major ways that Apple ranks their podcasts. So even though it only takes you a few seconds, it really does make a difference for us. Become a patron for \$3 a month you can support the creation of this podcast, pay my editor and join a community of fellow caregivers out here just doing our best. Thank you again for joining me Elle Billing in this episode of Hoorf. Until next time, be excellent to each other. Hoorf is hosted by Elle Billing @elleandwink. audio editing by Ricki Cummings @rickiep00h music composed by Ricki Cummings. Hoorf is a production of Elle & Wink Art Studio, all rights reserved. Hoorf podcast can be found on social media channels @hoorfpodcast at H O O R F podcast.