

Book Journeys Author Interview - September 5, 2013

Dr. Angela Lauria with Cynthia MacGregor, author of *Predator Proof Your Child: What You Need to Know to Protect Your Child*.

"If I can't do a good job of it I won't do it at all." ~Cynthia MacGregor

Angela:

Well, hello, everybody, and welcome to another episode of Book Journeys Radio. Every week, on Book Journeys, we talk to an author about their experience of – of becoming an author, of writing and their experience with publishing and promoting their books, and a lot of times we talked to first-time authors on this show, but this week we have a special treat. We're here with Cynthia MacGregor, and Cynthia has authored over a hundred books in the twenty years that she has been an author and an editor, and her most recent book is called *Predator Proof Your Child: What You Need to Know to Protect Your Child*, and you can learn more about Cynthia on cynthiamacgregor.com, m-a-c, not m-c, cynthiamacgregor.com. Cynthia, thank you so much for being with us!

Cynthia:

Well, thank you for having me on, Angela, I appreciate it.

Angela:

It's very exciting to talk to somebody who's written to – written over a hundred books in twenty years, which is something like five books a year. How have you write so much?

Cynthia:

Well, actually, I've written more than that, I just haven't gotten them all published yet.
(chuckles)

Angela:

Oh, my goodness! So, y – y – you must be writing a hundred hours a day! How do you do it? Tell us what ... your schedule?

Cynthia:

Well, I am a – I am a full-time – I am a full-time freelance writer / editor. I don't just write books, I also write business materials and ... with copy and articles and – whatever anybody wants to pay me for, but – a lot of what I write is books, and I write quickly and I work seven days a week, and – and it adds up.

Angela:

Wow! What do you like about being an author? Why have you been doing it so long?

Cynthia:

What do I like about being an author? Well, it's very satisfying, creatively. I've been writing since I was old enough to spell "c-a-t," and when I was nine years old I wrote a – a play that was put on in summer camp, and j – that was very gratifying, seeing my words performed up on stage. I don't – I've been writing one thing or another ever since – ever since I was six years old - ..., stories, articles, you name it, and it's very enjoyable work – I – I shouldn't even say "work," it doesn't feel like work. ... it's fun, it's – it's very satisfying and gratifying and enjoyable. And I also edit, I edit books, magazines, web copy, business materials, whatever anybody wants to pay me for editing, and about the only thing that I don't write – I don't write college papers, I've had people approach me ..., to – to ghostwrite – not ghostwritten books, but I've never – I've had people ghost – a – approach me to ghostwrite college papers, and I don't do that, and I don't do grant proposals, because grant proposals is a very specialized form of writing and I don't know the format, and just – I don't wanna turn in third-rate work, so if I can't do a good job of it I won't do it at all.

Angela:

So, let's talk about *Predator Proof Your Child*. How did you come up with the idea for this book?

Cynthia:

Well, it's – a – sam – I – I had found a new publisher, Familius, which focuses on family-oriented topics, and I put some thought into what family-oriented topics I hadn't covered in any of my previous books. I'd written quite a few other books that were – family-oriented, and I – I tried to think what I hadn't written about that would be relevant to, and of interest to, a family-centric readership, and – there's so much going on these days with predators, unfortunately –

Angela:

So, ...

Cynthia:

– both sexual predators and predators for ransom – and – and – and I decided it was a necessary topic to address, so I decided to write a book about it.

Angela:

So, *Predator Proof Your Child* is about sexual predators and kidnapers ...

Cynthia:

Those ... with predators – predators for a profit motive, predators for twisted, perverted desires, predators who prey on little kids, predators who prey on teenagers, predators who prey on people of the same sex, predators who prey on people of the opposite sex, it's – it encompasses the – the entire gamut – because there are all sorts of predators out there.

Angela:

Yeah. And was that a topic that was close to your heart in some way? Was that something you had an experience with, or w – why that –

Cynthia:

Well, I had – I had a problem in my teen years, with my – my own grandfather, who – whose hands went where they didn't belong, and who kissed me in ways that no grandfather should kiss his granddaughter, and – I – so, I had – personal – even though it never went all the way, it was bad enough, what it was. And I have three fr – well, I have had three friends, at least, over the years, who come to mind, offhand, who had experiences – one was preyed upon sexually by a – a male relative, a – a cousin, I believe it was, and the other two were raped by their fathers, seduced by their fathers, whatever word you want to use. Their fathers had intercourse with them, and – these are friends of mine, and – and it happens in nice families, Angela –

Angela:

Mmm.

Cynthia:

– there are people out there – blind themselves to it and say, “Well, we come from a nice family, it won't happen to us.” Bull-hockey, it can happen in the nicest families possible. I come from a – a middle-class, respectable, responsible family, my grandfather was a business owner, it didn't stop him from his hands wandering, and also these friends of mine also came from solid families, and still, their – their fathers molested them. And i – i – i – it's happened – it happens out there, and – and people need to – to be aware of this.

Angela:

And for you, personally, you've written so many books, is writing on a topic that you had personal experience with, does that – is that important to you? Does that make a difference for you?

Cynthia:

Well, it makes it easier to write in terms of – that I – I don't have to research that particular episode. That doesn't mean I don't have to do any research for the whole book, I certainly did do research for this book, but –

Angela:

Right.

Cynthia:

– parts of it were – were my own experience and didn't need research, and i – i – it makes the topic more meaningful for me.

Angela:

So, let's talk about your experience publishing because, I think for many people, they have the idea for their books first, and then they find a publisher. In this case, you had found a publisher you wanted to work with, and then you kind of backed into a topic that – meant something to you, but you were trying to fit it to what the publisher was known for publishing.

Cynthia:

Right.

Angela:

So, how did you find this publishing company, and why did you decide you wanted to work with them?

Cynthia:

I found this publishing company, if I remember, through through a – a listing, I believe, in Funds for Writers, C. Hope Clark weekly – newsletter, which contains valuable leads to publishers, and – she, if I remember correctly, ...

Angela:

... Are you there?

Cynthia:

Pardon me?

Angela:

Oh, we lost you for a minute, I'm not exactly sure where you went.

Cynthia:

Oh, okay.

Angela:

But your voice disappears.

Cynthia:

Hope – Hope Clark had a – had a squib about Familius Publishing in her Funds for Writers newsletter, and I went to their website and looked them up and decided that they – since they published on family-oriented topics, and since I have written a fair number of books on family-oriented topics, I decided they would be a good fit for me, and I should just try to find something to write about on a family-centric topic that I had not written about before, so I wouldn't be covering old ground, and I came up with the idea of predator-proofing your child.

Angela:

So, what – you’ve had a lot of experience, you’ve worked with several publishing companies in your career, ... multiple books –

Cynthia:

..., yes.

Angela:

– mul – multiple books that the same publisher, different publishers – what do you look for, what makes a good publishing company, and what advice would you give to authors when they’re looking for a company to work with?

Cynthia:

Well, I personally prefer small publishers. My first publisher was Berkley, which is a biggie, and I ..., I – I was the little fish in the big pond, and I felt that they – they didn’t give me personal attention or – that I was just – one of the million authors for them. My favorite publisher that I have had experience with so far is Impact Publishers in Atascadero, California. Unfortunately, their scope of publishing is rather limited, and most of the books that I write aren’t suited to the categories they publish into, but they have – four of my books, they have *After Your Divorce*, which is the – for women who have gotten divorced, they have *Divorce Helpbook for Kids*, *Divorce Helpbook for Teens*, and *Jigsaw Puzzle Family*, which is about stepfamilies. And my experience with them has been marvelous, they’re wonderful people to work with, they’re personalized, they’re – they – they give me – I’m not an attention hog, I don’t need to be catered to, but I don’t like to feel lost in the crowd, either, and they – if I pull up and say, “Hi, Melissa, it’s Cynthia,” the publisher knows who it is and she’ll talk to me.

Angela:

Right. And – and so, what – what would you say, if somebody’s looking for publisher, what are some of the questions that you think they should be asking?

Cynthia:

Well, of course you want to know if the – if the publisher has a track record, if they – if they’re new, that doesn’t exclude them, but if they have a track record, do they – do they pay their writers on time? I had a very bad experience with a Canadian publisher of childrens’ books that didn’t send out royalty statements timely and didn’t send out royalty payments timely, and I – I didn’t – I didn’t know that these were their ethics, and it was – it was a horrible experience, and I don’t know how I’d put a sound out in advance, but one place that a writer can go online is *Predators and Editors – Editors and Predators*, I guess I have it backwards. *Editors and Predators* –

Angela:

Mmm!

Cynthia:

– ... can find out about predatory publishers who don't treat their writers right, and if somebody isn't listed on Editors and Predators that doesn't prove they're one of the good guys, but if they are listed there, watch out.

Angela:

Wow, that's a great piece of advice, Editors and Predators, excellent. What do you think is the most –

Cynthia:

And that – that's online, and – I'm sorry, go ahead.

Angela:

Yeah. What to you is the most surprising part of writing a book?

Cynthia:

Most surprising part? Gee, I don't know, I – I don't know that there are any surprising parts.

Angela:

Because you've written so many, now you aren't surprised. Are there things about being an author that – that you've experienced that you think, without being an author, you wouldn't have experienced?

Cynthia:

Well, I think if I – if I weren't an author, it would have been harder for me to get a lot of the other writing gigs that I've gotten –

Angela:

Mmm.

Cynthia:

– that aren't book writing, certainly being able to say that I have over a hundred published books, or even that, when it was just fifty, being able to say that I had fifty published books, made it lots – i – it gave me credibility, and it made it much easier for me to get – assignments from individuals and businesses to write anything from student handbooks to advertisements to p – press releases, promotions, you name it, and being an author certainly – being a published au – a most published author gave me great credibility, and – also, another – another – go ahead.

Angela:

What, for you – w – what, for you – yup, go ahead. No, you go ahead.

Cynthia:

A – another – another good thing that I think being an author helped me with was, for nearly two years I had my own TV show locally, and I think that being an author of – of – of family-oriented books helped give me credibility and get the – the show. The show – the show was called *Solo Parenting*, and it was for single parents of all sorts, divorced, widowed, never married, and – male or female, a – custodial or not, and as I say we were on the air for almost two years, and it was a – a fun experience, certainly, great fun, also hard work, but great fun while being hard work, and I feel that – that my – my publishing credentials helped me land the show.

Angela:

For sure, yeah. So, what is more – what ends up being more lucrative to you, writing your own book or writing for other people?

Cynthia:

Well, it's more satisfying to write my own book, but it's more remunerative to write for other people.

Angela:

Hm. So you try and mix it up and do a little bit of both.

Cynthia:

Pardon me?

Angela:

So, you try and do both? You write your own books and you ...

Cynthia:

Yes, I try and do both. I – I ghostwrite books for other people, and I write my own books. I've certainly written far more books in my own name than I've – ghosted, that I've ghosted a fair number of books, and I will not – I will not take on a ghosting assignment on shares, I want money up front. An author may have a bad –

Angela:

Awesome! You don't have that great – connection, I keep losing you. So, here's the next thing I wanna ask about is – when you are – when you're working on a book, how do you structure your writing time? Do you work on multiple books at one time?

Cynthia:

I usually only work on one book at a time. I may work on other writing projects simultaneously, articles for a client or articles for a magazine or – whatever, but I don't normally work on more

than one book at a time. I would have trouble keeping them straight in my head, and – and so, I work on, normally, just one book at a time.

Angela:

And how do you – a – and are you working eight hours a day, or how do you split up your day, I mean, ...

Cynthia:

More than – more – more than eight hours a day. More than eight hours a day, Angela. I get up at five in the morning –

Angela:

Uh-huh.

Cynthia:

– and I get right to work. And I usually quit somewhere around five, it might be four, it might be six, but it's usually somewhere around five. I do take a half-hour nap, and – basically, I work sort of twelve hours a day, and – and I enjoy it, I don't feel put upon. It's work that I love.

Angela:

And are you – do you have a process you go through? Do you write an outline first – how do you approach a new book ...

Cynthia:

Sometimes, I write – most of the time, I write an outline, but sometimes I just pants it. Did I lose you with that one? "Pants." Riding by the seat of your pants is "pantsing." Prodding and pansting are the two forms – the – the two approaches. Pro – prodding, or – or to write by the seat of your pants, that's called "pantsing." Most of the time, I prop, but occasionally I pants.

Angela:

(chuckles) And so, do you know what ...

Cynthia:

Now, I lo – now, I lost you, I didn't hear what you said.

Angela:

No, no, no, I thought you were still talking. Do you know – do you know how long a book will take you? Can you estimate how long it will take you to write something?

Cynthia:

No. No, I can't.

Angela:

That's interesting. After – after so many books, but it's so – w – what makes the difference for you? What - are you just, sometimes – writer's block, or –

Cynthia:

Well, some books – well, I don't really get writer's block, Angela, but I – sometimes, it's very slow going, and other times it comes real easily. Sometimes, I'm – I'm – I'm not quite sure what I need to say next. It's not writer's block, i – it really isn't, it's just a – a – a temporary slowdown in the process while I think through what's the next thing that I need to say, or maybe I'll come to the end of my outline and the book isn't nearly long enough, and I'll say, "Okay, I need to go back and fill in," and then I'm kind of stuck, because I said everything that I thought I needed to say, and the book isn't long enough, and – and – and that can be a problem. It too – never insurmountable, but it can be a problem, and it does occur sometimes, not always, maybe not even often, but sometimes.

Angela:

And what advice would you give to people who are in that position, where they don't know what to write next? What do you do, and what would you tell somebody else to do?

Cynthia:

Angela, I lost you.

Angela:

Hmm, what ...

Cynthia:

Angela? Angela, I lost you, I don't know what happened. What advice would I give to people who what?

Angela:

Who are in that position, where they're kinda stuck not sure what – what to write next, came to the end of their outline, what do you – how do you get through that without getting stuck?

Cynthia:

Well, I don't have one single trick that works every time. Sometimes, I just pull back and read the – the manuscript and see where I can fill something in, and sometimes I go back and look at other peoples' books on the subject and see what – what they've covered that I haven't, that – that would be – a valuable aspect to – to make sure and include, and sometimes I talk to one of my writer friends and say, "What – what more do I need to say on the topic of such-and-such," and sometimes I need to just kind of put it aside for a couple of days and let it ferment in my mind. Th – there's no one answer, there's no one answer.

Angela:

Hm. Those are all great ideas, though. What's your take on writers' groups in general? Do you belong to writers' groups?

Cynthia:

No, I don't. I – I just never felt the need to.

Angela:

Interesting. So, if – if somebody really wants to write a book, but for some reason they haven't been able to – to get it done, they haven't met that goal, but they say, "Oh, my God, you're written a hundred books, but I just wanna write one," what advice do you give them? What advice did you give to somebody who wants to write a book?

Cynthia:

Angela, I lost you again.

Angela:

... terrible connection. What advice –

Cynthia:

I don't know what's happening with this connection.

Angela:

Yeah, I know, me neither, but we're almost there, so we'll – we'll wrap this up, but in our final minute, what – what final advice would you give to somebody who wants to write a book?

Cynthia:

If you want to write a book, go for it. It is a wonderful pleasure, but don't talk about it, do it. Put aside – tushie to chair, fingers to keys and write. I know who talk about writing books, I know people who have great ideas for books, but they – they just never follow through, and I don't know why. If you – if you have the ideas for a book, write the darned book! I have also, on occasion, been hired to ghost books for people who have great ideas but don't feel that they have the skills needed to actually do the writing, and they'll give me an outline and they'll say, "This is what I want to write about, this is how I feel the book should be structured, I can't do the actual writing, will you ghost it for me?" And I have done that. I have – I have ghosted under – under those circumstances, both – both fiction and nonfiction, where the – where the outline, the concept is actually the ... author's concept, but I did the actual writing.

Angela:

Right. Well – I think that's the best advice ever for – for listeners of this show, so if you wanna write a book, write it don't talk about it.

Cynthia:

...

Angela:

Cynthia MacGregor is the author of over a hundred books, you can look at her titles at cynthiamacgregor.com, that's cynthia m-a-c-g-r-e-g-o-r, cynthiamacgregor.com. Her latest book, *Predator Proof Your Child: What You Need to Know to Protect Your Child*, was released earlier this year by Familius Books, and you can find it on Amazon or at the Familius website. So, check out Cynthia's books, what an amazing career over twenty years, thank you for sharing your wisdom with us, Cynthia.

Cynthia:

Thank you for having me on the show, Angela. Take care, now. Bye-bye.

Angela:

Thanks. You, too. And to our listeners, thank you for bearing with some of our technical problems on the show, I'm not sure exactly why the connection wasn't good, but if you missed parts of the interview, I do apologize for that. I appreciate your patience, and we'll get that problem corrected for next week's show. We will be back next week because, every week on this show, we talk to another author about how they are changing the world with their words, and that's what we are doing, we're changing the world one book at a time. Thanks for being with us.