

# Authentic Storytelling, The Gnar Gnar Honeys & Iced Matcha Lattes with Guest Trifecta Monica Medellin

## SPEAKERS

Lexie Smith, Monica Medellin

### Lexie Smith

Hey guys Lexie here, travel enthusiast, lover of puns, pizza and wine connoisseur and founder of THEPRBAR inc., and you're tuning in to the Pitchin' and Sippin' Podcast, from behind the scenes interviews with the media to honest conversations with other PR pros to a look at inspiring brands and entrepreneurs that are rocking the world of PR. In this podcast, we talk tips while taking sips and talking about all the things that make those in the world of PR tick. Let's get started. Today's guest on the Pitchin' and Sippin' Podcast, is Monica Medellin, a director, producer and founder born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Monica focuses on stories related to diversity, identity and social justice. Her work has been featured on Vice, Conde Nast, The Washington Post, The Huffington Post, and at The Women's March on Washington. Previously a video producer at The Los Angeles Times and Define American, and a member of the Global Social Content team for the World Surf League. Today, Monica works full time as the CEO and co founder of The Gnar Gnar Honeys, a creative collective of directors, producers, cinematographers and editors that bring a fresh perspective to filmmaking through authentic collaborations, and unapologetic badassery. In today's episode, Monica and I dive into the world of filmmaking and storytelling, we talked through the importance of inclusivity, not just on the camera, but also behind the scenes, and what really goes into creating and producing authentic and successful content. We wrap things up with some sips per usual here on the podcast, and the local LA shout out. So without further ado, let's get started. So I was asked to come and do portfolio reviews for graduating seniors at my alma mater a few weeks ago. And while I was interviewing the students, one piece of advice that I had was to be a kind human and keep in touch with those surrounding them in their classes, in their clubs, at the university and just really people that had met over the past four years, because in my experience, the people you meet in college might just be the people who someday move mountains, change industries and inspire the world. For example, my fellow duck and total badass Monica, Monica, I've been watching your life virtually since graduating, and your sheer talent is on another level. So welcome, officially I'm so excited to reconnect as quotes real adults and have you on the show. But before we dive into things career, I'd love to get to know a little bit about Monica these days outside of work. Let's start with where's home base.

### Monica Medellin

Thanks so much for that awesome intro. I'm honored to be on your show today and just appreciate you reaching out and hopefully this reconnection turns into more and more opportunities to meet in real life.

My name is Monica Medellin. I'm proudly born and raised on the west side of Los Angeles, to a single working immigrant mom from Mexico. I'm a surfer, a skateboarder, a action sports fanatic, filmmaker and co founder and CEO of The Gnar Gnar Honeys and off the clock, which isn't so often as I'm building a business currently, but you can catch me serving at my local break or skating around the city exploring new places I've never seen before. Or more recently, I guess, taking care of my plants and building home improvement projects, which is really new, but I've been trying to embrace those slow moments, even though it's between all of the action.

**Lexie Smith**

Literally the coolest person ever so many amazing hobbies. I wish I was that interesting. I mean skateboarding, surfing, for those who actually are listening to this and maybe they're surfers, too. Is there a specific surf spot in Los Angeles that you'd suggest?

**Monica Medellin**

Well, the number one rule that I don't necessarily agree with is never disclose the surf spot.

**Lexie Smith**

Oh, okay.

**Monica Medellin**

I am always happy to share my surf spots with people because I think that that's going to, you know, help more diversity and more women and more. You know, people who don't know these things get into the sport. I actually have been between LA and San Diego for the last few months because we've been wrapping up a project and my business partner lives in San Diego. I usually serve at my home break in Venice in LA. Or if I'm feeling up for it on a weekend I'll go up to Malibu, you know, some of the best waves in the world, you know, known by the world. And in San Diego, I love surfing in Oceanside, or along the reefs if there's some swell, so,

**Lexie Smith**

I feel like I've just learned about three new vocabulary words first, you're home break. I don't think... I need to watch more surf or maybe I'm just not cool. Your home break, swell. I feel like I've heard that. Okay. Have you been up to Ventura? That's where I'm at now. And I know we have a huge surfing community. There's I feel like hundreds of surfers out every weekend when I go by certain spots. Have you come up here yet?

**Monica Medellin**

Yeah, I actually love surfing in Ventura is a little bit of a trek for me, coming from LA. But it's always worth it. I'll definitely come up to a rink on or C Street. And I will now let you know next time I come up because I have more connections and I think up in up in Ventura. So

**Lexie Smith**

I do notice specifically that I am surrounded by a lot of people who love surfing. I am terrified of sharks so we won't get into that. But it's not...and my husband is born and raised in California and he has never once been surfing in his life. So we are not cool. I know. It's It's It's kind of funny to think about.

But anyways, he does do scuba diving. So he does do some form of water activity. So let's now talk about what has been happening since you graduated from the U of O. So rewind us all the way back and kind of just walk us through your you know, quote unquote, resume or your journey. And we'll tee up to today.

### **Monica Medellin**

Yeah, a lot has happened. I feel like my journeys pretty nonlinear, and a lot of ways, but recently, it's actually made more and more sense. And, you know, everything that happened happened for a reason. So just feeling a lot of gratitude as like I reflect on, you know, the past five years has been, six years. But after undergrad, I moved back to LA for an internship at The LA Times. And that's sort of where I started my journey in documentary filmmaking. And I grew in my role there and got promoted to associate producer about a year later, where my focus was producing content around race, identity and immigration with a super small team there. From there, I was actually brought on to help build a production company within another organization called Define American, which was actually the nation's leading media and culture organization dedicated to humanizing immigrants. So that was super niche in the immigration space. And while my storytelling in those spaces was sort of like leveling up, I really wanted to integrate other passions into my work. So sports, like sports have always been a thing for me. I played intramural volleyball at Oregon, I grew up doing, you know, every team sport you could imagine, thanks to my mom who really sacrificed a lot to get my name on those rosters, our family on scholarship, etc. So from there, I wanted to integrate other passions into my work like sports. And I've always looked for opportunities to marry those passions, so sports with my love of filmmaking, and in a different way, like a way that bridges, filters, communities and perspectives. And I had the opportunity to do that, at that organization with my first film around Latina and immigrant identity and surfing. And that film was called Water Warrior. And it's like my baby, I look back on it. And, you know, there's so many things that I would change about it, right? Because it was a super low budget, super, you know, a skeleton crew film, but really what spoke volumes was the story. And after that film dropped, I mean, Water Were your premiere that Save the Waves Film Festival, International Ocean Film Festival, Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival, and then finally The Patagonia Film Festival here in LA. And I never really needed that validation. But it was that moment when it really clicked like there was something there and people were really resonating with this story. When I was focused on the production value, people saw an amazing opportunity for something new. My goal was to really go deeper and that storytelling from there, make sure that other women knew women, women of color, Latino women, everybody knew that they belonged in surfing, even if mainstream media advertisements told them otherwise, with that said, I mean, after I finished touring Water Warrior, this whole new world opened up, and I actually landed a job at the World Surf League shortly after, that was where I was really able to deepen my knowledge of competitive surfing and the pro circuit and what it means to work from an industry leader, you know, and it was an amazing opportunity, I think I was able to sort of see firsthand like, why was the surf industry missing the mark with these issues of diversity and representation? And how can I change it from the inside out? So yeah, I'll stop there. Because that was my last full time gig. And it's been really fun to transition work for myself, sort of change the narrative from, you know, a business owners perspective, from The Gnar Gnar Honeys perspective, you know, from the perspective of this young girl who just wanted to see her herself, you know, represented in these sports.

**Lexie Smith**

Oh, my goodness, okay. First up, LA Times internship, we're gonna rewind it back. I'm curious. I mean, that's one of the world's largest media companies and outlets. How did that opportunity come about? How did you secure a internship and then a position there?

**Monica Medellin**

you know the grind, like when you're graduating from school, you really want to land a job in the city that you grew up in, potentially or elsewhere. I mean, honestly, getting my internship at The LA Times, I feel like I was just myself, I showed the work, you know, created the content that I felt was missing from the mainstream, and that really aligned with their hiring at that time, because they were launching a platform around race, immigration and identity. And I really wanted a piece of that, and I really wanted to help tell those stories. So I think, at the time that I was applying, you know, I got really lucky because, you know, the company values are really aligning with my values. From there, I mean, it just opened up so many more opportunities for me like working at a place like The LA Times that name right, like that name has such clout. It was definitely an interesting, you know, first experience in the real world for me after college.

**Lexie Smith**

Hey, guys, Lexie here interrupting the show really quick to drop a note. Did you know that in a study produced by Nielsen, it was reported that PR is almost 90% more effective than advertising? Well, it is, I swear, Google it. So if you've been enjoying learning about all things pitching in sipping, I wanted to give you an official invite to visit my website, theprbarinc.com spelled t h e p r b a r i n c .com, to learn even more about how you might be able to work with yours truly to increase your influence, impact and revenue with PR. If you're not sure where to start on the site, consider booking a free consultation. Alright, I'm done back to the show. Clearly, you were crushing it, because then they offered you a full time position. I know data is looked different. But I'm curious how your interaction behind the scenes was, you know, is it a 5000 person company and you were tied to a five person team? Were you out in the field every day? What was the general vibe of working for The LA Times like?

**Monica Medellin**

Yeah, the general vibe...I mean, for me, I think my experience was a little bit different. Because, you know, I feel like a lot of news media companies are shifting their voice and shifting the narrative in a lot of really groundbreaking ways. My experience, there wasn't necessarily in the newsroom, you know, covering events as they're happening, you know, currently, my experience was definitely more around, how can we do this differently, and still, you know, keep up with what's happening in current time, but have a more nuanced and authentic approach to it. And that was really through, you know, short digital documentaries that we were making in house. And that was with a team of, I want to say, three to four people, I think we grew to five, which was a big deal, because that was, that was a lot for, you know, what we were used to working on projects with, but it was a really small team. And we were producing probably one documentary every two weeks for release on on the platform. And those were, you know, three to five minute documentaries around different issues that face different communities, in LA and in the country generally. It kind of went from, you know, ideating and conceptualizing, you know, what was the story that we want to tell, okay, like, who are the players like who can we cast for this who represents this story. And then from there reaching out really connecting, I think that we, we did a great

job with connecting with communities because you know, behind the camera, and in our production team, we had a lot of different perspectives and diversity. So building trust, and from there, like we were out in the field a lot. We were out there shooting, traveling all around the city to tell this story. And yeah, it was, it was really fun.

**Lexie Smith**

How do you go about casting or finding the people that then were to be featured within these pieces?

**Monica Medellin**

It's kind of like leading into your next question. Like, what's the difference between producing and directing

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah, okay, we can answer that, too.

**Monica Medellin**

Yeah, yeah. So I think a big one that I learned at The LA Times in journalism, and that's what I majored in at U of O is, well, you know, journalism generally, like you want to tell ethical stories, and you want to make sure that you're representing people in places and things that you're writing about, as what they are. At The LA Times, I think it was great, because the communities and the store the stories around the communities that we wanted to tell were communities that I was familiar with, and connected with already, because I come from LA, you know, I'm a woman of color who was born and raised here. Like, there's an automatic synergy between me and the people that we're reaching out to, to feature that that was just a really awesome like connection, you know, right off the bat, as far as casting, you know, normally goes like, if we didn't know someone from our network, we would reach out to organizations, we would find out, you know, the local university groups, like we would find people on the ground who have been doing the work for a while to help us highlight, you know, who they think would be best to represent the story we were trying to tell, we're kind of in the weeds now,

**Lexie Smith**

I want to know, that weeds. And I actually, one thing, and one of the reasons of the million I wanted to invite you on was to kind of talk about directing and producing these are two different words that we hear a lot. But I think there if you're not in that world, you just think of movie production. And there's this, you know, you don't know what that means, really. So I'd love to hear your take as someone on the ground doing this. What does that mean? And what is really the difference between directing and producing media?

**Monica Medellin**

It's funny, because it took me a really long time to feel comfortable with identifying as either of those titles because they do hold a lot of weight. Like when you're from LA, and you think of a director or a producer, you're like, Alright, Hollywood, okay, this blockbuster film, okay, a man, okay, like so many stereotypes around what that actually means. But the moment that I started owning that, and, you know, calling myself that, and living that, that really opened a lot of doors for me. And just a quick break down of the differences between the two. I mean, the director leads the creative in filmmaking. So

usually, they're the one who has this big idea, right? Like, I want to make this impossible possible. And the producer is, you know, their kind of right hand who handles the logistics and the production behind it. How can we bring these ideas to life, but also bring it back down to earth, because sometimes there's a budget, there's, you know, different legal aspects, there's productions, recently, I've been focusing on directing, because it's really bringing out that creative brain of mine, but it's really helpful to have experience in producing. And it's been really fun to, to bring both of those into the room, even if I'm just one role, right. But focusing on the direction and the storytelling has definitely been a huge passion of mine for the last few months, and is coming to fruition. And you know, our next projects that are coming out

### **Lexie Smith**

Thank you so much for giving us that break down. And we're going to go to your recent projects. But I do have a couple more questions. First, you're in reading your bio, your work throughout your career thus far has been featured on and in outlets such as Vice and Conde Nast and The Washington Post in The Huffington Post, and many, many more. And the question that comes up for me is how did these mega mainstream channels find out about your work? Did you pitch them Did you just create these masterpieces and they were found them organically? Walk us through the process here to the best of your knowledge?

### **Monica Medellin**

Yeah, I mean, I feel like a lot of these opportunities came Pretty organically. I think social media is an incredible tool to get stories out there. So it's a mix between naturally and also pitching hardcore, sometimes we wouldn't even get a response. Other times, we would hear back, and they would say, Oh, it's just not the right timing, but not letting those moments deter you from finding a home for these stories. And it's not always gonna look perfect, or be the perfect partner that you had in mind from the beginning, but kind of rolling with the punches and flowing with what's right. And I think that's how a lot of these opportunities came to be is a mix of people noticing us and also getting after it, and really, you know, telling people why we think the story is important for them to share on their platform.

### **Lexie Smith**

Thank you for being transparent to that, you know, it's not always a yes, every time I think people see, especially those who've had these big wins, and they get frustrated, because they're on the back end, maybe not having immediate success, and maybe they are hearing crickets. So I think it's really important to shed a light on the reality that it can be hard working. Yeah, it also can be organic. You know, I've had clients pitch their way into places, I've also had them, you know, be approached. So and actually social media, I think is a big part of the people finding you as well. So, so thank you for pointing that out. Let's talk about it. What is The Gnar Gnar Honeys? What are you doing today? What inspired you to create basically all the things?

### **Monica Medellin**

The Gnar Gnar Honeys started as a group of girlfriends who serve skated and connected over what we love to do. And I actually met most of our team surfing and skateboarding in LA. And as we bonded over the things that we love to do, we also realize that we work in similar fields, and are all creatives in those respective fields. Some of us were filmmakers, you know, we all had different skill sets in this

industry. And we talked about this industry and how we never really felt represented in front of the camera one, but especially behind the camera, we just decided to start telling our own stories and create content around our experiences. So that looked different ways. One of our first pieces of content that we ever made, you know, was just because we wanted to go surfing and camp out for a weekend. And we filmed it, and people loved it. And we're like, wow, like this is actually missing, you know, like people want more from us. From there, we tapped into our skills a little more formally, and started producing content on a weekly basis. And my focus since then has been to lead and build our creative collective. So find more women who align with, you know, these things that we've experienced, and also build a production company. So we can actually, you know, start to build projects that are further than social media, we also want to be able to keep up with the projects that we're, you know, that we're getting and tell more stories than ever before. So that's really been our focus for now. But it really just started as a group of girlfriends who really wanted to see a difference in filmmaking in front of and behind the camera.

### **Lexie Smith**

Amazing. So and I've been all over the website and your social channels and the work that you guys produce blown away. It's so good. I'm curious on kind of the business owner side of it. How did you guys or your company go about connecting, you know, maybe this is more on the production side, these potential clients again, did they find you organically? Or did you just have personal networks? You know, I think it's one thing to dream about creating a collective but then to turn it into a business where you have clients is a whole nother step. So I'm just curious what that process has been like for you.

### **Monica Medellin**

I mean, I think that's the beauty of The Gnar Gnar Honeys as a collective as well. Our personal networks extend to so many different women and communities and cultures. And we started sharing our content on social media and gain traction. From there. You know, we had clients who wanted to work with an all women crew because they never had before. And that blew our mind. I think at that point in time, commercial and brand work was our bread and butter. But for us, we didn't just think about it as a client or a brand opportunity. It wasn't just a cool job. It was an opportunity to create imagery and content centered around diverse women and girls. And it was the representation that we wanted to see and had been looking for our whole lives. So I think that approach keeps clients. And from there, we got to keep telling more authentic stories with with different brands. That was awesome. And we're still doing it today, even though a lot of our focus has been on longer form content

### **Lexie Smith**

Producing content that is authentic and inspires and is engaging. I mean, it's a very large goal for a lot of companies and founders, really, it should be your main goal to produce very authentic and engaging content. I'd love to know, because you're so dang good at it, if you have some key findings or tips on how to create content that's both authentic and engaging, but successful as well.

### **Monica Medellin**

I think for me, it's always been finding the balance between being yourself having fun creating a community, and more recently, building something out of that, for the first two years, I as well as most

of my team, we were still working full time. And we would always make time for our ideas, even if it was before work after work on the weekends. Nobody was making us do it. We just did it, because we loved it. And as a woman of color in the film industry, and the action sports world, I never really felt like our story, my story was being told, and when it was felt like it was being told for me. So I think that's where The Gnar Gnar Honeys mission was born. And that's to promote diversity and representation in front of and behind the lens. There's a reason that I highlight both of those things. And I think that has to do with why our content is so successful. And at this point in time, just to give some media landscape, right, like, we're seeing more diversity than ever on screen. And I think people are generally beginning to understand inclusivity in front of the camera is really important. And it's really great. That's it right? Like we did it cool. But I actually believe that we need to push that further and take it one step more and ask who's behind the scenes. Who's producing, directing, shooting, editing, sound recording? Who's telling these stories? And I think the answer is we need more women and women of color from our communities picking up a camera, producing on set, conceptualizing and executing ideas and giving creative feedback. I think that we just need more of us in the room like period. And that's why the nano honeys exist in the way that we do and create authentic content from there. In my mind, I kind of think of us as the triple threat. And hopefully we can continue to build momentum and represent these stories in front of them behind the camera. Like...

### **Lexie Smith**

You don't immediately think of that you're right. We're seeing you know, we're sitting and we're bingeing more than ever, we're watching Netflix, and we're like, oh, cool, like, we're being inclusive, and we're seeing more diversity on screen. But you're right, what's happening behind the camera? Because there's a lot more people behind the scenes than on screen. Right. And so and that's driving the storyline. And so I think it's such a needed and cool and inspiring mission. And you're clearly so passionate about it, which I think ties into why your guys's content is so successful. So maybe one of the wise is really understand your why, right? Because in order to be authentic, you have to have a mission these days, I think consumers are seeing I know, consumers are seeing more and more through just, you know, a pretty picture. It's it's more than that,

### **Monica Medellin**

Right. And I think even for us, you know, with the shift in media, in storytelling in the narrative in the industry, we really have to think about our why when we're saying yes, accepting a project or passing. It's hard because we want to take every project on but we also want to make sure that it's a story that's really aligned with our mission. Sometimes it's a tough call and we have a really small team but I hope that in the future, you know, we're able to take on more and bring in more experiences, you know, more people from different backgrounds to help us tell every story you know, that's missing. But for now, we're just gonna work our way up there.

### **Lexie Smith**

Now what is now, what are... what's you know, the latest project that's lighting you up right now?

### **Monica Medellin**

So our most recent The Gnar Gnar Honeys' project is actually premiering in the next few weeks. It is a documentary series about young up and coming Native Hawaiian surfer girls who represent the future



of surfing. And it was also the first project that we pitched as I'm completely working for myself. The film is titled Kaikaina and that means little sister in the Native Hawaiian language and filming Kaikaina in Hawaii was such a life changing experience and getting to know these young women further prove that we need more productions like The Gnar Gnar Honeys, as women of color, you know, behind the scenes, and we were able to connect in a whole new level and build out relationships and a bond that I've never experienced on set before. So it's almost like the project itself is super exciting. But what happened behind it is equally as exciting. And I think it definitely shows in the story. The docu series is dropping with a new media company called Togethxr, founded by Alex Morgan, Sue Bird, Simone Manuel, and Chloe Kim, who are all Olympic athletes who I think are changing the game in a lot of ways.

**Lexie Smith**

So anyone listening, maybe they're too early, or maybe maybe they're not. Where can they go to either get on a waitlist to see it or to see it live?

**Monica Medellin**

Yeah, so you can check in with The Gnar Gnar Honeys on our website, all of our socials, it's going to be premiering on Togethxr on their YouTube channel.

**Lexie Smith**

Okay, and we will guys put that in the show notes. So when I have one more fun question for you. This is called the Pitchin' and Sippin' Podcast We've talked pitching and we've talked filmmaking, I'd love to know what we can find you sipping so what's your favorite beverage? Either non alcoholic or alcoholic?

**Monica Medellin**

My favorite beverage non alcoholic is an iced matcha latte. I have been on my matcha game for about... matcha journey really not a game I would never want to offend this beautiful drink for for anything less than an experience. Um, but yeah, I drink probably one a day. I was never a coffee drinker, surprisingly, considering how much I work, but I feel like match gives me like this amazing flavor but also like slow burn of energy. I don't feel super jittery or anxious after after drinking it. It's just right.

**Lexie Smith**

I've heard matcha is like a miracle worker and a lot of different ways and there's a ton of health benefits and I cannot list them here but I feel like it came more so on my radar lately. Am I right in thinking that there's a lot of health benefits to it or is that made up in my brain?

**Monica Medellin**

There's a lot of health benefits to matcha You know, I think you can drink it in so many different ways. Like I drink an iced latte. You can also have it hot you can have whatever milk you want. Also, in the summertime, you can add some lemonade and make a matcha lemonade actually shout out to my favorite coffee shop here in LA Sachi LA and they are Japanese running owned and they have the best matcha

**Lexie Smith**

What part of LA is that in?

**Monica Medellin**

It's in Marvista, in my neighborhood.

**Lexie Smith**

So last question for you Monica. Where can people go to learn more about you and how to work potentially with The Gnar Gnar Honeys?

**Monica Medellin**

Yeah, so you can find us at thegnargnarhoneys.com and follow us on all socials @thegnargnarhoneys.

**Lexie Smith**

Amazing well thank you so so much for taking the time out of your crazy busy schedule to chat with me today. I learned so much it was great seeing you. No one can see this but her hair looks fabulous as always. And so I just wanted to say thank you and we're gonna have to get together in person soon when this world makes it a little easier.

**Monica Medellin**

Definitely. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm super inspired by the work that you do and just really excited to be on on the show.

**Lexie Smith**

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