Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to listen to the Second Season of Tell It To Neil. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode, we're chatting with Distinguished Professor Robin Landa from Kean University in Union, New Jersey. Let's listen in.

**Neil**: Hi Robin, how are you?

**Robin**: I'm well Neil, how are you? Thank you so much for having me here.

**Neil**: Of course, of course. I'm very happy to have you.

**Robin**: Thank you!

**Neil**: So, let's get started. How did you get into advertising and design?

**Robin**: Well, I started doing Graphic Design when I was in College; I worked at a local newspaper and I…asked different instructors if they had any freelance work for me and that's how I started. I even started doing illustrations way back and then found out about advertising and found that more romantic, if you will! And I loved the idea of coming up with ideas all day long and so that was a lure and then also while I was in Graduate School I got a Fellowship and at that institution, you were allowed to teach your own course as part of the Fellowship. So I taught a Color Design course and that was so exciting and so wonderful that got me to love teaching.

**Neil**: Interesting!

**Robin**: I actually started doing Graphic Design in College; I had little jobs, I worked at a local newspaper doing layout and then did freelance and then did illustration freelance and then later when into advertising.

**Neil**: Well, other guests that I've had on the podcast, they're…some of them knew they wanted to be an artist when they were, you know, in elementary school and you know, that kind of fed into Graphic Design and others have gotten into Design much, much later in their life, coming from another discipline, so it's always interesting to hear, you know, when did the…when did the Graphic Design interest come along for that.

**Robin**: Yeah, I was always interested and…but I did pursue other things. I have a Master of Fine Arts in Painting and I have a Masters of Art History, so I haven't had a direct route in my career; I've had all kinds of…paths that I've taken that all come together in interesting ways for me.

**Neil**: No kidding! I had no idea that you had an MFA in Painting and Art History. Were those separate degrees at different times or…

**Robin**: Well, I wanted to get a Masters in Painting and you had to have an interview with the person who was going to be your Mentor and I went up there and it turned out the man who was interviewing me, a very esteemed painter, was exactly the person I wanted to study with and he said, oh you must the girl…oh, I mean woman from Queen's and that didn't start it off very well.

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Robin**: Yeah! And I just, it just really, and then he said, you know, I think you have too much in the head, not enough in the heart and it was really, just an awful experience and I decided to decline and I immediately applied for an Art History program and did that for a year and then I missed studio so much that I applied for an MFA at the same school and they let me, they let me finish the Art History while I was pursuing the MFA in Painting. So it was a really…it was a very interesting experience because the misogyny and the sexism was rampant, even at the other institution. So, I've survived, here I am, but it's been…I always wonder when I mentor young junior Faculty, they never ask about any of that. I don't know if you've interviewed Professors my age, but it was a very different scene way back. Sorry to take you on a different route here, but…

**Neil**: No, no. I love it, I love it, I love it! I have not interviewed Associate Professors or Full Professors on the podcast. One, because I haven't gotten to that side of Tenure and Promotion.

**Robin**: Right.

**Neil**: But I would like to, right, because that knowing the history of what prior Professors had to go through to get to where they are now is very compelling to me to listen and hear about and to see how far and how much further we need to go.

*(05:15)*

**Robin**: Yes. It's very different, yeah. I was very fortunate but it was very different and luckily things have gotten much better and of course more inclusive and more diverse but it really needs still to be more inclusive and more diverse and with people making decisions about all of us in the visual arts who know something about the visual arts, you know, going up for Tenure and Promotion, most people on the University-wide committees don't have any idea what we do. And it really, when you're comparing creating projects to articles on calcium, you know, or…or sustainable science, it's very hard for University Faculty who are not in the visual arts to understand. It's easier for the Theater People of course, and the Music people from any of the creative professions, but when you have Math people and Science people, it's very hard to explain it and I've always tried to go on the Promotion Committee to make sure I'm an advocate for anybody coming up because you need an advocate and I'm always happy to mentor Junior Faculty because you need mentors.

**Neil**: Well, and really good advice for those that are listening, once you do get past the Tenure and Promotion process is to get on the Promotion, Tenure and Promotion Committee to do exactly what Robin just said, to be an advocate. I've been getting…I received an email from an Assistant Professor in a department where they were the only Professor in Design and they were having a struggle because the feedback that they were getting on their Tenure and Promotion packet was from a Fine Art lens and the work that they are doing doesn't fit into that as well as the Department thinks that it should!

**Robin**: Right, it's…you really need to explain everything very well and explain the value you add and the void you're filling and it really, it's like writing a grant and if you're a good grant writer, you know that you never write in jargon, you always write to a general audience so that your narrative makes it as clear and simple as possible. But in the University setting, you have to explain the value and what you're contributing to the discipline and the field, but you have to do it in such a way that other people in other disciplines will easily grasp it. You're forced to…not only defend your work but make a case for it, in our field. Especially since Graphic Design is newer in academia than Fine Arts. I think University Committees have come to understand that people in Fine Arts were having shows but even there, it's like well, was your show reviewed, and what kind of gallery is it? Is it a co-op gallery? Is it a commercially owned gallery? You know, there are all these different criteria.

**Neil**: And with the invention of self-publishing platforms, like Medium or Blurb.com, these are all platforms you can self-publish your work in but, you know, how valid is that self-publishing, you know, is it the amount of views that you get, the amount of downloads you get? Our creative work isn't just posters and logos any more!

**Robin**: Right, right!

**Neil**: It's a lot of different forms.

**Robin**: Absolutely, yeah, and committees will really, I just sat on the Promotion Committee this past year and people were looking at journals and saying, well is it A-list or B-list, you know. It's…even if you're in a journal they're looking at the status, you know, it's hard to explain where Graphic Design journals fall in that arena also, because they're not, even if you Google them you don't get that kind of list; you get mostly Science and Math; a few in the Social Sciences and maybe something in History but it's really a Math and Science based universe.

**Neil**: I would like to think that we're making inroads there.

**Robin**: We are, but we have to be our own advocates and I always say, you have to explain. You really have to explain and not just explain the project, but explain the value of the project to society and to the discipline and to students and to academia!

*(10:07)*

**Neil**: *(laughs)* Just all around!

**Robin**: Yes, yes, it's…and it will get easier as more of us infiltrate…you know, I think they're all getting used to us but it's still, it's still difficult and we still have to be as clear as possible.

**Neil**: Any advice for those that are going up for Tenure or writing their narrative? Any advice for them? I mean you kind of went over a lot of it!

**Robin**: Yeah, I did. I think again to be as clear as possible and if you can get, if you're creating…if you're doing creative projects, I think it's important to enter them into competition or to have things reviewed, because once there's an outside and external validation, that's very, very helpful, you know, if you created a film and you enter it into the Emmys or if you create a poster and you enter it into a graphis competition, it really helps to have something validated by an external body, and that people understand.

**Neil**: And getting into the strata of…value in that, outside reviewer; the A-list, the B-lists, C-list and whatnot, what are your thoughts on that striation of perceived value?

**Robin**: Well you know, if we go back to the French Academy, right, and history painters were A-list, you know, still-life painters were B-list! You know, women were relegated to painting still-life and women and children because that's what they had access to. It's really, there's always that kind of snobbery. Somebody's making the rules somewhere and that's why organizations like NASAD and CAA and Design Incubation and AIGA are all important to set criteria for us, for what we should be evaluated on, rather than having the Social Scientists or the Science people determine it for us.

**Neil**: And all of those organizations, I believe, they all have areas on their website or documents on their website talking about this exact thing. If you are a Professor in a university or in higher education working towards Tenure and you're alone in your department or don't have strong mentorship, I would look to those organizations for that guidance and to point to as hopefully that will make more sense to those outside of your discipline.

**Robin**: Absolutely right, and I would reach out to other people who've gone through the process for guidance. Sometimes people think, well, I'll just do it and then you don't even know at your own institution how people handle it, so it's good to find a mentor at your own institution or …plus perhaps somebody outside of your own institution to help guide you, like you don't know if the Committees on your Campus value external letters or letters of support or letters from students or letters from alumni. You know, you need to know what you can include that will help you.

**Neil**: That is such really, really valuable advice. Thank you for that, Robin.

**Robin**: Oh, you're welcome. You're welcome, and there are discussion boards, so at Design Incubation we have a social platform where there's a discussion board of Tenure and Promotion, so that can help as well.

**Neil**: Do you have to register to see that or is it open?

**Robin**: No, no, totally open. Everything we have at Design Incubation is open; there's no membership fee, you don't have to apply to be a member, you just hop right on there! A completely open organization. We try to be as helpful as possible.

**Neil**: And I've participated in a few Design Incubation events. They are…they're really fun and I would definitely advocate, especially now, to participate in the colloquiums; they're a very short time period and you can talk about the work that you're doing, the amazing work that you're doing, to get it out there.

**Robin**: And also if you want to talk about prestige, it's a double-blind peer review, so it is the most prestigious way of being reviewed to get into present, and you always want to indicate that in Tenure and Promotion, if something's double-blind.

**Neil**: Thank you for adding that!

*(15:00)*

**Robin**: You're welcome! You're welcome.

**Neil**: As we're talking about Tenure and Promotion and guidelines and whatnot, publishing, research and publishing are, depending on the institution you're at, can be priority one or not, so if you're at a Research 1 institution, research and publishing is most likely your prominent duty. If you're at a teaching institution, that kinda backs up to you know, number two behind teaching, it just kinda depends on where you're at, but when we talk about publishing, I'm talking about actually writing a book! And Robin, I hear that you have some experience with that! *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Yes, Neil, I do. I think you're laughing because you know that I do it constantly. I'm working on the fourth edition of *Advertising By Design* right now, which is really exciting and my other best-selling book, *Graphic Design Solutions* is in its sixth edition and I think, I could be wrong, but it was the very first interactive Graphic Design book. It's on an interactive platform.

**Neil**: Oooh, congratulations on that!

**Robin**: Thank you, thank you. It was…it was…it was an experience, it was definitely an experience. Some publishers are trying to get rid of print and this publisher is one of them. They're trying to move to a completely digital platform and to a proprietor platform called…this one is on a proprietary platform that they have called MindTap. I think one of the reasons they're doing it is because of piracy and then the other is because, you know, we're all on screen and boy have we been on screen for this past few months!

**Neil**: Yes, we have!

**Robin**: Yes, yes. But I do have a lot of experience writing books. I think it's about I'm up to number twenty-three.

**Neil**: OK, so it's…definitely fair that you understand the process. Can you…can you walk us through what that process is?

**Robin**: Sure, I just want to say, we were kidding around before we got on the air about the fact that I don't cook but now you'll get an understanding of why I don't cook because…

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Because I do this stuff. Yes, if somebody's interested in writing a book, the first thing they want to do, if it…I'm talking about non-fiction, so I write fiction, I write short stories, but the books that I write are non-fiction titles that are pretty much related to my teaching. I do have a couple of titles that are not related but still in the same universe. So the first thing you want to do is write a proposal. Most publishers have proposal information on their website so you can find their particular format for proposal and you want to tailor yours to whatever they, the questions that they're asking. So if you have your proposal outlined, you can just copy and paste it and tailor it to that particular publisher. They also have contacts on their websites and sometimes they'll have just like submissions @wadsworth.com or they'll actually list which editor is in charge of which topic and that's always more helpful, I think, make it less going into a slush-pile. But you can also try to find the editors' names and try to find them on LinkedIn if that works for you, or ask somebody for an introduction; that's helpful, but for non-fiction, in our discipline you don't need a literary agent; you can absolutely submit a proposal without an agent, which is great.

**Neil**: That's good to know.

**Robin**: So you want to do the proposal, you want to make sure you in the proposal you include your bio and why you're the right person to write this and what the need is in the discipline and if you can tie it to a specific course or courses, that's very helpful and you also want to include competitive titles because that gives the editor, the acquisitions editor, a sense of where it falls on a list or on their list and they have access to look up al the competitive titles and see the sales figures for those competitive titles so they get a sense of whether there's an audience or not.

*(20:08)*

**Neil**: I'm so glad that I'm interviewing you on this because, you know, when I think of, OK, I'm thinking of publishing a book. OK, well let me get a proposal together and my proposal consists of…hey, I would like to write a book. Will you publish it? *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Right! And some people, you know, John Grisham, can do that, right? But for the rest of us…

**Neil**: Yes! It's a little more fleshed out than that.

**Robin**: Right. And especially for your first one. So now I kind of do that, believe it or not, I'll write to someone and say, hey, listen, I'm thinking of writing a book about personal branding. Are you interested? And at this point in my career, I get a response. But then they still want to see your proposal.

**Neil**: Wow!

**Robin**: So you can't get away from that. And the reason is, is that that proposal is going to either first go to a committee within the publishing house and it depends on the publisher and it depends on the editor, or if it's not and it's just the acquisitions editor who's going to green-light it, it's then gonna go to peers, so they need a proposal any which way you look at it. Unless, unless again of course you're John Grisham and they're just gonna go right ahead. But with us, with us it really…they're gonna send it out for peer review, even before, some of them before you get a contract to see if peers think it's worthwhile. And then once it passes muster and peer review, that's when you get a contract of them.

**Neil**: For those of you that are listening, if you are interested, well actually I might have you, Robin, talk about this. About the Fellowship at Design Incubation.

**Robin**: Yes. We have a Fellowship, as Neil said, and in that Fellowship you can apply for the Fellowship and we have three groups right now. A book group, an article group and a book review group and you send us, you still can't get away from that proposal! You send us a proposal, it goes through a peer review process and if you're chosen for the Fellowship, it's a three day Fellowship, we just finished it a couple of weekends ago: it was amazing, and we had people who want to write book reviews, people who want to write articles and people who want to write books, and I work with the book people and Aaris Sherin works with the book review people and Maggie Taft, who's a PhD Professor at UChicago in Design History, works with the article people. And then we all come together for various lectures and topics and it's a great, great experience. I would say that…anecdotally, I don't have the numbers in front of me. I would say that sixty per cent of the people I work with have gotten a book contract. Maybe more. It depends on the group.

**Neil**: Those are some really good odds.

**Robin**: Yeah, one year everybody except one person got a contract and the one person who didn't, didn't move forward with it and I bet she would've had she moved forward so yeah, it really depends on the group and how much time they have and whether they have a sabbatical, you know, all that. I just had a fabulous group of people and really interesting topics and it was very interesting for me to work with them with these four young women.

**Neil**: Interesting. So the people who apply for the writing, for the Fellowship, do you find that they're mostly males or mostly females or split half and half or…

**Robin**: It used to be split half and half. This time around it was mostly female and I don't know what it had to do with in terms of Covid but some people dropped out because of Covid; they couldn't manage finishing what they needed to finish for the Fellowship but generally it's pretty fifty-fifty. This time around it wasn't, but I would say this time was an anomaly because of Covid so people were dropping just as a matter of people, you know, home with kids and you know, crazy!

**Neil**: Yes, yes!

**Robin**: Yeah, so I wouldn't go by this last one but usually it's fifty-fifty. And also ages vary too. Though we get people from, we get international candidates, it's really cool. We've had people from the Middle East, we've had people from Ireland, from England, from Australia. This year it was all within the USA, but spread out across the country, yeah, I was exhausted, yeah!

*(25:20)*

**Neil**: Well, yeah!

**Robin**: But it was really, I had a very intellectual group so it was very stimulating, it was great because you know, and I'm sure a lot of your listeners feel that, that when we're at our institutions, we're all busy worrying about students and we have, you know, meetings about scheduling and all sorts of stuff and we don't get to talk about our fields of study; we don't get to talk about our research. So, having this was really delicious, you know, it was…oh, I get to talk about feminist design! I get to talk about, you know, just really interesting stuff.

**Neil**: And that, in and of itself is such a gift.

**Robin**: Yes, yes. Yes, but it was an exhausting experience because usually we do it in person and this was the first time we did it online because of the pandemic, so I think Zoom made it more exhausting. And we worked through lunch; we had…to help attendees, Aaris and I and Dan, Dan Long joined us and Liz DeLuna joined us. We did sessions on Tenure and Promotion.

**Neil**: Oh, fun!

**Robin**: Yeah, we're a great group to reach out to if you need a hand or you need advice. We're always happy to help.

**Neil**: And how would they get in touch with you?

**Robin**: They can email us. We're all available on Design Incubation on the Design Incubation website; you can reach out to me and I'll get you what you need.

**Neil**: OK. Thank you.

**Robin**: You're welcome, it's a really friendly little group!

**Neil**: They are, I can attest to that! So, back to the proposal; do you have to provide a sample of writing with the proposal or is that not standard or…

**Robin**: That's a really good question. Yes! They will, the editor will very likely ask you for one or two sample chapters and especially if you haven't had a book published before. If you've had a book published before, they may be willing to…move forward without that but unlikely. I have moved forward without the sample chapters for quite a while now but again, I've been writing for a very long time and I always say, well, just look at my other book! I know what I'm doing. And sometimes, even articles can help you move past that if you've written a lot of articles. They really want to see if you can write, that's basically it and they basically want to see if a chapter is coherent. That's another part of it and they want to see if you're able to structure a coherent unit. They really…you used to have more help in terms of editing in the past. Now, it's kind of bare bones at publishers so you're…the first editor you come in contact with is an acquisitions editor; that's usually a senior editor, that's either their title or acquisitions editor, and then they pass you on once they give you a contract to a development editor, and that's the person who's supposed to guide your book through. If that person has a lot on their plate and what I'm hearing lately and from my own experience is they're fairly absent, so it's very important for the acquisitions editor to see that you can create coherent writing chapter, whatever you want to call it.

**Neil**: OK, so that's a good litmus test, because if you can't write a chapter coherently…

**Robin**: Right, right! Right. Oh, and a table of contents. That's very important, that would go with your proposal, I didn't say that, but that is always part of your proposal. And if you can make it as annotated as possible, even with like a little abstract for each chapter, the way you would write an abstract for an article, that helps the editor understand how you're structuring it and it helps you understand how you're structuring it. I always go back to my table of contents for, sort of like my design brief. That's your design brief. That's your creative brief.

*(30:22)*

**Neil**: I like that metaphor.

**Robin**: Something we can all understand, right?

**Neil**: Absolutely!

**Robin**: Yeah, that's your strategy, that's what your initial concept is. In there should be the…I always tell people to think about it as a brief with who, what, why, how, right? All of that's in there.

**Neil**: OK, so if you make it past the proposal stage and the publisher says, hurray, we want to publish your book. What does a contract consist of? Because I imagine there would be, you know, the royalties; I'd imagine there'd be a timeline for work completed; I imagine there'd be…OK, that's all I've got! *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Well, you're right! You are right! Yes, and again, if it's your first book they will issue a boiler-plate contract, meaning their standard contract. And even if you've written a lot of books and you're going to a different publisher than the one you've published with before, they may again issue a boiler-plate contract. Meaning, it's going to be the lowest that they can possibly offer to you. The lowest royalties and the least amount of perks for you. You have to really be careful with a contract. I always say that if you can hire a lawyer, that's great. In our country, in the US, there isn't a mechanism in place to help people. There is in the UK, which is really interesting, so like if you are an author, you can go get help from an organization and they will look at your contract: not so here. So if you have a relative or somebody who's an Attorney who can look at it for you, that's really a good thing to do, or if you're going to hire somebody, again, a really good thing to do. You want to try to hold onto the copyright, which is, I always believe it's your intellectual property, there's no reason the copyright should be in the publisher's name. There's not really a lot of money attached to that; it's more about to me, it's about principle; it's your intellectual property. You want to make sure that you're getting as much as you can from them, so you want to negotiate and you want to see if you can get the highest royalty possible; you want to make sure that they don't make you commit to the next book, that you negotiate something there where maybe royalties are negotiated or first right of refusal. They pack a lot into a contract about indemnity. You have to indemnify the publisher against anybody else who's gonna sue them, and to me that's crazy.

**Neil**: Wow!

**Robin**: Yeah, but it's in every contract. And I have tried every time to get that out of the contract and nobody will take it out, so what I do is I'm really, really careful about imagery. It's imagery that's, that can really be a problem, so like let's say Neil, you let me use one of your design pieces in my book. I will make sure you sign off on it. With your signature!

**Neil**: Well, that's smart!

**Robin**: Yeah, and the publisher wants you to do that, but I'm really cautious because I don't really want to have to hire a lawyer to defend me if somebody says I'm using their imagery without permission. So that's the main thing and then you want to of course quote people and attribute any quotes and properly attribute and you have to be careful of fair use, which just means that more than if I quoted you, like say you wrote an article, Neil, and I quoted you and I used more than one hundred words, I would need to get your consent, your written consent. If it's under one hundred words for a non-fiction piece, I don't need your consent, I just need to attribute it to you properly. But, if you're quoting Bob Dylan…if you're quoting Bob's lyrics, you have to get permission even if it's one line or if you're quoting a poem or you're quoting fiction, you have to get signed consent. So there are all kinds of things you have to be aware of in the contract and then in your behaviors, but the contract does cover quite a few things, like you said, delivery date, how many pages, how many illustrations. There may be a stepped delivery date like you may owe them the first third of the book at once point and then the next third and then the next third. They may pay out the royalties in that way, depending on when you deliver. There may be X number of charts or graphs, they'll offer you a different royalty rate for digital and for print; they'll offer you something else for foreign rights. All of that is in the book, there's first right of refusal, there's number of copies they will give you; a lot of stuff but some stuff is way more important than other stuff in the contract.

*(35:59)*

**Neil**: Holy moly! That just made my brain do a summersault!

**Robin**: Yeah, I hate the contracts, I really…it gives me a headache and I can't tell you how many people have asked me to read their contracts. Well like, I'm not a lawyer: please, please!

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Robin**: And…and the language usually of the contracts is so bad. In the book before this one that didn't come to pass. I hired an Intellectual Property Attorney to go over my contract and she went over it so well and so thoroughly that I ended up in negotiations for two years and then we didn't move ahead! So you really…you know, you just have to say well, I'm just gonna live with this. But there are certain things you don't want to live with and that's where you need to…I will not give copyright away; matter of principle.

**Neil**: Yes, and just on a side-note here: depending on where you teach as well, when you're developing online courses, your ideas that go into that online course, sometimes become the intellectual property of the University that you're at.

**Robin**: Right. No, no, I think you're right and I think we all have to be really careful of that. Yeah, and one note for your listeners, and this sounds minor but it's usually not in people's contracts, and when I tell them to put it in they're like, oh yeah, and then the publisher will agree to this but it's not gonna be…they're not gonna offer it to you. So even if you own, if they give you the copyright, you still need to say that you have the right to write articles based on the same material and you need to be able to have the right to present that material at academic venues and it's not gonna be in the contract and they're gonna…they are, it's tricky, so I always put it in.

**Neil**: Now, see, I…wow, I just thought that that was just a given.

**Robin**: Yeah, right? Yeah! Yeah, and what they're worried about is that you're going to create something that competes. So, I just say listen, none of this competes, in fact this helps promote the book, but you wanna just make sure. Why not have it in there, right? So there's nothing they can say. Not that they're gonna like follow you around, they just don't want anything competing. And you can't, oh and this is another thing. They're gonna write in the contract that you can't write another book on this subject, so you want to make sure whatever wording they use, is as specific to the topic as possible so that you like don't write just Graphic Design because that…that's the whole discipline, right? So you want to be really, really specific, so that say you're writing about information design for one publisher, you can go and write about typography for another, but if you write, you can't write a competing title about Graphic Design, that really just handcuffs you.

**Neil**: Thank you for that.

**Robin**: You're welcome! Oh I'm just full of…

**Neil**: Why wouldn't it be in there?

**Robin**: Right, I'm just full of all these tips, yeah!

**Neil**: Well, so, well things brings like a whole new perspective on text books that we use for courses. Just like an Art History book alone, having to get permission for all of the images.

*(45:00)*

**Robin**: Yeah, and that's very costly too. So like, if you want to use a Picasso, that's gonna cost you for one Picasso years ago, it cost me five hundred dollars because there's the Picasso Estate and there's some other foundation for Picasso and there's the Picasso family. Oh my God, it's just amazing how much Fine Art can cost you.

**Neil**: So, and just for all of you out there that are listening, this does not mean to go down to your local art museum and take a photo of a Picasso to include in your book!

**Robin**: But…but you can take a photo of a building and you don't need rights.

**Neil**: Oh!

**Robin**: Yeah! So, if you see a lot of architecture in Art History books, there's a reason. They're not paying!

**Neil**: How funny!

**Robin**: Yeah. In fact I want to include Fearless Girl, this advertising piece that you may know about. It was created a couple of years ago by the McCann Agency and it's this statue of a girl facing down the Wall Street Bull.

**Neil**: Yes.

**Robin**: And rather than going to McCann to get rights, I'm just gonna go photograph it!

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Because it's an outdoor public piece.

**Neil**: Oh, how funny!

**Robin**: Yeah, so there are all kinds of rights and you just have to become aware of all of that. And Graphic Designers are so generous about allowing me to include their work in the book. I think maybe two or three have asked for remuneration for it, so I've been really lucky. Advertising too. Advertising brings a whole other level with it because you have talent, you have actors in the ads and that's another level of permissions. And famous photographers in the work, that's another level of permissions. But there are, to do as you said, a Fine Art book, that's a lot of money of permissions. That's a huge permission cost and you want to make sure the publisher either pays for it or shares it with you.

**Neil**: Definitely. So that's why History, Fine Art and History books are so expensive?

**Robin**: Yeah, yeah, and the color, and the color printing, yeah. The permission fees are huge. I wanted to write an Art Appreciation book once, but when they told me what the cost for imagery was I was like: nope, never mind!

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Robin**: Yeah. And one of the reasons that, I mean, it sounds like it's a huge amount of work, like I'm working on the fourth edition of my *Advertising By Design* book and mostly I've just been working on acquiring images. It's just constant, would you like your work to be in the book? Sure. And then I say, well I need hi-res images and I need signed consent and I need credits and like, so you get one thing but then you don't get another thing and you're like, ah, I still need signed consent, I still need credit. It's so time-consuming.

**Neil**: Well, and that sounds like a client project too! You get most of what you need but…

**Robin**: Exactly, exactly. But the beauty of books, for me, well three things for me. One, it keeps me really, really fresh because I'm constantly looking at what everybody's doing, and so I'm like curating constantly and that's great. The other thing is that I'm able to make money to donate to scholarships for my students, which is very important to me. And on a teacher's salary, that's hard to do, so whatever income I have from the books that really helps fund scholarships for bright students in need and then the other thing is that it makes you an expert, you know, you're…that's the main thing. I got one of my biggest clients because I wrote a book and he was like, oh, well you're a leading person in this area. I'm like: yeah! So it makes you a thought leader and that's kinda worth all the hassle. Plus you're talking about Promotion and Tenure: every Committee understands what a book is, you know, whether they like the publisher or not that's another story, but everybody…everybody understands what a book is. You don't have to explain that one.

**Neil**: That kinda got me thinking about after you sign the contract and then you follow the timeline and you get all the permissions and it finally gets printed or published and released to the world. Then what? Like, do you have…does the publisher provide book signing parties or a launch party or am I too *Sex In The City* on that?

*(45:02)*

**Robin**: Yes, yes! You are very *Sex In The City* on that! And they give you the high heels too! Yeah. Once it's published you sit back and have a glass of wine! And you can't take the smile off your face. They do…they don't do much marketing any more and in fact, when they're vetting you, they will ask you how many followers you have and they will ask you how many venues you speak at and how many organizations you're affiliated with and how often you speak to groups. They're really counting on authors to do the bulk of the marketing at this point, so if you have a big following on Instagram, that's great, or you have a big following on Twitter or you're very connected on LinkedIn because they're not gonna do that much and I…in the Design Incubation Fellowship I help explain how you market. Now I'm not great at the marketing part. I'm sort of like, the person who likes to create the book and then I move onto the next book and I forget that I have to market the last book! *(laughs)* And I'm not good at, even though I've written about personal branding, I'm not good at self-promotion, meaning you know, like this is why my book is great, you should use my book. I'm not good at that at all. But I do understand how one does it and there's that eighty-twenty rule when you're promoting yourself on any social media platform or networking platform where eighty per cent of the time you're not promoting yourself, it's only twenty per cent of the time, otherwise everybody's just gonna tune out. But it would be nice if they had book signings. Again, they do things like that for very big authors. People who are gonna sell a lot of books and they won't even do it for like their best selling Art Appreciation book. They really do it for, you know, Tom Friedman from the New York Times if he writes a non-fiction title, you know, they don't do that for us!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* Got it!

**Robin**: But we can do it ourselves, you know. I had somebody throw a launch party for me, a Graphic Designer who was in my book who's really generous and threw a launch party for me years ago, that was fun. But you know, it's…it's more how connected you are in social media and how often you present to different groups and professional organizations, that helps, and how you use Amazon to your benefit. There are ways to use Amazon and yeah, but if you're good at Instagram, you're not gonna have a problem.

**Neil**: That's really interesting that you say using Amazon to your benefit. What do you mean by that?

**Robin**: You can get your name after like Amazon.com, you can get your name there. You can get a shortened url to get to your book; you can put key words into Amazon; you can get, and this is where I'm really bad. If you, the more people you get to review your book, the higher it comes up in the search, so there's that. You can put videos on Amazon; you can use your Author Page to say where you're going to be speaking next and…you know, you can do a whole bunch of stuff on Amazon to help yourself. But it really is, it's a huge effort and I just, I always feel badly asking anybody to review my book, you know, and you always think, oh, my students will do it. They never do it!

**Neil**: No!

**Robin**: I'm like, do you know who I am? *(laughs)* It's really…I don't know, I feel shy about it but people, some people are really good at it. I've had a lot of people ask me to review their books, so you have to be assertive.

**Neil**: No, it sounds like…it sounds like a second job or a third job!

**Robin**: Yeah, I mean, my Associate Dean, Rose Gonnella, who is also an extraordinary artist and prolific writer, when I was pitching a new book I was telling her about it and she said, why don't you just focus on marketing what you've got because you're not…that's a job…you're right, it's really a job in itself and that's where I…don't like to spend my time in that space, where I really should, so a lot of shoulds. Although recently, I've started to do it a little bit and one way to do it is to create some content that you can give away from the book to promote it, so that helps people, you know, people, I create these check-lists and people really like them and that helps get the word out a little bit so if you give somebody utility, at least you're doing somebody a favor when you're promoting yourself!

*(50:21)*

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Robin**: I try to look at it that way. I don't like to just promote and I find that people are turned off by it so I would really rather provide something useful and hope that they appreciate it.

**Neil**: Well yeah. I mean, do you find that because we are so…we, as in general society, are so social media conscious, I guess, that we like having like little snippets?

**Robin**: Oh yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's another way to promote is to make sure you join all the groups and comment. That's another thing I'm not great at! I mean, you have to be, you know, there are some people who are just constantly posting and talking and socializing and that, you know, I spend whatever extra time I have posting internships for my students; like I'm always worried about them and so there's far less time to promote myself within a group but yeah, if you give people little pieces, I think that's helpful.

**Neil**: Well, and on a side-note, back in March; February or March, I subscribed to a vast company, their, like, updates and whatnot and they came out with a listing for the most popular 2019 long reads and I was like long reads? What are those? So I go on there and I start reading, I'm like…oh, this is a normal length article! It's not a long read. Yep.

**Robin**: Oh no, people are…yeah, and you know how, you know when you write an academic article and you signpost it with little headers? Well, people, like that's become the norm. People just want chunks and they want two-minute reads, right? And they want short stuff and it's really, in fact I'm working on the new edition now and I'm really trying to make myself a faster read, you're right. You can't be long-winded.

**Neil**: No. Nobody stands for that any more!

**Robin**: Right, right. And I've successfully done that in my teaching. I don't lecture for any more than fifteen minutes any more. Maybe not even fifteen minutes, but I have to get, like I have to do that more in the books, make it everything, like little chunks. Chunking, you know, like in music, you just chunk it. Like on a website. Yeah, but you're right: people want airplane reads or short reads. Two minute reads. People don't have patience; they're flitting from one thing to the next. I'm doing that; it's really hard, you know, I'm like, dying to know what's going on out there in the world!

**Neil**: And then a novel comes along and I want to read it and it takes me a month!

**Robin**: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Me too. But I'm able to binge on Netflix so there you go!

**Neil**: Well yeah!

**Robin**: Yeah, but I have found that…I have really, I can really write because I really like it, just like I really like to draw and I really like to design, so when I'm in a creative zone, I'm good. But lately I find that my attention is shorter and it's because I'm thinking, oh, well I really should check email, you know, and I really should check Facebook and who's texting me now? I've noticed that my own attention span has changed.

**Neil**: Interesting. And I can probably say that you're not the only one!

**Robin**: Mmm, right. Although I'm old enough to figure it wouldn't have changed me, but it has, so there's your, what did they call it? Oh my goodness, I forgot the term for like, micro-evolving where…micro-genetics where you're changing in a very short period of time, where it's not across the generations.

**Neil**: Well, I mean, you're at the forefront and you're a thought leader, so of course your thoughts would change!

**Robin**: Well thank you Neil! I owe you for that, thank you! Thank you. Thank you. Well I like to think I think a lot about teaching and I think a lot about the best ways to teach and a lot of the methods are in the books and I think I've learned how to communicate information to students in a concise way but I also found that I've gotten much more…again, shorter bursts, shorter projects. I don't know how other people do it. I know at my institution I give more projects than anybody because I do shorter ones and I think that there's a cumulative effect there and then if the student doesn't like it, well then they get to go to the next one pretty rapidly; they're not staying with a long project that is not for them or is not gelling with them. But I do like to think about writing and teaching. I don't know why I'm saying this…but anyway.

*(55:47)*

**Neil**: No, it's…what an Educator should be, I think.

**Robin**: Oh, thanks, I love teaching. I love talking about Design; I love getting the students excited about thinking about it and thinking about how they can look at the world differently and make things better and have a better voice out there. Well you know that, you're a great Professor, I see the notes your students post for you.

**Neil**: Thank you!

**Robin**: You get amazing feedback from your students.

**Neil**: I do now. It was not always like that! I just want to point that out!

**Robin**: I don't believe you! Well you're getting great feedback now. Well we all evolve, you know. When I first started teaching a long, long time ago, my Dean back then observed me and I remember thinking well, I'm a great teacher and he was like…yeah…

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Robin**: He said, you want to ask questions that don't solicit yes or no answers and I had never even thought about that back then. And this is a really long time ago, and so I've evolved too, we're all, we all become better teachers and I'm still working on things like not, like if nobody responds, I have to wait longer before I respond.

**Neil**: Isn't that excruciating?

**Robin**: Yes! Yes, because I just want to move it along. I'm a New Yorker: I'm like, let's go, come on! Somebody answer me! *(laughs)* And I have to wait because I'll just jump in and, I mean, I'm really trying as best as I can to be better and better and it was a really interesting challenge to move online and figure out how I could translate all the crazy stuff I do in the classroom and I do a lot of wacky stuff like having them carve soap or…I do a lot of weird stuff in the classroom, a lot of hands on, do it yourself imagery and like, how are we going to do that when they're locked in their rooms and all they have is a pencil. So it was an interesting challenge but I tried to take it as a challenge rather than feeling sad about it.

**Neil**: Absolutely. And I think, you know, this is my opinion, that Designers are just that way anyway; like, this is a problem, well, it's actually an opportunity, so what are we gonna do here?

**Robin**: Exactly. Exactly. Right, and you know, I heard of people in other disciplines who were like, well we'll just email assignments, like no, like, this is such…we've gotta…you've gotta change it up, Buster, you know? You gotta work with what you got and the parameters and I'm still trying to figure it out in case we have to go back to Zoom or Blackboard, or whatever vehicle we're using but you're right, I think Designers rise to the occasion because we know how to solve problems and we know how to anticipate. That's the other thing. We don't wait to solve a problem; we anticipate problems.

**Neil**: So, just to all the people who are listening, this is being recorded in June of 2020 after the Spring semester of 2020 when we had to shift to online teaching and online pedagogy for the second half of the Spring semester, so just to give a little context of what Robin and I have been talking about! So, we're almost at the…well yeah, we're almost at the end of our time. Do you have any parting thoughts or do you have any projects upcoming that you'd like to speak about?

*(59:53)*

**Robin**: Well, I'm working on the fourth edition so if you have any listeners who have used the book, *Advertising By Design*, I always welcome feedback. I love when other educators tell me what worked and what didn't work in the book. And Design Incubation has colloquiums coming up, so please join us. It's free and you can, I don't know if there are…we have one coming up I think in California but you can attend remotely and you can pitch, you can present remotely. We have awards open right now and Fellowships, so please check us out, we're very friendly as I said before, and I'm always happy to advise in any way that I can. I'm always happy to help.

**Neil**: Great, well thank you very much for your time today, Robin.

**Robin**: You're welcome Neil, it's always a pleasure to talk to you. I'm so glad we met a few years ago and have stayed in touch. I'm honored to be on your show.

**Neil**: Thank you and I look forward to seeing you in person at the next conference that we can attend!

**Robin**: Yes, absolutely.

This concludes Season Two, Episode One of Tell It To Neil. If any of the facts or information included in this Episode are incorrect, please feel free to get in touch through our email, hello@tellittoneil.com

If you would like to get in touch with Robin, please contact her through her website at www.robinlandabooks.com

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