

## **Apple Box Talks – Season 2 Episode 2 – Interview with Gladys Tong**

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(upbeat music)

CB: IATSE 891 presents Apple Box Talks, the podcast where we get to talk to the very best artists, technicians, and stakeholders that make up the BC entertainment industry. From prep to post and everything in between, we create worlds on screens of all sizes.

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HB: Welcome to Apple Box Talks. I'm Hillary

CB: and I'm Crystal and this week we're joined by an industry leader who works to fuse art and technology to entertain, inform, and inspire motion picture audiences.

HB: With credits to their name such as *Percy Jackson*, *The Last of Us*, *Deadpool 2*, *Star Trek Beyond* and *Watchmen*, we welcome Gladys Tong. So pull up an Apple Box and let's talk.

CB: Hi, Gladys. Thank you for coming today.

GT: Thank you for having me.

CB: So, when you started G Creative, there weren't a lot of people doing what you do. How did you get into this work?

GT: Thanks for asking. I got into this industry through the phone book. For those of you who have never used one, it used to be that you got this big thick paper book that you could look up anything you wanted, and you could get businesses and phone numbers. I was renting a monitor in Vancouver at the time and I went into the phone book and I basically was looking for a very specific model of a monitor and went through computer rentals and found the cheapest place that would rent me this specific model, which was an NEC multi -sync monitor, I was a nerd back then already. And that company rented it to me for about a week before they called me back. And they said, "We need it back." And this was a highly unusual business practice back then even. And I said, "Well, why would you want my monitor back, and couldn't you get it from somebody else? And they said, no, we need your specific one because we have this other business. We rent to the film and television industry and we do something called 24 frame playback. And I just thought, this is nuts. I've never heard of this. I mean, they offered to replace it with another monitor, but I got curious. So, I said, "Okay, I'll give it back and I'll take this other one on one condition. I want to see this. I want you to prove it to me." And that's how I got into the film industry.

HB: I think that's my favorite origin story so far because you basically started as a hostage negotiator. [laughing] So, how did you come up with the name G Creative? Does the G stand for Gladys?

GT: Well, I would love to say something very, you know, profound that the G stands for, but the truth is that I had to find a name very quickly because I was incorporating, and I didn't want a numbered company. And this was at the time where Apple had come out with the iMac. And it was, you know, if you were following computers and you were a nerd, you'd be thinking about these names going, "Wow, this is cool." And I believe Jobs decided that "i" was a symbol for the internet, and Mac was for Macintosh, for example, so an iMac was their name, and it was so cool, and I thought, "Oh, I want to be cool too." So I thought I could just find a letter

sort of as a parallel and I started with G and I think subconsciously Yeah, probably started with Gladys because was easy - But I hate my name anyway, so I thought G's perfect because G could also stand for other things like Geek, Growth, I mean it was just so cool that it wasn't literal and And I love that. I love the fact that it was a bit ambiguous and it could stand for many things. And that was the point. So I said, I want the letter G. And they said, no, you can't do that. It was illegal to do that. You have to have another name. So I had to quickly pull out something else that kind of spoke to the core of what I value. And I think a creative was something that just came to mind right away.

CB: In the simplest of terms, you could be described as working in computer graphics or digital technology for motion picture, but it's a lot more complicated than that, right? So how do you describe what you do? What is your title on set and functionality in relation to the rest of the working environment?

GT: This is a really tough question. Actually, it's funny. I actually avoid trying to answer that question usually, especially when you get together with people at a party and they go, "Well, what do you do?" And the reason I avoid it, it's always a conversation. It's never, you know, I'm a lawyer. I'm an accountant. It's always this very long description that nobody understands. And so, yes, it's usually a conversation, so over the years, I think I look at the situation, who am I talking to, and what situation I'm in. If I'm in a sort of a time constraint, I'll say computer graphics, because that's one of the things that describes what I do, and it's easily understood. But the reality is that it's a bunch of things. If I had to put it into a category, it would be the integration of hardware and software for live on set production. I mean, it's a mouthful. I think I love my job because of it too. It's hard to describe, but essentially 24 frame playback is what is known in our industry as the category and video playback is another term, but I think the most important thing is that it's not one thing, and even people in our industry don't understand what we do. Even productions always confuse video assist with video playback, and oftentimes we'll get a call looking for a video assist job, but we're actually video playback. And these are people who've been working with us for decades, you know? When I talk to people, usually, if they get interested in what we do, we get to tell them about this very, very small niche area. It has a bit of technology for all the nerds who love to talk about hardware and computers and processors and RAM and CPU and GPU and all these other acronyms. But then there's this other beautiful balance to that definition of creativity, and then it's about Art, it's about visual design. The one area that I really engaged with was human computer interaction and what that is is it's human beings working with tech essentially and we deal with the interface between those two worlds. That I think is a nutshell of what we do.

CB: So can you put that into sort of the context of a scene? So if you're on set and directors yells action, what's your job at that point?

GT: So anything that's a display, anything that has a visual component on a screen, we are responsible for both in the content, what you see, that's the camera sees, what the actors are usually doing in either response directly to that display, or in the set as part of the design of the set. Sometimes it's a prop, sometimes it's set dressing, sometimes it's a backdrop. We are responsible to carry out the playback of the content. I think that is probably the most succinct way I can put it.

CB: Yeah, right. So if there's a television on in the background,

GT: sure,

CB: you're responsible for what's playing on that television in the background.

GT: Yes. So in a nutshell, it's anything that you see that has a digital interface. We are responsible and that can range from something as tiny as - we did *Elysium* with Matt Damon and he had a head instrument that had a postage stamp of a display and we were responsible for that. But it also could be a big video wall. So it's large and small. But the main thing is that we are responsible for the hardware to have the content playback as well as any interaction if an actor is reacting to, you know, even typing an email or composing something on the laptop. Then we have to be responsible for playing that back.

HB: So Motion Picture is one of the industries where it's easiest to see how closely art and science play together. And it's led to some amazing advances in how we tell stories. How have you personally experienced those changes impacting your work?

GT: So one of the reasons I got into the film industry, I think is that I've always loved storytelling and visual storytelling. I loved watching movies, imagining the stories that were told and how it reflects my life. And it's usually what a lot of people enjoy entertainment for. It's an escape from their own world. But it's also a reflection of our society. And in the time that I've been in the industry, I have been living my life along with the technology that's changed. You know, I remember the first cell phone. I remember the change of the size of the cell phones. I remember my first laptop. And this was all paralleling the industry as I was working to tell stories that involve technology. So it's almost like you're engaged just by living your life as a human being on this earth and having been in Canada and growing up in the industry in Vancouver and seeing all of this change, it's impacted for sure the things that I want to say about tech. And we sometimes, not always, but we often get the opportunity to work with the creative storytellers, directors, designers, producers, and we try to give our two cents in how we've reacted to those changes. So in some small way I feel like we want to have a voice in those stories. I mean we don't get to write them and we have very little power but I think it's important sometimes as you know film is a collaborative process anyway and I think there is a lot of input from a lot of different departments and we are just one department that works so closely with the tech that our voices sometimes help influence those storytelling beats.

CB: So you've worked on some pretty incredible feature films and TV series, most recently *Percy* and *The Last of Us*, but over 60 credits. You've been part of building this area of our industry and been around a long time.

GT: Yes, I'm old

CB: and I say that with great respect because, you know, so many people that we've interviewed have been a part of that building blocks of, of what we're known for, for our highly skilled crews and you are part of that. And so I want to know what, what is the coolest thing you've done?

GT: Wow. That's a, that's a lot to have to sift through. Actually, thank you for that. I feel very fortunate to have been alongside a lot of people in the industry growing up with it over the last 20, 25, 30 years, some of our veterans that I work with have been even longer. Yeah, you never really look back. At least I don't. I try to look forward. So it's tough sometimes being interviewed like a podcast like this where you have to kind of like talk about your life looking back. I do enjoy, you know, everybody loves to talk about themselves but I try to think about the journey in the present day like we spend a lot of time worrying about the future worrying about the past and I'm trying to deliberately live in the moment. But there are things to share that we have had what I call the data to look back and analyze. And growing up in Vancouver with this industry has been a privilege actually. We learned a lot. We grew up together, a lot of us. I feel like this is a family, a community that's helped each other. The biggest thing I want to think about when I look back on all of those credits is not the number of credits, it's always the stories themselves, right? We are, I feel like I'm a collector of stories, and that's my favorite part. I'm not always good at telling them, like today I feel like I have to, you know, tell good stories, but really it's a lived experience and some of us are better than others at telling those stories, but we for sure have gone through those stories. We've lived them and it's a privilege to have had that opportunity.

CB: And is there anything that stands out to you?

GT: There's so many stories. Crystal, I could name a few. One of the highlights, I think, for our industry was when Star Trek came to town. Star Trek, it was special because it was their 50th anniversary and I believe at that time they had never shot outside of the U.S. in California, and they chose Vancouver to do this. And this was Star Trek Beyond and I believe that was in 2015 or 2016 when the movie was made and it came out. It was a very, very special thing because they had the confidence in our crews to be able to take something so iconic and trust us with it and believe in our crews. You know, the majority of our crews were local. They were all people that we grew up together with. And so when Star Trek came, it felt like a significant kind of pat on the back. It's not always about like the biggest. I know that it's not always about the name, sometimes there's smaller movies that you go, "Wow, that's incredible." And there are lots of stories in that category, people that

have won Oscars. You know, I remember meeting a director for the first time who won an Oscar for writing, you know, 12 Years Slave. And I was amazed. It was a small little movie. I felt so lucky that we get a chance to meet some of the most amazing artists and people in our industry and on a global level and they choose Vancouver for whatever reason. I just think, wow, we get invited to the party and there's been a lot of parties.

HB: I mean, my little nerd heart is so happy that we're talking about Star Trek right now because the first time I got to work with you was through the virtual production workshop that we put on for members in collaboration with our friends at 669 and with Gladys and we got to stand in that Star Trek virtual set. Can you tell us a little bit about how virtual production impacted your work and why you gave so much to that training because we couldn't have pulled it off without you?

GT: Thanks a lot, Hillary. I feel like that's one of the benefits of sticking with the same profession and sticking to the same thing for years and years because the momentum that you build doing this, there's all these unintended consequences and they're very positive and one of them is being able to be a part of a community with 669 and 891 and the Teamsters and pulling all the resources that us collectively put together for that workshop and to do it for the reasons that I thought was so important - there's nobody who's making money off of it- it was a lot of volunteer it was for the right reason, it was for education and awareness and my favorite thing is bridging all of these different worlds and departments and knowledge. And if we can do more of that, I would love it. So I was hoping that was only the first workshop of many. Unfortunately, they dismantled the virtual production volume right after our workshop. And so that was the first and last in that space. But what it did is it brought us closer together. And it made us work well with 669 and the Teamsters to try to tackle a new kid on the block, a new tech. And I don't think this will be the last, but virtual production is an excellent example of a conversation about what is going to happen. Because when I started, this is not even a thing, right? It's only come about in the last five years in Vancouver. Virtual production, if I don't know if I need to explain it, but

CB: yes, please do.

GT: So virtual production in our industry is, it's a big stage that uses LED panels. So it's like a large, large display. And so for me, it wasn't a huge deviation from what I've been doing. But the scale of it was massive. It's made up of a well, 3,000 panels of LED, but it's also tracking the cameras that we use to shoot in our industry, and it also utilizes a 3D gaming engine. And in this particular case, we were using Unreal. So those three kind of main ingredients come together to help us make a new form of film production. And so we call that virtual production often times you use the panels to display a backdrop that is a location Interior or an exterior digital image. But the difference is that when you move the camera the environment is in 3D and it moves and tracks correctly, so you'll get the parallax and the perspectives that are proper in our film camera and then we record it.

CB: And so volume is unique because traditionally we would put actors in front of a green screen, right? And then digitally insert the environment afterwards. And so volume is like, you have to create that entire world ahead of time and then put the actors in front of it and then film it that way. So speak to the differences there.

GT: So visual effects has always in trying to push the envelope in technology for various reasons, whether it's a process to make things faster, look better, simulate real-world conditions that are difficult to shoot so that we have more tools basically available to us. And I know that a lot of people talk about the Mandalorian as the origins of virtual production and using that as the bar. So what happened is once that technology got unleashed, everybody was trying it out. 'Cause it helped also that during the pandemic, we had a lot of challenges for logistics to be on locations. So this technology served a really good purpose. It brought locations to the studios. So it's kind of a flipped technology that it had to come together because the sophistication of the 3D gaming engine was at a stage where we could harness that software, which was not built for this purpose, but it was adapted for film production. So people still talk about game engine and somebody had the brilliant idea and you know Jon Favreau's credited for that to use it for the purposes of filming. The problem with the technology is that because it's built for gaming and the fact that it's so new not a lot of people had any experience working with it Including myself. Either you were an expert in one aspect or another, it's hardware, because it's building these giant LED panels and putting it in a configuration, usually in a semi-circle, in a cylinder, this was one aspect. Then you had motion capture technology using motion tracking technology with

the LED panels. And then adding this component of this gaming engine, well, what do you get? You get a giant science experiment.

CB: It's what I love about film workers in general. We have these minds that want to solve problems constantly and as you've described this, I can see you guys carving that path, and you've walked down that path.

GT: Yeah, I think nothing is ever in isolation in film, it is so complex. We have so many people involved and so many companies and I never want to leave anybody out. There are a lot of partners. There are a lot of experts in various areas and we all have to come together and solve problems. And I think this is very common to a lot of our crew members. We're always doing something we've never done before. Maybe we've done a part of it, but we've never done this exact thing before. We're faced with having to solve it usually last minute, usually in the heat of the moment. It's interesting that even after so many years, I still have that deer in headlights of a request that comes in because I can't believe they just asked us to do this. There's a lot of that. But I think there's a really exciting part of that. If you are doing something you never do twice, you're always challenged and there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, as long as you survive on the other side and you're not completely destroyed by it, then you just pick yourself up and you, you become stronger, right? I, uh, I think there's this Chinese saying about a knife that doesn't get sharp unless it rubs against, you know, a rock. And I always feel like you just become better with every challenge that comes your way. So virtual production was one of these technologies that was a little bit of a quantum leap because it, even if you knew something about one aspect, it's that combination that came together that was very challenging. And our workshop, going back to what Hillary was referencing, I think we put a lot of effort in that workshop because after an experience like this, you recognize that we all need to learn more. And even if you learn a lot about one aspect, it's not enough. There's more to learn. There's never a shortage. And just when you think you've learned it, the bar's moved again, the technology's evolved, and you have to relearn something, or you have to learn it again, or you have to pivot. This is a very topical thing right now, because as we embark on the discussion for AGI or AI, I think this is even more relevant because the pace of change is almost exponential. Every day I find out somebody is using an AI app or a tool in a different way that I never heard before, like literally every day. And this is recent, like in the last couple of weeks. So I think our conversation about technology is gonna have to continue. I think we should continue the conversation. I don't think anybody knows enough about any one aspect to be able to advise us. But having the conversations with many people from different perspectives becomes increasingly important for all of us.

HB: I think you've highlighted something so important that we've talked about, about a necessity to keep human, a human-centric focus in the middle of all of these conversations, because we're all looking at a future that has more technology, not less. How do you preserve that human-centric approach in the way that you approach this learning?

GT: Thanks for asking. That's an excellent question. And I think it's actually a really good focus if we keep asking ourselves that question, human-centered. I mean, the one thing that I found very fascinating about virtual production, if we just use that as an example, you know, it is one of the cutting-edge technologies that Hollywood and filmmaking has seen in the last few years. It made me think more about the old ways of doing film. It was a bit of an epiphany standing on this giant display with a very sophisticated technology, lots of computing power, a fully 3D immersive digital environment. This is stuff that 10 years ago, 20 years ago, we would think we were in Star Trek. But it actually harkened back to some old-style techniques. And what I reflected on is that the further in advancement of this tech that I am participating in and I get a front row seat at, the more I'm thinking and other filmmakers and even our director in some of the episodes, we were using old world techniques. And it reminded me that just because we're thinking we're advancing in one direction doesn't mean that we abandoned where we came from and it's almost kind of came full circle like there was a convergence of old tech and new tech it's a deeper discussion but when we think of AGI and we are thinking about artificial intelligence and the word artificial is the opposite, in my mind, of what we're talking about, human-centered. We are humans, and we always think that we can do things like, at first, you're competing with artificial technology. We have to compute faster. We have to talk faster. We have to think faster. We have to be faster. But we also have to go to sleep and rest and we have to meditate. We have to empty our mind. We have to do the opposite. And that defines us as human beings. We're organic. We're not inorganic. We

have emotions. We need to connect with others. But technology doesn't satisfy some of those human needs. Social media is one of the things that I always look to as an example of that. We have this ability to connect so wide, so far. And I ask the question, does that make us more connected? Are we having deeper connections with more people? Do we have more friends? Are we happier? And I think it's not a slam dunk, right? I mean, I don't know if you would agree, but it feels like there's more anxiety. And that shouldn't happen, right? You think if you hold hands with more people, you should feel more secure. You should feel happier, more connected as a community, and we should be coming together as one, right? Our world is supposed to be more unified if that's the case. But I know that that's not true. I know that there are a lot of issues that have arisen from social media that are quite the opposite, and maybe not for my generation as much as for the younger generations coming out. And if you care about other people, and that's the humans, then you're going to ask these questions. Like, do we really need this? And is it going to get us to a place where the human side of us gets to develop and flourish? And I don't know what, I mean, it depends on your values and your goals. What do you want? And that's what makes me more interested in having these discussions because I try to talk to people more, not through digital means. I actually enjoy having face-to-face conversations. And I've heard that that's not common these days with the younger generation, they'd rather talk through texting or, you know, through these apps. But human beings, ultimately, I mean, I'm looking at your eyes. I'm looking at both of your eyes, you know, and we're connecting. We're physically in the same space. This is important. We could have done this over Zoom. We have the technology. But what makes us want to be together physically, even if it's not necessary. So then it begs the question, just because you have the technology, you know, should we?

CB: Yeah, that's a very, very big question. You know, there's feeling behind being human, right? There's that whole piece of connectivity that, you know, artificial intelligence can tell you about feelings, but that human beingness, that connection, is so important. And the IA's philosophy is human-centric, using AI as a tool and leveraging it from our sort of place of knowledge and where we want to go. So we have a hold of it, it doesn't have a hold of us. Can you take that sort of philosophy and apply it to motion picture. How do you see AI impacting motion picture workers?

GT: Yeah, that's a very important question for all of us in the industry because we want to anticipate how we need to react to this new tech. I'm not an expert in AI. I can only tell you that my gut feeling is that in order to prepare for something new, 'cause this has happened for me, whether it was a new technology for playback in the past or like virtual production being a new tech, I think knowledge, first of all, you have to educate yourself and try to educate yourself by exposing yourself to all views, different perspectives, different experts who may provide some truth potential that you can collect. And hopefully if you collect enough truths, you'll get to a bigger truth that can lead you in a wiser path. I think that we look at technology as a tool. What's different in my mind with AGI is that there's some terms that I've heard people use AI is not really artificial, it's actually alien. Have you heard that? Yeah, so alien intelligence. Now, the reason they use this term is because it's not something that we know. It's not like a tool that we've seen before. It has a little bit of an agency and it's starting to increase in that regard. We've seen or heard of scenarios where it thinks for itself. It can create something new. So it's not just an input/output, you know, information in, information out. It's not just automation, you know, if it's a repetitive task. This type of technology is just going to replace those tasks. It has a different component to it that I think is creating the fear. And I don't think fear is a bad thing. I think fear is a good thing. It means that we're human instincts of feeling like we need to do something different. And I think that we should listen to that instinct. I don't have the answer as to what the impact is going to be because it's like a crystal ball. but I know that to prepare for this we need to try to educate ourselves on what we do know. We need to define what our values are as to what we want it to do. It goes back to like just because we can, should we. I'm not even sure if you know some people think that question is irrelevant now because it's too late you know there's a there's a real fatalist view that, you know, we were going to be overrun. It's a lot like our science fiction movies, right?

CB: I just need you to tell me we're not going to live in Westworld, please.

GT: Well, if you do, you won't know it, Crystal. How about that? You won't feel a thing. It's like the Matrix. I mean, I think that's why we got fascinated by those narratives, right? Because, a lot of science fiction has been written like a hundred years ago that's warned us about these potential realities, right? And that's not good

enough. We've known about this possibility for a long time. But we don't necessarily react the way we think we should because other values come into play. We get distracted. We look at the positive things of what this technology brings and sometimes it's easier just to ignore the doom and gloom because You know, it's a tough time. We live in a world that has a lot of negativity - I'm a very positive person. I want everyone to, you know, always think more positively and hopeful but also without, you know, their heads buried in the sand, try to be responsible. So I do reflect a lot to try to gain wisdom. I ask people a lot of questions, especially those people who have lived longer than me and may have some insights that I don't have. 'Cause I think back to when I first started, I definitely don't have as much to say that I do now because I've seen more. So I'm hoping that we're going to be smarter than that, smarter meaning wiser, because we can't compete on a computational level. There's just no way, right? So then it becomes, well, what is it that we are using these tools for? Are they going to run us? They already are, and there's a lot of examples of that, but how much are we willing to allow that? If it starts to be making decisions for your life, how do you feel about that? Do you want that? Maybe you do. So it becomes a question of a community, a society's value system of what they really want. And are they willing to trade this for that?

CB: I have an interesting sort of sidebar story here. So we were watching television, I have a seven year old son. We were watching television and Elon Musk just recently came out with the robots, essentially, right? I said, "Oh, man, I just want someone to fold my laundry and put it away." And my seven -year -old said, "Mommy, no, no, what if it turns bad?" Oh! And we've never talked about, you know, AI with him. And that was his first instinct. What if it turns bad?

GT: You see, we need to take the lessons from our kids and the younger generation and because they haven't been either contaminated or distracted as much, right? That's an excellent question, right? And I think that is the human part of us and it's an instinctive thing and we should listen to that. I mean, I think one of the things I want to make sure that when we get really scared and we're afraid of things and I happens to me all the time with the technology I mean as soon as a new software comes up. I'm like, oh my gosh I don't know I don't know this and I need to know this for my job And how am I gonna keep up and always there's a lot of things to be fearful and anxious about But if you pare it down to simple a simple equation Yeah, what if if there's something bad? Are you willing to have this robot fold your laundry if it has the risk of, I don't know, hurting you, right? Well, you have to make that decision as an individual, and then collectively, we have to make a decision. The problem is, is who's making the decision for us?

HB: I think one of the things that's really struck me in this conversation even so far is how much of this comes back to another question. Every question we ask leads to another question, whereas one of the faults that's been highlighted about where things are at right now with some of these intelligences is because of the way they've been taught, the way they've been trained, jumping to conclusions, having AI hallucinations, perpetuating really problematic stereotypes because it doesn't necessarily right now have the capacity to ask a question. And so the worst parts of ourselves are getting amplified, and it's scary to think that our development is losing that questioning, that interrogation of, "Just because we can, should we?"

GT: Are we ignoring that question, Hillary, do you think? Is that what you're thinking?

HB: I wonder, yeah, we're building into this technology that avoidance of the questions, because questions, for some people, perceive questions as a delay to advancement.

GT: Yeah, there's definitely two camps about AI/AGI. It's the same old conversation that I've had in the past about Windows versus Mac, Apple, or Linux. There's these systems that are closed, there's systems that are open, sharing everything, that don't put any locks on the doors and don't hide anything, have everything available to everybody at all time. There's that camp. And then there's this other camp that, no, we want to control, we'll give you a little bit, but we're going to control the rest. And in a very simple way, we are looking at AGI in the same way that OpenAI versus Meta have released their large learning models, and in Europe, they're having a lot of this kind of debate about governance too, and this is a whole other topic and I didn't think we would be going down this path, but at first I thought, "Wow, we can have AGI and all these wonderful tools that make our lives better if we have proper governance. And I thought there's a naive model about, you know, if we do this, then we're gonna do that and everything's gonna be great. And it's not the way anything has ever

worked. I mean, it comes down to trust, right? Trust, do you trust? Who do you trust? This is a big question. I mean, I think the lack of trust or the false sense of trust determines a lot in our lives. I mean, everything from your friends and family and your everyday decisions on information, right? Like there's a lot happening all at once, information explosion, but at the same time, trust. Trust is a big topic because these tools erode authenticity. You don't know if this is real. How do you know this is my voice? I mean, how do I know this is really you or me? Or, you know, we are in the same room. We can see each other. There's a tactile aspect to it. There's a human instinct that what I see with my eyes, I know there's Crystal, there's Hillary, and you guys are talking to me in this room right now. But there's a lot in the digital world that's an illusion. And we are putting so much faith in illusion. And I go back to what we talked about earlier about anxiety, because a lot of the younger generation who grew up with social media as their truths, and they've put their trust that their friends are having this great time, and their curated lives are their real lives. and they're feeling bad about themselves because they know the only thing that they do know is what they're doing or not doing. And they're comparing themselves to this illusion and trusting that this illusion is truth. So it's dangerous. It's very, very dangerous. The only thing that I take faith in is that human-centered approach, because I know at the end of the day, my instincts are still human, and I choose to listen to that part of me or not. I choose to spend more of my time with the illusion in digital tech or not. These are decisions that you can make on a daily level, right? I mean, there's not a shortage of information to tell you that you're spending seven hours on your phone and today you spent ten hours and you did three thousand steps today and twenty thousand steps. There's no shortage of information, but information itself is not providing the answers to us. So the question is, do you make tools that give you more information so that you think that's going to lead you to more truths, those are more questions, right, Hillary? Just like you said, more questions, beget more questions.

CB: I feel like we could talk to you all day long for a week straight and really appreciate you being here. Is there anything else? Because I feel like we should really do a part two with you.

GT: Oh, no, thank you. I appreciate it. I, you know, one of the things that I wanted to share and I, you know, and I was reluctant to have my voice immortalized in the data in the world out there, feeding another AI. But I do think that we have something to say, even if you feel it's insignificant, every human being out there, I feel has value. They don't always know it, but I enjoy very much talking to different people. Every production that I do, and you said I've done 60 I believe you actually I don't know the exact number it's just been a long time and I'm tired but you know I'm lucky because I'm in one of those departments that you could do you know four or five or six projects in one year because we're not in every scene in every set so that's been a lucky kind of a niche area that I've chosen to spend my time but because of that I've had the fortune of meeting so many people in our IATSE community that I get to work with, and they have expertise in so many different areas that every production I tell myself at the beginning of the production, I'm going to pick a department that I don't know much about, and I'm going to try to learn more about that department. And it's been so rewarding because I get to learn more about a particular craft. But I also get to meet the people making them. And they're not all from Vancouver. Some of them are. A lot of them have either come to Vancouver to work on these films or they're people that we've worked alongside. And the collective knowledge and the collective stories that I've been able to hear and listen to have really given me an advantage, I think, because I don't see a lot of other people doing this tech piece, especially from my position of running a company as a female in tech. It's been a really, really different journey for me, and it hasn't been alongside faces that I've recognised, especially when I started. So that's changed a lot in the last, I would say, five to ten years.

HB: So in the last few years, we've had a lot of campaigns and programmes that we've seen designed to improve gender and racial equity in STEM fields, particularly in tech. We've lost "girls who code" now, but we need more nerds campaign in Science World. And a lot of people I've been highlighting that technology is one of the places where people don't often talk about entrenched racism and entrenched gender bias.

GT: Really? Can you?

HB: Well, in terms of some of the forefront conversations, because they tend to get clouded over, I think, by the initial existential fear of things like AI, but then the secondary conversations, because often the voices we hear the loudest are the voices that are less concerned about equity, right? And I think the people in this room are



really ready and really aware to have those conversations, but that's not always the case in terms of public social commentary. Getting people to look at the reality of racial equity and gender equity in any topic is sometimes a little harder than it probably should be. So in terms of your lived experience as really a pioneer in that field of addressing that head-on when you started your company. You did just speak to the fact that it has improved. Um, I sense we still have a long way to go though.

GT: Yeah, absolutely. I, when I started it, I was a lot younger. So I, I really had one thing in mind, which was to survive, you know, and a lot of people are concerned about making a living- livelihoods, basic essential needs. And I think that's still the case for a lot of people going into a profession. So when you're consumed with that as your goal, you don't actually think a lot about, "Oh, am I being treated fairly? Am I, you know, usually you're the youngest person in the room or you're the newest person, you're the one that needs to learn the most, especially if you start maybe in your 20s and you're in a room full of people in their 40s, right? You're reticent to sort of say anything, you're just trying to absorb everything, and you're trying to find a way to survive. I think we've had the benefit in the last 10 years, I would say, where I could finally look back when I started and say, well, what actually happened? Was I treated fairly, and what are those issues about, especially my, you know, I'm Asian, I'm Chinese, that's my cultural background. There are no Asian parents who tell their kids, yeah, go into film, yeah, go into creative fields, right? Does that ring true for a lot of people?

HB: 100%.

GT: Yeah, I mean, there's, I don't think there's anyone in my family, even to this day, that either have started their own company. I mean, forget the Asian part of it, even any culture, they're not that many founders of companies. And then for the film side of it, yeah, creative fields. I mean, they'll just tell you, you're not going to make a living. You're not going to be able to survive. So if you go into it like I did, you already feel like an outlier. You already feel like, okay, I'm going to do something very risky here. And there is no support. There was definitely no support, Like the networks that we have and the awareness that hey She's the only female in the room or she's the only Asian in tech or she's whatever I mean, there was none of that when I started but I also didn't focus on that It's only when I look back that I recognize. Wow There's so many people who said so many mean things to me or treated me this way or that. I really wanted to take the, I guess the air out of anybody's tire who was going to attack me. I did not want to give it any energy. So if I, I feel instinctively if I was in a situation and there's some that come to mind where somebody was trying to cut you down, you know, for whatever reason. And I didn't have the support. I would just think about, well, what do I need to do in order to sort of overcome this obstacle? And that usually meant putting my head down and just working harder and really put the effort and commit to being smarter. And I had to put the effort in. It was not easy because there were a lot of things that I didn't know. I didn't go to film school and I didn't go to business school. And yet I found myself founder of a company trying to run a company and trying to survive in the film industry. So I really had to put the work in. But lucky for me, I had so much work in front of me that I was too busy to notice that, oh, so -and -so was actually trying to get something from me or trying to attack me and pull me down. So part of it was, I mean, I chalked that up to ignorance, but when it came to things where it was really hard to avoid, I mean, opportunities were taken away because of skin color or gender. That's when I really found myself challenged. I couldn't just pretend that it didn't exist because you don't want to make waves when you're young. You don't want to draw attention to yourself. And, um, and that's the way I was also brought up to, you know, quietly do the work. And I think I also felt like everything is hard and everything is a fight. And so when you're in that mindset, somebody's attacking you. What do you do? You put on a pair of gloves and you go, "I'm going to punch back," right? And you almost have to have that attitude of, "I'm going to fight, but how am I going to fight? I'm going to fight in a way that I'm going to be proud of myself." So if I resorted to any tactics that were unethical, for example, that would have taken away the satisfaction. If you were able to win and you knew that you kind of cheated, oh my gosh, that would be so unsatisfying, right? So you had to win on a high ethical kind of basis. That was for me. So I would either try to find a way to overcome the obstacle by being better at what I did and also not be greedy. So for example, if we had a budget and usually to win a contract, the logic was if you were cheaper, you would be more favorable, right? So I thought, well, if that's a race to the bottom, that's not a good solution. It's unwise because even if you win today, tomorrow you're working for a lot less, right? Because you've made this deal to be so low. But yet you're tempted because you want to beat the other bid. I mean this is a real situation in a lot of productions, it's a lot about money. So you had to ask

yourself, "Well, okay, what am I going to do to beat this bid, but I don't want to go to be the cheapest?" Well, you got to have something to make up for it, right? So you offer something else. And it was always this equation that I was playing with. Well, I'm going to be maybe not the best at this, say it's a creative design and I know somebody could be better, but I'm going to be better at this other thing. So it's about maybe pivoting and perhaps maybe creating a very complex set of skills that I could fight with, because it's not just one dimension, it's a multi dimension. And I am trying to see if this is a good tactic and mentality to fight AGI coming into the workforce to take away our jobs. I wonder if this was a way for me to survive and can I take that lesson forward and retool and think about the other skillsets that we need to arm ourselves and train ourselves with in order to beat this new tech and to maintain the human-centered values that we need to uphold.

CB: Well, yeah, it is incredibly inspiring how you move through the world, through your work. And I feel like you can do anything.

GT: We can all do anything, really. The message is, I actually don't think there's anything that complicated. If we just have the right perspective, you know, it's how you were brought up. If you show people respect, hopefully they'll respect you back, right? We can't give up on those very basic principles. It's worked well for those of us who care about the society we live in. It's not just about me, it's not just about how much money I'm going to make. It's like what kind of community do you want to live with? Most of the people now today and in future productions, I hear a lot of, well, I didn't take that job because I'm not working with the people I like, or I didn't think I would enjoy this experience because I'm not surrounded by the people that I want to work with. I think that's a very important ingredient and filmmaking is very much about collaboration. So we want to have fun, don't we? We want to enjoy ourselves and we don't want to be fearful and anxious all the time. We want to have a good time, we want to do good work. I'm very proud actually of Vancouver in the crews that we have in our space. We have been winning awards. We are very good at what we do. But I think more importantly, the people that we work with are some of the nicest people, the most generous. I think that's what makes me stay in the industry. It's just having fun with the people that we want to work with and do amazing work. I want to push our innovation. I want to make Vancouver the place to be for tech. It's a real possibility because we have the crews, we have the projects that come here, but we do have to keep working at it and we have to put a lot of work into it.

CB: Thank you for being one of those people yourself. And thank you for coming in today. This has been extremely thought provoking and just a thoroughly enjoyable conversation. Thank you.

HB: Yeah, thank you so much for giving us so much of your time. I can't think of a better way to finish this podcast than that note of that challenge of really fully participating in the amazing community that we have here. Thank you.

GT: Thank you so much for inviting me.

(upbeat music)

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