Jen McFadden: All right. Well, I am super excited this week to have Allison Mishkin here as our guest on Beyond the Bottom Line. Allison is a former WE@Yale fellow, is a graduate of the School of Management of the Oxford Internet Institute, and has done a number of things in her career that, I think, really exhibit what it means to be an entrepreneur, and also to just kind of create this entrepreneurial career path. So, Allison, welcome to the show. Tell us a little bit about your background, going back to when you were a kid, and through school, and how that informs what you're doing now.

Allison Mishkin: Great. Thanks so much for having me. It's really fun, if not a little bit weird, to be back. As you know, my background has really always been very interested in technology and youth, partially because when I was 13, as most 13-year-old girls are, I was obsessed with The Princess Diaries. I thought it was-


Allison Mishkin: Great movie, great book. And I was also engaging on the Internet at this time, and I thought, "You know? It's a little bit weird to me that the author isn't really engaging with us, with her community. I think that the Internet can really be used to bring other bookish teens from all over the world together, because I'm the only one in my school who seems to think that books are cooler than going out on a Friday night." So, I reached out to the author, and I said, "I have this great idea for how the Internet is going to change your business." So, I wound up working with her and with her publishing company, HarperCollins, to start an online book club that became this kind of template for how teen authors would engage with their teen audiences, which was something I knew how to do, because I was a teenager. So, I really understand the ideal.

Jen McFadden: Know your audience.

Allison Mishkin: The idea demographic. So, I did that all through high school, and as a result, I thought it was really interesting to observe how I created this book club to talk with other teenagers about like, "Man, I just read this other great book." And instead, it really turned into this social community, this actually weird ... It was the time where the Internet, before we had kind of behemoth social networks, where you could have these kind of special interest groups, which really felt like a supportive community, which a lot of people, unfortunately, don't have in their home environments. So, that kind of fostered an interest for me, both in computer science. I built the website based on what I was doing, learning in my computer science class. I was often in conversations with HarperCollins. I would be the technical expert, which was a weird thing to be at 16.
Allison Mishkin: So, I thought I was interested in computer science, but I was really also very interested in how can technology and how can what happens on the Internet be a force for good in young women's lives? So, I went to Penn-

Jen McFadden: And crafted your own major there, again.

Allison Mishkin: Yeah. I designed my own major. I was not a computer scientist. I started as a computer science major and spent two years as the only girl in most of my computer science classes. And finally, my advisor is like, "Look, you can do this if you want, but it doesn't make you happy. You're the one in class always asking like, 'But how did this algorithm influence politics? How does this do that?'" So, I designed my own major focused on computer science in society, really asking questions of, I think in order to understand how technology will influence children, you need to understand how the technology works so that you can design elegant solutions that allow, for example, childhood expression, but also keep kids safe. But you also really need to understand how the world works, so I mixed computer science with philosophy and a lot of psychology, a lot of communications, and a lot of history. So, I did that.

Allison Mishkin: After that, it was, oh gosh, so I have a BA in individualized. Literally, my diploma is a lot of Latin that I don't understand, the word individual, and then more Latin. My parents didn't hang it up.

Jen McFadden: They're proud of you now, though, Allison.

Allison Mishkin: Yes. And I did a lot. What do I do when I don't know what to do? I had a lot of conversations with people working in the ed tech space, and I got a really interesting opportunity to help launch a new gaming division at an old ed company called Wireless Generation, that had just been like a week before I met with the founder, they had been acquired by Rip Murdoch, and they now had a lot of money to build out what was going to be a suite of educational products, including, they realized, "Well, if we're making educational content, why don't we also make educational games that'll be adjacent to the textbooks that we're making with the goal of, how can we make educational games be as compelling as the best commercial content out there?" And as the youngest person there, they said, "You can figure that out. You must like games." So, I did that for a couple of years, and it was a really, really interesting opportunity. I learned a lot in terms of how to grow a new business line, how to build out different functionalities. Like my first day, I was flown to New Mexico to learn how to build a user testing lab, and I built a user testing department.

Allison Mishkin: And then I switched gears and started evangelizing the product at conferences and with our shareholders, and with our CEO, or our owner, and kind of everything in between. It was really interesting to get a glimpse into how every single functionality worked. But I really wanted to understand, "Just because we can build these games, like we have, really, quite a large budget," more than I've ever seen and ever will see again, "what does that mean that we should build?"
So, I worked at Sesame Street for a number of years starting educational video game design programs, which is a weird diversion that I’m happy to talk about. But then, realized that, what I’m really passionate about is making technology that’s good for young women, and that the best way to figure out how to do that would be a dual PhD MBA. So, I simultaneously got a PhD focused on how can technology be a force for good in young women’s lives? And an MBA so that I could grow and scale ideas related to that mission.

Jen McFadden: Can we go back to that PhD research? And can you talk a little bit about ... Give us a history lesson for a moment, and in seven minutes or less, give us a history of women in technology. Let’s see if you can do it. It’s probably going to be more like 10.

Allison Mishkin: So, I should mention that a lot of the story that I’m telling is research done by one of my mentors, Nathan Ensmenger, who wrote a great book about this, where the computer girls are. But yeah. So, the way that I like to start telling the story though is the first ever computer bug was a literal bug. Grace Hopper, who wrote the initial computer programming language, COBOL, and was Yale alum, proud Yale alum, was coding one day, doing her work, and the computers of that day were not the small laptops that we see now. They were probably the size of whoever is listening to this’s living room, if not double that size. So, these were really big machines. They had a tendance to get overheated, so when things get overheated, bugs come by. So, Grace Hopper was working in her machine, she sees a little bug, and she takes the bug out of the computer, taped it into her notebook and says, "There's a bug in this system." That's how we got the term computer bug.

Allison Mishkin: And what's interesting to me about this is two things. One is, a lot of the words that we use have highly technical roots, and I'll explain some more of them later. As well as the fact that the people who are really creating the roots of what computer programming are and what it will be become are women, are strong, brilliant women. So now, in 1965, kind of continuing on this, there's a Cosmo article about this, but now, when we think of who are the main computer programmers, it's all men. So, there's a really interesting thing that happens between the 1950s and the 1960s where computer science really gets gendered from being the Grace Hoppers of, "I'm a strong woman. I'm finding a bug and I'm coining new computer terms," into a very masculine field.

Jen McFadden: And primarily, at that time, I would say, in the '50s and '60s, a significant portion of the women who are doing the programming for these large mainframe computers that we had at the time were women. I mean, the people doing it were women, not men.

Allison Mishkin: Yes. So, it was mostly women who were kind of computer programmers. And in fact, the first large scale computer was called the ENIAC. It was at the University of Pennsylvania, and there's a very, very famous picture that I wish I could show you that has women programming the computer. And until about 15 years ago,
we thought that these women were what were called refrigerator girls, or people kind of like modeling the machine, when in reality, they were the programmers. And in the 1950s, pretty much all computer programmers were women. Even if you asked the designers of the computer, Eckert and Mauchly, they would have also called this, "Oh yeah, programmers are women." Because what happened was, because computers were so new, we didn't actually think that computer programming would be hard. We assumed that the difficult part would be building the machines, not in telling the machines what to do. So, the initial vision of the computer programmer is kind of a very soft skillset. It's a skillset for women, and that's why we call it software. We have hardware, which is what the men build, and we have software, which is the women just telling the difficult hardware what to do.

Allison Mishkin: However, it turned out that telling the difficult hardware what to do is actually very, very difficult in itself. A computer might have 18,000 different vacuum cubes, vacuum tubes, in the case of the ENIAC, or when it gets to slightly smaller scale business use operations, it's still, as anyone who's ever programmed a computer can tell you, very, very difficult to get the computer to exactly follow orders. So, it's much more difficult than we'd imagined, so we're kind of stuck as a society. We're like, "Okay, these jobs are a little bit difficult, and more importantly, the war has ended and we have created these great machines that helped our war effort, and we have all these companies that created these machines. How do we sell these machines to the greater public?"

Allison Mishkin: So, this leads to a couple things that happened. One, we start kind of trying to convince people that they should take these jobs programming these machines. There weren't quite enough women to program them. There weren't quite enough people to program them, so they just start running advertisements. These advertisements slowly start gendering it male. They say things like, "Are you the man to tame the beast?" Or, "Do you desire a career with this and that? And the next frontier with a brain of [inaudible 00:11:00]? If so, go be a programmer."

Jen McFadden: But it's not just the copy itself, it's the visual representation of who fits that role or who doesn't fit that role that really starts to switch in the '60s and '70s.

Allison Mishkin: Exactly. So, we start seeing this happen where we start seeing this as men. And then, to make it even harder for women to get these jobs, we're still not filling these roles, we start deciding, "Okay, I wonder what makes a computer scientist?" So, you start running aptitude tests to try to figure it out. And some of them test musical scales at first. There was a thought that it might be musician. And they don't really know what computer science is like, so they kind of just glom on to what they think it might be similar to, which is to say advanced math and science, which is how we wind up actually bundling computer science in with math, science, and engineering. And they give these tests like in the backs of magazines, and you can mail it in. And if so, you'll get an interview. But the issue is that, because men and women had access to
different forms of education, the tests wind up being designed, because they're being designed by men, for what men learned in their schools, not necessarily for what women were learning. So, women wind up scoring poor on these tests, and it becomes more and more masculine.

Allison Mishkin: And while this is happening, still no one actually will come out and say, "We think this is for men." In fact, they still want women to be doing it. There's a great Cosmo article that's, if you look at the original Cosmo, it's sandwiched in between an article on how to tame your mustache and how to get your man, but it's like, why you want to be a computer programmer. Because at this time, computers were thought to be like any other office device for women, which is to say that, you hide your typist, you hide your stenographer, you hide your secretary. These machines weren't in the big boss's office, they were adjacent to the office. And since they were adjacent to the office, they could be a women's job. So, no one's yet saying it's going to be man, we're just kind of doing all these things in the side in society that wind up making women think that they don't belong. And then, kind of what pushes this over the edge is, as computers are being sold more and more, or as we need to sell computers, we need to figure out how to sell computers, and we want to convince you that they're better than what you have. We want to convince you that they're easy.

Allison Mishkin: So, we start running ads like, "So easy, a woman can do it." Or, "This is so much better." They run ads almost targeting the boss's wife saying, "Your husband's computer can't sleep with him," or like, "What has 16 legs, waggly eyes, and won't stop talking? Guess it's not your computer."

Jen McFadden: With images of secretaries' legs and mouths.

Allison Mishkin: Yes. So, the basic thing that happens is, in order to convince you that ... We wind up selling computers both by having sexy women pose next to them, and by selling it as an alternative to those who we'd initially hoped to be our computer programmers. So, this combination of kind of aptitude tests that women can't perform on, the creation of advertisements that basically say what computer scientists should look like. Like, "Are you the man to tame the machine?" And advertisements that kind of sell it as, "So easy a woman can do it," or, "Let's replace your women." Women slowly get shoved out of the builders of tech and into the kind of consumers of and now ... The consumers of and kind of the victims of tech. What's really sad though, is we see this persist kind of until now.

Allison Mishkin: So, a lot of my research looks at, "So, this has happened-

Jen McFadden: But really quickly, also at the same time, you have this institutionalization of computer science as an actual degree program during that period of time, and early on, those numbers were the percentage of women who were going and getting degrees in computer science was around 35%. And today, we're at roughly, what? 18%? Maybe inching back up closer to 20%. So, when did that
piece of it start going awry? And what happened a little bit in the '80s as well, continuing on this idea of you can't be what you can't see, and the media messaging that's impacting how people perceive themselves in a particular role? What comes about in the '80s?

Allison Mishkin: So, in the '80s, we create the hacker stereotype. This comes out of a lot of stuff that's happening at MIT, so I think that's a great point, what you were saying about degree programs. Women are entering these degree programs, but they are, again, largely at male institutions. But still, and women are able to get these degrees. It's actually, the number is growing, growing, growing, and we have the institutionalization of the hacker where, if you actually look at comics from the 1970s and comics of today, they will also mock the hacker's uniform, and they still say like, "Slightly disheveled. Doesn't see the outside air." It's a stereotype that has persisted, and as that stereotype comes into play, we slowly start seeing actually the numbers of women decreasing, and-

Jen McFadden: In a big cultural moment, there was also Revenge of the Nerds, and some of the other cultural tropes that occurred in the '80s that were the John Hughes version of what the world should look like.

Allison Mishkin: Exactly. We have like Stewart Brand really talking about like, "These nerds are taking over. They're saving the world." We have- 

Jen McFadden: The economization of Steve Jobs.

Allison Mishkin: Yeah. All of this starts happening, and if you actually overlay a graph of appearance of the term hacker in the media with the number of women in computer science, they're both kind of like climbing, climbing, climbing, and then once hacker reaches this point where it's actually mentioned on a regular basis, that is the exact year that you see computer science, the numbers begin to drop and they haven't gone back up. They really haven't gone back up since. Whereas, every other STEM discipline was kind of like similarly marching up with women, with enrollment and with women, but while math, science, other forms of engineering, medicine have all gone up, computer science is the only one where we see it going down.

Jen McFadden: So then, can we talk a little bit about your research and the self-efficacy piece, and the belonging piece?

Allison Mishkin: Sure. I find this really interesting, because for me, what all of this says is that, "Look, social cues matter. What happened around us is, in my mind, the main thing keeping women from these fields." So, I really wanted to try to figure out what needs to happen in women's lives to make them motivated to learn computer science. Or if not to learn computer science, at least to feel self-efficacy around their technology use. So, there's a theory out there called self-determination theory, which basically says we are motivated to things for a lot of reasons. Some of them, like I do my homework because my mom tells me to.
That means I'm extrinsically motivated. If I do my homework because I find it interesting, I'm intrinsically motivated. And when I do my homework because I find it interesting, I do better, I work harder, I'm happier, all of the great things. So basically, how do we get women to be intrinsically motivated for computer science?

Allison Mishkin: Turns out, according to self-determination theory, you need a combination of competency, feeling like you can do it, autonomy, "I feel like I can do it on my own," and relatedness, "I feel like there are people in this who are like me." The theory has always said kind of like competency, autonomy, and relatedness are all important. Competence and autonomy, though, in a lot of the early research was like, these are the big ones, because this research was done in college laboratories with primarily white men who were in prestigious undergraduate universities. We didn't need relatedness, because everyone around us was related to us. So, relatedness was really ignored. I, however, a lot of my research has kind of been trying to study what actually gets women intrinsically motivated in computer science, and I launched a conference and an initiative for young women in tech called Bit by Bit. I did a lot of research there where I found that, actually, competency and autonomy are really not that important at all. If we do not have that critical relatedness piece, we will never, ever be able to be intrinsically motivated, if we're women in technology.

Allison Mishkin: And the reason for that is, when we are related to people, in our environment, it convinces us that we can have self-efficacy, that we are capable of achieving, because people like us are able to achieve, and then we become motivated. But if we don't feel like people like us are even capable of achieving, because we don't have that critical relatedness piece, then we'll never be able to develop competency, autonomy, or intrinsic motivation.

Jen McFadden: So, if you go back and you look at the literature, there's a book that was written about Carnegie Mellon's computer science department, and a lot of the things that they talk about around relatedness are things like having female faculty members, which is always really hard to change when you're in a tenure track system. Having significant number of women actually in a class, or closer to gender parity, having the ability to have access to the computer even in your home. Early on, oftentimes, when you'd see a computer, if there was one computer in a home, it might be in the boy's bedroom instead of out where the entire family could use it. You have all of these other cues. Can you talk a little bit more about some of those early relatedness factors, including the classroom research that was done?

Allison Mishkin: Sure. So, I think, like what Jen was saying, a lot of my research really does speak to a lot of what's been going on. A lot of other research about kind of how do we create feelings of belongingness for women? Because when we don't have relatedness, we develop what's called belonging uncertainty. And any cue that tells us that we aren't related may convince us that we are. So, rather than looking for things-
Jen McFadden: It's amplified, essentially.

Allison Mishkin: Yeah, yeah. Rather than being like, "Well, I could still fit in," it's like, "No, no. Definitely don't fit in here." We take it all as negative cues, rather than finding a way to spin it to positive. And this is actually really sad, because it means that there's so many ambient cues that wind up influencing the messaging that we interpret, and what we decide we can be. So, there's great research from Sapna Cheryan, who talks about what's called ambient belonging, and she did these experiments where they take two classrooms. One classroom looks kind of like a stereotypical science lab. There might be some Star Trek posters on the wall, other science gear, just very skewed, very heavily male STEM stereotype. The other classrooms just look like neutral classrooms. There are plans. Maybe some pictures of plants. Very, very neutral. And what she found is that, in the environment that looks very, very heavily male, women were almost unable to develop a sense of relatedness and a sense of motivation, because of what's called ambient belonging.

Allison Mishkin: And even when she put women in those rooms and asked ... She put dummy female in those rooms, would ask women a survey and say, "Do you think you want to study in this classroom?" If it was the classroom with the Star Trek posters on the wall, women said, "No, I still don't think it's for me," because of just how many cues we take from our environment. Whereas, when it was the classroom that was still going to be the same computer science class, but with plants, there didn't even need to be women in it for women to say, "Actually, you know, maybe I would consider taking this class. Maybe this class if for me." And then, when you put women in that classroom, that class becomes even more for them.

Allison Mishkin: So, what we learn from this is that, we're going to take cues from wherever we are about what it is that is possible for us, so it's really, really important, from a very young age, to start designing environments where we feel comfortable.

Jen McFadden: I think the other interesting thing, and this is very relevant for you as well, and I see it with my daughter as well, is that per the research, women tend to be very interested in Computer Science +. So, the application thereof to solve real-world problems, and you see this a lot, also, in entrepreneurship, and not necessarily computer science for the sake of computer science. So, if your messaging is, "You can learn this technology to help this person or solve this real-world problem," you're bringing more people in the fold than just, "Come learn this cool technology." Can you talk a little bit about how that influence you?

Allison Mishkin: Completely. So, I think that that's exactly right, and what's really interesting and sad is, we get men in with like, "We're going to have you solve this cool technology," but then, they also do wind up solving ... Ultimately, very few people now are getting computer science PhDs. It's a different problem in the field. What happens is, people, they want to build stuff, they want to make things, they want to apply it towards what they're passionate about. So, I find
this research really compelling. It's kind of what I've always done, is try to use my tech skills to apply it towards, usually, things with young women in tech. But I recently launched, or a couple years ago, I launched an initiative called Bit by Bit, which was an idea I designed to make a community of high-school-age women in computer science. And when we were designing the panels for that, when we were building everything around it, it was all about what computer science can do for you, and every single panel and every single event is mapped to some sort of thing on, what gets women interested?

Allison Mishkin: So, we have panels on computer science for social good, computer science and art, computer science and solving a business issue, and really kind of thinking about the so what, so women can really see the variety of paths and opportunities within it. Because what happens is, you hear computer science and you think like, "Oh, man underground coding in front of his laptop all day long."

Jen McFadden: By himself.

Allison Mishkin: Yes. Definitely by himself. With a lot of pizza, probably, and some Cheetos. But-

Jen McFadden: Yes. In a hoodie and some jeans, and flip flops.

Allison Mishkin: And Warby Parkers, probably like mine. When in reality, as anyone who has worked in the tech field can tell you, that is not at all what it's like. So, our goal is to try to diversify what visions of careers in computer science look like, and show you that breadth available to you so that you can begin to see yourself within it.

Jen McFadden: So, to that end, what makes you optimistic about the future?

Allison Mishkin: I do a lot of work with young women on the side, and honestly, whenever I interact with a young person, they have so much sparkle and sense of possibility, it makes me really, really excited. And one of the things that I realized when I was running Bit by Bit ... I started Bit by Bit. I had a bunch of ideas. I was like, "This researcher says this. This researcher says this. I did research on parents, which says this," and I'd kind of try to cobble all of my research and other people's research together into a compelling product. And I realized, no one wants to listen to me tell them why more women should do computer science. And honestly, the only reason why I think more women should do computer science is because I think that there are so many things that happen in a young woman's life, from zero to 18, that take away their sense of agency, and I think people feeling like they have agency is the most important thing in the world. And computer science, I think, is the best way to make all teenagers recognize that they have some control, because when you make something, you feel powerful.
Allison Mishkin: That's the similar thing for entrepreneurship, is that when you make something, you feel powerful, so how can we get more young people making things, because when people feel powerful, they do better. Sorry. Allison's wide vision aside, when I created this vision for Bit by Bit, and then I was like, "Look, I already have arguably too much agency. What I need is for more young people to see that they have that." So, I started mentoring young women in actually running the event, designing the event, doing outreach to keynotes. One year, we had Mindy Kaling keynote. I don't actually write that email. I said to a high school woman, "If you want me to edit the email, I will. If you want to write a P.S., make Mindy Kaling Allison's best friend, I wouldn't complain," but generally, the goal is, how do I empower more young women to do this?

Allison Mishkin: And as I've done this every year, there are more and more young women I see who say and take on the charge of, "Allison, can I be a leader this year?" "Allison, I really want to ..." I've noticed the effects of being a leader, and the spark that it gives young women to feel like they're giving it back to their community, to their girl group, and the number of young women who are, I think, so passionate about this, just really makes me incredible happy. And I've seen, through running-

Jen McFadden: Including my daughter, who went a couple of years and was an ambassador, and now is studying computer science and English, again, the application thereof.

Allison Mishkin: Yeah.

Jen McFadden: So, doing data journalism.

Allison Mishkin: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I think she's a great example of exactly what I want to achieve, which is A) How do we bring her voice into the conversation of designing what computer science can and should look like? So, that's why we created an ambassador program. As well as, she came to this thing, hopefully was a little bit inspired, and then went back to her community and it just really, really ... Look, most adults, we're kind of jaded about the world. We hear Trump is getting impeached and we kind of assume, "Eh, nothing'll happen." But it's really fun to work with young people, because they have a vision for change, and they're going to make it happen. And I just consider myself lucky that I get to work with them.

Jen McFadden: Looking forward, I think one of the things that we try to do here that really is coming from this piece of the research that I've done around the self-efficacy in entrepreneurship, but also computer science programs is, we talk a little bit about how hard it is. And I think that's one of the things that's not acknowledged. So, if somebody doesn't understand how difficult something is when they enter into it, and they don't have a person of authority saying to them, "This is going to be hard, expect it to be hard. You can still do it," they get into a situation where they're sitting in a classroom and they're not
understanding something and they kind of just decide not to do it. So, what other things would you encourage people who are either faculty members, or who are mentors, or who are working to pull more people into either of those fields to communicate to the next generation of girls?

Allison Mishkin: Well, you took my first one, which is communicate that it's going to be very, very difficult. And I think communicating that it's be difficult, but communicating that it's going to be worth it, I think, is really important. That there's some things, when you hear difficult, they're like, "I've done things that were difficult that were not worth it." I survived an undergraduate algorithms class. Not worth it. Not worth it. Did not feel like I'd accomplished something at the end. Whereas, I think that what's really important is recognizing, "This will be a very difficult journey, but you will feel rewarded every day as a result of it." I think also trying to showcase diverse paths within the field, and saying like, "There are lots of outcomes, because it's hard, that might be interesting and that might be applicable to you." For example, I was a guest mentor at the University of Pennsylvania last year for a couple of days, and I basically spent a lot of time talking to young women and men saying, "It's okay to do the unorthodox thing," and kind of normalizing the idea that doing something unorthodox does not mean wrong, but it might be difficult.

Allison Mishkin: And I think that there's such an established path, I think part of it, you want to explain that it's difficult, but part of it is helping you combat the social anxieties and the insecurities that will come up because you're doing something different. So, when you graduate from SOM and say, "I want to be an independent consultant specializing in technology and child development," and everyone is like, "I want to be a real consultant for McKinsey Bain, or BCG," it can feel-

Jen McFadden: And have a steady paycheck, and my loans forgiven.

Allison Mishkin: Exactly. It can be very scary to say, "I think that this will be okay in the end," and I think one of the great things that the Program on Entrepreneurship did to me was not just say it's going to be difficult, but have people say it's going to be worth it, and have people say it worked out okay. And have people even who struggled a little bit in entrepreneurship and then wound up going to just working for a company, but say, "These are all the things I'm glad I learned, even though I failed."

Jen McFadden: Yeah, which is a big part of what we say. We tend to say, "Go take that class that's helping you learn technology. Go take CS50. Go take CS101. Go try to take my class or someone else's class in entrepreneurship and get something off the ground, because even if you ... First of all, if you take any of those classes and you get a C, or a PR here, proficient, or a pass, your parents are still going to love you. Your friends are still going to talk to you, and you will have learned something along the way, and you will have learned something about yourself. So, even if you fail to get something off the ground, or if you get a C in a CS class, you will have gotten something out of it in the end."
Allison Mishkin: And when I first graduated from undergrad, I had gotten a couple of full-time offers from like on-campus recruiting, and I was like, "I just don't see myself being happy there. I have this passion. I really don't want to be a big cog, at least in this point in my career. What do I do?" And I just kind of hustled, and I talked to as many people as I could in my field, and then I would end each conversation with, "Who do you think I should talk to? Who do you think I should talk to?" And I wound up, through that, getting two really exciting opportunities, one to launch this thing for Rupert Murdoch, and I have met Mr. Murdoch, and one at Sesame Street. And at Sesame Street, and I worked there for a number of years, every single thing that I got there was just by hustling and kind of saying, "Wait, wait, I want to do that thing, too. Can you just put that on my plate?" And the skills that I learned from that, I think, have really paralleled into being an entrepreneur in terms of, you just have to make space for yourself at the table.

Allison Mishkin: You have to be really comfortable advocating for yourself at every single turn, and things that I wish I'd had someone, because while you're doing that and all your friends are saying, "Why are you skipping out on dinner Saturday night to go work on this side project for Sesame Street?" It can be very difficult. You're like, "Well, I just feel like it will work out someday," and there's a lot of imposter syndrome that comes up, and I think the more we can talk about that, the more we can talk about that ... I talk to high schoolers and they ask me, "How do you fight imposter syndrome every day?" And I talked to college students last year and they said, "How do you fight imposter syndrome? You don't get it anymore, because you're so successful." And I was like, "Are you kidding? Are you kidding me?" I have solutions, which is, I remind myself of, "Oh, there was that thing that I did where I didn't completely fail," and I've developed ways to combat it, but I think we don't talk about the fact that I don't consider myself successful, but I don't a lot of people who do. I'm clearly here, so I'm fine. That we all have these issues and we're just afraid to verbalize the fact that they never go away.

Jen McFadden: Last question that I always ask is, what book are you giving as a gift this year?

Allison Mishkin: Fleishman Is in Trouble.

Jen McFadden: Why? I guess I should have followed up with a why.

Allison Mishkin: I was torn between that and The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead's new book. Fleishman Is in Trouble is an excellent book about the modern marriage, but in particular, about what happens to feminism and what happens to relationships when we have women in the workforce and women who are as driven, and how do we honor everyone's perspective about that? It's a really great book about ... It's a fiction book by Taffy Brodesser-Akner, who writes a lot of profiles for The New York Times about celebrities, and she does a really good job, if you read her profiles, like really getting into the minds of people. And what I really, really respected about this book is, I think it did an excellent job at making everyone into both the hero and the victim, both the men, and the women, and the
children, and showing the valid points of views that everyone has, and how do we live with the discomfort that everyone's just trying to make space for themselves in this world?

Jen McFadden: Awesome. So good that we started with the book club and we're ending with the book club. Clearly, you just indicated why you were able to do book club when you were 16. Allison, such a pleasure to have you back on campus. Thank you again for coming.

Allison Mishkin: Thanks so much for having me.