

Episode 16: Black Girls Must Die Exhausted with Jayne Allen



Full Episode Transcript

[Scale Your Joy](#) with Kaneisha Grayson

You are listening to Scale Your Joy with Kaneisha Grayson, Episode 16!

Hello, hello, everybody you are in for such a treat today. Today I am interviewing a very new-to-me friend that has become a dear friend and what I call one of my goalfriends. Her name is Jaunique Sealey and her pen name is Jayne Allen, and she is amazing. So I mentioned a pen name – yes, she is a published author.

She is the author of the book, *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, what a title. So her book *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* comes out on September 28, 2021. And I am so happy that I was able to snag her during such a busy, busy pre-release, press tour time to come and speak to all of us at Scale Your Joy!

So you can either listen to our interview at your favorite podcast platform or come to our YouTube channel for Scale Your Joy, and watch the interview, watch me and Jayne Allen interact and just enjoy. It is such a treat. I had so much fun interviewing her and I cannot wait to finish reading – I already have the advanced copy, so I already have the advanced, pre-released copy of the book and I cannot wait to finish reading it.

Please go out, preorder a copy of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* by Jayne Allen. If you are a person who loves the library, I'm a huge fan of the library, go to your library, reserve your copy of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. It'll come to your house on September 28, on launch day, so that you can read the book along with all the other super fans on the day of launch, and support an amazing Black woman author who took time out of her extremely busy schedule to come and give us some inspiration, encouragement, and just some of her sparkle! So I hope you enjoy our interview.

K: Hello, Jaunique

J: Hi.

K: So good to see you! And I'm so excited to see your book poster behind you.

J: Thank you for having me. I'm gonna try to get out of the way so you can see.

K: Okay, yeah, that's lovely. It's beautiful. So my first question, just to make it really clear to everybody is: I'm calling you Jaunique, but then on video for those of the people watching it on YouTube, or for people who have heard of your amazing book about to come out there, like who's Jaunique? I only know Jayne Allen. So tell us just quickly, who is Jayne Allen versus Jaunique?

J: So Jayne Allen is my pen name for fiction, for this book, *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. Jaunique has been my name professionally and otherwise for most of the time. I've used other pen names for other projects. But this was really special for me. When I came up with the idea, you know, I call it a permission-granting decision to use a pen name because at the time, it was beyond me – it was my first fiction book, I chose this provocative title.

It was provocative to me at the time, and I really did not have a lot of experience being an artist and making artistic decisions. And so, I was working a full time job that was relatively conservative, and I wanted to be able to do what I really envisioned and feel confident about it.

So I decided to use a pen name, and I picked one that was close enough to my name that it would, you know, I'd be comfortable with, that I could live into, and so Jayne Allen. My middle name is Alline, which is my grandmother's first name. And so it's a take on my, you know, my own name, but it's my pen name and I love it so... It's my own version of Sasha Fierce.

K: I love it! I love the alter ego and the permission-granting action that you took to say, Hey, I'm in a job right now where it's not the right fit for me to publish something like this under my government name, but I'm gonna use a different name that has a special meaning to me. That is beautiful.

Okay, so here at Scale Your Joy most of us are very artsy-smartsy, and very degreed. So I always like to just jump right in and kind of cover the kind of pedigree stuff. So about your educational background, all college, grad school, all that.

J: Okay, well, I went to Duke University for undergrad, I was an engineering major. And ironically, we're talking about a book. But I was not liberal arts, because I believed – mistakenly – that you had to write a thesis to graduate from a liberal arts school. So I'm just gonna stay in engineering, even though I knew I wanted to go to law school.

And so, I graduated with an engineering degree but went straight through to law school. I went to Harvard for law school, and then that's really the end of my formal education. I should have gone to the business school, I think, but I told myself I would get an experiential MBA. So I think in business, I feel like I've gotten a – I call it an experiential MBA through my business experience, but my formal education is Duke and Harvard Law.

K: Absolutely. And that is a powerful combination, Jaunique, and I don't know if we were at Harvard at the same time? We don't know each other from Harvard. I was there from...between 2007 to 2010, did we overlap at all?

J: Not at all, I graduated in 2003.

K: Okay, got it. Okay, okay. Got it.

J: I was long gone!

K: Yeah, I still felt your presence. I was like, there's some writer...I just feel it.

J: The city was never the same! Cambridge was never the same.

K: It wasn't, not after Jaunique! Okay, so we didn't meet at Harvard, we actually met through our mutual friend, Kerry Ann Rockquomore. Kerry Ann is actually going to be on the podcast in a later episode, where we're going to talk about mentorship because she is one of my mentors.

But I did just want to mention that to everybody who's listening who might just be like, how do I meet people like Jayne Allen? How do I meet people like Kaneisha? Even though we both went to Harvard, we didn't actually – and both writers – we didn't actually know each other.

So just know that if you go to graduate school, that those connections don't just stop after you graduate. They go on and on. Okay, so we also love some diversity here at Scale Your Joy. So Jaunique, tell us, what is your cultural background? How do you identify culturally?

J: I identify as a Black American woman, I, the Black culture, Black American culture is my culture. I'm also, you know, an American woman, and I'm a little bit of a French woman too. A lot of my, a good portion of my time growing up, that was my second culture. I speak French. I started when I was three and learned to speak French and studied my whole life and spent a good amount of time in France. So that's my second culture, or my third culture. That's how I identify.

K: I love it, c'est merveilleux! Okay. So before we get into your amazing author journey as the author of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, coming out on September 28, 2021, tell us about your career before this, or outside of the book writing. You mentioned that you have an experiential MBA. Tell us about your career since college, since law school.

J: Sure. So in law school, I actually took a job. And I started with dreaming a bit. So I had a summer associate position after my first year of law school, which resulted in a permanent offer at a really great, fantastic firm. And I just, I really loved it. I was like, you know, here's – my life is set for me now. So I'm, this is the track that you take from, you know, law school, even, all I have to do is graduate. After that I went to my second year of law school, kind of with my future ahead of me. And it just gave me a space to daydream a little bit and say, Well, if I didn't take this path, and this well worn path, what would what ideally, what would I want?

And in that moment, this vision unfolded for me that I would really want to be at a record company, you know, and I really wanted – and everybody told me that you couldn't just go into the music industry straight out of law school, and you have to work for two years and, you know, do something you didn't want to do for two years so that you could do what you wanted to do, or

not really what you want to do, but you know, be close enough.

And so I just didn't believe that that was the only way, I just was like, This doesn't make sense to me. I don't ever want to do something I don't want to do like, why would I do that? So I started daydreaming and thought, Oh, I really want to be at a record label. But a small record label, that has a recording studio. And I want to be in Washington, DC, all these weird things that didn't fit together.

But a few weeks later, I wound up at a panel. And there was a gentleman there talking about his record label in DC that had a recording studio, and that, you know, it was just recently funded. And that you know, and I was like, This sounds so familiar! And I was a second-year at the time. And I went up to him and I said, you know, this is just so part of my vision for myself, it sounds exactly like what I want to be doing, and where I want to be. And would you ever hire somebody out of law school?

And I just say, shout out to Marcus Johnson. He said, Oh, absolutely not, I would not. And I said, Oh, okay, well, would you hire somebody who worked for free? Because what I could do, because I had the permanent offer and I had been at the firm previously, let's split my summer. And so I could work as a summer associate with them, and then take a kind of flyer and just see what the experience would be like. And you know, do a sort of internship for free that second half of the summer.

And he's like, Well, let's keep in touch. So he did wind up having me come on as an intern for the second half of my summer. And by the end of the summer, by the end of that second half of this summer, I was like, Oh, I have to go back to school where, you know, what are you going to do without me? He's like, I don't know, we really need you! So we worked it out, where he would bring me on, I would fly back and forth my third year.

I moved my class schedule to Monday and Tuesday, I would fly out Tuesday night. And I would fly from Boston to Washington, DC. And that was the first job that I wound up taking. So I went to actually making that my permanent job when I graduated from law school. And so from there, I moved to California. I was there about one year after graduation, I moved to California, took the California bar and then the meantime started – you can't really work as a lawyer without your bar results.

So, I had six months to kind of experiment, try different things. So I took a bunch of marketing positions, helped launch a social network that was like, dating-focused. This was at the time when Facebook, you could still only access it with the .edu address...

K: The early days!

J: And there was still MySpace. I know it was the really early days! And so I learned about launching, building a community then, and launching a digital product and platform and

foundations of marketing. And then I wound up working at a firm for a year. Then I went into digital strategy at Universal Music Group, which was my dream job at the time.

And I saw all the music startups in London doing all these super cool deals around the music portfolio in the digital space, and that was an industry in transition at that time. So it was so exciting to be able to do that, and sit with all these entrepreneurs coming in with their big ideas and trying to, and helping them enable these new business models!

And all the while I would write. On the side, I was writing. I was really interested in learning publishing. So that was my sandbox. So I would have these jobs, but my sandbox for myself was, first I started with nonfiction books. And I would write, and then, first I wanted to just see if I could write a book.

So the first book I ever wrote was, while I was sitting at work in between different things that Universal Music Group, never published it, just wanted to see if I could write it, you know! So I went to a small press and printed about 250 copies and gave them to friends and family. And it was a book about time management. I had a little system that I came up with—

K: Do you still have any copies?

J: I think I might, I have to look and see.

K: Okay... I want one!

J: I might have like one or two, okay.

K: Okay.

J: If I do, I'll have to set one aside for you. And so I never sold it or anything, I might have sold one copy or something. If I, you know, a family friend or somebody was like, you know, let me pay you for this! And, and then I just kept on, I wound up leaving there—I really wanted, what I noticed was that a lot of the startup companies were kind of like grand opening, grand closing.

So we do all the work to enable their business model, and it was so exciting what they were doing. But they weren't effectively translating for an audience what their proposition was. They did not know how to talk to consumers, or customers, I call them, you know, people. And certainly not building community. And so I thought this is really important. And I think I can, I see this so much, I really feel like I could be effective and helpful here.

So I moved off of, you know, law, specifically, and the legal side of business, and really moved more into business-business. So marketing, brand development, audience development, product development, product pipeline, and innovation. So I wound up working with the Lady Gaga team.

K: Yeah!

J: Yes. And then I wound up, it was the Born This Way album, that was an incredible experience, did some really cool digital-centered, digital-focused projects. And I wound up starting my own agency from there, and moving even further into consumer, which led to a cosmetics company. I came in as a turnaround CEO for a cosmetics company called Cosmedicine, we took that – we built the brand, we reestablished and positioned the brand for digital platforms, which was new at the time. This is before Kylie Cosmetics and the concept of the drop! This was, we were doing that in the digital space and using that to establish the brand and then we took it to QVC and launched the brand at QVC. Re-launched the brand.

K: Wow!

J: It was really fun and exciting, and such an incredible industry to learn and do something disruptive! So that was another industry that was disrupted, and has been in really cool ways. And again, I've been you know, I was writing nonfiction. And then I went to a large industrial startup after that, to build this humongous manufacturing facility.

K: Hmm.

J: And just to continue to learn, I wanted to learn how billion dollar companies are built, even from the inception stage. And that was an incredible opportunity and experience. But in the background there, I had the hankering to write my first fiction book, my first novel. So I had to learn how to write. I got the idea in 2016.

And I, maybe this is transitioning into a different part, segue, with this – that's my professional background and how the experiential MBA came about!

K: Yeah.

J: And I, all alongside, my sandbox was writing and publishing, and I was learning the publishing industry and trying to understand how it worked, and maybe how it could be improved along the way, just by my own projects. And having, it was so important for me to have my own project, as I learned different things in different phases in my career.

Having my own book project gave me an opportunity to utilize what I had been learning in a sandbox of my own making where, you know, there was, I can be, I can control all the things and learn the lessons I needed to learn and try the things I wanted to try. So that's, that is how we got here.

K: Oh, I love it! Well, one thing that I hear in your career is, first of all, just the diversity of experiences and also the self-belief. Also the appetite for risk, not necessarily risk for like,

you know, not being financially stable, but risk for changing directions. Each individual job you had, could have in and of itself been someone's dream job, but you just kept figuring out, Well, no, this is what I want to learn next. This is what I'm curious about next. And that's just so inspiring to me.

I, you know, went to Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School. I see super accomplished ambitious people all the time, but you stand out even among them to me, with your willingness to follow your curiosity and to believe in yourself, that you'll figure it out. Like you're like, I want to figure out the record industry, I want to figure out the cosmetics industry, I want to figure out how a billion dollar company is built from inception. Let me go ahead and get me a four-book deal!

So that's really beautiful. And I'm just really excited to just be connected with you, and that you're sharing with us. This is awesome! Okay. So now, tell us a little bit more about your creative journey. How did you come to be the published author of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*? That is going to be a trilogy, plus your bonus single book deal as well. So we've got a four-book deal. How did, how did that happen?

How do we go from I printed 200 copies of my time management book and sold one to Aunt Margaret, to a four-book deal?

J: Yeah. Well, it was a, you know, ongoing, evolving process. And, building confidence, learning lessons, and learning what an audience likes and would be responsive, and fill market gaps that have been left by the traditional industry. So I started with nonfiction, and that allowed me to learn how books are made, what the process is like.

And I was really involved in brand development, brand strategy, marketing, audience development. And that helped me understand how books make their way into the world and become products that people want to experience and buy. So I really, really wanted to do a fiction book, and I did not have the confidence. And when I got this idea for *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* I thought, Wow, this is really something I think is needed in this space.

I didn't see a lot of Black female protagonists in contemporary fiction living stories that were kind of everyday stories, that you would see a woman finding her way and finding herself and discovering herself with the additional layer of it being a woman that's also having the Black American experience. Which, there are different things that a reader can learn from that version of that type of experience, and just having that layer of human experience added onto it.

So I really, there are a lot of books – I'm a contemporary fiction reader, which, chick flick! And I just really enjoy those stories and those books, but I always thought to myself, you don't see a Black female protagonist. And it's really important who the protagonist is, because the whole story is for the evolution of that particular person. So it's going to look different and be different,

the more diverse background the protagonist has.

So it's important to have protagonists of diverse backgrounds, not just supporting characters. That doesn't make a book necessarily diverse or representative. And it's not the same level of representation, or just displaying the human experience and learning, a journey of learning for the reader. It really is meaningful.

So I wanted to craft that and try to make, position that where it is proven that this, Yes, this too can sell, this is important. And yes, people can relate, who are out relating out-of-culture. If I can relate to Little Women—

K: Okay!

J: I mean, you can relate to Tabitha Walker, who's a television reporter in LA, who happens to be Black, and who has a white grandmother, and who has these incredible friends and family with, you know, colorful personalities. But you can relate to her story.

And I really wanted to bet on that and double down on that. And when I approached traditional publishing gatekeepers, I did not get the reception that I was hoping for. They did say, Well, we don't think that this protagonist is relatable, we don't love her, we don't like her, we prefer her grandmother. These kinds of things, which in regret, she's the protagonist, as I said, was a Black, is a Black woman and her grandmother happens to be white, and they focused on the white character. Some people gave me feedback that they viewed the grandmother character as a protagonist as well. And that's just not the case, like she's not, you know, it's very clear.

So I decided I didn't want that to be the last word, that was very important to me. And the only way to make that not be the last word was to better myself and put it out, self-publish it, which I had, all the way along, been building up that skill set and building that muscle. And with all of the diverse experience, all of those things lent themselves to that decision and enabling that decision.

So I decided to put it out. I did. And at first it was crickets. And you know, there were people that bought the book, but it was so slow and it was harrowing and it...

K: So, Jaunique, tell us what year we're in. So you've you've written the book, you have a beautiful cover. Now it's very similar to the one we see behind you. But it's not the exact same.

J: No, the OG cover is green. Yeah.

K: Yeah, the OG green edition. It's well done, right? Because you've already written other non-fiction books. You've already, you went to Harvard Law School, Duke undergrad. So this is a well done book that probably the average person could not even tell was self-published.

J: Yeah, people couldn't tell it's self-published.

K: So what year are we now when that happens?

J: This was 2018. So I got the idea in 2016. It took me a bit to learn how to write a novel, I had to take some classes and really learn and then you know, start writing and put a project together and get the writing done, get the editing done. I hired a professional team around, I had a story editor I hired. I worked with Lisa Cron who's an incredible, she writes great instructional books and holds seminars on story. She's a great resource.

And I had an editor, I did everything as professional and parallel to the traditional publishing structure of producing a book as I could. I tried to match it as much as possible. I had a fantastic cover designer, Monira Mussabal designed the OG cover, which is beautiful. And in my mind, I thought of, I wanted this book to feel like, in the hand, the most valuable accessory or the statement accessory that you could hold.

And I think a book is an incredible statement accessory to hold in your hand, because it shows what you're putting in your mind. And it shows, it says something about you that other things can't say. And it's, books are such a personal thing, and such a collaboration with the author, between the author and reader, you know. The book doesn't come to life and unfold until the reader's mind makes it so.

So to me holding a book in your hand is so much, you could, it's more valuable than a \$10,000 purse because what's what you're feeding your mind with, you know. It's how you're growing and expanding as a person. So I wanted it to look and feel that way as an accessory, as you, holding it you would feel as if you had the finest bag or other type of thing in your hand. You know, I wanted to convey that feeling. So I really put that into thinking about the branding and how it looked in and how someone would feel with it. That was important to me. So

K: Okay, show me, show me how to show me how to carry the book is that most finest – Oh, it's gorgeous.

J: You just, you just hold it...! On either side, it's the same.

K: Okay, just okay. We've got the clutch.

J: Yeah you just have it.

K: Okay. Show us it open–

J: You can just do casual, you know.

K: Ooh, oh! And open, fully open on the train!

J: Oh, and, oh, yeah. And if you have it open, you know, you just...! You just are in the know, you just look like...

K: It is a beautiful, beautiful book. So 2018, you, we have published a beautiful book, you said it's crickets and a few people buy it. And then—

J: It was the trickle, and then it started taking off. And I joined the bookstagram community on Instagram, very authentic. I'm a book lover, I wrote because originally I wanted to read what this type of book would be, I didn't see it. So I wrote the book I wanted to read.

And I just, I, you know, am a book person. And I always felt that books were very special. So it was very natural for me to join the bookstagram community in a substantive way, and build my community and platform and audience. And it just started to happen. And I put my book out for reviews first, and the reviews started to come in a little bit, and then more and more and more.

And it was just beautiful to see that beat. I didn't know what was gonna happen at all. And the feedback was just so beautiful! The fact that people would take the time to write the reviews. And it was just, it was, it was an incredible experience. And it was community driven, very much so. And I brought on a woman named Dawn Hardy, who was my first publicist, and she goes by the Literary Lobbyist.

So it was just she and I doing this in the next phase. And I waited until the book sales were able to sustain that, bringing that on, you know, so timing is important when you, for sustainability. So I'm paying for all of this out of pocket, so like it needs to be self-sustaining. It just grows. So we just, she was very instrumental in helping to corral a lot of the bookstagram community and bring them into this effort, this joint community effort – group effort – to start to spread the word about this book. And it really became word of mouth.

It was reviews and recommendations. And it became where it was positioned very much alongside traditionally published books at the time, within the genre.

K: Beautiful!

J: And even if you look, you know, the number of reviews, the positioning, everything it was, you know, it was working well alongside traditionally published books. And nobody had any idea that it was really just a first team of one, and then team of two, but it was this lean of a team working on this. And after George Floyd, so George Floyd happened, and the pandemic happened, those are two big things that shaped part of the trajectory of this book.

And the, the pandemic, so it started to build a lot of momentum and was taking off and then my

speaking engagements all were canceled, of course, because of quarantine in the pandemic time. So I decided I was going to still try to connect with readers. So I was even more active, I doubled down, I would do a weekly Instagram Live just to help other writers, because my secondary goal with all of this was to change the publishing industry for the better.

I didn't want what happened to me to happen to anybody else. If I had to go through it, then that should be enough. And now it stops with me and we're going to change this. So I, the bias that I experienced, and I do think it's bias – and not that makes you a bad person that you hold bias, but it's something that needs to be corrected. So the bias that I experienced in my journey, I wanted to try to fix that and help with the diversity issue in publishing.

And part of that was encouraging, fostering, facilitating other voices of color, other voices that are speaking about different perspectives on the African American experience and other life experiences, from diverse perspectives, to be encouraged. To write and to understand that you can move forward on your own if you need to. And there are other avenues.

So it was really important to do all of that alongside this book. So I was teaching, I was doing as much education as I could. I was also, I was doing the Instagram Lives, and I was doing book clubs.

K: Okay.

J: So I told – so after George Floyd, I, actually just before but it really picked up after George Floyd – this whole time I said, if you are a book club, and you're reading my book, I will join your book club.

K: Mm hmm!

J: No questions asked, it can be 2 people. It could be 20 people, it could be 200 people. And literally I did book clubs from, it was maybe 3 or four 4 to 200-300, you know, so the whole gamut. And it allowed, it was over 60 book clubs across five continents.

K: Wow!!

J: And I got to meet all these incredible people. And we talk about *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. But we were really talking about life. Because Tabby's journey in the book is, you know she has infertility issues, there's just life that she's dealing with. She's trying to be self determined as a woman in contemporary times and redefine her place in this, you know, what is going to be fulfillment for her.

And so it was such an incredible opportunity to discuss and unpack this book and all of the wonderful layers of this particular person's life experience with these incredible people. So many

people from different perspectives and backgrounds around the world! So that is how we got to ultimately the HarperCollins deal.

I met someone in, Ashley Bernardi was, she organized the Black Lives Matter book club, and invited me to join. And at the end, she asked me what's next for you? What do you want next? And I said, you know, honestly, and at that day, that day, I just felt, I was feeling it. I had kind of reached the max extent of what I could do with the book, I felt it. I had taken it as far as one person can go and I thought this needs to be amplified.

I think it's time that a traditional publisher comes in and I think this would be the right time and that what I most want is for traditional publisher to come in and bring it to their platforms and take this to – all of it, as an accessory, to put it in all the hands that–

K: Every airport!

J: That I would like to have it you know! To really bring it to as many readers as possible because it's shown itself to be something that people are enjoying, it's doing great things for people's lives and... I'm really enjoying hearing the stories about it, and I just want it to have more reach and, you know, the, the powerhouse of the big publisher, what they can do.

And so she said, Well, I think I can help you. And so literally that Monday, a few days later, she introduced me to my agent within the Halpern who met with me the very next day. She said, You know, this is highly unusual to go to a publisher, and for publishers to publish something that's been published or self published. But I get it, I get it, I get your story, I get this book. It's, it's fantastic.

She's like, I believe, I can't promise, but I'm going to try. And she went out, and two weeks later, a few weeks later, HarperCollins offered us a four-book deal. And it was just incredible. And working with that team has been a dream. They're so invested, so excited. It's been a learning experience. It's everything I wanted to learn.

I'm in love with the publishing industry now! And I see all of the incredible changes. It's just one of the, it's ripe for evolutionary change. And I think everybody is kind of ready for that. And to be a part of that, at this time is so exciting. So I'm really in love with, with this industry, and such great, wonderful people. And I just think we're gonna see a lot of cool things in the future, in the very near future.

K: Oh, I'm so excited. Sign me up to be one of the first, whatever we are called, devotees! Yeah. Awesome. Oh, my goodness, this is just so exciting.

J: Thank you!

K: So this title, *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. That is quite a provocative, evocative title! What does that mean?

J: Well, it means different things as the course of the book/story evolved. So it means something very different at the end of the book relative to the beginning. And when I was thinking of a title, I wanted a title that rang true, that just got you in the spirit when you read it, like, Oh, this sounds like something that someone said before, like something that old folks might say.

K: Yes!

J: You know, even if it hasn't been said before, so that was what I was really looking for. And to me, that had to be rooted in something that was part of truth, of experience. And for me when I first was coming up with this book and the concept, the word that I kept coming up with and hearing even, was exhausted, exhausted. It was exhausting, and I'm exhausted. So what I wanted to do was bring that into perspective.

And one of the ways that you bring things into perspective is looking at it from the perspective of a life lived. And the original concept is, you know, at the end of a full life lived, living with all of these layers, and we talked about that constantly, the backpack, and everything that's in that backpack, if you take, examine that, it's exhausting. So at the end of that road, it is exhausting, you'd be exhausted. And so I wanted to acknowledge that first, and just make this so, in the way that the title unfolds in the book, it starts out as just an acknowledgement. And then it becomes a celebration of all of the, in spite of all of this, we still thrive.

There's all this beauty and joy and sparkling, and all the wonderful, incredible things that it brings into life. This is, even in the process of carrying these weights, and all of the things that we go through as women and as Black women both, it's just, there's this beautiful, joyous, incredible, colorful evolution and unfurling of who we become and what we put into the world. And then at the end, it's a call to inspiration and adventure. The definition changes, it means something else completely different when you close the book. So that's the journey of the book, it's, it's meant to be something that's the acknowledgement first, then – the title, I'm sorry, something that is meant to be an acknowledgement, then a celebration, and then a call to adventure and an inspirational close.

K: Oh, how beautiful. I love it! Oh, what a title, that, the meaning of which evolves throughout the book. Oh, it's almost like the title itself is the heroes – the heroine's journey.

J: Exactly, exactly.

K: Okay, so tell us, what is the plot? You know, no spoilers. But what is *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, what is it about?

J: *So Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* is the story of Tabitha Walker, who is the protagonist. She is a woman and she's 33 years old, she happens to be living the experience of being a Black American as well. And she finds out – we meet her on her most vulnerable, worst day.

And every day before this, she just thought she had her life all squared away, she's living along the lines of her checklist. She's, you know, good job you know, she has a partner she thinks she wants to be with and all of this stuff. And she winds up learning that she has a reproductive health issue that only is giving her six months to rectify if she wants to have a biological family. And that's what she dreamed about. And there's reasons for that. But you find out in the book, why she's so pressed about having this family of her own.

So her life, we meet her right as her life is starting to completely fall apart. And she finds out in this moment, that the word that she's been living, and we're all living a word, and she finds out – and sometimes it's just, we're just sleepwalking it but we don't realize – but she realizes in this moment, the word she's been living is exhausted. In so many ways. And that's not the word that she wants for her life.

So we follow this journey. And it's a journey supported by her friends and family, and a colorful cast of characters at work and otherwise, there's work adversaries and work, I won't even call her an ally, I call her a work accomplice, Lisa Sinclair, who you'll meet in the story. But we follow this journey of Tabitha redefining the word for herself. And that's sort of the trilogy.

In the first book, we take the first part of that journey with her, and then it goes on as the trilogy continues. And hopefully, it's a space of learning and inspiration, not just entertainment. Which it is entertainment first but it's meant to be a journey that will also inspire, and you can learn about the television industry and how that world is. I tried to keep it pretty true to life, with facts and details that you can trust. And so you learn a little bit about what Tabitha's life is actually like in LA, there's actual places in the book.

So it's sort of a true to life journey, that is a personal evolution experience as Tabitha redefines her word, and I hope it helps readers to also examine for themselves, Well, what word are you living and what would you like it to be? So that's the gist of the story.

K: Oh, I love it. I love it. So of course, I'm sure you're prepared for this question. What word are you living?

J: You know, right now, I am living fulfilled. I won't say fulfilled like completely fulfilled. But in each moment, I am living it to the fullest that I can be fulfilled right now, I just feel very fulfilled in what I'm doing. And – maybe it's purposeful, is a better word, because fulfilled I don't feel, like I'm not finished yet. So I'm still fulfilling. So I would say purposeful is my word right now.

K: I love that!

J: What about you? Do you have a word?

K: Oh, I do, I do. So I have a recent podcast episode, one of the questions that I answered on the site – so I was the interviewee on my own podcast, in an episode.

J: Oh, yeah.

K: And one of the questions was, What are three words you would use to describe yourself? And what I said was finding my way. And you actually used that phrase in the interview! And I'm like, What?

J: We often repeat phrases. Well, reuse the same phrases, not repeat because we never heard each other say it before, but we have the same lexicon in some respects, which is very cool!

K: We do. I love that! Yeah. And so I would say if I could choose, if I could have three words, it would be finding my way. If I could have just one word, I'm looking here at these books on my desk, you know we always have books surrounding us. I think my word would be... okay: recommitting. Recommitting. So I grew up always knowing I wanted to be a teacher and a writer. And actually my third grade teacher told me you're going to be an amazing lawyer one day and I said, No, I'm not!

And I would say that that's the word I'm living now, is recommitting. Meaning recommitting to my creativity, to my identity as a writer, recommitting to my identity as a storyteller. And so yeah, that would be the word that I'm living out.

The word I'd been living out for many years would be, probably would have been driven. Feeling very driven to build my business, scale my business, pay off my student loans, buy a house, and now I find myself having checked a lot of those boxes, like Tabitha Walker, I already had my life fall apart, two years in 2018 and 2019, and now I feel that I'm moving out of that word driven and into that word, recommitting.

J: Yeah, that's beautiful. I love that. I'm so excited about that for you.

K: Thank you. I'm excited too, I'm excited and curious, and I'm so happy to have met you at this, this is the exact right time to meet you!

J: Yeah, this is beautiful. I'm very happy that your word is recommitting and I can't wait to see what comes of that!

K: Okay, so I have questions about numbers, any numbers that you're willing to share. I'm curious how many copies of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* you sold when it was self published. I'm curious about, whatever you want to share, I'm curious about how much of your

own money you invested in the startup that was *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, which has now been acquired, in a way, right?

J: Yeah. That's right.

K: Yeah.

J: So the the numbers, I sold almost 20,000 copies of my self published version.

K: Whoa!

J: Between physical and digital. Yeah. So that, it was a pretty significant, you know, performance, sales-wise. And the investment, I have to add this – but it was, I definitely was, it was a five figure investment, low five figures. And it was, and I did the most. I did you know, hiring a publicist is expensive. Yeah, so I, but I did that, you know. So, but, you could do it with less money than what I spent.

K: Yep.

J: But um, and I think it was fairly lean with you know, I didn't overpay for cover design, I paid for editing. I did pay for all these setup costs. And I did pay for advertising, I got a very good return on advertising, with social media, everything, and that's my background. So I did leverage!

And there's, I guess there's some, you know, invisible costs of using myself. My skill set probably wouldn't be expensive externally, but I used myself for free. I didn't charge myself. But I was able to get a really good return from ROI, from my advertisement placement. I did digital advertising, which is very helpful, but I did not spend exorbitant amounts. And I really closely monitored how my ads were performing relative to what I was spending, and tried to, because you can, that can go out of control.

K: Absolutely.

J: So I think you know, you can get it done for somewhere in the four figures, you know, if you're, especially if you're just starting out. And I would tell someone who was thinking about doing this, and if they're thinking about self publishing, definitely try to get as much information as you can. And do it as leanly as you can just to start, because this is a journey. And it's not necessarily about your first book. It's about being consistent along this way. Because you're and you're creating a library and asset, IP asset, that will continue to pay you back over time.

And when you build your profile, even the things that you publish before will start to pick up traction. So it's always going to be worth your while to get started, and just think with the long term, this is something you can do forever. So just let it be a journey.

K: Mmm! Oh, this is wonderful. So tell us what was the thinking, the reasoning – I know that this was not an accident – behind making *Black Girls* a trilogy?

J: Yeah. I'm, it was what, for me I think it's really important to write a series, especially if you're going to be self publishing because it allows people to get to know you, and still continue in a world. So when you're doing world building, and creating a story, that's a big undertaking. And if you can keep readers in this world with those characters, that is, it's great to extend it out. Everybody, it makes everybody happy. Because a lot of times you read a book and you really want to stay in that world, but then sometimes it's not a series, so you can't, you know, you can't really revisit it unless the author decides to, but then they'll move into another, creating a whole nother world.

But I think for me, it was – I thought it was going to be good for relationship building with my readers to keep them in my, in this world and to keep me in this world as a newer writer, that can give me more space for character development or story development. And I just really thought that if I created strong enough characters, that I would have all the material I needed for a trilogy.

This is, the series and the characters, this can go far beyond a trilogy. I mean, yes, you know, and, and I'm thinking of, there's all these ideas that keep bubbling up, and stories I want to follow, different characters, I can easily switch protagonists between some of the people that you meet. But they're just, you know, but that comes from character development, story development. So that was why I knew it would be a trilogy, that was going to be the best way to do this, and to give me room to develop out these characters and their stories, and to continue on. And it's, it's exciting to have the opportunity to not just do the three books but, you know, there's just, so there could be prequels, there can be offshoots! I'm super excited.

K: Ooh, prequels! Oh, that is so cool. All right. I love how, even though writing a non – excuse me, writing a fiction book is a creative endeavor, you're approaching it with a very business mindset, right? If I'm going to take the trouble to create this world, let me get the most I can out of this world, right?

J: Absolutely.

K: So it's like, how can this turn into merch? Television, film?

J: Right.

K: You know, where, where can this go? But you have to almost think of that from the beginning.

J: Absolutely!

K: Because if you close all the chapters or kill all your characters off, you know...

J: That has happened! I have friends that are like, I killed off, you know, this really important character in the writing process and wasn't thinking I'm gonna need them for future, you know, books or installments. If that does happen, I think it's really – and I will say this, which I'm actually, thank you for saying that, because there's something I should say was very, very important. That, before I wrote a word of the book, I did write intentions for the project, for the book. For the impact I wanted to have, what I wanted it to be, what I wanted to do.

I was very clear about that before I wrote a single word of the actual manuscript of the book itself. The most important thing that I wrote for this book, not the book itself, were the intentions for the book and the project. That was the most important thing that I wrote, to this day still, because that's what's unfolding. So how do you start is going to be how things, you know, continue. So it was important.

K: Oh, Jaunique, oh my goodness, you're taking me to church. So, I have a title for my next book, which I shared with you. And that's not the point of this episode, so I won't even mention the title, but I'm going to write out my intentions and we're going to have a little date and read them together, and then you're going to push me to be like, But what about, but what about before I write the book – if I can nail you down, I know you're very busy, but.

J: It's the goalfriend way!

K: Absolutely, absolutely, you are my goalfriend! Okay, so, what else do I want to ask? I have so many questions that I still – do, I still have you for, for the forty more minutes?

J: Yeah we have some time! When my, my dog will be there as the alarm clock! When he's ready to go outside, that'll be our...

K: Okay. He will let me know when my time is up! Okay, well, we just talked about you, you mentioned how we're goalfriends, and I love how in the book we get such a detailed insight look at 30-something college educated professional Black women: their friendship, their conflicts, their insecurities within the friendship. I would love to know how your friendships have been important to your self care, to your personal development, to your professional development.

J: Sure, well for *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, Tabby Walker, this her story and this story is really a celebration of the structures, people, experiences, that keep women standing, in spite of all of the obstacles and experiences that would otherwise tear them down on a day to day basis.

I always say, Congratulations, you survived yesterday! You know, if you survived yesterday, you deserve – you should celebrate yourself, because yesterday definitely tried to take you out, you know. So this is one of those books, and just examining a life where we have an, even without the layer of race all the time, but with that especially, there's all of these experiences, there's all of these slight, I call them tears in the fabric of your experience that just happened.

And you do need that self care. And a lot of times that looks like your girlfriends, that looks like your family, that looks like support from unexpected places, that looks like following your dreams, that looks like taking the risk on self fulfillment, and – or fighting for, you know, what you really want from your professional career and all of those things. So that's what Tabby is dealing with and that's what she's going through.

And I wanted to show that in all of the various layers, from her girlfriends who were in her corner, as imperfectly as they are, which, you know, it's important to show that that sometimes people show up for you, and it's showing up imperfectly, but they're still there. And they're still, it's, it may not be what you want, but it's what you need. Or you know, and to be able to see and celebrate that.

And her grandmother, you know, just to be able to – and not to have the same cultural or, well, cultural experience may be in somewhat alignment, but not necessarily, especially as Tabby got older as a Black woman, living life as a Black woman. But her grandmother is, as a white woman, still her closest family member, and they're able to discuss and support each other in whatever, what life is going, is delivering to them.

Her grandmother's in the assisted living facility, but she visits her every week. And she supports her grandmother, her grandmother supports her. And it's beautiful to see the real experiences of that, the textures of that. And I really wanted to bring that into the book because I felt like it was so important. For me, my girlfriends, my guy friends, my family members, have definitely been the bedrock of my support systems, and how I managed to navigate the ups and downs and roller coasters of all of the things – parts, some of which, we talked about, but not in detail. But just you know, a life, when you're really living it, when you're really engaged, is going to take you on a journey one way or another. And it's gonna have its ups and downs. And that self care that, all of the ways of self care, and, but people are – having relationships definitely is self care, not just romantic relationships, and then developing a relationship with yourself. So that's part of self care, to just being yourself. And I say to, you know, to love yourself, you first have to be yourself.

K: Okay.

J: And it's, for a lot of people that's, that's the biggest challenge.

K: And to be yourself, you first have to know yourself.

J: Exactly. Exactly. Listen to yourself.

K: Yes, yeah. Oh, beautiful. Um, what are the top three most important things that I can do, that listeners at Scale Your Joy can do, to help you achieve your vision with *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*?

J: Oh, thank you for that question. I love that. Well, first, right now we're in the preorder, pre-sale period. So definitely picking up a copy of the book, and, from your favorite local retailer or reserving a copy at the library, asking them to put it on reserve for you and order it for you, though, that's a huge one. We're definitely trying to get those pre-sale numbers, and my dream and my goal is to hit the New York Times bestsellers list.

K: Okay, so let's, yeah, let's just pause there and make that really clear to people. So *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* comes out September 28, 2021. But please don't wait until that day to go get it!

J: Right, no, don't wait! It will get delivered to you if you're doing preorder.

K: Absolutely, it's really important for those of you watching this, listening to this, wherever you're experiencing this interview, to understand to order it now. Because those preorders all add up to the first, and my understanding is like, the first weeks or whatever.

J: Right, exactly. It's the one opportunity that you have for that week's sales to be reflected in the preorders alongside the first week sales. So it's an important week.

K: It's a very important week, a huge opportunity. So yeah. The best way to support is get yourself a copy, preorder it before September 28. Buy one for your mom, buy one for your little sister, and buy one for your best friend. And to just be clear, the version with the pink cover!

J: Exactly. Yes. Yes, that, the HarperCollins version is the pink cover. And that is the one that's the, it's the new edition. We did a rewrite. It's the, it's what I wanted it to be, it was so great to work with an editor, a professional editor, my editor is Sarah Ried, she's also a Black woman. So it's so lovely to collaborate and do this together at that level and that scale, and to really evolve this writing into the experience that's the best experience that it can be.

So that's such an incredible opportunity to do that with this manuscript, and the story. So yes, I'm so excited for this edition. And for readers to have this and even if they've had the, the OG, I what I call the OG, the first edition, this is an evolution. It should feel like a completely different writing experience. It's different, even from the first page. So I encourage everybody to continue with the journey of this new edition!

K: Absolutely, absolutely. Okay, so that's the number one thing we can do is preorder.

J: Number one, number one thing. Preorder or, or reserve the library, you know, whatever works best for you. And the second thing is, if you've read the book, to write a review. Or to just tell somebody about this book and this journey, that is super helpful. And...the reviews, tell a friend, yeah. Those are, those are the biggest things.

K: We really have two, just two.

J: Yes, spread the love, share, you know, share, spread the word, and then you know, writing a review – those would be the biggest things to help, and especially even just for people to know as readers, and if you're an advocate and supporter of diversifying fiction and diversifying the book sphere, please always think of writing a review! That helps authors so much, it helps us so much to write a review. I have, on my website, how to write a review if you – because I know a lot of people have never written reviews before and sometimes that feels intimidating.

So my website is Jayne, jayneallen.com. And I have a how-to on the main page, how to write a review, because a lot of times I know that that can be intimidating if you've never written one before. So I kind of go through what's helpful, what should you include. It's just very like hand-holding, makes it very easy to do.

So that's a very powerful thing for any author, if it's a book that you love, and you haven't written a review yet, please consider going back and writing a review for that author. It's always going to be helpful.

K: Absolutely, I completely agree. I, *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* already has over 1,000 reviews just on Amazon alone. And I still went through and was reading so many – I just wanted to hear about people's experiences! Yeah. It's amazing that it has so many reviews. That's more, I can imagine, that even some mini traditionally published books have, and those are your 1,000 reviews, are before the HarperCollins version, those are the OG version.

J: Yeah, I made a post on Instagram about how to use *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* as an anti-racist, anti-racism resource. And because what was happening in the reviews were that a lot of Black women who were reading the book, were giving their life experience layer as part of the review. So they would talk about their own lives, and reading reviews is like reading another book.

K: Yeah!

J: It is beautiful, and it adds another layer to the book experience that should not be missed. So I like, take some time if you have time and you enjoy the book, read some of the reviews, because it brings this whole layer, people just so generously sharing their own life experiences that were brought up or brought to the surface for them, or they were reminded of by the experience of reading the book. So something very special.

K: Oh, that is so special. I love that. Okay, so Jayne Allen, you told us JayneAllen.com is where we can learn how to write a review. Tell us in general, where can we find you on the internet? If we want to know about all the books coming out in the future, and what's going on, where should we find you and connect with you?

J: So JayneAllen.com. I have a mailing list, which I try to do maybe weekly, bi-weekly. But I always am trying to give good information about books that I come across that you might also like, if you like this book, and sometimes just self-development books and thoughts, whatever I'm thinking about. I think of it as my chef's kitchen. So you want to know, if you, there's a chef that you like, you want to know what that chef's eating or thinking about or you know! And I think that same thing with reading and books, you know. For me, I want to know, what is that author thinking about? What are they reading? What are they doing?

So I try to give that to readers and folks that are part of the *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* community. So there's a mailing list, JayneAllen.com, and also I do blog posts and just try to keep everybody connected with more information and ways to help improve life, or perspectives, whatever is somehow related to the idea of fulfillment and self love and self care.

K: Oh, so beautiful. This has been such an uplifting, inspiring conversation today. As you know, from the very first text we exchanged, I have been very enthusiastic about getting to know you, just being like, Who? What?

J: Amazing. It's so great. I'm so glad we got connected. And it's so, it's been incredible getting to know you, you're such a light!

K: Aw, thank you Jaunique. Oh, this is beautiful. Thank you for spending this time with us.

J: Thank you for having me! I really appreciate it.

