

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Season 2 Episode 2:
From Cleft Con to the Spotlight: An Inspiring Journey with Allisha Pelletier
Transcript

- Iva Ballou: Hey everyone. Welcome to the Love Meets Joy podcast of the Smile Train Podcast Network. I'm Iva Ballou. I was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate, I'm Smile Train's Cleft Community Development Manager, the CEO of Real Sophisticated Joy and a confidence coach.
- Ashley Barbour: And I'm Ashley Barbour. I was also born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. I'm the creator of Cleft Love, where I share my journey of self-acceptance and spread awareness of cleft. We're so excited to have our guest with us today actor, writer producer, Allisha Pelletier. Welcome.
- Allisha Pelletier: Woo! Hello. Happy to be here.
- Iva: We're so excited to have you. When we started talking about this season and people that we wanted to come on, we were like, we have to have Allisha come on. And that was really cemented, I would say. We had a couple of conversations via social media separately, but I think we both came back from Cleft Con saying, yeah, / yeah, we got to go ahead.
- Ashley: Yeah
- Allisha: It was so nice meeting you both there. We were like, we totally jive with her.
- Iva: And there, there's certain similarities, but there's like, we had more questions. We wanted to get to know you. So first, just again, thank you for coming onto the show and I know that the audience, once they see that this is this guest for this episode, they're going to tune in because you kind of got a following going on in which we're going to talk about why, but I think we have to just get started about what was your experience coming into Cleft Con? Were you prepared for it?
- Allisha: No. No. I was not prepared for that. It was so much better than anything I could have expected. I knew it was going to be a good experience for me having grown up and not known anyone else with a cleft lip, just being in a room surrounded by a bunch of people with similar experiences. I knew that was going to be wonderful, but just the level of connection so quick. I've never experienced anything like that before. But it was also very educational. I learned a lot while I was there. And it was only a day. It was only a day.
- Iva: It goes by quick. It goes by quick.
- Ashley: So wild. Do you have any favorite moments that really stood out to you from being there?

Allisha: Ooh, that's a tough one. Moments that stand out. You know what? The very end, when everyone got an opportunity to stand up and share whatever they thought about the experience, there was something that I thought, I held it together that whole day. I was like, I am strong. I'm not going to break down and cry. But that part of the experience happened and I completely came unraveled. And when they were just talking about the parents and that part of the cleft experience, I was like, it resonated with me. And I so very much wished my mother was there at the event because I think it would've been really incredible for her as well. So next year?

Iva: Yeah, next year. Next year.

Allisha: Next year.

Iva: Yeah. And I'm so glad that you brought that up, Allisha, because that's the first thing that you came up to me at the very end. You were like, I wish my mom would've been there. And being able to share that, and you get to have that experience at Cleft Con, even though it's just one day and it goes by so quickly, you do find yourself looking around. I want to share this with everyone, especially those that were a part of your cleft journey in any kind of way.

Ashley: Yeah. I feel like one of the biggest takeaways from Cleft Con for me is just the sense of community that I feel, and I feel like I have found community online over the last several years, but being able to be in person with people, and you don't even have to be talking about cleft.

You can just be talking about whatever, but for some reason, your soul just feels like the other person sees you. And I think it's something that many of us didn't even realize that we were missing. So something that we're definitely going to get into is talking about the H word, but I know that something that was a big theme at Cleft Con this year was storytelling. And so we would love to hear a little bit about your story. What was your early life like? What was growing up like? We just want to hear, sort of, about Allisha.

Iva: Yeah.

Allisha: Okay. Well, it's a loaded question. It's a lot. Well, first I was born with a unilateral cleft lip. My mother was only 17 when she had me. So young parent, and she pretty much did it all on her own. So navigating that experience for her, I can only imagine how difficult it was back then. Early nineties. Don't want to give my age away.

Ashley: I'm in the decade before, so...

Allisha: Oh, never would've known.

Iva: Exactly. We get it.

Allisha: Yeah. Well, so back then, I mean there wasn't community. There were no resources. And we talked about the cleft care team, and that's kind of all you've got, but we moved around so much. So I don't recall really having a cleft care team. I felt like I was always in new care. The most care I do remember is at CHEO Hospital in Ottawa. I think I lived there the longest during a lot of that care. But I think we all grow up with a very similar experience with just having any type of difference where you feel alone, you're bullied. But I also, yeah, I moved around a lot, so I was constantly having to start over and having to explain why I looked different. And I started getting really creative with those explanations. Because I was tired of getting the "ew" or "that's weird". So things were pretty rough until I would say grade 10. Grade 10 was the turning point for me. And I think a lot of it had to do with getting into the arts.

Iva: We had to ask about that.

Ashley: We do. And that will definitely come up. I am wondering, you said that you started making up reasons for why you looked different. What were some of the reasons you would give?

Allisha: The one I remember the most, because I think I used it the most was that I fell down the stairs as a kid, people would be like, oh, oh, wow. "Fell down, face first!"

Iva: Did you use any of your acting skills with that? Did you really go into it or you just left it at that?

Allisha: I was like five, six. I for some reason, even as a little person, I was, even though I felt like an oddball and I was excluded, I still managed to be very outgoing, just a tough kid. I had no problem being the one to make people laugh or whatever. So yeah, I was young doing that. I didn't do that into my teenage years. My teenage years. I rarely talked about it. Yeah.

Iva: So I do have this question that you've talked about before, and we talked about, and you brought up just now, the fact that you were transitioning and moving all in Canada, and I know that there's others in the community who may have the same experience of frequent moving. Do you think that you notice a difference in between treatments of different doctors or care?

Allisha: Yeah, I think it would've been really nice to have had people that I trusted through the experience. And not that I didn't trust the health professionals, but there's this emotional aspect of the experience. And so I have this weird, I hope I'm not going off track, but I have this weird memory and I can't even remember what hospital it was at or what city I was living in at the time, but I was brought into a room and I was sitting at a round table with a bunch of health professionals and they were asking me a lot of questions related to my mental health, and I think they were trying to make sure that I had that type of assistance as well. But I didn't

know any of them, and I actually was terrified the whole time. So I grew up just yeah. Oh, she's okay, she's fine. Saying, well, she's fine. So I think if we were living in the same city and I had a healthcare team and people that I trusted, my experience probably would've been different.

Ashley: Yeah, I feel like too, I hope that there's been a shift in mental health on cleft teams because I think I had a social worker involved on my cleft team as well, but a lot of the questions didn't apply to me because I was doing well in school and I was overall happy. And so I feel like they weren't always able to get at, I don't know, figuring out what-

Iva: Or the questioning that they asked. Because again, depending on how you asked it, I think all three of us and others would say, yeah, I was doing fine in that way, but internally or emotionally, you didn't really ask that question. And that's how I was, if you didn't ask me directly what the answer that I thought that you were looking for, I'm not going to tell you.

Allisha: Yep.

Ashley: I also thought that I was fine. I kind of feel like it wasn't even that they didn't ask me explicitly, it was just like, I'm good. I have friends.

Allisha: You're making this thing work.

Ashley: And that's definitely, yeah, and interesting similarity. Also, thinking about you moving around a lot, I'm curious what your experience was like socially. I think you've mentioned before that you lived in big cities and small towns and all of that. Did you find one place more welcoming than another or one place that was more accepting of differences?

Allisha: Yeah, so my worst experiences were actually in a very large city. So when I talk about grade 10 and things changing, it was because I moved to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Iva: Say that one more time.

Allisha: From Ottawa, which Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Ashley: Is that where the Moose Jaw brand is from?

Allisha: The Moose Jaw brand? There's a Moose Jaw brand?

Ashley: Yes. It's very big in Michigan. It's very big in the Midwest. Sorry, go on. Go on. I didn't know. Anyway, go on. Yes. So Moose Jaw was the best place I see.

Allisha: Yeah. And it was a smaller, smaller city, and that was the best experience going from the capital of Canada to Moose Jaw. But the larger cities tended to

be, I don't know, it was just harder. It was harder to find a group of people. It was harder to get involved into extracurricular activities. That was where I felt the most irrelevant, the most small. Yeah. I was so devastated when I had to make that move. 14, sorry, 15 years old. I'm like, I'm starting to finally feel a bit more like myself. It was the longest place I had lived. And then my parents were like, no, we're uprooting again. And I was devastated.

Iva: That is crazy. So was there a role in high school that you played that just cemented, this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life?

Allisha: It still took me a while to decide that I wanted to do it for the rest of my life, but in grade 11 there was a play that I was really excited to audition for, but the timing was supposed to work out. I was supposed to get my, what I call nose plugs.

Ashley: Nasal stent, for the nose?

Allisha: Yeah, that's really bad. But yeah, I just forever call them nose plugs, but I, nasal stents, they were being taken out and I was unaware that I was going to have to wear them for a few more months, like a new pair. So I went home and I cried for about an hour and then I was like, no, you got to just keep going. I auditioned with them in and the role I was auditioning for was this annoying cousin that came to visit and I was like, I'm going to give her a nasally voice. She's going to say words wrong. I'm going to just really feed into this look I've got going on. And they loved it. They laughed in the audition. I got the role and it was such a fun role to play. That was when I realized that it's never going to stop me from doing what I want to do.

Ashley: I love that.

Allisha: Yeah.

Iva: That's how you know that you are an actress. And then as listeners, if they are cleft affected, we've all been there trying to plan the surgery so that way you can still do what you want to do. For the non cleft affected listeners, you don't understand the planning that goes into this. So kudos to you for like, I'm going to make this work.

Allisha: I didn't get to date the boy I wanted to date who was in grade 12 from another school because I don't think he liked the look, but hey-

Ashley: You got the role; you got the role.

Allisha: I got the role. I got the role!

Iva: I'm leaving here with something, okay? I'm leaving here with something.

Ashley: I love that not only did you not let it stop you, but that you used it to your advantage. And that's just so amazing. So you said it took you a while to

figure out that acting was something that you wanted to do long term. Did you study acting in college? Did you go to school for it?

Allisha: No. I always got to do everything the hard way. I don't know why.

Ashley: Of course.

Iva: Yes! My kind of girl.

Allisha: Yeah, ugh!

Iva: Give me those life lessons. Yeah, learn by experience. Learn by experience.

Allisha: There was still that insecure part of me that felt like I couldn't be successful and make a real career out of it. And so I went to university for psychology. I wanted to eventually be a cop. Looking back, I'm like, makes no sense. So I did a year of university and I still took some drama courses while I was there, but I hated university. I dropped out, I ended up having a cleaning business. I scrubbed toilets for a couple years. I did aesthetics. I really went a different route. And then I realized how much I missed being on stage. So I did theater and I did a western tour. So it was a couple months of working and I was like, this is what I'm meant to do. And I left everything behind. I eventually moved out to Toronto to learn more about film and tv, and I did it. I did it the hard way. I did it by being on set, paying ridiculous money for small courses and one-on-one sessions, and I don't know, it was like a calling, it sounds so silly, but it honestly just felt like a calling and I knew I could make a difference on screen. I knew I eventually wanted to create and write my own projects, and that was going to be how I contributed to positive change. And so when I first moved to Toronto, I did a lot of films related to mental health and it was rewarding, but it's been almost 10 years. Wow. It's been almost 10 years. And-

Ashley: That's amazing!

Allisha: Only the last couple to few years have I actually had some success. But it was a lot of years of not a lot of hope. I was like, I can't believe I'm still sticking this out.

Ashley: You must have had hope though. There wasn't a lot of maybe return-

Iva: Something kept you going.

Ashley: But you had hope because right?

Iva: Something kept you going.

Ashley: You kept it on.

Iva: Yeah. So 10 years later and you're still doing inspiring things. So what are you working on? Do you have anything special that's coming out?

- Allisha: Yeah, so right now I am producing and starring in a show called Two Brothers. We're shooting season two next month. And that one, it's a BIPOC LGBTQ plus story, my best friend, it's his story. That has been incredibly rewarding and kind of gave me the strength to also do the same in sharing my experience. And so I don't know if we're going to get into this now, but that's why, part of the reason why I felt ready to start developing a show related to growing up, cleft affected, but I also wanted to share my experience being in the industry as well because we've had many conversations about representation in media and what that looks like. And I also do believe that my experience in the entertainment industry would have been different if I didn't have any type of facial difference. It is a very superficial industry. It doesn't matter how small or that difference is. Like they'll find ways to push you out.
- Iva: Well, absolutely. And of course we're going to talk about this amazing series that you have coming out soon. You have the whole entire cleft community behind you. And I know that people listening are dying to get some inside scoop and they will get that right after this break.
- Announcer: We are happy to tell you more about our sponsor. Smile Train. Smile Train pioneered a sustainable model of partnering with local media professionals in more than 70 countries. Since 1999, it has supported more than 1.5 million safe cleft surgeries more than all other cleft charities combined. And as many people in our audience know, children born with clefts often need more essential cleft treatments than just surgery. Because their partners provide local year-round care, Smile Train is also able to fund nutritional support, dental care, orthodontic treatment, speech therapy, and psychosocial support for those who need it. Smile Train invests in their partners providing them with the state-of-the-art equipment and training they need to make safe and quality care possible for those who need it most. But this isn't possible without your support. Go to smiletrain.org/donate/lovemeetsjoy today and donate \$21 a month to make sure that every child with a cleft can receive the care they need whenever they need it. That's smiletrain.org/donate/lovemeetsjoy.
- Ashley: Welcome back everyone. We are still here with Allisha Pelletier and just before the break we kind of teased that we were going to start talking about her new series that she is writing, producing, and starring in called the H Word. And so I feel like before we even dive into the H word and what's happening with that as a show, I feel like we need to talk about the name, right? Because initially when it came out, when you first started talking about it publicly, it was called "Harelip the series" or something like that. And then there was a shift where you changed it to the H word. And I was wondering if you could kind of talk a little bit about what that process was like and how you decided to make the change to the H word.
- Allisha: So I initially was feeling very bold. I wanted to deal with the issue around the term head on. I also wanted others outside of the community to see the word

and know right away we were talking about. But as I started joining more groups, educating myself, I realized that everyone has a different experience with that term. For some people it's extremely triggering, although for me, I hate the term, which is why I'm addressing it. I didn't feel triggered by it. And so I changed it to the H word and it was the best decision. I felt so much better because I already was a little stressed about this. I already was. And I actually think now that it draws people in like what is the H word? And we know what it is, but other people don't know what it is exactly, and I want them to ask questions. And so I'm really happy that people let me know how they felt about it and I am trying to continue to do that. Cleft Con was amazing for that. I talked to so many people about their experiences and I wanted to make sure that, you know, I can only speak for my experience, but I can't speak for others and I need to make sure that as many people feel represented in this show.

Iva: When you and I spoke, that's something that we kind of bonded on because I've said before, for me it's not a trigger, but I do stand with Ashley or others in the community who was like, it's hard on that one.

Ashley: I wouldn't say it's a trigger for me. I just dislike the word, yeah.

Iva: Rightfully so, yeah. Where I'm more like, yeah, I'm on fence, but because I'm still going to support those in it. And so when I heard you say, I listened to the community and they were against it, and you were like, I'm going to change it, I was all in. I was like, yep. Because she gets it. Because it's one thing to say, oh, I'm doing this for a community or I'm doing this to help. But the very people that you're trying to help, they have told you, I don't like this, this hurts me in some way and you still don't listen? It's like, are you really trying to help? And so the fact that you were able to take yourself out of it, because it is your story still.

Ashley: Yea, and that you sought those answers out too, because I don't know, maybe you received messages from people talking about how they didn't like it, but I know that when you and I talked about it, you messaged me because initially I didn't think that it was something to speak to you about just myself, because I feel like anyone who is born with a cleft can choose what words that they use, what words that they identify with and all of that. And so, in the beginning I was like, oh, well this is her thing. Maybe it's just not something that's for me, and that's okay. It doesn't have to be something for everyone. But then you actively reached out to people and I just thought that was so, I don't know, important and really great.

Iva: It said a lot.

Ashley: Yeah. And so with the H word, I know that there is a very, very short trailer out right now, but what can people expect from the show? How is the show going to be set up? What are the episodes going to be like?

Allisha: Basically, so it is comedy leaning, comedy and drama. There's obviously some heartfelt moments, but it's very much a comedy. It's 18 plus it's adult content. It's more for our generation. It's not for kids, more for parents of kids who are cleft affected so they can understand what it's like growing up, dating, that kind of thing. The lead is seeking out therapy for the first time in her thirties. She's having a hard time with her career relationships. So every episode follows a therapy session. And so it gives us an opportunity to learn something new about the cleft experience. I was like, how can I include as many stories as possible? And so it eventually moves into group therapy sessions and so we get to hear many different stories, but it's still always going to be grounded in comedy. It needs to be educational, but it's for the community. But at the same time, if it's not reaching people outside of the community, then what's the point? Totally average, everyday people need to enjoy the content and relate to it outside of just the cleft experience. So for anyone who grew up feeling different or alienated for other reasons can relate to the experience that the lead character is having.

Iva: It's almost kind of reminiscent of Abbott Elementary, Quinta Brunson, how she basically took some of her own life moments and tied it in. But that can be kind of challenging. Have you had to deal with anything challenging or breakthrough as far as producing the H word that tied into your personal story?

Allisha: Oh yeah. When I first started writing or had the idea of writing a show, it was actually a drama and I was sitting there just a mess. I'm like, I don't like this. If I don't like it, no one else is going to like it. And I, I'm kind of past this stage and so I need to find ways to find the comedy in all of this. And then when I made that shift, it was so much easier. But let me tell you, there are some things that you just can't laugh at. You can't make funny. And so I struggled with that a little bit experience around abandonment and growing up thinking how I appear as a part of that. And so that part was really difficult to write in the show as a comedy. And I'm honestly, I'm still writing. I'm still trying to figure that out. And I would love to bring on a second writer once we have a full budget. I think having a second set of eyes would be really, really good. Because I'm a little too close to absolutely the project.

Iva: But you've kind of also opened up one of the, you opened up, and I like the fact that you found a way to tie in all of your loves. You keep mentioning the mental health aspect of it. And so it's like great because you never know somebody else in the community by watching me be inspired to they themselves to maybe try out therapy for the first time. So I do love that I had to just put that on there.

Ashley: And you were just talking about how you wanted to include another writer to have another set of eyes on it and that it can be challenging because you're writing only from your own experience. So is there anyone else in the show that is also going to be a cleft affected actor that's going to be in the show?

- Allisha: Yeah, I'm pretty excited about this. I don't know if the listeners know who this is, but Nikki Payne is a standup comedian with a cleft lip and palate. I watched a lot of her stuff. I don't want to say growing up I was little, but she was on Just for Laughs. She's so funny. But she is agreed to come on board and I've thought about asking her if she would want to co-write maybe even just an episode or two that she's in, but I am thrilled to have her involved.
- Ashley: And is her perspective going to be similar to the main character, like your perspective in the show?
- Allisha: No, completely different. Before I had even reached out to Nikki, I had already written a role specifically for her where she was this confident living life to the fullest. You would never know that she grew up with any type of difference. She dates, she's at the age where she's in her sexual prime and she's just so full of light. And it's a great contrast to Stevie because Stevie is very insecure and she's struggling with dating and even her therapist can't even understand what she's going through. And so there's this character where she actually gets more out of having conversations with her than she does with her own therapist. And yeah-
- Ashley: I love that there's a contrasting experience because for many people watching the show outside of the cleft community, this might be the one and only sort of perspective of someone with cleft that they have. And so I love that by providing two different experiences, it won't limit the viewer's thoughts on people with cleft to just one.
- Iva: Or even with having the community session, you'll get to see several different because we always talk about that, yes, there is a lot of similarities, but each journey is different. And you've kind of talked about that is that you made a point to do the research to find those different stories that everyone can relate to. So can you get a little bit more or elaborate a little bit more what kind of background research you did?
- Allisha: Well, mostly the support groups. I grew up feeling alone and you would think that I would've known that there were support groups. And I didn't seek that out until maybe six months ago until I started diving into this and I was like, this is hard. I am struggling. I don't know if someone told me I should join a group. I honestly can't remember. But I joined a group and part of it was I needed the support, but I also realized that there was so much I didn't know. And then once I got into it, I was like, whoa, there's a lot here. People are pouring their hearts out, things they're dealing with. Triggers. I mean, there was one where I joined the group and it was like the H word term will not be used here. And I was like, dang.
- Iva: Yeah, they're serious about that.
- Allisha: There it is. Yeah, there it is. And I was like, I've got a lot to learn. I got a lot to learn.

Ashley: And were you surprised since you hadn't been a part of those groups or part of the cleft community prior to that? Has anything come up for you emotionally that surprised you, you weren't expecting when you joined a cleft group online that you weren't prepared for, maybe?

Allisha: I was not expecting to make friends. The connections that I've made, I feel like I have really strong friendships and I hadn't even met them until Cleft Con, but even prior to that I was like, I think I love this person. I have such a strong connection to them. And then I met them and then I was just like, wow, I can't wait to see them, see them next year. I got to find a way to see them before then, and I wasn't expecting that and I didn't know how much I needed that. I'm really grateful, and there's so many of my current best friends that I haven't shared my experience with them. Being able to talk with other people who've been through a similar experience, it just really opens you up.

Iva: It's like they say you can only sweep something under the rug for so long. Eventually you got to pull that rug back and get all of that out. And so that's what's going on, that's what's going on here.

Ashley: I feel like for so many of us, our loved ones, our friends, those closest to us don't want to ask those questions because they don't want to be offensive. And I for a long time didn't necessarily want to talk about those things. And so I love that this is giving you a platform to have those conversations. I feel like for me, I have been sharing myself publicly about my cleft experience and I feel like it has made a lot of my relationships closer because there are things that I never talked about before. Or even if it's not something I talk about in a conversation, my friends are seeing it and my family is seeing it and it's just helping them to understand me a little bit better.

Allisha: Yeah. Well that makes sense.

Iva: I have to go back to something that you had said about now that you have the sense of community, you feel that inclusiveness, you feel the bond. And so how do you take something that is so precious and almost sacred or a serious topic such as cleft and our experiences and turn it into funny because it takes a very skilled comedian to take something and turn it to be funny.

Allisha: I feel like I've been preparing myself for this for years. And my mom, she's so funny. She's just like, I've been telling you for years, step into your power.

Iva: That sounds like a mom.

Allisha: Step into your power. And I was like, even two years ago I was like, I am stepping into my power. I'm in my power, I'm doing it. And she was like, no, you need to step into your power. And so having a call with her the other day after the crowd funding went well and all that, and I'm like going to make a show. She was like, this is you in your power. Notice how everything's changed for you since you decided to step into your power. And that power

was full acceptance. It was like knowing who I am, what I bring to the table. And I was like, okay, but I got to keep stepping into that power because you can easily slip out.

Iva: Exactly. And part of being in that power is you knowing when to go too far. And as you've been writing, I think you kind of hit on it a little bit earlier, have you come across something that was like, you know what? I can't make that a joke. There's no way that I can make that funny. As far as the cleft experience.

Allisha: There was one topic that was pretty heavy relating to dating; an experience that had happened that I know very much stems from my insecurities was growing up with a cleft lip. And I was like, there's no way of making this funny and that the only way I'm going to put this in the show is if there's a moment to drop the comedy, I guess. Because there needs to be that balance. Not every moment's going to be funny.

Iva: Life is hard sometimes.

Allisha: Life is hard sometimes. But this one was just a little too real, a little too much. And I was like, oh, maybe in season two or three.

Ashley: Something that I am very curious about. When the show comes out and watching it, how do you make sure that you are making something that is funny that people are laughing with us and not at us? Because I can laugh about getting food stuck in my nose. I can laugh about all sorts of cleft related things, but as soon as somebody else would laugh about it, I'd be like, it's not that funny. I dunno. How are you being mindful of that? Or is that something you've thought about?

Iva: That's a good question.

Allisha: Yeah. Oh, it's definitely something I've thought about. I'm almost too much on the side of caution. I'm always so scared of offending people. I'm like, I got to, I'd be able to tell my story and I can't hold back. What I think has been really important for me is, and again, coming back to community being so important in this show, is that I've been asking people. It's okay to run ideas by other people in the community and get a majority. Do you find this content funny? Do you not find this content funny? What would you want to see? What topics would you not want to address so publicly for the world to see? You know? And I think I just got to keep doing that as I write.

Ashley: Yeah, I love that.

Iva: And so as you are going on this journey, going through and creating this wonderful series that we are all excited to watch, do you feel that you are also at the same time healing your younger self through writing? Because I know Ashley and I have talked about that before the podcast and our writing and what we do kind of helps that. Is it the same?

- Allisha: Yeah, very much so. On my desk, I have a picture of baby photos and kid photos of me that I leave out. I've been leaving them out through this whole experience, whereas, oh, even a year ago, I didn't even really like looking at them, my mom having those photos up in the house, she eventually took them down. I just didn't like having those photos up. And so I'm really connecting with my inner child and I feel like her and I are kind of working together on this thing. It's been very, very healing. And because it's a comedy and I'm trying to find comedy in ways to last, with the painful moments is I'm coming in with a different perspective of some of the trauma that I've had. That in itself is healing. It's like, I don't need to feel this way about that anymore. Why am I still holding onto that? Time to move on! So it's been very therapeutic. Yeah. I actually, just going to full disclosure here, I don't go to therapy. I'm actually hoping that the show will allow me to afford therapy. I'm doing the work. This is the version of me at her worst had she not done any of the internal work, but I know there's a lot more work to be done. And yeah, the plan is to keep doing the work, do the therapy, but therapy's expensive. If we could just have that covered by healthcare.
- Iva: It is worth it. But part of therapy is they're going to make you write anyway, so you are already doing half of it. They're going to make you right anyway.
- Ashley: Well, my therapist doesn't make me write, but I definitely have found so much healing in writing. I feel like writing is just a safer way to explore feeling. And so I feel like that's really beautiful. So I love that you are healing and following your dream and raising awareness of our beautiful community. And we're just so grateful that you were willing to come on here today and talk with us, and it has been such a beautiful conversation. So thank you so much for that and for all of our listeners, that's our show for today. And don't forget, we would always love to hear from you. So please share your thoughts about the H word and keep us posted. And don't forget that you can find me on Instagram at @cleftloveig and on TikTok @CleftLove. And Allisha, where can people find you?
- Iva: I was going to say, where can we, they're going to want to follow, they're going to want to follow and don't miss any of it.
- Allisha: Well, you can follow the show, @theHwordseries on Instagram and you can follow me personally @allisha.pelletier.
- Iva: Perfect. And everyone, you can find me on Instagram and TikTok @realsophisticatedjoy. Don't forget to go to SmileTrain.org to learn more about all of the wonderful work that Smile Train is doing for the cleft community around the world. You can find us on your favorite podcast streaming site. While you're there, don't forget to leave us a five-star review. Thank you so much for listening to us. Bye.
- Announcer: If you like this show, be sure to subscribe, leave a review, follow us on social, and tell all of your friends to listen. Questions or episode ideas? Email us at

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