

[00:00:00] **Leo Diaz:** This is We Met You When.

[00:00:05] **Leo Diaz:** A podcast by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University.

[00:00:10] **Leo Diaz:** We go back in time, dig up news stories from 2020, and track down the people in those stories. This episode is a little different.

[00:00:20] **Student 1:** I've heard the episodes of the previous seasons, and they're all really amazing. And I was like, in doubt, "Oh my god, am I ever going to be able to do an episode like that?"

[00:00:29] **Leo Diaz:** We want to take you behind the scenes of season three.

[00:00:32] **Student 2:** I felt the pressure of that whole thing about getting it right because it was such a sensitive story.

[00:00:37] **Leo Diaz:** To let you in on our process.

[00:00:39] **Student 3:** We know what it's like to be overlooked and excluded from conversations. And during the discussions and the pitches, we all felt like sex workers were excluded from the conversation.

[00:00:50] **Leo Diaz:** What surprised us about the making of this season?

[00:00:54] **Student 4:** The fact that you were like, "Oh, I have this person who has this," or, "I have a friend who has this, who's willing to do it." Just the level of community.

[00:01:01] **Leo Diaz:** And our visit from Pulitzer Prize winner, Connie Walker.

[00:01:05] **Connie Walker:** But yeah, I think agency and having informed consent is like a very, uh, important thing when reporting in any community, for sure, but in particular with indigenous communities, or other community groups that have been marginalized or underrepresented in media.

[00:01:21] **Leo Diaz:** You're listening to We Met You When: Inside Season Three. This episode was produced by me, Leo Diaz, with additional reporting by Megan Bevis. Episode one, The Power of Shantel, was produced by Adam Flujay, Yanna Kaluja, and Martha Nyakuon Gai.

[00:01:44] **Martha Nyakuon Gai:** I'd say one of the things that I've learned the most, uh, in this process is that you can never fully know the outcome of an interview until later on you listen to it, and you try and put everything together. During our first interview, we thought we had a lot, we'd finished the interview, we felt satisfied. But then going back and listening, and then now getting a clear idea of what you want to pursue, what you think the story's about, you realize that you need to go back, you need to get more things. And I'm like, it's just one of those things whereby you never know the story is done until it's published.

[00:02:14] **Adam Flujay:** I was— I was in the control room during the interview. I wasn't even in directly the room, but I felt the pressure of that whole thing about getting it right, because it was such a sensitive story. But I had a very unique perspective because I was other side of the glass wall from our interview subjects. So I saw them comforting each other when the questions got hard. Um, I saw, you know, a side view of their smiles, tears, wiping of tears, details like that, are what really stick in my mind. And I remember at the end, I asked Michael, who's Shantel's partner, what his favorite things about Shantel were. And what I remember is her smiling, turning, looking at me through the glass and laughing. It was special, um, because that first interview, there was a lot— there was tears, there was pain, there was trauma. But what shines through at the end was their love for each other, which is just something that, uh, hopefully we do a good job of, of telling and shining through at the end.

[00:03:13] **Yanna Kaluja:** We put a lot of care into our questions, and we wanted to make sure that we're giving her the opportunity to talk about the things that she wasn't able to four years ago.

[00:03:23] **Martha Nyakuon Gai:** We definitely had our share of challenges, you know, we thought at one point, "Is this going to happen?" Because we had the first interview, and at first when we ended it, we were like, "Oh, great, amazing story, I think we're going to work with this." And then we go into it, and we're listening, and we're like, "Oh, we can't use this. We can't back this up," you know? It would need a separate investigation that there's no way we're going to have that within the semester, or within the period that we needed to have the story published. So that's one thing that, that put us in position where we now know that this important piece of information is something she was very passionate about. Like, we can't tell that part of her story. And we wanted to be able to tell her that with the care that, "We still want to tell your story, just not that one."

[00:04:09] **Adam Flujay:** I think the big thing is just, why did she want to speak to us? Because we were willing to listen when this is not an easy story to tell. This isn't easy to listen to. But I think it was just because we showed willingness, like every journalist should with a story like this. That's simply why, because we were ready to listen to her.

[00:04:34] **Yanna Kaluja:** I'm like, really proud of how the team has collaborated, how Shari has been so helpful. Um, how all the— all our classmates have been so supportive with the feedback and all their— all their love and support for this story. My advice is just two words: Get ready. Get ready for this class to push all your buttons. Get ready to eat, sleep, breathe, this class. Think, like, honestly, not even sleep anymore because you'll be thinking about that story constantly, whether you're out partying, or you're studying, or you're just out with friends, sitting with family, you are going to be thinking about the story you're taking. And honestly, take this class if you want, like, if you want it in a list— in the list of like, top five journalistic, um, milestones you've covered, because when you— when you are done with your story, you're going to be so proud.

[00:05:27] **Adam Flujay:** If you're taking this class, depending on your story, you will not have a class that is demanding as this one, as time consuming as this one. This is not an easy class.

But on the other side, you will never feel more grateful to have taken the class, and you will never be as proud of yourself. As, at least I think the three of us can admit that we feel, the way we are doing this story.

[00:05:51] **Martha Nyakuon Gai:** This is a class that you have to take. It's not even like, should I, no, take this class. Take this class and you'll learn a different version of you, you'll learn different interests. Like, previously, I don't think— I— I— I— I've always loved audio. I've always wanted to work in audio, something radio, podcasting, any kind of thing like that. I love audio. But I wasn't a big fan of long form storytelling. It wasn't really my thing, you know? I'm like, obviously, except if something is, obviously, my personal interest, I'm going to, obviously, want it. But I wasn't into the documentary and stuff like that. Or feature— I've never really liked feature stuff. Yeah, but I'm rethinking that. Like, okay, you know what? Maybe I guess I'd weird, uh, like experiences before, because I really, really love documentary now. I want to tell the stories long-form. I want to research about them, I want to get that, like, into the heart of something. And I would say this is that class that, literally, the only thing I have to focus on the entire semester is this story that I love, this story that I want to see the end of. And everything that I'm going to be doing, I'm going to be dedicating my time to it. And it's very rewarding at the end. So I would say it's one of those things whereby, you're not just going to do it for a week and move on. No, you're going to come back to it, revisit it, you're going to get deeper into it, get to learn more as you go on with the story. And I feel that's what makes this class so interesting, because you have one thing to focus on and pour your heart, and spirit, and everything into it. And at the end of it, it's very, very rewarding.

[00:07:31] **Leo Diaz:** Episode two, Let's Meet at the Pow Wow, was produced by Gabrielle McMahan and Katarina Zenny.

[00:07:40] **Katarina Zenny:** I think I'm learning a lot. I'm definitely letting Gabby take the lead, but I'm also trying not to shy away from learning and from, like, engaging with the culture. Um, I'm obviously not placing myself at the head of the story or anything, but um, I'm trying not to be like, "Oh, I don't know, so I'm not going to do this. I'm going to let you do this." I'm really trying to, like, learn and, you know, like, listen to Isabelle's story, listen to Gabby's story, and then go from there. And you know, like, like, the round dance, like, I want to take every opportunity to attend, um, the different gatherings and stuff, because when we did the Pow Wow story, or the— when we did the editing assignment at the start of the year, and we, uh, attended the Pow Wow that you were part of, Gabby. Like, that was— we were only there for a little bit, but it was such a cool experience. And I think we've spoken about this before, but I loved the feeling of the drum, and that's kind of why I approached you about working on the story. Because I was like, "It's so interesting, and I'd love to work with it, and I'd love to work with the audio with it." So.

[00:08:41] **Gabrielle McMahan:** Mhm. I think that's part of the reason why I'm so sad that we didn't get to go to the round dance. Um, but they actually do, like, have other round dances around the city. So, like, maybe that's something we can look for if there's one in the next, um, three weeks. But yeah, I also wanted to say, like, even though Kat's not indigenous, I think I've really appreciated that you haven't shied away from also, like, bringing your perspective and,

like, your opinion to the table, because that makes me feel like I'm not doing this episode alone. Um, so I actually really appreciate that.

[00:09:18] **Katarina Zenny:** Thank you, Gabby. It's good to know that. The fact that you were like, "Oh, I have this person who has this," or, "I have a friend who has this, who's willing to do it." I think, and this speaks to our story as well, just the level of community, and the fact that, you know, like, everyone's got doing stuff going on. But everyone's willing to come together and contribute to make sure the story goes well.

[00:09:38] **Gabrielle McMahon:** Yeah. That's something I've noticed.

[00:09:40] **Katarina Zenny:** I think that's from the relationship that I've established with my community. Like, being there to show up when they need me, and then, like, the willingness to support each other. But I think, for me, what stood out is that I'm allowed to kind of openly say, like, "Yeah, I'm not objective." And having Shari kind of, um, support that as, like, a statement that I can make, and kind of doing it still in a good way, and still having a journalistic element to it. But just kind of evaluating, like, the power that we hold as journalists, and like, where this objective view really comes from. Um, so I think that's really powerful.

[00:10:21] **Leo Diaz:** Episode three, Sex in the Archives, was produced by Hania Nor, Akosia Uboa, and Alyssa Reed.

[00:10:29] **Akosia Uboa:** Well, we wanted to do this story because I feel like me, Akosia, and Hania are all from marginalized communities. We know what it's like to be overlooked and excluded from conversations. And during the discussions and the pitches, we all felt like sex workers were excluded from the conversation. And we really just wanted to give that community a platform. Um, we really wanted to just— we don't want to treat it just like as an assignment. We really want to just connect with this community and give them that platform to speak about how they felt during that time when they were overlooked, where they weren't given a voice. So I think that's why we're passionate about it, and why we want to highlight and do that story. But I think this will teach us a lot about trauma-informed reporting. I feel like that has been a big discussion, um, since recently, since starting this class. Um, especially moving away from objectivity and trying to give voices to people who need it. Um, and personally, um, we're talking with Hania as well. I think we all share the same sentiments where we really just want to build a community. We were all saying we don't want this to just feel like, "Oh, we're just, like, checking, like, off a checklist," which is what, um, Hania said— credits to her 'cause she's not here. But yeah, so we really just want to build a community. We want our— the people that we interview, Helena, um, her colleagues and friends and family, we want them to feel like we're doing them justice. Like.

[00:11:57] **Alyssa Reed:** And comfortable. We want them to feel comfortable. We don't want them to feel like this is just another journalist coming. We want them to feel like they actually are being cared about. Their voices actually are being heard. And to spin back to the trauma-informed writing. We've been learning about— we've been learning a lot about that throughout our four years here at TMU. And so to be finally able to apply what we've learned to

an assignment, or just to anything, I feel like it would be really interesting and a bit of a challenge. Because although it's easy to talk about how to approach trauma-informed writing when you're writing out, like, an article. But then how does that translate into real time in which you're doing interviews with people? And based on everything we've learned— we learned there are certain things you have to do. So it's going to be interesting to see us try to, I guess, coincide both the— our journalistic needs to always ask these tough questions. But also our human side that wants— that doesn't want to touch upon, um, sensitive topics. So it'll be interesting to see how we manage to approach this and apply the techniques we've learned in school, like the trauma-informed reporting. Up until this point, I've focused on a lot of, more like, entertainment news, or more fun stories. This will be one of my first big, I guess, serious stories. So I really want to do well on this one. And maybe it'll help me shift my gears towards more serious topics because I haven't been as interested in serious topics. But I really do care about humans and the rights that we are involved. So I, I think it would be great for me, as a person, to be able to cover this story, because it— I think we need to— we need to do more to humanize communities that aren't humanized, because there's so much prejudice in this world. And I guess I think a job— the job of a journalist is to help break those barriers and bring everyone— everyone and different communities together. So I hope that through this, um, assignment I get to learn more about the sex work and sex work community, as well as myself, and what I'm capable of doing in a more serious setting. Because I know I'm capable of doing well in, like, fun settings, but I want to challenge myself and do something different.

[00:14:08] **Leo Diaz:** Towards the end of our semester, Pulitzer and Peabody Award-winning journalist Connie Walker joined us to talk about her podcast, *Stolen: Surviving St. Michael's*.

[00:14:20] **Gabrielle McMahon:** Thank you, Connie, for joining us today and giving us your time. Uh, Chi-Miigwetch. My name is Gabrielle McMahon, and I am mixed Ojibway Anishinaabe from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and a fourth-year journalism student here at TMU, and freelance journalist for the Narwhal. I, um, also do a lot of reporting on indigenous community and indigenous lived experience. Um, and I know there are often times when we're dealing with these stories about trauma, and people are interested in kind of seeing what's going to be shared or what's going to be published. Um, and so I was kind of wondering about your approach to this, especially because you're doing work with your family and your community. And I know, like, I was telling Shari, if I did a story on my Nana, she could, like, call me up anytime and be like, "No, I don't want this in," or like, um, I think it's a different kind of process than maybe talking with people that you're not that familiar with. So I just kind of wanted to get insight into how you approach this.

[00:15:28] **Connie Walker:** Yeah. If at any point, anybody in my family said, "I don't want this in," like, I would not— I would not include it. Like, I, I think that it's really important to give people, especially because, um, because of the history of, of harmful reporting in indigenous communities, to give people agency over, over their own stories. And so if anyone ever said that they didn't want something in, um, you know, I, I would absolutely respect that 100%. Um, and that's something that's, that's very difficult sometimes. Like in the first season of *Stolen: The Search for Jermain*, um, I had spent three weeks in Montana, it— in Jermain's community, and, and interviewing her family members, and friends, and police, and trying to— trying to, um,

investigate her unsolved, like, her disappearance. And, um, one of our main— my main sources was her, her aunt who was actually raised like a sister with her. And I— I did a lot of interviews with her, and she was kind of my, my main family contact. Um, and after the three weeks of reporting, at the end of that time, I was also, like, like, doing my own research and, and spending a lot of time with the, the police officer who was investigating Jermain's, uh, Jermain's disappearance. And, and I had uncovered some things that he was not happy about, about the early aspects of their investigation, particularly some sealed— some search warrants he thought were sealed that really gave a lot of insight into what they did and what they didn't do. Uh, particularly that, um, you know, they, they, they didn't search this property where they believed she, she may have been, um, the night she was killed. And for a long time there was a bit of a delay. And, and I asked him about that in kind of, you know, one of the accountability interviews at the end of our reporting trip. And he, he wasn't appreciative of that. And he told the, um, you know, Jermain's aunt, uh, Valinda that our reporting could compromise his case, and that he was worried that our podcast would, would jeopardize his investigation. And she was very— then was very worried and very upset and called me and withdrew her consent, and said I couldn't use any of her interviews. And, um, and I felt terrible because, you know, obviously, like, you know, for family members, especially family members in this desperate situation where they're missing a loved one, I— like, I didn't want to cause them any more stress or any more anxiety. Um, but it was a really stressful time for me as well because it was the first season of my podcast, I had just started at Gimlet, and, and I wasn't sure, like, obviously, without family consent, I was like, "I can't do this story, and we've just spent, like, three and a half weeks in Montana." And, um, and, and, and again, you know, I went back to my, my editors and we, we strategized, we talked. And, and they were understanding. They, you know, I think that not— not every organization would, would have maybe responded the same way. But I was really lucky that, that they did. Um, and then we, we reached out to other members of Jermain's family to, to see if they also felt the same way. And they— and they didn't actually, like, her, her Yaya, her grandmother, um, wanted us to continue. And her— her other aunt, um, also wanted us to continue. And so we— so we went going, but we respected Valinda's decision not to be in the podcast, and we didn't use any of her audio. Um, but then when the podcast came out and she listened to it, she had a better sense of our reporting and the care that we were taking, and some of— some of the information that we, we, like, I guess, like, you know, we— like, some of the information we had and then some of the information she was given by the police. And, and she, you know, eventually, like, after she listened to the first couple episodes, she called and, and said that we could use her interviews and, and thanked us for doing the podcast. And, and so she— you can hear her actually in some of the later episodes. But by then we were already, like, working on episode seven and eight. But yeah, I think agency and having informed consent is like a very, uh, important thing when reporting in any community for sure, but in particular, with indigenous communities or other community groups that have been marginalized or underrepresented in media, because I think there's always a sensitivity, there's always, um, like, some harm that comes from not feel— not seeing yourself in media, but also, um, feeling like reporting's enforcing terrible stereotypes about you or your community, um, which often happens when you're not adequately represented in newsrooms and your stories are not— not being told. And so I, I think that, that that's something that, that is really important. Um, but for family members, especially, like, I always want to make sure that they're not feeling surprised by

what's coming out in the next episode, you know? Like, I always try to run through, like, "This is what happens in the next episode, and then we go here, and then we hear from this person, and they say this." And it's never like, "Here's my script. Like, read it and let me know what, what, what you think of it." It— um, but I want them to be aware. It's not a— it's not a veto, um, like, that, that they're editing my script or that they have any kind of editorial control. Because I think it's also really important that we're independent, um, in our work, but I also don't want them to ever feel surprised. And if there's something— if they— if there was something that came up and they're like, "Oh, wait, I didn't realize that was going to be in there. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that." Like, that's definitely worth consideration and conversation, and, and, and if they feel really strongly. Like, if it's their personal information, like, um, we, you know, I think— I think we have to respect that. And that's not to say that, that I don't think that we shouldn't challenge some of the norms in journalism when it comes to this kind of reporting. Like, I, I— we've definitely done that too, but that's where— where I've kind of landed on it.

[00:21:42] **Noel:** Hi, Connie. Um, my name's Noel. Uh, and my question is, when producing such an emotion-filled and heavy podcast like *Stolen*, what are the— the technical details that you focus on to, like, really capture that emotion? Like, is it, like, the tone of the narrator? Or is it the interviews? Or is it the scoring?

[00:22:03] **Connie Walker:** Yeah. I think that— I think that all really comes down to the production of the individual episodes. So it comes down to writing the episodes and, you know, have this idea that we want to do this podcast, and then we go out and do some interviews. And especially with the serialized narrative podcasts, like, not every idea is going to be something that works. And, and there's, like, you might have an idea to start with and then it's going to change a lot by the time you finish your reporting, like, any story. But one of the things that we would always do was that after we finished, like, the lion's share of our reporting, we would get together and, and spend a few days together in person. And just with, like, whiteboards all around, try to sketch out the arc of the season. And it's like, "What is— what is the journey that we're starting at the beginning? Like, what is the journey? Where do we end up? What is the character development?" And, and— it's, like, weird to talk about real people as characters. But like, character development throughout the season, all of these stories are meant to be kind of, um, introductions into indigenous life in Canada and the United States. So it's like, "What is the context that we're exploring? And where are we— where are we hitting the— the bigger history, the bigger context, the bigger social, social justice issues, and how are we weaving them in in a way that, um, isn't— doesn't feel like you're spoon-feeding people vegetables?" But that it's actually, like, you can bring it in, in a way that they, they're ready to, to receive it, and ready to care about it, and understand its weight and significance. And so all of that is really delicate, and again, really subjective. Like, you know, it's like— it's, it's, it's kind of like, I always feel like, um, it doesn't matter how talented the audio producers are. But if you're expecting to— people to listen to something that is really heavy or something that is really, um, emotional or something that is very intense, I always need a compelling question at the beginning. And, and it doesn't even have to be a, like, a s— a serious question. Like, sometimes it is, like, with *Surviving St. Michael's*, obviously, it was like, "Can I find my— the priest who abused my dad?" Like, and, and that's not— that's not even what I th— I didn't think about that. Like, like, when I heard that story about my dad, I was like, "Oh my God, he was abused at residential school. I want to know

more about this residential school. What was happening there? What happened to him there? How can I find out? He passed away, what am I going to do?" And it was my producer, uh, Anya who was like, and— but I was like, "But there's no qu— like, what is the question? We can't just, like, sit through a bunch of episodes of, like, residential schools." Like, there has to be a question that, that leads us through that. And I didn't have it myself. And, and Anya was like, "Why don't we try to find the priest? Like, what happened to him? What, like, was he— was he ever, like, did he abuse other kids? Did he, like— was he ever arrested? Was he ever invest—" And I was like, genius, like, uh, maybe the most obvious thing to everyone else in the room, but I was like, "Oh my god, that's amazing." But I think there has to be a compelling question, especially if you're dealing with, like, history or context, or dark subject matter. Like, think about, "What is the question that you're— you're kind of—" Your question is an invitation to your listeners, like, to come along on this journey with me. And because— I mean, I don't want to sit and listen to something if it's just going to be really, really intense for, like, you know, like, if you don't have a sense of what the journey is. And, and, and I think that having, like, an element of mystery, having a compelling question can bring people through a lot.

[00:24:58] **Martha Nyakuon Gai:** Hi, uh, my name is Martha Gai. And my question is, I like to know how you pitched the idea to the station. Like, the Search for Jermain was a story that was clearly still under investigation, and you didn't know how it was going to end and how it was all going to come together. So I'd like to know, like, what went into, like, the pit— like pitching it to the station and getting them to say, "Okay, I'm going to give this a chance."

[00:25:27] **Connie Walker:** Yeah. No, no, I think it's, like— you're right, it's a huge gamble. Um, and really, I think the, the, the biggest pitch was actually the very first podcast we did, *Who Killed Alberta Williams?*, because we had— CBC News had never done a podcast, a serialized investigative podcast. I had never done a podcast. All of our tape, like, the majority of it was from camera mics, like, we— we had filmed a TV story. Like, the audio's atrocious, actually. Um, but, um, but for that— for that *Who Killed Alberta Williams?*, like, we had— we had been able to kind of do enough reporting initially, like, in the first week that we had a sense of the skeleton of, of what, like, six or to seven episodes would look like. And each episode we had a sense of, like, what we would explore in terms of, like, the different, um, facets of, of Alberta's unsolved, uh, unsolved murder. And so what we— what I did, um, for— to pitch that one was, I created, like, a Google Slide presentation that had photos and audio and text to kind of, um, help my, my editors and producers see kind of the, the structure and what everything would, would look like. Like, you know, that there was enough here to, to, um, sustain multiple episodes. Of course, it was all, like, smoke and mirrors. Like, we had no idea then, like, what it actually was going to end up being, um, 'cause then you have to write the episodes, and, and, and, and the, the great thing about that series was that, obviously, at, at one point, we, we got an idea that we had to include more context, and that's what really, actually, I think made the podcast, um, what it— what it was. And that for me was, like, a light bulb moment because that was like, "This is how we can explore all of this stuff that I really care about and I'm really interested in." And, and so I feel like that was the biggest gamble because that— we had never done a podcast before. And once that was greenlit, and then once it was successful, and once they could see what we were able to turn it into. Then *Finding Cleo*, they were just like, "Do you have another one? Can you do another one?" And we were like, "Oh, I got this— I got this Facebook message from this

woman who wants us to help find her sister." Like, "Maybe that's it." But you really don't know until you start doing your reporting. Like, "Is this— is this going to be a story that sustains?" Like, I think now I have a better sense of, like, not whether something is going to be a— could be a podcast, I think lots of people— lots of things could be podcasts. But I think the, the other thing I've learned is that it has to be something that is so interesting to me, and so compelling to me, that I can turn my interest into a series that, that then will help other people be interested. Thank you, guys, so much for your thoughtful questions. I really appreciate it. And I'm so glad that you were all able to listen to the podcast.

[00:28:51] **Leo Diaz:** We Met You When is a production by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University. Shari Okeke is our executive producer and professor. Eunice Kim is our senior producer and teaching assistant. Angela Glover is our director of audio production. Our season three theme music composed and performed by Eric Crouda. Web design by Lindsay Hanna. Special thanks to The Creative School, The School of Journalism, and the Journalism Research Centre at Toronto Metropolitan for supporting season three by sending us to the Resonate 2024 Podcast Festival in Richmond, Virginia. Thank you for listening.