

Rejection to Reinvention

Bold(h)er, brought to you by BMO for Women

Amanda Brugel: I'm human, and I get hurt and I get stunned, and bruised and fall down and want to crawl under the covers, but again, to reinvent the way you think about things, particularly negative things, I think it's really important not to let things crush you or halt you and stop you. I think it's really important to use anything that hurts, be able to examine it, question why it hurts, and then use that to propel you out of the hurt.

Lisa Bragg: In the cutthroat film and TV industry, Amanda Brugel has made it. She reinvented character acting for women of colour and built an award-winning career along the way. I'm Lisa Bragg and this is Bold(h)er, stories of and for women who stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women. You may know Amanda as Rita in *The Handmaid's Tale*, but the Canadian actress has played hundreds of roles. Amanda, take us back to where it all began.

Amanda Brugel: Performing and expressing myself in front of an audience was always my draw as a kid, whether it be because I was looking for attention or being able to look out and see people's faces and have a collective group in an audience was always something that I really loved. And so I begged my parents to allow me to be an actor when I was younger. This was way before internet, so I went to the phone book and on the Yellow Pages and I looked up a lot of agents, I wrote a letter out on a typewriter and I typed up 12 individual letters and I put them in envelopes and I handed them to my father to send out to agents because I was going to get my big break and meet an agent.

Amanda Brugel: And so we didn't hear anything back for six months. And we were moving, and in the process of moving, I was helping my parents clean out a bookshelf and I pulled a book behind the bookshelf and all 12 of the letters came sliding out, sealed, hadn't been mailed, had the stamps on them, hadn't been sent off and my parents didn't send them off. They didn't send them off because they wanted me to have a normal childhood, they wanted me to stick to school and stay in sports and stay in dancing.

Amanda Brugel: It was heartbreaking, but I trusted my parents and I knew that by them keeping me from something, they were trying to protect me and not hurt me. And so it stopped me for a long time of wanting to be an actor. And then flash forward to high school, I was really sporty, I was into sports, we had to take a drama elective and I was in drama class

and I was failing on purpose because drama wasn't cool in my school. My teacher pulled me aside and said, "I will give you a passing grade if you audition for the school play." And I auditioned for the school play and got the lead role and then was hooked.

Lisa Bragg: Okay. Wow. Let's unpack a little bit. This is not about parents today, this is about reinvention, but... So you were nine when you found the letters?

Amanda Brugel: I was. I was nine. And you can imagine at nine years old, you look at your parents and they can't do any wrong in your eyes. And suddenly I realized that they were trying to protect me and keep me as a child and keep me innocent and keep me young, and I respected that. I really respect my parents. And so it was hurtful, but they hadn't done anything like that, so it was enough of a lesson for me to be like, "They must be shielding me from something. I need to respect that." Until I became a teenager and then the respect goes out the window when you're a teenager.

Lisa Bragg: So rejection wasn't your first thing, it was your parents protecting you, and that was the path.

Amanda Brugel: It was. It was. It really was. The rejection, I mean, I think I was raised as the kind of person to always see rejection as a good thing. My father, if I ever got a bad grade in anything, my father would make me see it as a place to start growing, to learn. And instead of being punished or getting in trouble for it, they would encourage me to learn and give me incentives to get better. So rejection for me personally has always been fuel, like a little gas in the tank. I receive rejection well, I love it, I thrive off of it.

Lisa Bragg: That's great. So you have like a growth mindset because that's a term we're all hearing now-

Amanda Brugel: Yes.

Lisa Bragg: ... especially if you're a parent, is having that growth mindset. It's like, "Well, no, but I can learn from that." No. So you really have that.

Amanda Brugel: Absolutely. And if we're talking about reinvention, you have to pivot. And so instead of, sometimes when you receive rejection and you hit a wall, some people become immobile, they don't know how to get around the wall. But if you just reinvent your vision, if you reinvent the way you look at things, the way you look at yourself, instead of it

being a wall, you can easily find a door and walk through it or finding the ability to walk around.

Lisa Bragg: But what challenges as a Black woman, as a woman, first of all, but as a Black woman, did you face in the industry? Did you face any?

Amanda Brugel: It's interesting. I wrote an article a while ago in keeping with my childhood, I am adopted by my father, and I didn't know that until I was 11 years old. My mother is white. I'm obviously a biracial woman, my father is Indian and Jewish. And growing up I was never taught about race. I didn't look at my mother and look at my father and see two people of colour, different colours and recognize that I really shouldn't fit into this family. It wasn't something I fathomed, it wasn't something I even questioned, because we never discussed race. And so when I was 11 years old, my birth father, my biological father called and I answered the phone and my adopted father ran across the room like a hyena and grabbed the phone out of my hand.

Amanda Brugel: And it was quite a shocking reaction. Sent me to my room, and when my mother came home from work, they sat me down, my adopted father and my mother sat me down and finally told me that I was adopted. And then the first question they asked was, "Didn't you know?" And it was the first time race and identity and self came just tumbling down on me. Most children are taught from when they can speak what their race is and I wasn't, it just wasn't a part of our everyday dialogue. And I didn't realize that people were categorizing themselves by colour, it's just not a conversation we had in our family.

Amanda Brugel: And so because I wasn't taught race, because it's something that you're taught, because I wasn't taught to identify with a certain race, going into acting was incredibly difficult because suddenly I had to reconcile with the fact that the world saw me as a Black woman. It's not that I don't see myself as a Black woman, but I just see myself as Amanda first, a woman, a good person, funny, strong, and then my colour. Not that I'm not proud of it, I just don't walk into a room Black-first, I walk into a room Amanda-first, because that's what I was taught. Acting doesn't see it like that, the entertainment industry doesn't see it like that, the world doesn't see it like that.

Amanda Brugel: And so I quickly had to pivot, reinvent the way I think about colour, the way I think about race. And when I say quickly, it took a period of a few years to understand where that would lie with me, where I was comfortable with it, and where I also had to fit into industry standards.

Lisa Bragg: Did you feel then at 11 that you reinvented who you were then?

Amanda Brugel: Not at 11. I think I was just trying to grasp what it meant to be a biracial woman with a white mother and a Jewish-Indian father. I think that I really was trying to work within my mind and sense of self, particularly at 11 when you're so vulnerable and you're just about to go into adolescence, just really trying to figure out what and where I belonged and who I was. And my parents were amazing. My father especially never allowed me to rely on race or rely on preconceived notions of what it's supposed to be like to be a Black woman, he just always encouraged me to be myself first, I think because he grew up in India and he was half-Jewish as well, so he struggled with coming from two very, very different worlds.

Amanda Brugel: It wasn't until I entered high school and until again, I started in the entertainment industry that I completely had to reinvent and revamp who I was in order to be marketable, unfortunately, to people.

Lisa Bragg: You're an award-winning actress now, but tell us about those early days in high school and then growing into being an actor. Tell us about that.

Amanda Brugel: In high school, it was wonderful because again, you're in a bubble and you're cast in roles, the only roles that are available to you, it's not based on how you look. It sort of lulled me into this false notion that I would be cast because I was the best as opposed to I would be cast because I looked like someone. And in those early days, in the 90s we're talking quite early days, roles for women of colour were typically for prostitutes or servants and the idea of being a woman of colour as a lead, a romantic lead was just out of the question. And so because I had at high school and also going into university, I went to York University For Theatre, again given lead roles in a lot of the plays when I graduated, it was a stark reality to when I started getting auditions of "prostitute number one" or "big booty chick number three."

Amanda Brugel: I was really confused because I'd been preparing from high school into university to be the lead, to be Catherine the Great and to play the leads in a lot of, especially classical theatre, and so "big booty girl number three" was a little hard.

Lisa Bragg: I did not see that on your IMDB.

Amanda Brugel: No, no, I turned her down. I turned her down. But what I did do, and this is really when I realized how, how important it is to reinvent

myself and how important it is to start thinking differently about race and how I present myself to the world, the auditions kept coming for "prostitute number one" or "sassy chick number two." And I wanted to obviously hold the audition, but I wanted to set myself aside and set myself separately from everyone else auditioning for those roles. So for the first time I went in, the very first time, I decided to change. It was a morning and I was dressing up for an audition in short shorts and latex. And my mother said, "This isn't you, what are you doing?"

Amanda Brugel: And I got really upset and really defensive and I kept saying to her, "This is how the world sees me." And she said, "Well, you have to change that." And I didn't really know what she meant, so then I decided to change and I went into the audition, still auditioning for a "big booty girl number three," but I decided to do a Cockney accent. Didn't get the role, and the casting director was a bit confused, but I kept from then on, kept trying to change how casting saw me. They could still call me in for the roles, but they had to understand that I would be bringing in a different person every time.

Amanda Brugel: So shortly after that, I was suddenly the wild card. I was Amanda, but I had invented this personality or this version of me that was always the wild card. So I was still a Black woman, still very proud to be a black woman, but instead of helping the narrative of sassy Black woman, I was delivering myself, but with just a different flavour, a different accent, different clothing.

Lisa Bragg: That is so brave, because we are so taught, especially I think as women, to go with the flow, do what people tell you, follow the rules and you'll succeed.

Amanda Brugel: Yes.

Lisa Bragg: You said, "I'm going to break the rules."

Amanda Brugel: Yes. I don't believe any of that. I think it's imperative to break the rules respectfully, not to hurt anyone. You find out so much about yourself, you find out your resilience. It's a little fun too. I think with men, they're encouraged to be rule breakers and break down walls, and with women we are supposed to acquiesce and be polite and fit into the form. And we don't recognize how much fun it is to be rule breakers, and once you do it once or twice and you start to become known as a rule breaker, it's a bit seductive and it's a lot of fun.

Lisa Bragg: So without breaking the rules, you really wouldn't be where you are today, then?

Amanda Brugel: No, I wouldn't. I absolutely wouldn't. I'm known as more of a character actor, and making that decision and planting that seed so long ago to come in and reinvent myself almost every audition, I had no idea how it would blossom into now being a 40-year-old character actor of colour. It's almost unheard of; a Canadian woman of colour character actor, it's really difficult. And I didn't set off intending to do that, I just set off intending to prove to myself and also prove slightly, push back to the casting directors and the people who were asking me to do those roles, to ask them to slightly stretch their imagination. I just wanted to ask them to think outside of the box.

Lisa Bragg: That's a trailblazer statement.

Amanda Brugel: Thank you. I think trailblazers, I think it's interesting with trailblazers that you don't ever set out to be trailblazers, and it's the one thing I think is really important to tell younger women, if you set out with the intention just of blazing a trail and it doesn't come from any place of personal change of wanting to invoke personal growth or societal growth, I don't think it will work. I think it will fall flat. But if the intention is true and it's to better yourself or better other people, then you can never fall off that trail. You will only have the fire to go forward.

Lisa Bragg: So when people hear reinvention, it means to a lot of people throwing out all the good, being something totally new. What does reinvention mean to you?

Amanda Brugel: Oh, goodness sakes. Reinvention to me, I think the thing that people think to reinvent yourself is you have to totally disregard everything that you were and start fresh, and I don't agree with that at all. I think that reinvention is you're constantly looking at achieving a balance in your life. And so for me personally, at the beginning of every year, I would do it with my friends, we would at the beginning of every year, we would have a box, we called it "The Box" and we would go back throughout the year, the previous year and list all of the negative things that happened and then all of the positive things that happened. And then all of the positive things, we would make a little collage or a little storyboard and then for the following year try to stick to that person.

Amanda Brugel: And so instead of throwing everything away because it's suggesting that you're never good enough, reinvention to me is constantly building on those positive building blocks, taking what's from your past that you learned and applying it to the future, and you're constantly revamping the balance of just trying to achieve the most positive, well-formed being you can be.

Lisa Bragg: So just a slight remake.

Amanda Brugel: Just a slight remake. And instead of thinking of how you can throw away yourself, there are so many good things that have come out of tragedies in my life, and so I even try to learn from that and even reinvent how I revamp, rethink, how I deal with loss and how I deal with struggle. And with my agent, particularly, in regards to work and reinvention, every year, we sit down at the beginning of January and we go through the year and we think about what we accomplished in the past year and what we want to do this year and how we can change our motive, how we can change our intention, and how we can reinvent a new year for ourselves, come up with new goals.

Amanda Brugel: And again, it's learning from the past, but also just slightly tweaking things that will help us in the future.

Lisa Bragg: We do have so many high-achieving women or people listening to the show, and reinvention is a scary word for them, but it's remaking yourself, your business, your future on so many levels. And so, where are you now with reinventing yourself?

Amanda Brugel: Well, it's interesting when I speak about wanting to review years and take from the positive, I hit a wall at the end of last year because... I have a little story. When I first signed with my agent, I had come back from acting after having a hiatus. And the thing that I decided, the reason I decided to go with her was she sat down and said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I want to act." And she said, "That's not good enough. I want you to write down a list of 10 things you want to accomplish." And so I wrote down, I wanted to go to a gifting lounge at TIFF, and I wanted to be on two television shows at once. And they were modest wishes at best, but they were mine. And so within eight months, we achieved everything on the list.

Amanda Brugel: So she made me write another list. And she said, "Now, this is your big one. This is your blow-out-the-ceiling, pray-to-the-gods, just-go-for-the-gold wish." And so I said, I want to go to the Academy Awards, and I want to win three awards in one year. I lay down the craziest thing I

could think of. And a year to the date of me writing the list, I crossed everything off. The first thing I crossed off was going to the Academy Awards for *Room*. And so we've done this now for four years. I have no wishes left, I have nothing. There's nothing that I can think of.

Amanda Brugel: And so what we decided to do was instead of thinking about it just for acting, and instead of thinking about it in one lane, we decided to create another list for possibly a new career or a side career, a career that would compliment acting. And not because I ran out of things, but because we learned how successful we can be when we combined our thoughts and our positive intention together. And so this year, it's not really reinventing anything for myself, it's being brave enough to now think outside of the career that I've cultivated and expand on it. So that's what's next for me, and I'm a little scared and a little nervous to be producing my own film, which I'm going to be doing this year.

Amanda Brugel: I'm also going to be speaking on behalf of a book for something called Canada Reads. It's in March, it's at CBC. And so becoming much more of a public speaker and a much more of a motivational speaker. It's just things now trying to attack and trying to push myself beyond the boundaries that I've already been quite successful in.

Lisa Bragg: I think a lot of our listeners will tap into that intentionality. And some people, it's still too much "woo-hoo" out there. Can you ground that for a little bit for us? Can you talk to us, what did you do? You just wrote a list and, voilà?!

Amanda Brugel: I just wrote a list. I mean, I'm a huge subscriber to whatever you want to call it, positive thinking or law of attraction or intentionality. And I just think that we have so many thoughts throughout the day, particularly as women, successful women, women that are quite busy and juggling a lot. And sometimes we can become overwhelmed in those thoughts, and our true intention, what we truly want can be forgotten. It's the thing that's the lowest on our list of priorities. And so for me, it's as simple as becoming clear, just clarifying what you want, whether it be you want to clean out the basement this weekend or if you want to be the CEO of a major company.

Amanda Brugel: And so the thing that I try to say to people in the easiest way is write it down so you can clarify what you want. Write down a list of 10 things, tuck the list away, keep it in your wallet, keep it on your screensaver so you can remind yourself, every day if possible, but every time you look at the list, remind yourself of where you want to go and what you want. Because it's really difficult to say, "I'm not getting there. I'm not

achieving anything." But some people don't even really know what they want. It's so important, particularly as women, especially as women of colour, when we're not given as many opportunities, it's so crucial to know precisely what you want.

Amanda Brugel: And the more precision the better, because the quicker I truly believe it will come.

Lisa Bragg: Absolutely. So what I've done for this year is I have, I'm doing Rolling 12 so I have my intentionality.

Amanda Brugel: Good.

Lisa Bragg: I put it beside the bed, and I'm going through it because I have big dreams too and I think we all do. So every night I look at it, it's beside my bed, "Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" Because you forget in the busy-ness of being a business owner, a mom, a human, we don't do the things we do.

Amanda Brugel: I think you were right. I think that people think it's a little too cosmic, it's a little too "woo-woo," as you put it, but the only thing I can say back to that is, we make lists constantly, we make lists of what we want to buy for the holidays, or grocery lists or lists of things that we have to do. And what better way to make a list for your future and what better way to make a list for yourself of reminding yourself, "This is actually what I want to be doing with my time." Just because it's something that seems that it's not possible now, it doesn't mean it's not going to happen. You have to first make the list to know where you want to go.

Lisa Bragg: Of course, we have to talk *Handmaid's Tale*. How's that going? That little thing you're doing?

Amanda Brugel: Oh, that little guy, it's wonderful. It really is. It changed my life. And a funny thing about *The Handmaid's Tale*, when I was in high school, I was in love with Margaret Atwood. It was my first book that I was introduced in Canadian Lit and I fell in love immediately with *The Handmaid's Tale*. And so I wrote a series of short stories on it, I was obsessed with it and I read all of her books, and I didn't know getting into university whether or not I wanted to be an actor or a writer. And so with my little short stories, I submitted it to school and I got a wee little, like a wee little bursary kind of scholarship to get into the first year of university.

Amanda Brugel: And so my, my first year we had to decide whether or not to be in the acting program or the writing program. And again, I was still torn. So I wrote a massive thesis on *The Handmaid's Tale* on Rita, my character, and I was awarded a full scholarship to the writing program.

Lisa Bragg: Wait, full stop. You wrote a thesis, a paper, on the character, 10, 15, 20 years later that you ended up playing?

Amanda Brugel: In 1996. And I started playing it in 2016.

Lisa Bragg: Wow.

Amanda Brugel: Mm-hmm. And that's why I tell people to write it down because I was so much in love with her and she was such a big part of my life. I had been talking about the book for years, and the casting director that I would read for a lot, at auditions, I would be the audition reader, she was sick of me talking about *The Handmaid's Tale* and about Margaret Atwood. She got the job, she happened to be the Canadian casting director and she called me and said, "Listen, I'm the Canadian casting director on this. They're not hiring any Canadians. I will allow you to come in and audition, but I just want you to be able to speak the role. I know how much you love the words. Give it a whirl. You're not going to get the part."

Amanda Brugel: So I did. And I spent, I cannot tell you how long I spent on this audition, and if you've seen the show, Rita doesn't speak that much, but there's so much that she communicates by her body language and her breathing and her facial expressions. And I spent hours trying to find her. And so I auditioned and lo and behold, got a call back. And when I got the call back and the screen test and all of the producers and the director were there, they were asking me about my thesis and I kept correcting them on what I felt was wrong in the script. Again, being a little more brazen, I suppose a trailblazer, I just wanted to be honest.

Amanda Brugel: And I also wanted them to understand that they were dealing with, as far as I was concerned, almost like a book in biblical proportions, a Canadian legacy, and so they had to treat it with care. And so I just started telling them I didn't love their work on the script, and then they hired me.

Lisa Bragg: Wow. Again, brave. "I don't like what you're doing, you don't have the depth."

- Amanda Brugel:** Yes. Well, just to understand, I'm indebted to the company, but it's an American company coming in and doing a Canadian story. I'm a very, very proud Canadian, so I just wanted to make sure that they understood just the legacy that they had to uphold.
- Lisa Bragg:** It's like maple syrup, Margaret Atwood. It's the part of the whole thing.
- Amanda Brugel:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Lisa Bragg:** That's amazing though, and I had shivers when you were telling that story that you wrote your thesis and here you are now telling the directors that are doing the remake of it, that this is the way it is.
- Amanda Brugel:** Mm-hmm. Or this is the way that I envisioned Rita because she has been a character that was so close to my heart for over 25 years that I felt very strongly about her, and in a polite yet forceful way, I chose to express my opinion, which is again something I don't think that we do as women. We're getting better, we're seeing many more women who are outspoken being rewarded for being outspoken and not being shamed or being called an assortment of not very nice words. There's more role models, especially for younger women coming along. I would've just like given a part of my limb away to have seen the amount of strong women that I see now on a daily basis, particularly women of colour, speaking their truth and sitting in themselves and being brave enough to come across as aggressive or outspoken.
- Amanda Brugel:** And so I think young women are very, very fortunate to be able to have those role models. But I also, knowing that I'm 43, I also take it quite seriously to then speak my truth in order for younger women to feel that they have permission to do so.
- Lisa Bragg:** Because we really have to see it to be it.
- Amanda Brugel:** Yes, you really do. You really do. And I think at the same time, I'm raising children, two boys, and I think it's imperative for them to see a strong woman and their mom to be successful in her career. But if they can also see me successful every day in our personal lives, they'll be able to recognize that that's how women are, and not question it when they grow up and they meet strong women.
- Lisa Bragg:** What's it like though being the only Canadian delivering this massively Canadian product? How is that?
- Amanda Brugel:** At the beginning, it was very difficult. At the beginning, I felt like an outsider and because I felt like such ownership on the material, I felt

even more as an outsider because I felt like I had something a little to prove because I wanted to do justice to the book, but also being the only Canadian, we don't have much of a star system in Canada and so there is a bit of a hierarchy on set. And I think at the beginning, a lot of the American actors they just, they didn't really want to associate with me and they didn't really want to open up to me as much as they could.

Amanda Brugel: Not because they're not very nice people, they're wonderful people, it's just that in Hollywood, particularly on Hollywood movie sets, there's just a very small group, people sort of want to keep at a certain status and commiserating with the unknown Canadian, I don't think it was on their top priority list, but I just did my work and did my thing. I'm never really... Again, rejection. Going back to rejection, it's something that drives me and not being welcomed or led in immediately to this group of very famous Hollywood actors. It enticed me to just do better work because instead of trying to befriend them, I let my work speak for itself.

Amanda Brugel: And so finally after a while, I think they realized that I was a contender, or at least I was someone that had come to play, and now we're very, very close, all of us.

Lisa Bragg: So you've really get fuel, you use things as fuel.

Amanda Brugel: Yes.

Lisa Bragg: And do you think about it or does it just come to you that like, "ugh, okay, I'm going to use this to power me forward?"

Amanda Brugel: Oh, I think I have to think about it. I think we all do. I'm human, and I get hurt and I get stunned and and bruised and fall down and want to crawl under the covers. But I again, to reinvent the way you think about things, particularly negative things, I think it's really important not to let things crush you or halt you and stop you. I think it's really important to use anything that hurts, be able to examine it, question why it hurts and then use that to propel you out of the hurt. And instead of, again, like I said, just becoming completely immobile. Some people I know, and I think this can happen with women especially because we are sensitive beings and we are quite empathetic creatures.

Amanda Brugel: We can let something that happened stay with us for the rest of our lives and keep us down and keep us hurt and keep us from moving

forward. And I've seen that in my mother, I love my mother. My mother is an amazing person, but I think the thing that I learned about her is that things that have happened in her past, they've kept her in her past for years. In some ways for her, it's still 1988, and I want to keep moving forward and I want to not let things hold me back from moving forward. It's painful, it's painful, but you can still learn from it.

Lisa Bragg: We simply can't dwell. It's the dwelling that holds us all back and so you have to place that last year and just say, "I'm moving forward." Move on.

Amanda Brugel: You can't be angry with yourself for it. I think it's really important to understand if you're hurt, because again, as we're starting to see stronger women, I think that we think that we have to be unfeeling now and you have to be powerful, wonder women. We can still feel and we can still be gentle and soft and hurt, but it's how you deal with it, how you change it and how you can use that into becoming your power and not staying slain by it.

Lisa Bragg: So still being empathetic and having the characteristics of women, but also being bolder and moving on faster through.

Amanda Brugel: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lisa Bragg: *The Handmaid's Tale* has themes of sisterhood and women coming together and supporting each other at a time where women are doing that, they're doing it in real life. So how does that make you feel?

Amanda Brugel: Oh, goodness sakes. It's a beautiful question. I think that starting off, like I mentioned before, we weren't as close of a cast, and seeing how we rely on one another as a cast has really impacted me and how I carry that forward in other jobs. But seeing how the roles and how we fight together on television and how that's resonated globally has been remarkable. It's so mind-blowing to me that people are using the costumes to protest in forms of protest or people look at, and when you see the bonnets and just the red dresses and immediately now people look at it as a sign of rebellion, as a sign of women and women's empowerment.

Amanda Brugel: It's not something you set out to be as an actor, you don't set out to have a global impact, but the fact that it's had a global impact, particularly among women, particularly among women uniting together has been, I think the most successful thing I've ever been a part of.

Lisa Bragg: Such a big statement. Let's move to the future, but you touched on it a little bit already that you're going to do your own film?

Amanda Brugel: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lisa Bragg: Really? What can you tell us about that?

Amanda Brugel: I can't really tell you a lot about it. Like I mentioned before, I started as a writer, and write occasionally and, write little things and write pieces for magazines. But I've always been afraid of, I didn't grow up in the generation that you can do everything and be everything like younger women that are coming after me. Even women that are 10 years my junior are able to wear many hats or have the confidence enough to say that they can wear many hats. And I have learned from the generation that's behind me and I would like to do the same. And so I have optioned a script with my agent and we'll be producing it this year, which is really exciting.

Amanda Brugel: I don't know what I'm doing, which is also very exciting, but I do know and I do have confidence enough that I've done this for long enough that I'll find my way. And I know there'll be pain and I know that I will grow from it and I know that there'll be mistakes, but I'm excited to venture into this unknown territory. Not that I'm bored in what I'm doing, but again, because I've gone through my list and I don't really have things on my list that excite me anymore besides maybe becoming a Marvel superhero, I want to do things that scare me. And I know that sounds so cliché and so Hollywood, but I think it's imperative if you are trying to grow, you're trying to reshape who you are, that you have to put yourself in uncomfortable places.

Lisa Bragg: Yeah. You have to have the confidence to try something new that will scare the (pause) out of you. That's the way we keep growing and reinventing or remaking ourselves.

Amanda Brugel: Remaking ourselves and knowing that if it's new, it's not going to hurt you. It's a lesson that every time I fall down, and I think that I'm just about to not make it through and I make it through and I remind myself every time, "You're not going to die. It's going to hurt, it's going to be scary, but you're not going to die." I think it's so important for women to understand that we can push ourselves and feel like it's the scariest thing, but you're not going to die.

Lisa Bragg: Oh, you just have to take that leap and do it and you will land well. And you prove it over and over again.

Amanda Brugel: Thank you.

Lisa Bragg: What challenges, now that you're internationally recognized, you're not just a Canadian actor anymore, now you're internationally recognized. Does that bring any new challenges?

Amanda Brugel: Oh yes, all of the time. I think that there's still a humility when it comes to being a Canadian, so it's interesting to answer this question, but walking down the street sometimes is different or being in large groups or large groups when it comes to film festivals or large events, spaces can be difficult. Last year I had to hire a security guard, which I've never had to do before, which is interesting. And I think just privacy, with my children, I don't really talk about what I do, it's not important. It's interesting to see the full circle I've gone back to, where I protect them from what my parents were trying to protect me from.

Amanda Brugel: And I didn't really realize I was doing that until my son started getting the ability to Google and Googled my name and then started finding out that mommy was on TV and then started seeing pictures of himself. He started sort of adopting an attitude or thinking that that made him special. And I don't want him to think that, he needs to carve out his own path and find reasons that he's special as an individual as opposed to just because he's on the internet makes him special. So anything to do with my children, I get really protective about.

Lisa Bragg: Yeah, as a mother. And there's two boys?

Amanda Brugel: There's two of them.

Lisa Bragg: As a master of re-invention, what tips would you give others?

Amanda Brugel: I think the number one thing to do is to write down a list of what you want to become or what you want to do and then stick to that list, and think so far outside of the box that the dreams scare you. Number two, speaking of being scared, I think that you need to on the list, have several things that scare you, several things that make you so deeply uncomfortable you think, "Why did I put it on the list?" And then at least commit yourself to one of them. And number three, check back. It's really important to look back on the progress that you've made and see how far you've come and all of the things that you've changed.

Amanda Brugel: Because again, as women, we're so busy and we're constantly taught to be grateful and constantly encouraged to have gratitude about the

things that we've done or we've done other things that we have. But I don't think that we really look back and see how many times in a year we have reinvented ourselves or sidestepped problems or remade parts of our life. You have to really go back and see how many times you've done it to be able to go forward and do it again.

Lisa Bragg: Those little shifts just keep us going in different ways and growing.

Amanda Brugel: Write it down, be brave, and also just to remind yourself the fact that you can do it.

Lisa Bragg: Celebrate. Good. What hopes do you have for the film and TV industry and diversity on screen? Do you have any hopes or?

Amanda Brugel: Oh dear. Oh, so many hopes. All the hopes. I was greatly disappointed this year with the Golden Globe Awards, there were so many brilliant performances by women of colour. And when I say women of colour, I mean Black women, women of South Asian descent, Asian women. I just think there's so many more women out there that we could recognize and so many more stories that are being told that are the same story, North American story that we're used to seeing over and over. And so, my greatest hope is that there are more lead roles for women of colour, more romantic leads like *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Amanda Brugel: It's not a secret that that was such a massive hit. And not just with the Asian community, but with a widely diverse community. I think the more we start changing how people see stories of romance and if people that aren't of colour are able to see themselves in roles of people of colour, like people of colour have been doing for so long, I think it'll be easier for women like me to get cast in roles.

Lisa Bragg: And it's also women like us who are in our 40s though, where you're not locked on that path or things are not just that way. There's so much more, there's lots of runway.

Amanda Brugel: That's something that I'm quite excited about actually. I always think that there could be more roles, but just to watching shows now on the streaming services where there's a lot more women cop shows, where there are cop buddy shows and it's led by two women, it's so exciting, and not just young women but women in their 50s and 60s. That's still young as far as I'm concerned. But there's so many more roles and so many more production companies and networks allowing women that are more mature to thrive. And that to me, when you're at the height of your career and when you're the most successful, when you've

tapped into those emotions, when you have a few years of experience, you're the most interesting.

Amanda Brugel: And so the fact that the film industry is starting to recognize that, it's really exciting.

Lisa Bragg: Because we do have so much knowledge that we've built-

Amanda Brugel: So much knowledge.

Lisa Bragg: ... over these years.

Amanda Brugel: And so much power. And I think that that's the thing that also really inspires younger generations, whenever I speak to younger women, they talk to me about how confident I seem and I have to remind them that I have 20 years of experience over them, and 20 years of learning, reinventing, of hurt, of picking myself up and moving forward again, and that they will be there too just trust that they'll keep picking themselves up, and eventually, hopefully sooner than I did, stand in their power and reclaim it.

Lisa Bragg: Because those failures are fuel.

Amanda Brugel: Yes.

Lisa Bragg: To wrap the show, we have the same three questions we put to everyone, so we'd like to hear your take on them. The first one is, what's the boldest thing you've ever done?

Amanda Brugel: Okay. I have it. At the 2017 Emmys. I was sitting beside Margaret Atwood, and Oprah came out on stage and was about to announce who the Drama of the Year Award winners were. And I turned to Margaret and I grabbed her hand and I said - I swore, but I'm not going to swear here - I grabbed her hand and I said, "Get -beep- ready because we're going to win." And Oprah announced *The Handmaid's Tale*. So I pulled Margaret Atwood up out of her chair and I thought, "This is the only chance I'm going to have to walk Margaret Atwood up stage and just walk her straight to Oprah." So I held her hand and then yanked her upstairs the whole time. So aggressive and bold, yes, but two of my dreams were fulfilled. I think it's the boldest.

Lisa Bragg: Okay. I have to ask a followup though. Did she know that you were going to walk her, escort her?

Amanda Brugel: No. She didn't have a choice, but she came willingly and it was fantastic and I got to speak to Oprah. She said congratulations, and I said her name back to her and then just stared at her. And so that's not really a conversation, but in my head either qualifies as a conversation, and so all of my dreams came true. So bold and dreams.

Lisa Bragg: Absolutely, conversation, awesome. When do you wish you were bolder?

Amanda Brugel: When I was younger. Yes, when I was younger, and like I was saying before, there's been years of experience to teach me that being bold or speaking my mind or being a little more outspoken, a little more confident in the way that I ask for things took me a long time to learn that. And so I wish I had learned that lesson earlier. I wish I had learned that to be outspoken, to be bold per se is not a negative thing, especially as a woman. And that if I were to have done it younger, I probably would have inspired women younger than me and a group of people around me to do it. And so if you think that you can't or shouldn't or it will be impolite, just go with your gut. Be bold.

Lisa Bragg: What would you say to your 10-year-old self?

Amanda Brugel: I would tell her that she's crazy and to embrace her eccentricities regardless of what she's going to learn in a year. Walk into a room as Amanda first, that she has a beautiful skin colour and being biracial is the most beautiful thing in the world. But walk into the room as her person first and then her race will follow. Because the idea of race and the picture of race will change a lot. And having to succumb to a box, having to be a certain type of person because I'm a certain colour, you're not going to have to do that for much longer, sweetheart, so just hold on and walk in as you first.

Lisa Bragg: Today's guest was the award-winning Canadian actor, Amanda Brugel. You've been listening to Bold(h)er, brought to you by BMO for Women. If you liked the show, subscribe and share it with others. I'm Lisa Bragg. Thanks for listening.