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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today and so happy to hear your thoughts on the GAF Christmas movie review episode. Listen, keep it coming with the trees and the cheese.

Before we dive into today's conversation, where I think we also actually mentioned Trees + Cheese, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). When you think about finding comfort this winter, you might just think about cozying up with a blanket and a movie. But the comfort you need could be found through therapy.

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Intro: Today on the show, you are in for a treat. My friend Danielle Kartes is here, and she is bringing us the Christmas season food tips and just all around fun that we need. Danielle is an author, a recipe genius, an entrepreneur living near Seattle. She and her husband run their boutique food and lifestyle and commercial photography business, Rustic Joyful Food. You can also watch her show on YouTube, Rustic Joyful Food. Y'all, it is so great. It is such a great watch. It's so fun. We'll link that in the show notes as well.

She's written and published four cookbooks, seven kids' books, and one devotional memoir, and she is a regular culinary contributor to The Kelly Clarkson Show and The Today Show. You are going to love getting to know her. So here's my conversation with my friend Danielle Kartes.

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Annie: Well, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Danielle: Thank you for having me.

Annie: I'm so glad you're here. What a treat.

Danielle: I feel like in awe.

Annie: Me too. Let's back up to the birth of our friendship one actual year ago. We both showed up at the LO Conference in West Monroe.

Danielle: Yeah. So I came to conference and ended up doing a breakout session. And then I met you. And I was such a fangirl. I literally had like a threadbare sports bra on and a tank top. And I remember... I think I told Zach Dasher, like, "I have to meet Annie Downs. I'm locked in. I'm the creep right now."

Annie: No, it was great.

Danielle: And I remember tapping on you. And then we were staying at the same hotel and then we just worked together-

Annie: It was great.

Danielle: ...and hung out in those... three days? Two, three days?

Annie: Yeah.

Danielle: And then we sat with Chris Caine. And you were just so sweet and invited me into every circle. And it was lovely. Absolutely lovely.

Annie: My favorite part was watching you and Heather Thompson Day become best friends.

Danielle: Yeah, we did.

Annie: Are y'all still close?

Danielle: Oh, totally. Absolutely. Talk all the time.

Annie: She's amazing.

Danielle: And she has such a tenderness. The cool part about her is that, you know you meet somebody and you're like, Oh, you're my people. Like you're my people and you can kind of cut through all of it. And we really bonded over this goofy little story. She was kind of shaking her leg and it was like an emotional part of the conference.

So I put my hand over on her and she's shaking. And I thought she said, "I tooted." And I was like, Oh, we're really... Okay, we're super close. We're so close that you're shaking. Okay. Okay.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: Because I wear my emotions on my face. She said, "What do you think I just said?" And I said, "I tooted." And she said, "No, I do this." I was like, "Oh, I just thought the Holy Spirit was moving and the toots were coming." No. Ever since the toot comment, we have just been besties. Yeah.

Annie: You and I have a similar story that we've never talked about of, like filming a pilot that goes nowhere.

Danielle: I have filmed so many pilots that go nowhere.

Annie: Say that to people.

Danielle: People don't understand. Like they look and they think, "Oh, your life is glamorous." And like, "No, God opens these doors and then they shut." And then what are you supposed to do with it? And we'll get into this but this summer I had to lay everything down to the Lord. I'm like, "God, what do you want me to give up?" Because I'm an achiever and I love business and I like to open stuff up. But then it's like, at what cost?

And if the Holy spirit and the Lord isn't the goal or the end of it, or if it's taken too much, like what am I doing? Even food. I'm a recipe maker by trade. I sell pictures of food. How do we bring glory to the Lord in that? Like there is so much that I'm a quick, God, you can have it. And then 9 times out of 10, it gets bigger.

Annie: Interesting.

Danielle: But He has to prepare my heart in a completely different way where I have to give it up.

Annie: I mean, 9 out of 10. Congratulations. I'm like 6 out of 10 on my best year.

Danielle: No. I like one specific example in my brain. But the pilots that go nowhere.

Annie: It's a funny thing because it's a hard thing to... it's not a hard thing to share about. It's a thing you don't think to talk about. Because you're like everybody's business has ups and downs and everybody has things they try that don't work. We don't share every single thing we try to make that doesn't actually come to completion.

Danielle: Absolutely.

Annie: But over and over rejection happens and over and over things start and then do not finish and do not go all the way till the finish line.

Danielle: Absolutely.

Annie: I had a friend say, talking about a TV show, she's in that world, and said, "You don't get excited till you're standing on set."

Danielle: You know what's so funny though? In me, I want people to get their hopes up. I love the don't get excited thing, but then I get excited and I'm like, Okay, Lord, how can I funnel this excitement? And there's still hurt after it. Like I'll shed a tear for sure because I thought this was it.

I have a fun story too, about how we thought the show was going to happen. I sat next to a woman who was a big VP, mucky [mucket?], this great company that everybody knows, and she was like, "Pitch me."

Annie: Sat next to her where? On a plane?

Danielle: On a plane on the way to New York.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: And she asked me, she's like, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, I really want to show." And she said, "Well, pitch it to me. Maybe we can finance it." And I thought, "Lord, this is it. We're going to do this." I pitched it to her. I made this beautiful deck. It was 10 pages and I didn't hear anything. And I sent it again and I sent it again. And it ghosted in the middle of January last year and I was like, "Wow, Lord, I really thought that was it. And then we had the idea to pitch to our clients and we got advertising buy-in and funded the show.

I never would have moved if I wasn't so freaking pumped. Like, God, this is it. But the "this is it", He has something completely different always. Because literally for the four successful things that I do, there is one hundred and forty that are flopping.

Annie: Totally. Totally.

Danielle: To where I've lost my house, cars. I mean, when our restaurant closed-

Annie: Y'all lost your house?

Danielle: Oh, yes.

Annie: I didn't know that.

Danielle: I talk about that in *You Were Always There*. I thought I would never cook again. I thought-

Annie: Also for everybody to hear. I read every single book of people who come on. But because we're mostly talking about your TV show, I did not read your book yet.

Danielle: You don't have to.

Annie: I read your cookbook. I love reading cookbooks. I mean, everybody's used to me reading everything. So for me to bring up something that was in a book, they're like, She lies. I did not read this one.

Danielle: Fake it until you make it, baby.

Annie: I did not read this one.

Danielle: That is an excellent point.

Annie: That's really interesting because you kind of thought the thing I'm most gifted at is what's ruining my life.

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: I will link to that?

Danielle: And I will like, I'm never going to do this again. I went back to work in makeup. I thought, Okay, Lord, I almost ruined my marriage. I have a brand new little baby. We're living in an apartment. My car's got repoed. Like we had nothing. And I thought, I will never cook again.

Annie: What kind of restaurant was it?

Danielle: It was a new American bistro.

Annie: Okay.

Danielle: And it's so funny. The other night I was laying in bed and I could envision... On the sign, it said Manola. And then it was New American Bistro and Winehouse. And we have wine now. And God just restores. Like one of your companies is a winery.

Danielle: One of our companies is wine. We are partners with R.M. Winery out in Washington. So we make beautiful Washington wine. And I'm the face of it and they're the logistics. So I don't actually make that wine. But it's a big part of our portfolio. And the cool part is God restored that when I thought I would... I mean, I thought cooking destroyed us. Give me a timeline. Give me how many years from there to here.

Danielle: 13 years. Because my little baby is 13 years old.

Annie: People will appreciate that.

Danielle: People are like, oh, it just must be so easy. And you're like, no, it's actually a slog.

Annie: Or they're like, I'll be okay in five years. You're like, maybe not.

Danielle: Maybe 13 years. And I got to be super honest. I'm very transparent. I'm still a freelancer and there's still times when it's super lean. I'm waiting on paychecks and people are finishing out their fiscal years. And I'm like, Oh, I've got a lot of money going everywhere and it's Christmas time.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Danielle: There's so much that people don't know. And just because it's hard doesn't mean we're not called to it. That's a really big thing for me. People think like, "When the going gets tough, I got to quit, I got to get out. This isn't the Lord." But if we look in the Bible, it's all tough. Way tougher than anything I've ever experienced. But God called them to it.

And so I just feel like, Okay, you got to put your big girl panties on. Rest when you need to. I'm not the best at that. That's one of my big weaknesses. But yeah.

Annie: Are you an Enneagram 7.

Danielle: I'm an eight wing seven.

Annie: Oh, there you go. That's why you can't rest.

Danielle: I have a really hard time resting. And then it's funny. I was talking to Jamie last night about like when I'm unhealthy, I'm a five. So it's just interesting. All that stuff is so interesting.

Annie: It's really helpful as a tool. It is such a helpful to go, Oh, I know exactly my motivations behind why I'm doing this. Our behaviors may look just the same, but why we're doing them is totally different.

Danielle: Exactly. Exactly.

Annie: Tell me the companies. You said when you walked in, you're like, Well, I run four companies." I was like, You do?

Danielle: Oh, that was so creepy.

Annie: It was not. Listen, our friends listen, love talking business.

Danielle: I love business.

Annie: I do, too.

Danielle: Guys, when I was in the seventh grade, eighth grade, I sold suckers. I would go in my backpack and I would go... I was literally hustling the Rite Aid store, the little drugstore talking to the manager as a 12 year old, like, "When are we getting stock back in?"

Annie: How do you get into that? Because I saw a reel last night of Baby Sitters Club and I was like, I think Babysitter's Club made me an entrepreneur.

Danielle: I was poor.

Annie: Okay.

Danielle: And my parents, super hard workers. And my dad always said when we were little, like, "Poor doesn't equal dirty. You take care of your good stuff. You work really hard. And God is faithful." And so when we were little, we had a garden. My dad lost his job and he was a sheriff. He put himself through night school to go back to school. And he's incredible. He was in the military. I had a wonderful childhood.

Annie: Did y'all live in Seattle then?

Danielle: We lived south of Seattle in Spanaway, Washington. If I wanted something, I knew my parents were working super hard, like you had to earn it. So I would sell

earrings and I would ride my bike to Joanne Fabrics, which is a mile and a half from our house.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: And I even sold cups of water to construction workers. Like they're out paving asphalt in the front and I'm like, I got water for you. So I've always had this innate sense to sell something and product and supply and demand. I'm very tenacious, but I used to think I wasn't the brightest tool in the shed because I never fit into like traditional school. So for a long time, I had a narrative in my head that I wasn't smart.

And now I'm in my 40s and I'm like, I'm so smart. But I'm a different kind of smart. There's so many different kinds of smart where you might not fit in that traditional box. So it's important for me that women know, like, you don't have to have it all together. And cooking too. We're talking about cooking and entertaining. Some of the most beautiful dinner parties I've ever thrown were paper plates and on the floor of our apartment when we had nothing. And I was, you know, roasting chickens and making snickerdoodle bars. And it's that fellowship and the connection, not the pretentiousness of the food.

So even coming into Christmas, like... we're doing prime rib on the Christmas special. But I really went back and forth. I'm like, I kind of want to do poor man's pot roast. And then we ended up with the team and they're like, well, it's going to be more clickable for prime rib. And I'm like, Poor man's pot roast kind of has my heart.

Annie: Maybe that's January when we're all like back on a budget.

Danielle: Yeah, absolutely.

Annie: So the four companies you run. Talk to me about that.

Danielle: Rustic Joyful Food, Fluorescence vodka which we partner with a distillery out in Washington. And then French for Water Wine, which is so near and dear to my heart.

Annie: I love that title.

Danielle: I love it. And then Rustic Joyful Literary Group, which we're-

Annie: Are you an agent?

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: Oh, wow. Okay.

Danielle: It's so funny because last year I went to a little conference out at Jeanne Oliver's... She's incredible. She runs these little creatively made business. She's just a genius. And so just to be in jeans presence, like she's encouraging you, you feel like I'm going to make a better decision. She shows you how to be a better. Here's a plug for Jeanne. A better businesswoman. She's incredible. And it's neat to get around... when you're a businesswoman, you got to get around like minded business women. It just is awesome.

So when I was there, I met a woman who introduced me to Justin Stewart, who is like a YouTuber. And we got talking because I've had 13 books published. Some of them were self-published though.

Annie: Me too.

Danielle: That's how I got in the game was self-publishing. And then publishing relationships came years after. Eight years after.

Annie: Wow.

Danielle: Maybe not eight. I'm probably misspeaking. Probably five.

Annie: Still.

Danielle: So the first book came out in 2013 and then I published again with a publisher in 2018 or 2019.

Annie: Wow.

Danielle: And people think that a publisher is the end all. Get out there and publish yourself. Get it out. It doesn't have to be perfect.

Annie: There is more than one path to a successful career as an author.

Danielle: Yes. And I was going to be like lowbrow and be like, there's more than one way to skin a cat.

Annie: Yeah, you can say that too. That's true. I mean, it used to be like self-publish until-

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: And that was my story. And your story. I self-published until I got a traditional. And now it's kind of like self-publish or. And figure out what you... it's a way more viable path now to just stay in self-publishing.

Danielle: Absolutely. And with social media and all the different outlets and ways that you can get your message in front of people. I think that God can do absolutely anything. I mean, I had no platform at all when I put my book out. Like zero. I mean, absolutely zero.

Annie: Was your first one, a cookbook?

Danielle: My first one was a cookbook. It was called *My Heart's Table*. And it told the story of losing the restaurant. And I wasn't healed yet. Like God likes to give me these projects where I'm healing through it. And I was sharing about the loss. And we were still not paying our bills. I mean, there was still no food in my house and we're making a cookbook.

Annie: Wow. I remember one of the shoots, I would save. And a friend of mine was a photographer and he would come over. We would shoot all the food. We would have to eat that food. And flies were landing on the food. And I remember thinking, I have to eat this chicken.

Annie: Oh, my God.

Danielle: Me and my little two-year-old and my husband. And so it was such a wild time. But I remember calling my mom during that time and she was like, "You just put that bad boy back in the oven and you crank the heat up to 425. And any germ that landed on it will be absolutely fine."

And that's another one of those pick yourself up stories. Like whatever you're going through, like stick it back in the oven and crank that heat up and walk on. You give so much life right now. We live in this like... I want to be careful, but I don't want to, you know, step on anybody's trauma. We all have a bunch of stuff. But I feel like we're feeding the traumas that we've been through. Like we're nurturing them like they're yummy. We just want to hang on. I feel like God's calling us to like, let's heal through it and move on.

Annie: I think that's how counseling helps because my counselor has said, here's what we need to sit in and here's what you need to let go.

Danielle: That's good. So you need to be careful because I'm not a counselor.

Annie: Be careful. You're right, though. You're right there. I didn't know which ones were let go of this until a professional helped me.

Danielle: That's smart.

Annie: I was nursing all of them until she said, yeah, actually three of these, keep nursing, but five, you can... Let's talk through it and release it. Go with God.

Danielle: And it's not who you are.

Annie: Right. That's exactly right.

Danielle: Because I want to make it my identity. And I went for a long time too, like I lost a restaurant. I lost a restaurant. We are poor. And then I was like, Ooh, do I talk about that anymore? And I'm like, Oh, I have to reframe that. And look what God has done. And that's a big part of my story.

Annie: And what does that look like? How many weeks before your last meal did you start thinking we're going to have to close this?

Danielle: Oh, you know what? I'm a hanger-oner. I am a hanger-oner. And so until we literally got papers from our landlord that said, you're getting kicked out, I was a hanger on her. God had to remove that from me. Wow. Because I'm a hanger-oner till the nth degree. I literally be hanging on the edge of a building like, We can work it out. The Lord's going to show up. So sometimes he has to just absolutely remove me from it. Which is a... it's a great strength, but it's also a great weakness. It's huge.

Annie: That is incredible. Because when I'm thinking about my business hat on, I'm like, how do you go that long? How do you hang on that long?

Danielle: You limp through it. And I was literally nine months pregnant. My husband was working all through the night. When we knew that-

Annie: Did he work at the restaurant, too?

Danielle: He did. So he delivered bread all night long and then he would go and work at the restaurant and he hated it. I mean, our marriage really suffered. We were going to get a divorce during that time. And then when we lost everything, God used Noah, my little boy. He's 13 now. I know that I say this all the time, but they say, don't have kids to save your marriage. But God used that and the loss of our restaurant to bring us back together and show us what was important.

And having a baby is hard, but losing the restaurant was harder. And then it was like all I could focus on was now I'm a mom and a wife. I had to go right back to work. I mean, Noah was probably eight weeks old and I started slinging makeup again. And that was hard on my heart.

My husband and I were driving through Issaquah. We don't live there anymore. But we used to drive-

Annie: Is that a neighborhood?

Danielle: It's a neighborhood. It's a city where I used to live during the hardest point where God really restored our marriage and everything. So I have such a soft spot in my heart for this place because we left where we were and then he restored us in this city. And so we're driving through and I'm just like having all these visceral memories of dropping little baby Noah off with strangers at Adventure Care. And he hated it, but I had to go to work.

So there's just so much hard. So I never want people to look at my life and be like, wow, you got it so easy. My life is just like anybody else's. I just choose to live it out loud and share it with people. It's wild.

Annie: How did we go from that, slinging makeup, to being a recurring guest on the Kelly Clarkson Show?

Danielle: Oh, my gosh. It's like a 10 year overnight success story.

Annie: How?

Danielle: This is so fun. So when we were super broke, we started working for a local magazine. So our friend Jeff that helped us with our first cookbook, he introduced us to this little local magazine and my husband started learning photography. So this is 10, 12 years ago. No, 2013. So, yeah, 11 years ago. And he was like, "Hey, could you do a cover shoot?" And Mike's like, "I'm not a photographer. I'm not a food stylist. There's no way." And he said, "You're good at what you do. Go to the Goodwill, hit up World Market, find a couple of props and we're shooting chili."

Annie: Wow.

Danielle: So I set it up at my sister's house.

Annie: Three cheers to World Market. Can we get them as a sponsor? I freaking love World Market.

Danielle: I love World Market. And it makes me feel good to walk through the store.

Annie: Okay. We're going to get back to your story. But do you know that there are golden tickets at World Market?

Danielle: I'm obsessed.

Annie: I'm obsessed. I want to find one so bad.

Danielle: I found them before.

Annie: You have.

Danielle: I can send you a picture. I have found a golden egg. I will go in weeknights, ladies and gentlemen. If you're listening, stay away on the weekends. On a weeknight, you are 100% going to find it.

Annie: Okay. Great. When I have a Sabbath in the midweek, sometimes if I speak on weekends, my Sabbath is a Tuesday or Wednesday, I almost always go to World Market.

Danielle: Have you found one yet?

Annie: No, I've never found one. I just like to kind of peruse. John Mark Comer teaches not to shop on your Sabbath. So I try to sometimes honor that. But it just makes me feel so good to walk through it. It's beautiful.

Danielle: It's just a form of therapy. It's good. Anything that lifts that little heart up. Even if you need to buy a pillow on your Sabbath.

Annie: That's exactly right. Thank you. Thank you. So you're collecting all the things to take pictures of chili.

Danielle: Yes. So we take the pictures of chili. Fast forward to Jeff getting sick and calling Mike and saying, "Hey..." He walked through a leukemia journey and he's great. He's doing wonderful now. And he says, "I need you to take these cover photos." And Mike's like, "I don't think I'm good enough." So Mike takes the cover photos. And that really was the birth of our photography business.

Annie: Do y'all do your pictures still?

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: My husband, I'd make all the food and Mike takes the pictures.

Annie: It says so on the cover.

Danielle: Homeboy's a genius. He is so good at what he does.

Annie: I did not... Listen, we have so many of these recipes to talk about. I did not realize your husband took these pictures.

Danielle: Yes. And so Mike is self-taught. I learned the craft of food styling. Isn't that wild?

Annie: Unbelievable. This was one of the ones I thought, she's playing chess while we're playing checkers. Sprinkle shortbread cookie Sammies.

Danielle: With strawberry buttercream on the inside. And you got to use the dehydrated strawberries because that's where you get that power punch of flavor. You don't have time to mess around with fresh strawberries.

Annie: Okay. So he's been taking all your pictures.

Danielle: Yes. So I am a little hustler and God's given me the ability to like reach out, just reach out. And I have a great story. So I reached out to a photography agent in Seattle and she was very condescending and she tore my appearance up and she said all these things and she was being a little show offy. She's like, well, this is how I bid a contract. Because I wanted Mike to have an agent. I wanted Mike to have somebody putting him out there and getting him jobs that was beyond what I could do. And this was, I mean, in the early days and we didn't have a lot. And I went on the Rachael Ray show and I was wearing an old bra.

Annie: Well, hold on. "I went on the Rachael Ray show." How did that even happen?

Danielle: I got to get back to this story because it's going to be so encouraging for people.

Annie: Okay, great.

Danielle: Just a little timeline. Started out at my little local TV station. There was a producer there... So through 425 Magazine. They called and said, "You did this noodle cover. We want to do these noodles for Chinese New Year on the show."

Annie: Will you come cook it?

Danielle: Will you come cook it?

Annie: The Lord.

Danielle: The Lord did it.

Annie: Look at that path. He has the righteousness for his namesake. That's it.

Danielle: Amen.

Annie: And I said, yeah, I'll do it. How cool! That started it. Then a producer there who had just started, her name is Kate, she said, you're really a natural, you should pursue television. And I thought, Could it pay my bills? I literally have nothing. Like I had to buy the groceries to come in to do the ramen noodle shoot.

Annie: To do the shoot?

Danielle: Yeah. Oh yeah. 10, 15 years ago when I was doing that, I had no money. But you had to buy your own stuff to do your shoot on the little local shows. You still do.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: So, I said, "Well, is there money in that?" And she was like, "Yeah, there's good money if you're good at it and you can get an agent." And I was like, "Okay, well, do you know anybody?" And she's like, "No." So then six months later, after I'm doing the show regularly, I'm a regular little gal, I'm out there. Every single month I'm making grilled cheese and silly things. And she said, "Do you remember when I told you didn't know anybody?" And I said, "Yeah." And she said, "Well, I lied. I just didn't know how much I was going to love you." And I was like, "Oh, really?" And she said, "I was a producer on the Rachael Ray show for years and I think you and Rachael would have a blast." And I was like, Okay, the Rachael Ray show? I was thinking like, Good Morning Portland. I wasn't thinking like big leagues.

And at this point we're still self-publishing our books. We had no publisher.

Annie: Mike's still taking the pictures.

Danielle: Mike's still taking the pictures.

Annie: Oh my gosh. This is so cool.

Danielle: She hooks me up with the producers out there and they said no for a year. And I remember one of their EPs was like, "If you're ever in New York, maybe we'll have a meeting." And I told Mike, I said, "We got to get to New York."

Annie: Twice I've done that in my life where someone says, "If you're ever in (fill in the blank), let's meet." And I go-

Danielle: I will be here.

Annie: "Book a flight."

Danielle: You said that like, "Hey, if you're ever in Nashville," and I was like, "Looking at the flights because I will be there."

Annie: Yeah, exactly.

Danielle: You got to make it.

Annie: That's what we do.

Danielle: So we threw a workshop in New York and we had no money and it was \$8,000 to rent the studio. And I used Karen Mordecai's beautiful Sunday supper studio. And I remember her assistant saying, "I need a \$4,000 deposit today if you're going to book." And I was like, "Oh my gosh, I don't have \$4,000." I said, "Could you give me a couple of days?" And she was like, Yeah.

So I told Mike, I said, "I'm just going to put it online and we're going to sell a thousand dollars a ticket for the people to come to this workshop. And we sold four tickets that day.

Annie: Geez.

Danielle: I'm not joking. And \$4,000 at that time... it's still a lot of money.

Annie: That is a lot of money.

Danielle: But it was a-

Annie: A \$1,000 ticket is a lot of money.

Danielle: A lot of money. A lot of money.

Annie: But you only had to sell 4 tickets.

Danielle: I only had to sell 4.

Annie: Dude.

Danielle: And then I sold four more to cover the workshop. And I invited Ina Garten. I invited the editor... people that I didn't know. And you know what was wonderful? Ina Garten's assistant wrote me back and said, "Thank you for the invite. She can't make it this weekend." We forget that you have the ability to get on Google, figure out where people are, invite them, make a friendship and be genuine. Don't just be [shmamy?] like a hanger-oner. Be genuine in it and your purpose.

And I was like, Okay. Well, we got to New York. So we got out there and we had the meeting and they tested me out with their culinary producers, Steve. Actually had real chops. Then still when we left, I didn't book the show and I was like, "I got to book the show. We got to book the show."

So I remember just writing a little email. It's like, Hey, it's kind of like time to jump or get off the pot, like all those kinds of things. And I didn't say the bad word. And I didn't say that to her either. But then she was like, well, what does this date look like? I think it was like December 4th or December 16th. And I was like, It sounds great.

Annie: Meanwhile, you haven't even looked at your calendar.

Danielle: No.

Annie: No idea if it'll work, but I will make it work.

Danielle: No idea if it'll work.

Annie: I've done it.

Danielle: And my brother and my husband came with me and it was like the coolest experience. And I had no idea what God was going to do through that. I remember being on national television and Rachael Ray saying like, this girl is one of us. She knows what it's like to choose between toilet paper and potatoes. And people resonate with that. We're all struggling for something. So yeah, that's how I started.

Annie: Is this where the Mike story intersects again, where you were getting him agent?

Danielle: The photography agent. Yes. So I meet with this woman and she tears me up. And I was literally trying to hold back tears. But during the meeting, she was kind of

flaunting how she runs a bid for a shoot. And she's like, Well, I bid out for lights and I bid out for this. And she's like, do you even write your bids like this? And she kind of shows me and I was like, "I'd never seen anything like that." And I just kind of memorized it.

Annie: "What does this word mean?"

Danielle: Yes. And I was like, Oh gosh, okay." And I just remember reading it and like memorizing it and thinking, Okay, Lord, thank you for that. Because now I know how to properly bid a shoot. And it changed our business.

Annie: Wow.

Danielle: It absolutely changed our business. And I stopped charging \$150 and we're moving into \$5,000, which was more money than... I'm like, "You can charge people that?" And then it was like, oh, there's marketing departments that have all kinds of access to everything. So we teach this to people freely because my audience is never going to be your audience. And maybe we share, but the pie is big enough.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. A decade ago, a manager had me bid to write a musician's bio. So I put in my bid, I put in my whatever, and he called me and said, "You said you would charge us \$50. Every other person said they would charge us \$500. You could have gotten \$500. I'm only paying you \$50 so you never forget to do more research before you put in a bid.

Danielle: Wow.

Annie: I've never forgotten.

Danielle: Change your life. Correct.

Annie: I've never forgotten. Thank you, Craig. Because he's like, "You didn't research the market. No, you just put in like an amateur."

Danielle: And you read like an amateur. Absolutely.

Annie: But we're hiring you because we want you to write it. But you made 450... and at the time, \$500 and still \$500 is a big deal. But at the time, \$500 was like, can I pay my bills this month? And he was like, we're paying you \$50-

Danielle: Because you just put yourself out?

Annie: That's right.

Danielle: And isn't it cool how God just reveals it? So this woman thought she had a little leg up and the Lord the whole time was showing me-

Annie: Was teaching us.

Danielle: ...This is how you're going to write your bids.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Danielle: This is what you're going to go for. This is the golden standard now. And then now you're going to learn how to negotiate in big old boardrooms and ask what their budgets are. What is your budget? Are we working with \$175,000, like more money than I could ever think of? I mean, you get them to put that out there first and then you build your bids around it.

Annie: Oh wow. "I need \$150,000."

Danielle: "I'm saving you money."

Annie: "I'm going to save you \$25,000." Meanwhile, on the inside you're imploding at the idea of \$150,000.

Danielle: Beads of sweat are falling down.

Annie: Yes, I get it.

Danielle: "Can I write that?" Yes, yes.

Annie: That's right.

Danielle: Wild.

Annie: That's right.

Danielle: And the same thing happened with the literary agency. It was like, okay, how do I bid how I would want to bid? For our authors, like I'm in there like getting good high royalties. I'm not so worried about that advance. I want that high royalty and an excellent marketing plan. And then you're set up. And this is all just like the school of hard knocks where the Lord has opened doors and taught me so much and put me in front of people where I never want to be the smartest person in the room. I always want to be learning. I know that that's like a cliché thing that people say, but I feel so like fortunate.

Even walking in here I'm like, "Lord, I'm so fortunate to be in Annie's presence and look what she's built." That isn't even like a flattery thing. Like that's like, "Okay, Lord, how cool." And God wants that for us. He wants that for us.

Annie: Yes.

[00:28:40] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Storyworth](#). Y'all, I love Storyworth. I gave it to my parents for Christmas last year, and I finally get to give all of my family the finished book this year. It is so special. It is so good.

Here's how it works. Each week, Storyworth emails, your loved one, a thought provoking question that you actually get to help pick and curate. Things like, what's the bravest thing you've ever done? Or how did you used to get to school every day? And then they just respond to that email with a story. Long or short, it doesn't matter. After the year, Storyworth compiles their stories and photos into a beautiful keepsake hardcover book that you'll be able to share and revisit for generations to come.

That's what I cannot wait to give my family this year. I'm so excited. With Storyworth, give those you love the most, the most thoughtful, personal gift from the heart and preserve their memories and stories for years to come.

Go to [Storyworth.com/ThatSoundsFun](#). And you'll save \$10 on your first purchase. That's Storyworth.com/ThatSoundsFun to save \$10 on your first purchase.

Sponsor: I know it's confusing to go grocery shopping sometimes because you're trying to figure out if the marketing on the front of the label matches up with the actual ingredients on the back. Like it may be marked as healthy, but is it? I legitimately love [Thrive Market](#) because certified organic is always their first choice. And they study every label to search for the best wholesome ingredients that have been vetted for safety. This way we don't have to spend hours reading the back of ingredient labels.

They even restrict a thousand plus ingredients that are found at the conventional grocery stores. Plus I save money every time I shop Thrive Market site and then it all gets shipped right to me, which is my preferred method of grocery shopping.

Their mission is to make a healthy and sustainable living easy and affordable for everyone. So they seek out brands and products that follow ethical practices. Want

to shop at a grocery store that actually cares for your health? Go to ThriveMarket.com/ThatSoundsFun. You're going to get 30% off your first order plus a free \$60 gift you guys. That's ThriveMarket.com/ThatSoundsFun.

Sponsor: Listen, I've gotten a lot of texts from friends asking if I really do like my [Helix sleep mattress](#) because they're in the market for a new one. And I am telling you, I sleep like the dead on that thing. You guys, I am telling you, I'm sleeping so good.

My old mattress had done its time and formed a real lump that looked like I was sleeping in a ravine, but I hand-to-heaven overslept every day for the first week I slept on my Helix mattress. It is so comfortable. It was concerning. I was late every day.

And their sleep study stats say I'm not the only one who's sleeping like a dream. Helix measured the sleep performance of participants after switching from their old mattress to a Helix mattress like me, and here's what they found. 82% saw an increase in their deep sleep cycle, including me. Participants on average achieved 39 more minutes of overall sleep per night or in the morning, as was my case. So basically this mattress is changing lives out there, including mine.

If you're looking for a new one for Christmas, or you're refreshing some things around the house before the new year, don't miss this deal, you guys. My friends get 20% off and two free pillows for all mattress orders at Helixsleep.com/ThatSoundsFun. Again, that's Helixsleep.com/ThatSoundsFun.

Okay, now back to our conversation with Danielle.

[00:32:21] <music>

Annie: Why do y'all stay in Portland? Why haven't you moved to New York? I mean, you fly across the country to be on Kelly Clarkson once a month or something.

Danielle: Because it's not who I am. I love New York. I love to visit. I love LA. The show was in LA for five years. I'm not out there that often. It's like monthly. It's great. And then I'll do The Today Show monthly. Like I had back on December 12th. So when this little guy air-

Annie: This day.

Danielle: I'll be on The Today Show.

Annie: Oh, yay.

Danielle: All my favorite Christmas food gifts, which will be cute. So we'll back that up for this guy. But I like my life. And it's so cool because people are always like, Oh, this is so cool what you do. But it's not who I am. Like I love Jesus and my family and my friends. I love to be in my sweatpants with no makeup on and telling jokes. That's who Danielle is. And for me to just be vulnerable and share Jesus with the world. And He happens to use food as the vehicle.

I mean, if God ever opens the door and says, Hey, it's time for y'all to move, we'll move. 100% I'm open to it. But right now it just feels great out in Seattle.

Annie: Like you're just happy. Your husband's happy. You're happy. Are both of your families there?

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: Okay. Yeah, that's tough.

Danielle: All of our families out there. So it's good. We like it.

Annie: It's hard because figuring out where to be... when you're an entrepreneur like you are, figuring out what city to be in really matters-

Danielle: It does.

Annie: Because you have to take me... I mean, I'm not a West coast person. I love West Coast, but I mean, I had to be in LA a couple of weeks ago. But you have to go, I'm here. Let's take every meeting. But now when I'm in New York, I'm like, "Hey, I'll be back next month."

Danielle: "I'll see you next time."

Annie: That's right. And so living there has made career things... they are easier because... But LA, I'm always like, "If you need me, you've got four days."

Danielle: And that's so cool too, because you've stretched yourself and you've put yourself out there and you're living literally in two cities. God's blessing that with new opportunities and new people that you're meeting. And it's all for His glory. And you're good. That is the coolest thing in the whole world.

Annie: That's really cool.

Danielle: And it's a stretching. It's uncomfortable. And there's gotta be like teary times too. Like I feel like my life, Oh, I'm coming off a bender of crying. I mean, I've been

crying for this last week. And the Lord's just tenderizes us when you're stepping out in faith.

Annie: Talk about whatever you want to about your summer.

Danielle: Oh my gosh.

Annie: That you had to lay so much down-

Danielle: Our summer was difficult. I have a tendency to overwork and it's something that gives me pride. It makes me feel good. The Lord calls me to it. I find a lot of value in work and sometimes I don't turn it off. And so I went to Italy where I could... I taught in Italy. I said no for so many times. And I went to Tuscany. I was there for two weeks and it changed my life because I didn't know that my nervous system could calm down the way that it did. And I wasn't expecting that at all. And I got there and I thought, "I got to go home. I'm out of my comfort zone. I don't know anybody." I barely knew the woman that I was teaching with. Lovely people.

And then all these women came together and it was the most life-changing time for me because I was unplugged. I remember just crying in Tuscany, thanking the Lord that I couldn't answer my email. I could send my kids and husband like a little text at night, like, "Love you, I'm safe."

It was so good to be with me and Jesus. I just turned another book proposal in that I'm so excited about. And I wrote all about just being alone in Italy with the Lord. God wants an Italy for all of us, no matter where we are. Maybe you can't drop on a plane and fly half across the world and teach somewhere, but God's got this moment for us.

I had to completely unplug. And then when I got back in just diving right back into heavy summer, shooting a book, because Mike and I, we shot a kid's book, it rocked my world. And I was sad. And I had to work through learning now that I know my nervous system can calm down. Now Lord, what do you need to strip away so that I can have balance?

And I remember hearing Joyce Meyer talk about the early part of her ministry, how she was so stretched thin and she couldn't do it anymore. And she had to lay a lot down. And God ended up... and I'm paraphrasing, but God ended up healing her life. And when she came back into her ministry, she was accomplishing 10 times more than where she was.

And so I told that to Jesus, I'm like, I can't have the rain so tight anymore. I need your help. And I need to lay some things down because the way that my body felt, I

didn't know that was possible." I have been at a fever pitch for so long. And sometimes we don't even recognize the signs.

Annie: That's kind of a restaurant lifestyle too, right?

Danielle: And food and then running so many different things. It's like you get used to all of it. It's like, oh, we run it. We're up at five o'clock in the morning and we're doing our things. And then literally at seven o'clock at night, I shouldn't feel like crash and burn. I can't even open my little eyelids anymore. That's not a life that I want to choose. So God's just was very faithful and so tender and convicting my heart, not a way that was like, oh, it was me. It was like, oh, there's a stripping here right now. Like there's a refiner, there's a fire going on in my heart and in my soul.

And then just reconnecting too with my husband. We've been married for almost 17 years and you forget how to connect when you're just go, go, go, go, go, go, go. So our kids are back in school and we reprioritize. Because it's funny when you're married for that long, you remarry a new version of that person.

Annie: Every five years is what the counselor next door... We're next to a counseling center and they say every five years you're married to someone new.

Danielle: And I want to make sure I'm not perfect. I'm a mess and I have an anger problem. But I want to make sure that I'm still soft and lovable and kind because I can be sharp and rude and that I'm having a space where my husband feels accepted and loved and all the things. And we want to be better versions of ourselves. So right now I would take the marriage that we have right now over any other version of our marriage before. So it's been good.

Annie: We're making an adjustment in my schedule that we're calling One Hat Days where I only do one, one job a day. So Mondays I'm a CEO, Wednesdays I'm a podcaster, Thursdays I'm a writer. So we're trying as best we can. It's not gonna be perfect, but as best we can. One of the ways to slow down my nervous system and kind of unload the pace that we've been going at is to make a one hat day every day. Is there anything you've put into your life like that, that has helped you keep some of that alone in Italy?

Danielle: Absolutely. I walk around the mall.

Annie: Oh, I love it.

Danielle: I grew up walking around the mall. When Mike and I will drop our kids off at school, sometimes we walk around the mall. I also have this little weird spot on my couch. It's like indented now that has kind of become like my office is where I work

and I've got my stacks of notebooks. I'm very analog. So I like to write everything down and tactile. So I've got all my notebooks and everything. And I just kind of hang out in this little spot and breathe.

I've also started reading my Bible in the morning. I think that that sounds silly, but sometimes at night I would read it. But if I wake up and it's quiet and have the one light on and I'm spending time with the Lord only, or I have a pile of clothes that I never fold in my closet, I will lean on my clothes and spend time with Jesus.

And it's funny because the Lord is everything to me, but I wasn't making time for Him. And it gets easy to talk about God all the time but not take time for the intimacy with the Lord. If I'm not creating a space for intimacy with Jesus, I can't create a space for intimacy in my marriage or intimacy with my children or intimacy in your friendships, with my parents. There's so much that literal trickle-down effect comes from spending time with Jesus. And I hadn't made it a priority.

I didn't even learn the power of the Holy Spirit until I turned 40. I grew up in church. I knew we'd talk about the Holy Spirit. I didn't realize His comforting power until I was 40 years old. I didn't understand that on this side of heaven we have this tool that we won't experience in heaven because we'll be living in perfect. I get chills now thinking like the Holy, this is my helper, my helpmate, my guide. That is something that I want to share with people. But that comes with intimacy with Jesus.

And reminding yourself, what does it mean when I'm reading this stuff? Like it's so good when you do the Read the Gospels because you're reading them every single month, but God is interjecting incredible stuff every single month. I've been speaking a couple of times lately and every single time I'm saying to people, read Psalm 23 once a day for the rest of the year. If you will start your day, just reading those six verses once a day for the rest of the year, that will start something different in your day. That is this Holy Spirit connected.

And there is something that slows you down for your whole pace if Psalm 23 is what sets your day. It's really interesting.

Danielle: And pray it out loud. Like, Lord, reset my... pray it out loud. Not to name it and claim it weirdo, but like claim this over my body. I speak healing into my brain. But the ruminating thoughts where I'm running stuff back, I'll run it back down. I'll run it back over. I don't want to live that way. So I'm giving this to you. I have no strength to... I need you to take this from me. God's been so faithful.

And I feel like this September, there's been this new life. God's getting ready to do something new. And I feel like whenever I feel like that, He's doing that in His church too.

Annie: Because that's when you launch the YouTube show is the fall. So you have this summer of laying things down and then you launched this beautiful cooking show on YouTube that people are loving.

Danielle: The show is so cool. Rustic Joyful Food. I want people to make beautiful food. I have an affinity for beautiful things, but it doesn't have to be that way. I mean, we're literally shooting in my friend Annie's kitchen. She's passed away. And so it's such a legacy. She passed away of colon cancer two years ago. And her daughter has become such a good friend. They're like my family. And so just to film there, it is-

Annie: It is a beautiful kitchen. It's incredible.

Danielle: It's like a French Chateau.

Annie: And they come over.

Danielle: Yeah. And we set up and lights and camera and crew come in. And Lucy is an interior designer and she is literally-

Annie: The daughter?

Danielle: Yeah. ...art director extraordinaire. And she is so gifted and she just sets up the florals and the dishes that we're using. Like creamware from the 1700s. And people don't realize, but it's such a gift and Annie's legacy is just living on. And she's in heaven just loving it.

Annie: Loving it.

Danielle: I know. Loving it.

Annie: She loves it. I'm sure you're right. Will you talk a little bit about your Christmas episode that released last week? What did y'all make?

Danielle: Yes. So we did prime rib. I'm a real big advocate for make whatever you can afford. Do not break the bank for Christmas. But prime rib right now, if you skip fast food, I went to teriyaki the other day, it was 70 bucks for four of us to eat. So I'm like, if you skip fast food, you can buy yourself a little hunk of prime rib. And you can make that stretch. So your four pound prime rib can feed eight people easy.

Annie: Oh wow.

Danielle: And you can make a creamy potato side, like slice it nice and thin, you slice it in half so everyone's getting a smaller piece. But you can have a pretty fancy dancy little Christmas dinner. So we did asparagus, crouton, and I wanted everything to be hands off. Oh, cream and butter abound in this episode. Let me just throw that out there. There is no room for calories for this episode because we got a wheel of Brie larger than my face. I'm not joking. This cheese company sent me a wheel of Brie for the Christmas episode and it was just like the gooey-est, most amazing. We're dropping honeycomb and pomegranate seeds on it. It was just a gift to unwrap the cheese.

Annie: I need you to talk about how you feel about salami because before we started recording, you were losing your... I was like, "Stop until we hit go."

Danielle: I'm kind of over hot meat. I love meat. Listen, I'm a meat eater. Last night I was on the phone to my sister and she was like, you know how I always say there's never a potato I don't love? Well, my niece was like, I love a bean. And I said, "Your aunt loves meat." Give me a steak, a burger, a pork chop. You name it. I'm a meat girl. But I'm kind of over salami on tables.

Annie: Mostly in-

Danielle: Charcuterie.

Annie: Charcuterie.

Danielle: Because it just sits out. And I think because I've done the catering thing for so long, watching people eat salami and just the crumbles and bits. Just to let our listeners know, you shouldn't eat over a buffet.

Annie: Oh, Lord have mercy. The idea you have to say that.

Danielle: Let me just throw it out there. Unless your mama never told you. You can't do a chip and crunch over a bowl.

Annie: Your biggest fan, Pam Downs, is shocked you're having to say that. My mother loves you so deeply. She's shocked you're having to say that. You have to tell people not to eat over a buffet.

Danielle: Grown people. We're not talking about like 18, 20, I'm fresh out of high school. We're talking about grown women, grown men, elegant women.

Annie: So what do you put on a charcuterie board if you don't have space for salami?

Danielle: Cheese.

Annie: Just cheese?

Danielle: Cheese. So I like to pick three different types. So kind of a funky one, if you're guests like funk. I'm not a funky cheese gal. Brie is as funky as it gets for me, except I do love Camberzola. I love a Camberzola,. But it still can't have the funk on it. Then I love a coastal cheddar. Or maybe a goat cheese, like a mild goat cheese. And then you've got to have a jam. I love spicy jam, like a fig jam is really delicious. And you can also use up anything in your fridge. If you have old apples, old pears, stew them and add a little bit of sugar.

Annie: Stew them.

Danielle: Yes. And cook all that water out and you're making yourself a jam. Food is too expensive to throw anything out or buy specific. So the necessity is a mother of invention for me when it comes to food. We were doing an asparagus shoot, and I was like, well, what can I do with this?

Annie: Asparagus shoot. Things I've never said in my life. "We did an asparagus shoot."

Danielle: One of our clients is an asparagus company out of Mexico. And so I thought, why don't we gratin these bad boys? And it just turned out so good that I feel like I will never not gratin an asparagus. And all you're doing is you're laying your raw asparagus, no pre-cooking into your cute little dish, butter, olive oil, garlic. You're covering it in Parmesan cheese, heavy cream and breadcrumbs. There's no way to mess it up. It is heaven.

Annie: Oh, I love it. And so we'll link... because the show came out last week, so we're going to go straight and watch it.

Danielle: Go straight in and watch it.

Annie: I got to watch episode two is the one I've watched. Tell me-

Danielle: Which one?

Annie: You had on-

Danielle: Episode two? Coq au Vin? Was it Coq au-

Annie: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Danielle: Coq au Vin.

Annie: That was the meat of choice. Yes. Your show is exactly what we want. It's exactly what we want.

Danielle: Thank you.

Annie: It's so friendly. It's so inviting. I had it. But when I can't follow... Well, I've tried to read a book sometimes. Sometimes at night my brain is too tired. That's why we're doing-

Danielle: I YouTube it. I watch a little YouTube.

Annie: I can't read anymore. I read for my job. So I read three books a day sometimes. And so I get home and I'm like, I would love to read. I will also just lay here and watch Ted Danson's podcast or Rustic Joyful Food show.

Danielle: My kids like to watch this lady Carissa Eats? She's like, oh, that's so delicious and so creamy. And my kids will literally... and they'll do it now. Like this is so delicious. My kids are so funny. The other day I made cabbage soup and my son came in. He's 13. I love cabbage soup. And he was like, "This is dinner." And I was like, "Yeah." He's like, "Cabbage soup?" And I was like, Yeah. So he's quiet for a minute. And then he starts to sing, "I never thought my life would be anything more." He just starts to sing the Willy Wonka tune. Like, how are you even my kid? You're so much funnier than I ever will.

Annie: That's so fun. What's your hope for the show?

Danielle: My hope for the show is that people learn to love right where they're at. And I know it's the most beautiful setting, but I want to take the sort of like... there's this elitism in food. It's got to be the best. It's got to be the best of the best of the best. I want people to use the food that they have. I also want them to give themselves permission to cook.

In the fish episode, I'm burning the fish. Like I'm like, your family's going to eat it.

Annie: Yeah. It'll be fine.

Danielle: It's going to be fine. And I also want people to know, like, you are the boss of the pots and pans. When the fire's going... people get super nervous. They want it to be

perfect. I'm like, turn the heat off. Right. Start back over. You can't mess it up that bad. And if you do mess it up that bad, you just got to take control back and turn it off.

Annie: Really good.

Danielle: Set it aside. That happens in life, too.

Annie: Amen.

Danielle: Let's just turn it off. And then God can show you how to get back in a healthy way.

[00:48:01] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends. Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Aura Frames](#). Last minute shoppers, you know how difficult and stressful it can be to find a great gift. Luckily, you still have time to get a thoughtful, personal gift for your family, A digital picture frame from Aura Frames loaded up with all your favorite pics. My parents have one, they love it. My sister has one, she loves it.

Aura Frames was named the number one digital frame by Wirecutter, the Strategist, and Wired. It'll be such a nice surprise for whoever, your mom, dad, grandma, your sister, and the gift that keeps on giving because even if you hand it off, you can upload new photos from the Aura app and invite the rest of your family to join in on the fun. And it is easy for grandma, too. She can just swipe the top of the frame to get past all the photos everyone else sent and get straight to you.

So save yourself the hassle of last minute shopping and save on the perfect gift by visiting [AuraFrames.com](#). And my friends get \$35 off their best-selling Carver mat frame by using the promo code FUN at checkout. That's [AuraFrames.com](#), promo code FUN. This deal is exclusive to our friends, so get yours now in time for the holidays. Terms and conditions apply.

Sponsor: This is the time of year where we start to tell ourselves we'll get back on track with our spiritual disciplines in the new year. And I get it. This month is so full of all the things, but I know when I feel disconnected from God, I feel disconnected in a lot of other areas of my life, too. That is so profoundly true about me.

So even the simplest thing that helps me spend some time with Him are so, so worth it. [Glorify App](#) is one of the resources that is just an easy way to help you kick off time with God. Glorify is the number one Christian daily devotional app.

So when you open it up, you'll see they have a ton of great resources for you every day.

A short amount of scripture to read, a daily devotional, a song for the day, which I love, a guided meditation. Honestly, you can create your own adventure with it, but they've got you set up with tools to choose from each day to help you connect with God. I love it.

Right now Glorify app is offering a free 14-day trial when you visit glorify-app.com/ThatSoundsFun to download the Glorify app. That's glorify-app.com/ThatSoundsFun to download the Glorify app for free.

Sponsor: Are you hoping for some diamonds this Christmas? This might be the information to forward right along to the people who love you. Or maybe you got some spending money and now you're ready to buy something fun for yourself.

Whether you're looking to add some more sparkle to your jewelry collection or you're shopping for someone else, [Blue Nile](https://bluenile.com) offers some of the highest quality standards in the industry at prices that are significantly below traditional retail. Plus, you don't have to leave your house. There are so many options to choose from. Truly, it is all so pretty.

And if you have questions as you shop, Blue Nile's jewelry experts are on hand 24-7 via phone or chat. They can handle everything from your technical questions to budget suggestions. Plus, if you don't get exactly what you want, they offer 30-day returns and a diamond price match guarantee. You cannot beat that or Blue Nile's selection. They've got thousands of independently graded diamonds for you to sift through.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Danielle.

[00:51:38] <music>

Annie: I'm so glad you're on today's show today too, because then we can link to that and show all your gifts. But I particularly need your help.

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: I have an unfair advantage right now, because we do a food competition in our family at Christmas every year. And this year it is Deck the Balls. And we all have

to bring 24 balls of some food, sweet or savory. But it has to be one thing. And here's how we're judged. Taste. Shape. So they can't be oblong. They actually have to be round, spherical. And then design and presentation.

So I'm leaning toward a meatball with a cheese on the inside.

Danielle: I like it. Like a juicy Lucy?

Annie: What would you have entered? What would you have entered into our Deck the Balls competition?

Danielle: The first thing that comes to mind is some sort of like delicious cream, cheesy cranberry jalapeno bite. And then maybe we're rolling that in like pecans or some crunchy... even like toasted corn flakes.

Annie: So almost like a mini cheese ball.

Danielle: Yeah. Like a teeny tiny mini cheese ball.

Annie: That is fascinating.

Danielle: That was the first thing that comes to mind. Like 1975 old school food. But then I go to a meatball because I'm a meatball fan. I would pick a meatball over anything, any day of the week.

Annie: What's my meat? Am I going to need to go like half pork, half beef to make it really juicy?

Danielle: Yeah, I think so. Maybe you put a little bacon in the food processor. Not super over smoked, because you don't want it to overpower. But maybe a little bacon in that food processor.

Annie: I don't really use my kitchen, so I don't tend to win this competition ever. But I work hard.

Danielle: You're going to win. You're going to win.

Annie: I still have real feelings about my butterboard year, because I did a croque madame butter board.

Danielle: That's genius.

Annie: Ham and cheese. Oh, I got destroyed.

Danielle: Who won?

Annie: Well, Sally. My sister Sally's won both years. This year there is a trophy. And Sally made a point in the family text to say, "Interesting that the two years I've won there have not been any prizes." Do you know the other thing we do that I think you're going to love is we do... We kind of had a dream. We do monkey bread every year on Christmas morning.

Danielle: That's amazing.

Annie: We've had a dream of how you could do that with chicken nuggets. And we call it a nugget loaf. And we are on our fifth year of trying to make it work between wrapping. So what it's become is like a version of chicken minis.

Danielle: But you need them to cook the whole way in and then not be soggy and kind of crazy in the middle.

Annie: That's right. It's very challenging. It's actually supremely challenging.

Danielle: No, that is super challenging.

Annie: But we don't do Christmas on Christmas. We do Christmas Eve. We call it Christmas Steve. We do it three days later so that everybody goes to other families and then we all come together.

Danielle: I love that.

Annie: So Chick-fil-A's open. So we get nuggets and that's how we-

Danielle: To do your thing. Oh, this is amazing.

Annie: It's an excellent experience. But I've got to win Deck the Balls.

Danielle: You have to win Deck the Balls. Now, I'm not above a little friendly competition or even buying off the judges. What are the judges?

Annie: It's mom and dad.

Danielle: Mom and dad. Let's cater to their taste buds. Let's cater to their taste buds today.

Annie: Mom's not eating dessert. She doesn't like it anymore. I don't know. And so anyone who brings in sweet is going to regret.

Danielle: They're done.

Annie: Yeah.

Danielle: So we want to lead your sweet little sister-in-law into sweets. We want to lead her into sweets. I'm very sorry if you're listening.

Annie: No, my actual sister, Sally.

Danielle: Oh, your actual sister, Sally.

Annie: Easier to lead her astray.

Danielle: Okay, easier to lead her. We're going to lead her into sweets and we're going to take you savory. And what's your mom just loving right now?

Annie: She loves olives, but I don't. Who cares? I'm not judging. Maybe there's an olive in the dead center.

Danielle: Have you seen... I haven't had them before, but I've seen little fried olives that are like stuffed with a little cheese. Have you seen that? A little panko crust. I might be into like a little... Wait, what about an arancini?

Annie: I don't know what that is.

Danielle: It's like an Italian rice ball. It's stuffed with cheese, but you roll it and you literally like string and goo and you dip in a little... I think... And then you cook the rice-

Annie: Can I do that?

Danielle: Yes, 100%.

Annie: Is that in one of your cookbooks?

Danielle: It's not, but I'm going to get to work for you.

Annie: Okay, thank you.

Danielle: I'm going to make sure because you pop a little cube of mozzarella or Monterey Jack, something that oozy, and you make the risotto rice the day before. You can even bake it or put in your crock pot because you want mushy rice and you're going to season that all up. And then you make them in your perfect ball, wet, cold hands.

So ice water, dip them in ice water. And then you're going to put them in a little egg wash and flour and roll them up.

Annie: And then deep fry them?

Danielle: Then deep fry them?

Annie: I'm going to bring out the deep fryer.

Danielle: You're going to win.

Annie: I'm really excited about it. This feels like a year. I think everyone's going to do the turn your balls into a Christmas tree. That's my guess. So I was thinking I'm going to lay it out like a garland. I'm going to get actual garland and lay it out like ornaments on a garland.

Danielle: Oh, I think that that's a... you're going to have an advantage.

Annie: Well, we're going to hear this 20 days before it happens or 15 days before it happens.

Danielle: We're leading people astray. I've got an entire other strategy that's going... We're really just talking. We're cooking with gas here. Okay?

Annie: It is one of the most fun things now that my generation has become the adults along with the grandparent generation to be like, we love competitions. But when we go on our summer family vacation, we aren't like playing a game of football. Some families do. We don't do a Thanksgiving football game.

Danielle: We're not either.

Annie: We don't have enough people.

Danielle: We don't have enough stamina. The kids do. But you can't catch me on the football.

Annie: But we can do some food competitions. Yes, we can do that.

Danielle: Oh my gosh. I love that so much.

Annie: Okay. Thank you for your help. Why did we not say that you want to make sure we say?

Danielle: Oh my goodness, we talked about the book. We talked about my origin story. We talked about *You Were Always There*.

Annie: Beautiful.

Danielle: And the cool part about the book is the "you were always there" part. It's you. I feel like women, especially we feel like we lose our identity to just life events. I mean, you insert life event, motherhood, singleness, I mean, divorce, you name it. And I used to think if I could just get back to who I used to be, then everything will be okay. And God had to really show my heart, like you were never gone. You were never gone.

Annie: That's it.

Danielle: We get lost sometimes, but not for who we are. And so I think that that's important for people to know.

Annie: That's beautiful.

Danielle: And then just life is not so... don't be so hard on yourself this Christmas season. Don't overspend. Don't break the bank.

Annie: That's it.

Danielle: Make a little Christmas gift. I mean, make some salts, make some jams. In my forties now I'm all about a poem or something that you made me. It doesn't have to be extravagant.

Annie: I'm really into these jalapenos you cut up and make sweet.

Danielle: Oh, like a cowboy candy?

Annie: Yeah.

Danielle: I make Pepper jam that is spicy and delicious with jalapenos.

Annie: What a great gift. I love when people do that.

Danielle: Me too.

Annie: Okay, last question I'm going to ask you before I ask you what sounds fun. We got *Butter, Flour, Sugar, Joy*. So that's going to show up in people's stockings. That's

what the cookbook that people are getting this year. What is the first recipe they make? What's the one that you're like, you're going to think this is so fun to make?

Danielle: Coconut macaroons. If you like coconut. And if you don't like coconut right there, those with the whiskey cream cheese blondies, those are pretty special.

Annie: Whiskey cream cheese, blondie.

Danielle: Delicious. I mean, even the chocolate cake, the peanut butter cake in the back-

Annie: Oh. Dude I saw it.

Danielle: And it's just a sheet cake and it is insanely delicious.

Annie: I mean, prayer fudge, get out of here.

Danielle: Oh yeah.

Annie: The way I can crush fudge is embarrassing. I love it so much.

Danielle: The way I can crush most things, isn't it?

Annie: Right. Right. I'm a professional with fudge. It's a beautiful cookbook.

Danielle: Thank you.

Annie: Susan Vu, who is my recipe tester and food stylist in The Kelly Clarkson show, she was the recipe tester in the book. I mean, everything she does is magical, but she was like, "Danielle, this book is so solid."

Annie: Sweet.

Danielle: So, I mean, I just feel good that it's tested... We tested all kinds of flour and butter because my biggest thing is for somebody to get a recipe and spend their money and time and it for it to not work. So everything I write is basic. Super basic. No honeybee tears in anything I do because I want it to be accessible for people.

Annie: That's right.

Danielle: If you live in the middle of Missouri, you're not going to be able to find like a bay leaf that was babysat.

Annie: That's right.

Danielle: So you just need butter, flour, sugar, joy.

Annie: I love it. Okay. Well, then the last thing we have to ask you.

Danielle: Yes.

Annie: Because the show is called, That Sounds Fun, Danielle, what sounds fun to you? What do you do for fun?

Danielle: Oh, what do I do for fun? I like to go to the grocery store.

Annie: Really?

Danielle: I love to go to the grocery store. I love to go to restaurants.

Annie: What's your chain of choice of grocery stores? What do y'all have? We have a Met Market, which is kind of fun. It's like your little fancy dancy.

Annie: Like a Whole Foods?

Danielle: Yeah. Like a Whole Foods. I love Whole Foods. Love Met Market. I love a little farmer's market-y action. I love gardening. Like I'm literally an old lady with my garden. I will sit back there like they're my babies. I smuggled a tomato home from Italy and we call it the Sienna Smuggler because I planted that bad boy and I got eight plants off of it and a lot of tomatoes.

Annie: Wow. And I will just be propagating this every... and I'm like, this is my little child. My tomato child. Yeah.

Annie: Did you put it in your carry-on?

Danielle: I put it in my pocket.

Annie: Okay. And if they said, what is that? And you're like, It's my snack.

Danielle: Well, you know it's so funny. I got through customs and they're like, "Did you bring any produce back?" And I was like, "Dear Father, please forgive me." I was like, "No." "Did you bring meat?" I was like, "No." And then the woman looked in my eyes again and she said, "No produce." And I was like, "The tomato. The tomato." And then I said, "Nope."

Annie: Just propagated it.

Danielle: I hope I single-handedly don't destroy the American tomato crop with my smuggled one cherry tomato. Because I was-

Annie: Oh, it was a cherry tomato?

Danielle: It was a cherry tomato.

Annie: You flew from Italy back to Seattle with a cherry tomato in your pocket.

Danielle: I babysat the cherry tomato.

Annie: I cannot.

Danielle: And one of the women that was with us, I was looking for a plastic bag and they don't have those. I mean, there's no like Ziploc bag in our Italian Villa. So she's like, "I took my medicine this morning. I have my little pill bag." And I was like, "I'll take it. I babysat that tomato. I didn't want it to squish." I literally had to keep him on lockdown. And he made it.

Annie: Unbelievable. Fantastic. Great answer. I love you. Thanks for doing this.

Danielle: Thank you for having me.

Annie: Merry Christmas, my friend.

Danielle: You too. Merry Christmas.

[01:01:24] <music>

Annie: Oh, you guys, isn't she awesome? I love her so much. I love her so much. She's so funny. And great ideas for our family competition coming up. Make sure you check out Danielle's new YouTube show, Rustic Joyful Food. Go follow her on social media, tell her thank you so much for being on the show with me.

If you enjoyed this episode, I think you'll love any of our previous episodes with Aarti Sequeira. I adore her, including her 2019 Christmas episode. Those are all linked in the show notes below.

If you have any questions from this episode, drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app, if you're a Spotify listener or send them to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunPodcast. We'll try to answer them there for you.

And if you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. Anywhere you need me, that's where you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you and I will do the same. I'll tell you what sounds fun to me today is a weekend full of Christmas parties. I cannot wait. So y'all go have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with our old pal, I'm glad to have him back, Anthony O'Neill. We'll see y'all Monday.