

History Detective

by Chelsea Pegues

Ironically, Australian podcast host Kelly Chase didn't always have a love of history. When asked how her interest in the past blossomed, she says with an easy chuckle, "I hated history in school. I went to school in the late eighties, early nineties, and classrooms were a chalkboard and a black-and-white textbook, and occasionally they'd roll in a TV for you, if you were lucky... so it was really, really, boring and I didn't even like it." Today, she not only teaches the subject, but also hosts and produces the *History Detective* podcast, a show for "teachers, students and lovers of history. It delves into stories from the past that don't always get told in the textbooks."

It wasn't until her early thirties, while traveling to Japan and across the U.K., that Kelly's passion began to form. Taking in these foreign cultures and seeing ancient locations was an enlightening experience for her; in her trademark musical laugh, she exclaims, "Then I was like, 'Whoa, history is really interesting!'" She explains that on her way home, she began reading a book by popular travel author Bill Bryson, which piqued her interest further. He had written about Australia specifically, and in learning more about the First Nations People of her homeland, Kelly was hooked. "I read parts of that book, and I'm like, 'Oh my God;' I didn't learn this history in high school, and, probably because it was a bit secretive back then and a lot has happened politically for us to be able to reveal this history since then, and I just started getting into it." When Kelly resumed her own education in order to become a high school teacher herself, she chose history as her major so that she could empower future generations with the stories she was fortunate enough to discover in her formative years.



At the height of the Coronavirus pandemic, when the world shut down and teachers were forced to adapt to holding classes virtually, Kelly knew she could no longer procrastinate- here was the ideal moment to bring her passion to life in an unexpected way- thus, the *History Detective* podcast was born. Especially palatable is the length of the episodes, with the majority ranging (on average) from six to thirty-five minutes. "It was a very, very pointed decision, I did it on purpose. A, partly because of my attention span and, B...because I'm creating this resource for...specifically I want schoolteachers and history students in classes to be able to use it. [There are] tons and tons of history podcasts- some of them go over two-and-a-half hours, and [that's] very, very in- depth. I mean, I listen to those to get background knowledge on lots of different issues but that is not viable for any student who has a TikTok attention span." Indeed, for a teacher to be able to use a podcast as a learning resource, says Kelly, "It needs to be short and snappy- it needs to be ten, fifteen minutes tops, so you can deliver a little bit of content and then do some activities around it, and talk and chat and analyze sources...most history podcasts are way too long for any classroom usability at all." Another valuable point Kelly considered when organizing the construct of her show is that not all pupils have what she refers to as a "pre-understanding" of historical context and they (especially younger students)

simply aren't equipped with that yet. She found that quite a lot of existing shows almost expected this of their audience, and so "their vocabulary was pitched a bit high," as she puts it. "I like to make mine, just a [nice] bite-sized, here's the basics, this is what it is, and this is just- a really interesting person to learn about." This format makes for a wonderful educational springboard of sorts. *History Detective* lays the groundwork, providing the perfect amount of research and context to pique one's interest-it is up to the listener or student to continue the journey from there. In fact, one of the show's partners is Amped Up Learning, where Kelly is able to provide teaching resources which accompany each episode.

Recent shows include "Case #34, Joan of Arc: Go Down Fighting." This episode focuses on the



fifteenth-century teenage girl who became revered as patron Saint of France for her fierce defense of the nation and insistence on the coronation of Charles VII during the Hundred Years' War. Once a mainstay in popular culture references across books, film, and music in the twentieth century, the magnitude of Joan's legend and her significant mark on the course of world history has become almost completely lost to the newer generations. "It's interesting that she's fallen out of the cultural zeitgeist a little bit with the younger generation, because when I was growing up there were all those songs and movies, and you know, all that kind of stuff in reference to Joan of Arc. I was at the hairdresser's the other day and we were chatting and I said 'Oh, I'm doing an episode about Joan of Arc' and she's like, 'Oh, who's that?'" Kelly laughs knowingly at this. Though it may be inconceivable to

history buffs and educators alike, this is exactly why we need more podcasts like *History Detective*. There is a need to bring these important historical figures and events back into the spotlight in an engaging way. As philosopher George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

History Detective is unique for many reasons, but one exceptional feature of the show is the original songs Kelly writes for each episode. While she is not a professionally trained singer, her natural vocal talent is strong, and she has also played guitar since her teenage years. Because of the copyright laws surrounding existing music, Kelly decided to put her abilities to use and start composing her own for every show topic. "Some of the songs are better than others, but it's fun to get it out there," she says with a chuckle. "I usually always write a song before I write an episode...when I write my episode, that means I can kind of do little allusions to lyrics in the song, so when you listen to the song at the end you can make connections through the episode." Kelly will comb through primary sources and articles on her subjects to gather quotes and bits of information to aid her in making the songs not only factual, but very catchy. She tries to imagine how the person she is focusing on would want to write a song about themselves- what would they want to share? As she says this, Kelly also raises an interesting point- imagine how these historical women would be able to propel themselves even further if they had had access to the social media platforms and media tools we utilize today? It's a captivating thought, indeed. When asked what advice she would give to other women looking to start a podcast, Kelly keeps it straightforward: planning, planning, planning! "It depends what kind of podcast it is, really. If it's a conversational podcast, where you're interviewing people, it's probably not as important that you're doing the pre-planning, but obviously research on the person you're interviewing. I think just organization and lists is a big thing for me, and just planning out [which day] I'm going to drop the episode, what I've got to do exactly for each

episode.” Of course, a history podcast is very research-heavy, so it is important to decide the subject matter your show will focus on, and what type of format you are most comfortable in so that you can clearly decipher the amount of research and writing you will need to do before sitting down to record. Kelly also likes to stay two months ahead of schedule with her episodes to give herself some time to properly edit and not feel too pressed for content (and time, of course). As far as equipment, she reiterates that sound quality and editing are her most important concerns. She is lucky enough to have a dedicated recording space in her home (with proper sound insulation, no less), but is quick to encourage anyone who wants to start to just jump in- as long as you have a drive and a decent microphone, there’s really nothing holding you back! Kelly’s fantasy podcast guest would be a First Nations woman called Tarenorerer, “Because often we don’t get sources from the perspective of First Nations people...to get someone whose voice has never been [heard].” While there’s really not a historical topic she would shy away from covering, she tends to avoid male-driven stories “Because there’s already so much out there.”



Long-term, continuing to put out high-quality, easily consumable content is Kelly’s main focus, although she is also very excited about the April 2023 release of her first book, *History, Her Story, Our Story: Inspirational Women Who Shaped Our World*. “It’s basically [a condensed] version of content from the podcast, but how to be more inclusive of female stories in the classroom. [In the textbooks you’ll find] one-hundred-and-fifty depictions of male Vikings, and three women doing the washing, and women were there, and they did more than the washing. This is a seven-hundred-year period of history, so I just wanted to even out the stakes, and create a resource where females could be included.” It is so important to Kelly as an educator that the girls in any classroom know that their voices, past and present, always matter, and that they are well-represented throughout major historical events. Recently, a teacher contacted Kelly to tell her that a vision-impaired student of hers was able to use the podcast to connect with historical events in a way that other kinds of resources can’t provide. “That was really heartwarming and touching, that I was creating something that was diverse, for people with vision impairments to be able to enjoy.” It’s that kind of emotional payoff that can be such incredible motivation for any podcaster. And Kelly Chase certainly deserves all the praise. Overall, her sharp wit, remarkable passion for education, and intense creativity give her (and her show) a kind of sparkle. To talk to her for five minutes is like a sip of that perfect cup of morning coffee: warm, comforting, and makes you feel like you, too, can do anything. And as women, that is certainly what we need more of! “I absolutely love learning, so I am happy to never stop...and that’s a good thing about creating content, is every time I write an episode, I learn so much!”



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