

[Book Journeys](#) Author Interview - July 11, 2013

Dr. Angela Lauria with Dawn Shaw, author of *Facing Up to It: A Triumphant Memoir*

"I wanted my story to be shared because I felt that people could benefit from it." ~Dawn Shaw

Angela:

Well, hello everybody and welcome back to Book Journeys Radio. My name is Angela Lauria. I am the founder of The Author Incubator, creator of The Difference Process for Writing a Book that Matters, and a publisher with Difference Press. Every week on Book Journeys, we have another author - I'm here to talk about their experience writing their first book and... Every once in a while I am lucky enough to have an author that was published by Difference Press, and this week, we are lucky enough to have with us Dawn Shaw, who is the author of *Facing Up to It*, which is a very special book to me because it was actually the first memoir that we ever published at Difference Press. I am passionate of memoir. It's my favorite genre to read and I have always wanted to publish one, and Dawn's book is a very powerful memoir of her experience. Dawn, welcome to the show; thanks for being here.

Dawn:

Well, I'm happy to be here.

Angela:

Yay! Why don't you... why don't you... Let's just start off by telling them about... about your journey and this memoir.

Dawn:

Well, I actually started the process in about 2005 as a suggestion. When I talk a little bit about myself and my experiences, I've had feedback, "You should write this down." I've always been or considered myself to be a good writer - a creative writer. So, finally, with some motivation, I actually took the step and started doing it. It certainly was not an easy process. It was a long process. Took about seven years, from beginning to end. But of course, I didn't write continuously that whole time.

Angela:

What's the... Why don't you start by telling people what the book is about so they know a little more about you and the subject matter?

Dawn:

Oh, yeah. Well the book is my story. I was born with a teratoma, which is a type of tumor, and it was protruding from the left side of my face, and interrupting my ability to breath. And they removed the tumor... it grew back. 'Cause at the time they took it out, they took out bone, nerve, and muscle that caused paralysis on the left side of my face. So, basically, I have what can be described as a facial difference, and that has affected my life.

Angela:

Uhm. And the book... and the book covers, uh, what aspect of your journey?

Dawn:

Well, actually, I started the book... I talked about the experience of what's life been like for my parents when I was born. The surgeries that I've had (what it's all like); also the experiences that I've had with other people. How they reacted to me; the things that I had to learn in order to cope... and basically my coping mechanism was just simply to live my life. I decided not to let my appearance affect my ability to be... to have what would be considered a normal life and in some respects... my way to make my life more interesting.

Angela:

Hm. Interesting. Yeah, it's uh. I mean, it's pretty... it's a pretty powerful story, and certainly, uhm, you know, you haven't been handed the easiest deck of cards, but uh, it's a journey that I think anyone can relate to, even though the situation is pretty unique. Not everyone goes through the experience of having a facial difference, but we all have differences and we all process them in our own way so even though it's a very specific story, it's also a very universal one.

Dawn:

Yes, definitely. That's a lot of the feedback that I get.

Angela:

And so, a lot of people, uh, a lot of people that listen to the show, are told by... by their loved ones, or their friends, or, even, you know, teachers or mentors, "You should write a book," uhm, and they want to, but things stand in their way, and I know that your process took about seven years. Uhm, why don't you tell us about how you decided to write a book in the first place, and then what were some of the obstacles that came up along the way?

Dawn:

Well, the decision to write the book was simply... it was just timely. I have no other way to describe it. Uhm, I developed a... friendship with somebody who happens to also be writing a book and I think that's what... probably motivated me to actually sit down and start it. The... what made it both easy and difficult for me was because it was my story and I could... It was easy in that, well, the material, it's all there, and they... I wrote... the book was originally over 500 pages. So I just chose a... of just writing basically everything, and then trying to... with the help of an editor, figure out what are the more significant aspects.

Angela:

Would you recommend that approach?

Dawn:

If that's what works for some people. I think... I know that one of the things that I got caught up a bit was trying to be too much of a perfectionist the first time around. I'd write a few paragraphs or a chapter, and it's gonna be like, "How is this gonna be done the minute I write it?" and it just doesn't work that way. You... It's a process. Just get it out. In my case, I needed to get it on paper. I could always go back and fill in details to make things more... for me the biggest issue at first was telling... I was telling the story instead of living the story on the page. So I had a lot of revisions... That was like, "I needed to make this..." I needed my emotional... my feelings to come out more into what I was writing, and I'd revise it and I would be told, "Yeah you have to feel it and we need more... more, more, more. I was like, "How many more?" and it was like, "Yes you do. Go find it."

Angela:

Find it. And so, the whole... for the whole seven years, were you writing and working on it consistently, or would you take breaks or get blocks? What was that like?

Dawn:

I would need breaks. I don't know if writer's block is a correct term in my case, but I would definitely take breaks. Whenever you're writing about something that's [about] people, that's very difficult, it's easy to just avoid it. I would go for months at a time and not write. It's always on my mind, and one thing that I will say that I always knew.. I always knew I would finish it... it takes me that long, but I always knew. I had no doubt in my mind that I would finish it.

Angela:

But I definitely think that sort of mindset is one of the keys to actually finishing it. Uhm, just knowing... almost everybody I interviewed on the show would say something similar - that they knew it was gonna get finished. They weren't sure how or when but they knew that it would eventually cross the finish line. What was your... What was your motivation for writing the book? Was it really... Was it something that you were writing for yourself or did you have another... in mind?

Dawn:

It was always my intent to... I always wanted it to be published. I always wanted it to be out there in the world. I... kind of a joke with myself and with other people, that the book would make me famous but not rich. Well, I haven't done either but I do know that... it's early in the process for me in terms of having a book out there. But I... It's uh... I just lost the question...

Angela:

Oh, I... Would you... just in terms of like... What was your motivation..? When I coach clients one on one, I talk about the big WHY? Like what was your WHY? What was your reason? 'Cause it's such a big commitment to write a book. It takes a long time and you mentioned, especially in a memoir, there's an emotional component; there's an emotional pull and so, you know, I was just wondering like why... why go through this? Why tell your story? Why tell your

story in such a permanent medium or that specific medium? What do you think motivated you?

Dawn:

There were two things. One, it obviously was a process that helped me grow personally. I learned a lot about myself during the process. But also... I wanted my story to be shared because I felt that people could benefit from it. I felt like there were people who like isolating themselves because they look different or might not have confidence that could read it and say, "Wow, she looks like this and yet she's... and productive and does... and gets out there and that's what I wanted to be able to convey to the world, and so, it's possible... it's possible. You don't have to look normal to be normal.

Angela:

Yeah. When I work with clients that are working on memoirs, one of the things that comes up for them is the people in their life, uh, reading the memoir, and, you know, I hear a lot about mothers... uh, but how their, you know, how their mother's going to feel when she reads this section or that section. Was that something that was an issue for you and if so, how did you deal with it?

Dawn:

Uhm, yes. It definitely was. Uhm, my mother, especially. Uh, I was worried about that... I never... Nothing that I've said... I was very careful, actually, to not say anything... In fact my editor would say, "Oh, you have to put more in about the family." I went, "I want to!" But I did. I tried to do that. My family was very supportive throughout my whole life. I don't have anything bad to say about my family and the support they gave me. There was... probably the most significant issue with me, and I almost always hesitate to bring it up, was the religious aspect. I would worry that my mother would be disappointed in my religious choice or lack thereof.

Angela:

Mmm hmm.

Dawn:

Unfortunately, I kinda got out of that problem because my mother passed away in February right after the book came out, so I just have to deal with that but it was kinda sad too because she was actually looking forward to reading it and I had come to terms with the idea that she would read it and I had decided that I was okay with that. I don't think anybody else in my family have read it and I'd given them a copy but it's their choice.

Angela:

You know, that's something. That's something that's so... A lot of people that have written memoirs about... that, uhm... that they're surprised that their family members don't want to

read their book or don't read their book. Why do you think that is and how has that affected you?

Dawn:

Again it's... I kind of come to terms with that. I think... Well, with my dad, especially with my mom's passing not too long ago, I think would be very painful to him, my day, especially. Even when he'd come to, uhm, like, book readings ('cause he did come to a book reading), the emotions that he had were pretty... and even though I don't feel like, I mean, anything negative, it's all open to interpretation and...

Angela:

You can... as carefully as you want, but people will... and all of your readers, any of your readers, will interpret them, uhm, you know, will interpret them in different ways.

Dawn:

Yeah, and sometimes I am surprised at what comes back. The feed... what comes back to me... what I think I wrote, or what I (I'm sure I wrote it) and how it's fed back to me. It's not always bad. It's just different.

Angela:

Right. Yeah. I mean, we can only tell a truth and then it becomes a product of other people's imaginations and experiences that we don't have control of.

[Dawn interjects]

Angela:

Yeah. Go ahead.

Dawn:

I was just gonna say, I'm getting to a point where I know... I know how it feels like when I need to defend myself because it is my point of view and other people don't have to agree and it's like... I think my dad actually said to me one time, that he read, like the first chapter, and he said, "Gee, I didn't remember it that way at all," and I said, "Well, I just kinda had to guess." I thought... my parents and my family while I was writing the book, but not... so I had to kind of imagine what it must have been like... in some of the occasions that I can't possibly remember.

Angela:

Hmm. Right, right. So, I'm sure it has happened that you have, you know, met people since becoming an author and they have asked you how you did it, what advice that would you have for them... What advice do you give to people, especially to people who wanna write a personal memoir that, you know, may bring up some issues, for their family members, or may,

you know, be hard in some ways for themselves - for their own personal journey? What would you tell them? What *do* you tell them?

Dawn:

Well, I would say, "Do it." Just try to do it as best you can and just get it out. You can always bury it or you can always hide it away; you don't always have to put it out publicly, but I do believe that people, especially if they've lived very difficult experiences, just getting it emotionally out - catharsis, if you wanna call it that, is valuable, and sometimes, they realize that they have feelings but they didn't even know they had and it comes out during the process...

Angela:

And is that's actually what happened for you?

Dawn:

Uh, yes, I ca... I don't really have anything specific that I could use, but I do know, uh, well, on a simple level, whenever I... 'cause it's... a lot of emotion, a lot of nostalgia, and that's... I try to reconnect with this person from my past, and sometimes, I... Usually, I... was a... successful. I couldn't find them, and on the one or few times that I did, I was kinda like, "You know, I think I know why I moved on." It's not that the person has changed, it's... I've changed.

Angela:

Yeah.

Dawn:

And the way I perceived... on a certain situation or a certain individual, at times, is really different in how I'm perceiving now, and it's like, "Okay, that's my past. It's staying there."

Angela:

Right...

Dawn:

And sometimes, I've been able to make some very positive, uh, connections, so...

Angela:

And so, uhm... What is something that has come out of having a book? Uhm, something in your life that has happened that wouldn't have happened without a book?

Dawn:

It's all part of the process. I'm actually transitioning to becoming a public speaker. I am a motivational speaker, and this is coming out because I wrote this book and it's allowed me to connect with people. The combination of the book and speaking have allowed me to... I've

started to seek out and find people all over the world who have a facial difference and I'm... about their stories and some of them are like me trying to make pages in how we're perceived, how we're treated, and in the... of the ignorance of the people, so it's been... huge...

Angela:

Wow, that's... Yeah... fascinating. So, uhm, for you, the process of writing a book... about seven years, you worked with an editor, you worked with, uh... did you work with any other professional to help you get it done? Do you think having uh, you know, other... other, like an editor or things like that are those things that you would recommend to other people?

Dawn:

Oh, absolutely, if you need an editor and as an adviser told me early, early in the process when you have an editor, "Make sure hire somebody who really is an editor rather than somebody who just says they can edit. I mean, your brother-in-law is probably not a good choice to be your editor. It should be somebody who's totally objective and who actually has some success trying to get recommendations, references... yeah, read... If they're a write, read what they write.

Angela:

Uh huh.

Dawn:

I would just... Editors are... I mean my editor changed my story, I mean, not changed it... she totally redirected how I presented my story and it made a huge difference.

Angela:

Are there other... I wanna say "expenses." Are there any things you spent money on during the process that you would say, "This is a good use of money. I would recommend it," or this is something that, you know, I wouldn't do or recommend if I were doing it a second time?

Dawn:

Uh, for me, not so much. I mean, I... I... uh, I'm not quite sure where the bill has got, but I had a personal adviser...

Angela:

There are... I always try and... I always try to ask authors, like especially in their process of writing, where are good places to make investments, because as... you know, books... there are lots... you can spend as much money as you want, on a book, and how do you make... how do you make those decisions? Or you want the best book possible, but at the same time you don't wanna necessarily spend your life savings getting the best book possible. So... for you the number one thing was a good editor that you had a good relationship with and who like your work and you trust in.

Dawn:

Yeah, well, working with your company, Angela, also gave me the advantage of having a... someone who designs the cover and someone who designs the interior. I still had input, but I also... I believe it's important to have someone... to have other people around to help you interpret what you've done.

Angela:

Mmm. That's a great point.

Dawn:

And I think, yeah. Yes.

Angela:

We'll talk about publishing a little bit. So, some people with a memoir may go with a traditional publisher, they'll find an agent, they'll work with a traditional publisher and that publisher will have... they will have bought the copyright, so they will own your personal story, and they will have full say over things like the title and the imagery used and, you may in your contract get something called a "consultation" which means they will ask you, "Do you like this cover?" but they won't necessarily change it for you. And some people who publish will self-publish and they will literally go and find their own artist to do the cover design and the interior design and they will, uhm, they'll approve everything. They'll take the artists; they'll decide whether or not to pay them, and if they like it and how many versions, and they have full control. And then with a company like mine, uhm, like The Difference Press, it's a little bit of a combination. Our company works in partnership with the authors and the author maintains the copyright. Ultimately, they get the final say, but instead of having to learn how to become a publisher and learn how to do the cover designs, they're working with artists and art directors that have done many book and know those elements - that you're getting the feedback that you would get from a major publishing company, uhm, but not your self-publishing, but at the same time, you have some of the control... more control than you would with a traditional publisher. So that's sort of a balance, in a way, uhm, but obviously there's a cost-benefit analysis there which is that when you self-publish, you do it yourself but you're up to get a 100% of the profit. Uhm...

Dawn:

Yeah, but there's just still... I know it's changing, but there is still that stigma associated with self-publishing. I mean, I realize that people have done it successfully and kudos to them. But I think for the majority of people... "Oh it's self-published. Uuhhh." Okay... so...

Angela:

Okay, and a lot of times, they look self-published, uhm... you know, there's a lot of manuscripts... and I get a lot of books sent to me, and you know, you don't want to be able to

see from across the room that it's a self-published book. That's one thing, and if it's your first book, it's probably gonna look self-published. I mean, our first book does not look as good as our twentieth book, for sure. So... you know...

Dawn:

Well.. and I... I also think because it's not... my book is not self-published, it... I believe I do have some added credibility.

Angela:

Mmm hmm.

Dawn:

When I go out, I say, "Yes, I'm an author." ... self-published? "No, no. I didn't self-publish." So, I think they actually like to hear that it's not self-published.

Angela:

Right. Right.

Dawn:

I mean if I... all the sales myself... and I didn't care, it would matter, but when you're using it for promotion, it does matter.

Angela:

Well, and that's really the key, it's... there's lots of different ways to publish your book. You wanna look at, uh, you know, the way that it's gonna benefit you which depends on your goal - your goals for the book and your goals for yourself.

Dawn:

Right.

Angela:

So, uh... what, uh... When you think about the process of... the process of getting your book published, what were some of the challenges or process that came up after your manuscript was done, uhm, but before it was actually printed and available for purchase? What were some of the obstacles that came up for you?

Dawn:

Well, for me, I uhm... I started uh, putting it out there 'cause I was looking for what we call advance praise, and I had, somebody that I know, who is an author, read it, and just... Basically the review she gave was actually not a very good review, so I... had a panic attack. Uhm, but that was actually the beginning of what became the process of realizing not everybody's gonna love it and you have to accept it for what it is. It doesn't mean that it's not

good. It doesn't mean that people are not getting something from it. It doesn't mean that it's not achieving its goal. It just means that not everybody is gonna look at it the same way and interpret it the same way. So people put more value...

Angela:

And how... and what... That's... that's a really hard thing for people... with memoirs. I mean all of my... all of my clients, when I'm coaching people... I'm... their books, it's important to them that they... their book and they want people to like it. So,, what have you... what have you learned about negative feedback, and how do you handle that now?

Dawn:

I... you know... Once... there's not really much you can do about it except think, "Well, alright. That's very interesting feedback," and just because they have a certain opinion, doesn't mean it's reflective on the work as a whole. Basically, like, this is my story and I had a certain goal with it to help people understand that . it's possible for people to live a normal life and look different and I think that comes out in... with the book. So you just have to... you just have to roll with it. I mean it's like if you produce a movie... and a lot of people love it and a lot of people hate it... not everyone... It's like how you... I mean... not everybody likes me as a person. I know it's hard to believe but it's true.

Angela:

Yes... for sure.

Dawn:

Exactly, and everything ... People are... everybody has a different viewpoint. They have different opinions. They have different... some come from... things from different angles. So you just kinda take it. You don't throw it away by any means, but you just take it, file it, and move on.

Angela:

Yeah. So... yeah.

Dawn:

When you put it out, you made a choice... When you put it out into the world, you're making a choice but you have to accept that as well - as well as all the good stuff. It's balanced.

Angela:

So why is it so... So why is it worth it? What's the best thing to come out of becoming an author for you?

Dawn:

It gives me that avenue to get out there and share my story in person and I think being a speaker is what I'm meant to be doing and I didn't realize that until I was writing this book.

Angela:

That is so powerful. That's so powerful. So many people have a story, a hard lesson that they've learned, experiences they've accumulated, and being able to not just to apply that information in your own life to help others, I think is, you know, even if... a lot of people wake up because they're thinking it's the way to make money or, you know, generate revenue and sell the rights to make the movie, which I do think your story would make a great movie, uhm...

Dawn:

Well, I'll take that as a compliment.

Angela:

Yeah. But I think the size... the money aspect... there is such a gift in being able to... to share things that necessarily weren't easy to come by. You know, lessons that were... that took a long time to process and, uhm, you know, being able to make a small difference in people's lives is a really a good powerful way to... And what I always say is once you have written a book, you absolutely have a legacy. I mean you might have other things in your life... but your book will always be in your legacy, and makes you in a small way, immortal. Your story will be there for people to read after you're gone, which I think is also pretty powerful.

Dawn:

(Inhaling and exhaling)

So any uh... In our last minute or so... any parting words of advice you would give to somebody that wants to tell a deeply personal story about how... maybe some... something you feel like maybe you did wrong, you would do differently... or maybe not wrong, but something you would do differently if you were doing it again?

Dawn:

Hmm that's tough because, uh, it was a process. It took what it took. I mean, could it have taken less than seven years? Absolutely. But on the other hand, that... if that's what it took for me to do it, then that's not wrong, uhm. A lot of people also think that maybe their story is not very interesting, but that's where... See what happens when I put it on paper... A good writer to me makes an average story interesting; a bad writer may make a phenomenal story unreadable.

Angela:

Right, right. Yeah, I love that. I think that's great. Your journey... I... I... I... your book journey and that's because every book is almost like a living being to me and they all have their own journey and they take what they take and some are fast and some are slow and some linger

on for a long time and... they're all different and being able to expect that your journey is your journey and if you were born to write a book, that experience is gonna be something that will be part of your life in the way that it needs to be. So I really appreciate you sharing your story. *Facing Up to It* is Dawn Shaw's book. You can find it at facinguptoit.com; you can find her book on Amazon, and if you are interested in hearing Dawn speak, you can also check out her website and learn more about that. So, [facinguptoit dotcom](http://facinguptoit.com). Dawn Shaw. Be sure to check out her book and when you... leave a review on Amazon. I encourage everybody to do that for the books you read. It definitely helps the authors. So Dawn, thanks for being her on Book Journeys.

Dawn:

Well, thank you for having me.