

[Book Journeys](#) Author Interview - June 5, 2014

Dr. Angela Lauria with Jim Johnson, author of *A Coach and a Miracle*

"You really gotta have that belief and faith when you do a book." ~Coach Jim Johnson

Angela:

Well hello, everybody. Welcome to Book Journeys Radio. My name is Dr. Angela Lauria. I am the owner of The Author Incubator and creator of The Difference Process for Writing a Book That Matters. Every week on Book Journeys, we talk to an author about their book journey. Everybody's story of becoming an author is unique and our books often take us on journeys we had never expected to go on. This week, we are going to be talking to Coach Jim Johnson... coachjimjohnson.com and he is [a] speaker, a basketball coach, and he is the author of *A Coach and a Miracle*. Jim, thanks so much for being on the show.

Jim:

My pleasure. Thanks for having me, Angela.

Angela:

So tell us about *A Coach and a Miracle*. What's your book about?

Jim:

My book is about... It was very blessed to be part of an inspirational story with a high school student, name is Jason "J-Mac" McElwain and he was autistic - he still is autistic - and he was my team manager but he had a dream about trying to play in a high school basketball team and so he kept with our program. He was our team manager for three years but what made him unique was that he tried out for the team all three years and unfortunately he didn't make the team. So, for a senior year, when I brought him in and told him he wasn't quite good enough to be had in the team, I'd shared with him that I wanted to give him a gift and the gift was I was going to put him in uniform for a final home game which was our senior night, and he got into the game with just a little about four minutes to go and he shocked the world; he shocked it and pretty much anyone in any part of this planet when he scored 20 points in four minutes, including six three-point shots. And so after that dramatic game we got a lot of publicity and it really got me into thinking about... into my own personal development and people started to ask me, when are you going to write a book about it and I wanted to write an evergreen book and so certainly the story is sprinkled throughout, but I wrote it as a life lessons book and I take you through chapter [per] chapter, actually the first six chapters of the six keys that I talk about in my keynote on how to make your dreams come true. And then we talk in three other chapters of some other, I think the essential points, and they were relevant to the book and so it's very much a life lessons book. We've gotten a lot of really nice reviews about it and we're very proud of it. I wrote it... I actually had a co-author. He was a high school classmate of mine that actually had two sons on the autism spectrum, so they came [in] that game and [it] touched them deeply and so it was a great process and the book is, they said, has been out and when it's uh... we've been very proud of it.

Angela:

Well that, uhm... I actually remember that story as... For me it was the first, like, viral video I found that... It must have been in 2005-2006? It was almost... through YouTube, I think.

Jim:

Yeah, it was... It became very viral and been... millions of hits now on YouTube, ah, that show the video of the game, so it's uh, yeah, it uh... it exploded like, uh... it was incredible, so.

Angela:

Wow! I can only imagine what that would be like now that video is even more popular than it was back then.

Jim:

Yeah. I know it's, uh, crazy.

Angela:

Wow, that's just an amazing story. So, a lot of [the] things I talk about, what inspire people to write their book, but clearly, your inspiration was right in front of you. What was it that made you actually decide to write it down. So a lot of people had said to you, "When are you going to write about it?" Why did you say yes to that? To that call, 'cause people get that all the time. "You should write a book. You know that's amazing."

Jim:

Right. Right.

Angela:

Well, you know I.. Certainly because it gathered so much publicity and I think it gave so many people inspiration and hope, and back in 2006 when the game occurred, uh, you know, autism was just starting to become... a little bit more... but there was still a lot of questions to be answered, and so... In fact we're now... the latest research I've seen is that one out of every 68 babies born in the United States are going to be in the autism spectrum, so that's [a] pretty staggering statistic. So I thought... You know when I uh... With this story and with all the years that I've coached, I thought this'd be a wonderful opportunity to give people hope and inspiration and write as a life lesson so it could make them think, and one of the things they talk about is developing your own mission statement and having a direction in life. We talk about goal-setting in the book and... So uh... It was a way that uh... You know we had a really inspirational story but it was a way I thought... I could expand it with all the lessons I'd learned as... being a teacher and a coach for a long time... A way that I could give back and try to help with as many people as I could.

Angela:

Oh, yeah. That's what we're all about here... writing books that matter; writing book that make a difference and this is a story I know made a difference in millions of people's lives and it's an incredible story to have been a part of. What is it now that you wish you knew before you wrote the book?

Jim:

You know, I think the biggest thing is that uh, really establishing a platform of being able to reach out and uh, you know, really, you know, keep people abreast of the book and you know, having a systematic marketing approach. That was probably my, you know, [for] both myself and my co-author's biggest mistake is that uh, I think we assumed, because the story had been so popular that the book would just jump right off the shelf and uh, you know. One thing I'd really learned about books is, as good as a book... and we're very proud of the book... is if you don't do a great job of, you know, getting that out and people being aware of it, uh, that uh, they can die in the shelf, so it's uh. As I began... The biggest lesson I'd learned is I think that you really... if you're thinking of writing a book is really put together how you're gonna market the plan, uh, the book, and also how you're going to, you know, reach out to your platform, you know, social media has gotten very big, and it was, you know, back then, it was, you know, getting there but now it's just extraordinarily big and so you really got to stay on top of it, but I think that would be the best lesson I could share with people is that you gotta be... uh, you know, establish a platform and find, you know, really come up with a strong marketing plan... once this book comes out... how to reach as many people as you possibly can.

Angela:

Yeah. I mean... So here's... I could... to you all day. Uhm, so what most people that come to me that wanna write a book, what I find most of them think is the way to get readers is to write the best book possible and so they're focused on what's going in their book and they're focused on their writing style and uhm, you know, to have a book that makes a difference, is a threshold that you have to meet. You know, there's kind of a bigger minimum writing standard, but once you meet that threshold... you need two things to write a book that makes a difference: a powerful story a lesson, something you wanna teach - clearly you had that - and then you need it to be in people's hands, 'cause it's not making a difference in a box in your basement or on a shelf on Amazon. And so, I think that for so many people, what they're expecting is the reaction that you got to that viral video. They're expecting to sort of win the lottery. They put the book out and all of a sudden, you know, two million people happen to buy it. And what happened with you with the viral video is, I think, is incredibly... look at it with different... with different eyes now... that it wasn't just the quality of the story, 'cause here's the same story in the book and it didn't have that reaction. There's some sort of... you know, some people write a book that wins the lottery. Some people just get lucky. But that's a pretty small percentage of people and so, to write a book that makes a difference, you need to have a plan for how you're going to reach your audience. So, what are some of the things you've done since the book has come out to connect with readers?

Jim:

Well. I've tried a lot of different things. Some certainly worked better than others but I think the one is, you have to keep your face out there as much as [you can]. So the more you can get about... interviews and those types of things and just keeping the, you know, publicity alive is, I think, a really positive thing. I think the other thing is that you really gotta become or add a lot of expertise in social media, you know by finding ways that you can incorporate parts of your lessons or your books or little segments that you can send out on all the various... whether it's tweeting or Facebook, you know, all the different ways that you can do it. And you know, I think... you know, cause I do a lot of speaking, is that... you know, certainly you can sell your book as a back-in-a-room [item] or negotiate it as a part of the package where everybody in the audience would get a book. And then... Those are some things that early... wasn't that aware of but now, you know, those are always the things that we make sure we try to bring up when we go out to speak at some place because I think the more you can get it into people's hands, especially, you know, when you're getting a lot of nice reviews, that's hugely important. You know the other thing is... It's interesting if you're like... We had some pretty big names in the sports business that endorsed the book but I found it... What you need to do though, I think is take it a step further 'cause and you gotta get somebody who's really gonna reach out that has a big platform... and who would be willing to reach out to their following and really recommend the book. We didn't use that resource. I think that was a mistake. If I was to do it again, I'd definitely... you know... some of the people who did endorse it... If you can get them, you know, get their tribe that's following them, to get the book, I think that's hugely important as well.

Angela:

Yeah. I think that's a fantastic piece of advice. What are some of the things... if you can think of any... not that you haven't thought... but anything that you did that you wouldn't do again from a promotional perspective? Any investments you made or, you know, things you tried that just really didn't work?

Jim:

Well, you know. I think that... the one thing... and I'll say this... because of my circumstances... I'm retiring in three weeks from my teaching job because I'm gonna go speak professionally full time at... but I think the one thing that was a real challenge, for me, is that when our book came out, is that I was still doing a full time teaching job. I was still coaching and I was speaking, you know, on a part time basis... it's that there's just not enough hours in the day. Like I read, you know, with some of the authors who have made it huge with their book, wherein they were on some type of interview or media thing, you know, at least once a day if not multiple times a day for months, and uh... it was very challenging because of where I was in my life with the various commitments that I had that I couldn't make it, you know, big... high priority to promote my book, but I would say to any author, "You know, if your book is something you really want to try to sell a lot of copies of, you know, its gotta be a major part of what you do for a good segment of time, 'cause if you don't, it's just gonna go by the wayside. One other thing is you gotta be careful with book signings. It's that

book signings can be very effective, but if they're not well-publicized and really getting the word out, they can be your real flop... and I've had some that were really good and I've had some that, you know, I was there for three hours and we only had three people show up, so we just gotta be really careful of making sure that it's very well publicized and you get the word out when you do a book signing 'cause they can be deceiving if you don't do a good job at that.

Angela:

So, if a really crappy book signing is three people in three hours, what makes for a hugely successful book signing?

Jim:

I'd say that would be ah, where you could sell twenty five to fifty books an hour. You know, that you're getting out... getting people there and... they have a line and waiting for you to sign it.

Angela:

Let's talk about the process of writing... You actually had writing partner. Was it a ghost writer, co-author? How did that relationship work and how did you write the book? Did you write it in sections or... How did that work?

Jim:

He was the, you know I wouldn't call it... 'cause we did call ourselves co-writers, but uh, basically, he uh, put most of the writing down on paper and then I... What we did, we met a tremendous amount of times and, you know, he... well we did, you know, a lot of interviews together to go through the... you know, so there was a lot of sharing the stories. So we spent a lot of time together. We also interviewed a lot of, uhm, uh, celebrities that also made comments for the book as well. And then, from there, the processes that went... like [when] my co-author would start writing. He would send, you know, some copy to me. I would assess it. We have a... My wife also look at it as well and then we would uh, you know, make adjustments, and that was the process going through, and so. The other thing about a book is that it's a labor... it better be a labor of love 'cause it's very time consuming, no question about it.

Angela:

Yeah. Uhm... So here's a really good piece of advice. I'm gonna guess that the way you wrote this is basically the co-author was interviewing you and then he would type that up and organize it in some way?

Jim:

Correct.

Angela:

So, for people, 'cause I guess that's all the time, and for some people there are actual, like physical, limitations to typing, uhm, but if you have a story and you feel that you aren't the one to write it; having somebody interview you and put that down... It's a good way to get it out and hopefully it sounds like your voice when you read it, but does it feel true to your story and your experience?

Jim:

It did for me. Yes.

Angela:

Yeah. I think that's really the key... Somebody who can really interview you; spend a lot of time in person and just really get your voice and being able to translate that that into writing is a really good partnership especially when you have such a clear story and an idea for a book.

Jim:

Well if you want to... step up and is effective, my co-author is a newspaper writer so he's very used to interviewing people and finding, you know, go with their voice, so that was helpful.

Angela:

Yup. So once you had the manuscript done, did you work with an editor, an agent? How did you get that to the next stage?

Jim:

You know that's a very unique story. I gotta say it. The book's called *A Coach and A Miracle* and we actually, one of the early process, we did reach out and we did have an agent at one time. Actually, we thought the agent was very good, but, uh, for whatever reason it just didn't work out and then, we actually started because... there was some faith based on it... both my co-author and myself are Catholics and so's J-Mac, and so we actually... we sent to the bigger Catholic publishers and one of them was very interested and for whatever reason, I can't explain it, backed off, and then in the next evening, we were really talking about self-publishing and I had a unique experience of it. I was actually in a mess during Easter, and there was a book being given away, it was called *Rediscovering Your Catholicism*, and I read the book and I enjoyed it, and the author, I knew nothing about, but I enjoyed the book, so... I think that was Matthew Kelly and I actually sent him a donation and a note that I actually lived a miracle and I... 'cause I, you know, I'd just researched that he was a progressive writer and asked if he had any advice, and to make a long story short, he actually got the manuscript from us and enjoyed it so much, he actually had a publishing company... he actually published it for us. So it was a unique way that probably most of your authors... didn't get that type of publishing,, the way we'd done.

Angela:

Yeah, that is definitely a first, but, you know, the thing that I'm going to take away from that is just that everyone [on] *Book Journeys* is different and it doesn't always look like what you

think it's gonna look like so when you, you know, when you, uh, finish the manuscript and when you're thinking about your book, I'm guessing your plan was a traditional publishing route?

Jim:

It was...

Angela:

And so... and you got an agent... and then normally, what would happen at that point is the agent would shop that around to different publishers, and it sounds like the agent did that, and everything that's... interest. And then you would get a contract or something that's an option or kind of a bidding was as to who wants to publish it and you get an advance. And sometimes, the agent can't sell it and you're locked in with a contract for six months or a year until you can find another agent or try to do it on your own. In your case, did your agent just let you out of the contract when you got another publisher or was that contract already finished at that point?

Jim:

Uh, the contract, uhm... You know I... I... I can't remember if it was... if it had actually ended or... you know what, I actually still had a month, but he felt at that point that, uh, that uh, it was best that we just, you know, try different directions, so... sure, we didn't, uh...

Angela:

Yeah, that's... I mean that's a great... That's a great surprising story! It's a great story. I mean a lot of people get stuck in contracts with their agents and they can't do anything, so the fact that you guys ended up finding a whole other way, it's just a testament, I think, to the book... The book was meant to be out there.

Jim:

Yeah, you know, I will say that, you know, one of the keys I talk about in my keynotes is perseverance and we definitely (chuckles) did that to... in getting this book published, sure.

Angela:

That's like listening to your own medicine right? You're like...

Jim:

Uh, the other thing I'd like to say is that... (Angela interjects: Well you've taught...) Oh, go ahead.

Angela:

No, you go ahead.

Jim:

I was just going to say... The other advice... I would say, is that, you know, you really gotta have that belief and faith, uhm... when you do a book that uh, you know, you gotta find a way to get it published and I think that was a really valuable lesson that we learned, you know, that, you know, we went through some... and then we went... you know, at first it took some time to get an agent and then we were really pleased with our agent and then that didn't work out an then we had a couple of other possibilities that didn't work out, but, you know, it was a real testament that you just gotta hang in there and we believed so strongly in the book that, you know, we found a way.

Angela:

Yeah. Okay so let's talk about how having a book... and I guess this is... tied with having a story in your life, but how did having a book made a difference in your life? What are the things, some of the things that you've done as an author that, you know, didn't do as an unknown basketball coach?

Jim:

Well, I think, you know, the... the initial thing is the proud pride that you get from being an author. I guess that's a really neat experience. I think the other thing that, for me personally, because I'm doing a lot of professional speaking, is, you know, I belong in the National Speakers Association and I'm a member, you know, when I'd gone to different book workshops that uh, they would say, you know, the book is a great business card for you and I... I've found that, uh, that is very, very true that when I'm going out, you know, connecting with people that possibly would... some type of speaking that I could send a book, or, you know you can give it as a gift. I mean there's just a lot of options... You can use the book, you know, [as] a very powerful connector.

Angela:

So let's talk about speaking. I think speaking, you know, certainly you can be a speaker without a book, uhm, but having a book definitely helps you get a speaking engagement. So what's the process of getting a speaking engagement and how has having a book helped you, or how has it helped you?

Jim:

Well, I think... First, the process of getting a speaking engagement is that, again, you have to come up with a plan and I'm probably a little bit off the beaten path because until next month I'd not done it full time, so I... my speaking has been somewhat limited because of my schedule, but I think the first thing is with the speaking is you gotta have a really good website, so that when people... when you start to get out there in the social media world or connecting with people, that you could get on your website and you do that by giving them opportunities, like for example, I've a newsletter, so people could sign up for that. I've a weekly blog, so people could look at that, you know... and...

Angela:

Oh, by the way... coachjimjohnson.com. So it's coach, Jim (J-I-M), Johnson (J-O-H-N-S-O-N) dot com... talking about here.

Jim:

Alright. I think the other thing is, which is hugely important, is that you have a demo video and a demo video is something that's professionally done and one of the huge things that I didn't know right away 'cause I was kinda thrust into the speaking world, was you should try as much as you can when you go out to speak to get your speeches videoed and so then you can start to put together a... you know, sometimes clients would actually want a whole speech, but most of the time they're looking at a video and so much is now done on the Internet with the website, so that... like a have a demo video right on my website so people can... and a demo video... you put clips; it's good if you have somebody... it's unprofessional to do a voice-over... and kinda give a little feedback... you know, what you're all about as a speaker, and then also... the other thing that's hugely important is to get testimonials. You know, once you start speaking... what people are writing, but you know what's even more powerful is if you can get some video testimonials and put those... any demo video... or put them on your website so people are both seeing... uh, you know, people saying good things, and you can also have some written testimonials out there, uh, which I think is hugely important, you know, it's like... anything... you know, once you can start to get the word out there that you're an effective speaker, you can make a difference, and uh, you're very good to work with... you can start building that reputation and that can get you some important... You know, and that having a book, I think this is an added credibility, you know, that you're a published author and, as I mentioned earlier, you know, you have opportunities where... you can make it as part of your speaking tactic where you try to get the book to everyone in the audience or you can do it as, you know, back-of-the-room sales afterwards. You know it's also a nice way to connect when you're trying to reach out to people, like uh, you know, that you, somebody might recommend. "Hey, uh, you know, John Jones is looking for a speaker and, you know, you might know him a little bit.. You start by signing him a book, you know, so it's...

Angela:

Uh huh.

Jim:

...make a connection with them. So those are all nice little ways that you can keep. But I think the website and then really having a process of that, you know... that you're, you know, you're gonna have to very... you know, if you wanna be a speaker, you know, you're gonna have to do some speaking for free and try to build that credibility up and you know, there's more that you can get when you speak and, you know, get videos so you can assess yourself, and then, you know, if you can get some people (that's one of the reasons I joined the National Speakers Association). I've met some wonderful speakers that have helped mentor me... some have helped me, uh, gain both more ability on the marketing piece and more ability on the platform.

Angela:

Yeah. So, uhm. I'm sure you've had the experience when you're at maybe at a cocktail party or at a networking event and you tell people you're an author and they say, "I've always wanted to write a book" and "How did you do it; how did you get it done?" What would be the advice you would give to somebody who wants to write a book but they haven't, for whatever reason, been able to finish it? What do you tell people?

Jim:

I think the huge thing is very simple but a lot of people just don't wanna do it - you gotta get started. I think that when you set yourself a goal that, you know, I'm gonna complete a book in six months or a year, whatever, you decide, and then, you know, it's like you're saying this old saying, "How do you know... one bite at a time. You just gotta start writing. In my case, you know, I had a co-author that uh, you know, so we'd meet and get a regular schedule... when we met and you know, how we're gonna lay the book out and all those things, so. But the huge thing is just getting started in writing... and if you're writing, you know, [what] I want to reemphasize is that [you] make sure, because at the bottom line, when you finish the book, you wanna get it to as many people as you can as you also got to put together a plan of action - a marketing plan, how, you know, the different avenues that you're gonna try to promote the book.

Angela:

Yeah. So I'm just curious. Have you stayed in touch with J-Mac and what's his story now?

Jim:

Absolutely. J-Mac and I are actually very, very close, even closer than we were back in 2006. He is actually one of my assistant basketball coaches. He's doing wonderful and in fact he's a great illustration of the power of goal-setting. He's actually, [in] the last couple of years, he got very big into running. In a couple of years, he came to me and said, "Coach, I wanna run in a marathon, and he'd been a runner in high school, but he kinda gotten away from it when he got out of high school and, "Really?" I said, "What's your goal in the marathon?" He goes, "You know, I'm not sure, let me think about it." And he came back to me in a couple of days and he said, "Coach, I wanna qualify for the Boston Marathon." And I said, "What's the qualifying time...?" He said "Three hours and five minutes." I kinda go like, "J-Mac, that's... and he actually went out and... marathon and happy to share with you, he ran it in 3 hours and just under one minute and qualified and was passed to the Boston Marathon... He actually ran in the marathon and he set another goal, and his goal this time was to run on in three hours and so I'm happy to tell you he did that... he ran for 2 hours 57 minutes and 5 seconds, so. J-Mac is doing wonderfully well [and our] relationship continues to grow and I think he's gonna be speaking, uh, teaching... for my party, for myself tonight, so he's gonna be speaking at that, so. That's a lot of... wonderful...

Angela:

Amazing! Congratulations on your teaching career! How many years were you teaching?

Jim:

Ah, 33.

Angela:

Thirty-three years. Well, congratulations on 33 years on your retirement. Here's to a successful full time speaking career, and uhm, Jim Johnson. He is the author of *A Coach and A Miracle*. You can get that at coachjimjohnson.com or on Amazon. Uhm, so many great lessons on, in this book, both about this story but also just life lessons. So Jim, thanks for being here and for your book.

Jim:

Well, thank you. Can I just say one quick thing, Dr. Angela, is that uh...?

Angela:

Sure.

Jim:

I actually hooked up with a local autism organization, well actually it's called... People actually purchase my book off of my website and I actually donate a dollar fifty to that organization 'cause I'm partnering with them, so...

Angela:

Fantastic! So go buy the book on Jim's website. We are gonna be back next week doing what we do here, changing the world one book at a time.