

Book Journeys Author Interview - Dec 12, 2013

Dr. Angela Lauria with Donna Henes, author of *The Queen of My Self*.

"You don't need to have diabetes to have a book about diabetes." ~Donna Henes

Angela:

Well, hello, everybody, it is Thursday at 3pm Eastern Time, and that means it's time for Book Journeys Radio. My name is Dr. Angela Lauria, I am the founder of the Author Incubator and creator of the Difference Process for Writing a Book That Matters, and as you know, every week on Book Journeys Radio, we talk to an author about their experience writing their first book. And this week on the show, I'm really happy to have Donna Henes. Donna is an urban shaman, a spiritual teacher, a speaker and, of course, a writer. She is the author of *The Queen of My Self*, you can check that out on thequeenofmyself.com, Donna, thank you so much for being here!

Donna:

Thank you for having me!

Angela:

So, tell us about your book, what's it about?

Donna:

Well – *The Queen of My Self*, the subtitle is, *Stepping Into Sovereignty in Midlife*, and that is basically what it's about. Most of us, before this book, had no idea what the process that midlife procc was – process was about. We hear – hear about – midlife crises, and we hear about menopausal mania, and – and all kinds of terrible things, but we don't really look at the midlife transition as a time of excitement, to really grow into your true self and have the opportunity to reevaluate your life and recreate it in the way that you would like to see it. So, it really is about – coming home to yourself. Most women, by their midlife, have spent decades in caregiving, whether it's literally, for their family, husband or wife or children, but also for career or a business that they've started, or an art career that they have. Motherhood, coming out of motherhood. Traditionally, those of us who think of ourselves as – shall I say, devotees of a divine feminine principle –

Angela:

Mmm.

Donna:

– a goddess principle, have heard of this – the triple goddess, which is the maiden, the mother and the crone, which, until this book, actually, was meant to describe the three stages of a woman's life. The maiden is the young girl who is adventurous and curious and mainly her job is to figure out who she is. Then comes the mother, which is the time where women give birth to something of their passion and they keep it alive, as I said before, it does not

have to be a physical baby, but it could be a business baby, or a career baby, or an art form baby. And then, supposedly, after menopause, we are supposed to be crones, old, wise women, and even though that's a – a lovely goal, to be old and to be wise, at, say, fifty, we are not either one.

Angela:
Yeah!

Donna:
Because – live so much longer these days –

Angela:
Yeah.

Donna:
– you can't be a crone for half of your life!

Angela:
Right!

Donna:
More and more people are living to be a hundred now, so – so it's – for me, there was a step missing, there was a stage missing, between motherhood and cronedom, and I called –

Angela:
Okay, and what's that stage called?

Donna:
I call it the queen, because we do not ... –

Angela:
Oh, oh! ...

Donna:
– ... in charge! And it's a – it's a time of an – of heightened power for women – literally, physically, when we lose our hormones for reproduction, we get new hormones in our brain, actually, that are about empowerment, and it's not testosterone, which is – which is about aggression, but it's more about – determination, and so, y – the French have an incredible saying, that I just love, that, when a woman loses her voice – I'm sorry. Oh, I gave away the punch line. Start over. ...

Angela:

Oh, no. We'll start over. Rewind. Nobody – everybody, forget what you just heard. The French have a wonderful saying, what is it, Donna?

Donna:

Yes, I get that. ... When a woman loses her blood, she gains her voice. And that is true – we get to be a certain age, and we wake up one morning and we say, “Who said?” “Who said I had to do this? Who made this rule? I don't wanna do this!” And we realize that we can be, do and say anything we wanna do with – I hope the caveat of not hurting anybody. But, besides that, we – we really realize that – our life is – is terminal – hopefully not for another fifty, forty, thirty years, but we – w – w – one of the things that we gain as we get older is, we realize that we are mortal creatures. And so, our life becomes very important, the time left is very important, and what are we gonna do with it, and who do we wanna be in, what dreams did we have to defer, for any number of reasons, because our family needed us, because we didn't have the money, we didn't have the financial support, we didn't have the emotional support. We might not have had the courage, we might not have had the time or the energy or the education to do what it was we really wanted to do, but here's our chance.

Angela:

Here's our chance.

Donna:

Here's our chance, and if not now, when? ...

Angela:

As you actually say, “Turn your midlife crisis into your crowning achievement,” and I love how that ties back to that queen phase, your crowning achievement.

Donna:

Exactly. Exactly. And some ...

Angela:

And so, for people – for – for people that are – that are listening, you can actually get *The Queen of My Self* on Amazon, and if you do that right now, you can get – buy the print book, you'll get the e-book for free, so you can – you can take it with you on the road, or have a copy at home, so, just wanted people to know, *The Queen of My Self* by Donna Henes. So, Donna, tell us about your journey to – writing this book, ho – how did you pick this topic, how did you decide to write this book?

Donna:

Simply, I wrote this book because I needed to read it. (chuckles)

Angela:
(chuckles)

Donna:

I was coming into my midlife, and all I knew about menopause was that you stopped bleeding and you went crazy. I didn't know anything about it, I – I certainly didn't know that it was an opportunity for empowerment. I – I – so I – I got into researching and realizing that old triple model doesn't really apply to us anymore. It – it still does apply to women in the Third World, who don't live as long, unfortunately, but for those of us in Western cultures and – and – developed cultures, wherever in the world they are, we have a whole other opportunity between the time when we give up our role as – procreators, and we can take up a new mantle of creators before we're old and wise. I don't think that we're as wise at fifty as we're hopefully gonna be at eighty-five or ninety, and so, this is – this is the time to really – flex our muscles.

Angela:

So – so, okay, so, you're passionate about a topic, you – you wanna learn about it, and, of course, ... is a great way to – to learn about it, but why – why write a book, and how did you – how did you fit that into your life? How did you make time to write it? How did you prioritize that when there's so many other ways you could get that message out? I understand the message was important to you, but why a book as a way of getting it out?

Donna:

Well, I am a writer, and – actually, this is my fourth book. So, I have written books before – I've written – syndicated columns, I – I have newsletters that I write, so it is my natural way of expression.

Angela:
Mm-hmm.

Donna:

And – I love – I love to write, and – it just was something I was passionate about, so it seemed like an obvious choice for me.

Angela:

And what was your writing process like? How long did it take you to write it, when did you write?

Donna:

Well – it – it went pretty quickly, once I solved the – structure problem. I knew exactly what I wanted to say, and pretty much how I wanted to say it, but I did have a lot of trouble finding

the – the perfect format for it – the perfect structure for it, and once I made that revelation, it was pretty quick going. I would say that I wrote it, probably, in about six months.

Angela:
Mmm.

Donna:
But I had been doing research and – workshops and interviews and so on for a lot before I started writing. So, I had huge files on –

Angela:
On the same topic.

Donna:
On the same topic. I – I'm very interested in the empowerment of women, and suddenly this became very personal.

Angela:
And so, did you use those – did you use those events to help develop content for the book?

Donna:
Which events? The – the even – the ritual events that I do?

Angela:
Yeah, or the speaking that you were doing on – on this topic –

Donna:
Oh.

Angela:
– did that help you –

Donna:
Yes, it all went into the book. Lots of women told me their stories, and there are lots of stories in the book – about and by other people, and – one of the things I was doing was collecting what I call “midlife mantras,” and that is, if I heard thousands of women saying the same thing, I knew that this was a real concern of women, and one of them was, “Now, it's my turn.” I heard this thousands and thousands of times.

Angela:
Mmm.

Donna:

“I did my duty, I was a good daughter, I was a good student, I was a good worker, I was a good boss, I was a good parent, now it’s my turn, what do I wanna do?”

Angela:

Mmm.

Donna:

And – so, all of – all of that, everything that I’d learned went in, and unfortunately I continued – well, not unfortunately, I – I did continue to do workshops after, and some of the best stories I’ve heard have been too late to print in the book, but –

Angela:

Yeah!

Donna:

But it’s really – it – it was really a wonderful experience, travelling around the country and meeting all these women of – every description, and finding what we had in common, which was this need to focus on ourself for a change.

Angela:

Yeah. Yeah. So –

Donna:

Women are raised to care for everybody, and we’re always at the last on the list.

Angela:

Yeah. So, for you, this was an important message to get out. Writing, you knew, was a way to that you wanted to do it, you wrote this fairly – fairly quickly, in six months. How – how would you say – what was your writing schedule like? How did you write fast? Are you one of those “wake up early and get your word count in,” or – how’d you make the time?

Donna:

Well, no, I – I’m at the opposite end. During the – my days are filled seeing clients and doing other kinds of work, not job work, but – administrative work for – for my career. So, I find that the best time for writing, for me, is at night, when the phone doesn’t ring and things are really quiet, and sometimes I would write into three o’clock in the morning, or whatever. I was also very lucky. The Omega Institute of Intregal Stu – Intregal Studies, I guess it’s called –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Donna:

– where I’ve taught, on and on – on and off for a long time – made me a Visionary in Residence, and – and gave a – a cottage for two weeks, where I had to do absolutely nothing except whatever I wanted to do –

Angela:

Wow.

Donna:

– and so, I – I wrote at least one, if not two, chapters in that two weeks, it was just – twenty-four hours a day of – of peace and quiet and – and my computer. So, that was a huge gift.

Angela:

That’s terrific. So, how did you get – was that something you’d applied for? How did you get that opportunity?

Donna:

No, it – they – they just – they just do that. They invite various spiritual teachers and – writers – to come in their – I don’t know that they do it year ‘round, but in three seasons, for sure, and they give you two weeks in what they call “the hermitage,” and i – they believe that – somebody working, somebody praying, somebody meditating up there, in that hidden place where nobody knows where it is –

Angela:

I love Omega, yeah!

Donna:

– energy – to the place.

Angela:

Wow.

Donna:

So, I was very lucky, I’ve ... three times as a Visionary in Residence, but this time was so helpful, ‘cause it was right in the process of writing.

Angela:

That is gorgeous, what a great opportunity, and – in this case, I know it wasn’t something that you applied for, but it actually – there are several “artists in residence” programs that you can Google and you can apply for, and that can be quite a powerful way to work on your book, so I – I love that part of the journey.

Donna:
Yeah.

Angela:
What about the editing process? Did you work with an editor? How does that – how'd you do that?

Donna:
Well, I did. My agent, my literary agent, is a great editor, and she is – really better than I am at that whole structure thing. So, it wasn't about line editing so much as, she would say, "You know, this – this couple of pages here, this would go much better in that chapter," or whatever.

Angela:
Mm-hmm. More of a developmental edit. ...

Donna:
And that was – she – she was wonderful, and – I paid her to do that, and – I'm so glad, because she's – she's really good.

Angela:
So, let's talk about – having a literary agent. How did you come to have one, do you recommend – do you recommend a literary agent to people? What does your literary agent do for you?

Donna:
Well – since this book – I – I haven't really – I'm in the process now of – of putting together a proposal for a new book. She's my second agent, my first agent – sold the – the two books before this one, it was called *Celestially Auspicious Occasions: Seasons, Cycles & Celebrations*, and this was back in the day when publishing – actually paid advances, and –

Angela:
Those ... good old days.

Donna:
Yes – so nostalgic, let me tell you. But he was great, but then he had a career change, and he decided that he didn't want to agent anymore, but he wanted to do PR for authors and writers.

Angela:
Hm.

Donna:

So, I lost him, and – this one came, actually, through a mutual friend. We had a mutual friend, and – Gail just said, “Oh, you need to meet Deirdre, she would love this, and she’s a great agent, and blah, blah, blah,” and we hit it off, and that was that – so, she has been my agent for ten years.

Angela:

And how did you go about publishing this book?

Donna:

Well, this is – this is the really interesting part of the story. She sold it to – I’m not gonna say the publisher, but it was a mid-range publisher – and the reason I wrote the book so quickly is because they had this great marketing strategy, which, as I know you know, is unheard-of anymore, and they had this –

Angela:

Yeah. Some others don’t tend to have marketing strategies –

Donna:

Exactly. Exactly.

Angela:

– ... try and make it as difficult as possible for the authors to market their books.

Donna:

Exactly. What – the – the *Celestially Auspicious Occasions* book was a – was a Perigee imprinted Putnam, and they spent more money on a lunch between me and my new editor than on my entire PR (chuckles) budget.

Angela:

That’s pretty common.

Donna:

So, they don’t do anything, basically. But this – this one was – really excited, and they had all these plans, and they were gonna do this big – big release on Mother’s Day, and blah, blah. It sounded great, but that meant that I had a really short deadline, and if they wanted to meet what they said they wanted to do, I had to get it in really quickly, which is what goosed me to write it so quickly. A – and then – and – and I – again, I know that you know this, but when you turn in a – an outline, or a proposal, if you’re halfway through the book, sometimes, you can make a left turn. Sometimes, things change, or you get a new idea, or whatever, and so the book that you turned in might not be exactly what the outline said it was gonna be.

Angela:
Mm-hm.

Donna:
But this one was. It was precisely – I mean – I knew what I wanted to write, and it was exactly what I'd wanted, and he gets it, and in this case the publisher himself wanted to be the editor of this book. And he gets it, and he sends me – twelve pages of – of derogatory comments in eight-point type, and his first complaint was – and this was after it was in their catalog –

Angela:
Mm-hm. Oh, wow.

Donna:
– was, “*The Queen of My Self*, isn't that selfish?”

Angela:
Maybe.

Donna:
And I thought, “Oh, no. (chuckles) Oh, no, I don't believe this.” So, I don't understand, because he obviously read the proposal, I had meetings with him, he knew exactly what the book was and exactly what the title was, but he clearly didn't get it, and that was another one of his comments, is, “I'm sorry, I just don't relate to this,” and I'm thinking, “Yeah, well, you're not middle-aged and you're not a woman!”

Angela:
Right.

Donna:
And why should you? You don't need to have diabetes to have a book about diabetes.
(laughs) ...

Angela:
... Right. And this is a great lesson, too, about – finding an editor that you really connect with
–

Donna:
Thank you.

Angela:
– 'cause it sounds like, as an editor, you weren't really on the same page.

Donna:

Well, I thought we were, until this.

Angela:

Right.

Donna:

And so, w- what I did is, I returned my advance, and I bought the rights back. And – 'cause I knew he was gonna kill it, it was just – it was obvious.

Angela:

Right.

Donna:

So – at that point, then, I just – I founded – my own publishing company.

Angela:

Wow.

Donna:

And it – it – it cost twenty-five dollars to go to town hall and get a business permit – it was nothing to do, but I didn't want to, quote unquote, self-publish it with any of the print-on-demand – labels on it, because – let's be honest, a – a book that's put out by Lulu or whatever is not really usually reviewed, and they're not taken seriously, unfortunately. So, this – and – and – and – and this is ten years ago, and I have to say that self-publishing has come a long way, and it's no longer about vanity –

Angela:

Right.

Donna:

– self-publishing used to be, print thirty copies for your family and you're thrilled you wrote a book in your life.

Angela:

Right.

Donna:

Ands – but now, more and more and more and more authors are seizing control of their own work –

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Donna:

– and I figured – as I said, this is my fourth book, I’ve had a book by a super-major, big deal publisher, I – a mid-le – mid-level publisher, and my first book was by an obscure arts publisher that no longer exists in L.A. So, I had the – the full range of experience, and I knew I could do better than them in terms of promoting it, and I did. I have. And, actually – kind of a miracle happened, is – I had – I – in the book for – all – all the quote – I – there are a lot of quotes by women in the book, and I always would add their – their dates of birth and if – if relevant, death. And one was by Dr. Christiane Northrup –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Donna:

– and I could not find any bio information about her, so I wrote to her office and I asked, and her assistant got back and said, “Oh, she doesn’t give that information unless she really understands what the project is.” It was just her birth – all I wanted was her birth year.

Angela:

Mm-hm. Okay.

Donna:

But I sent – some chapters, and in return mail I got a handwritten blurb for the cover from Dr. Northrup.

Angela:

Wow.

Donna:

And that was – “Wow,” exactly. So, ...

Angela:

Mm-hmm, that’s an amazing story. That’s an amazing story. Mm-hm.

Donna:

I made the right decision, and – yeah, and so, now, it’s gone into – the second printing, and – and it’s just – it’s done really well.

Angela:

And so, for you, what is the best thing about being an author?

Donna:

Oh, wow. (laughs) Well, it's having a voice, certainly. I love that – that I get letters and e-mail from women all – literally all over the world, at this point, and – that – that the book really touched them, or it inspired them, or it helped them get through a tough passage, or whatever, and wow! What a – what an honor, to have that in your life, to – to actually know that you might have helped somebody. That's – that's tremendous.

Angela:

That is tremendous.

Donna:

So, I like that. (chuckles)

Angela:

Are there opportunities that you think that you'd had because of being an author, speaking opportunities or – other projects you might have done that came out of being an author?

Donna:

Yes, for sure. I'm – I do a lot of radio, I'm invited to do a lot of radio stuff, and also teleseminars. Next month, I think it is, I'm gonna be a – in a – in a – a – one of the experts, as it were, in a teleseminar called – "Rock the Change" –

Angela:

Hmm.

Donna:

– which is a – a very upbeat – informational teleseminar on – the menopausal changes in life. And so, again, that's another opportunity to be out there, and to have a bigger audience, and to, again, hopefully, put some good ideas in peoples' minds, and – and en – and encouragement for – and inspiration for them to find their own way to their own personal power.

Angela:

Right.

Donna:

And I ... ultimate goal for that, I guess, is that I really believe that our planet, right now – o – our planet and e – all living things and beings on the planet are suffering right now from what I think of as testosterone poisoning. And I really want to see more women in more positions of authority and power and decision-making, and – I really do wanna put my – my energy and power behind women becoming empowered, because I think that we really need a feminine sensibility to correct a lot of the dangerous wrongs – in the world today.

Angela:

And so – with your – with your book, do you feel – like the – well, let’s talk about how you’ve been marketing your book. And so, obviously, doing the workshops and things like that as a way to get it out, but how – what’s one of the most successful ways that people have heard about your book?

Donna:

Well – I do – I do have a Facebook page for *The Queen of My Self*, and a Twitter account – but also – I really did reach out, and I got – two distributors –

Angela:

Oh!

Donna:

– which is really important, so it’s now carried by New Leaf and Baker & Taylor, and that gets you into bookstores. Ingram is the really big one, but they don’t take any – publishing companies that have only one title.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Donna:

And – when – when I’m ready for my next book, then, maybe, I can move up to them. ...

Angela:

How did you find the distributors that you work with?

Donna:

Yes, distributors are – are important.

Angela:

How did you find them?

Donna:

W – well – I – I just researched, and again, my agent – was very helpful – “Oh, I think New Leaf might take this, I think Baker & Taylor might take this” – and – you have to do the research, go on their websites, make some phone calls, who do you write, how do you – what do they need from you, and you just have to do all this stuff, and – that’s the hard part. And get it on Amazon, and barnesandnoble.com, although I have to say, barnesandnoble.com is a very poor second to Amazon in terms of their audience and their – and – what you get from them. And then – again, every time you give a talk or something, bring books with you, and – and sell them and promote them, and – and what I did, also is, after doing – when the book first came out I did do book tour – and I did have some contacts, the bookstores that I’d been

to before – but a lot of it was just research, “Oh, well – this is my route, and you just have to Google – bookstores in a certain area,” or if you have – specialty book, you have to look for some kind of specialty bookstore – whether it’s a New Age book or a – mystery book, or what – whatever, there are specialty bookstores, and those are really good – to – to partner with, because their audience is your audience.

Angela:
Right.

Donna:
And – and what I did also is, after I got back in town, and I had met all these people and, of course, you collect everybody’s e-mail – if they come to an event, you ask them if they would please – sign up on – on your mailing list. And so, I put out a newsletter now, a monthly newsletter called *The Queen’s Chronicles*, and it kinda picks up where the book leaves off. It’s not the same format as the book, but it’s filled with stories of inspiration and encouragement of midlife women who are doing something great or changing their lives or are role models for us. I always call it – “Living in - With Meaning, Moxie and Majesty in Midlife and Beyond,” and – so that – that’s been really wonderful. At this point, I have about five thousand – subscribers.

Angela:
Wow.

Donna:
It’s free, but – you have to sign up for it, and people send it to other people, and every week – Constant Contact is – is the service I use to send it out, they send you an update on your mailing list, and it’s kind of interesting, because people really do share – share with other people, and then those other people sign up and so on, and I don’t know who they are –

Angela:
That is how it works! That’s how it works. You get – you get found in the most surprising ways.

Donna:
Exactly.

Angela:
So, you can find Donna Henes – you can find her – on her website, which is – same name as her book, it’s thequeenofmyself.com, thequeenofmyself.com. Donna Henes, so much – thank you so much for being with us today.

Donna:
Well, thank you, and it’s a great show. Good luck with it.

Angela:

Thank you, we will be back next week, doing what we do, changing the world one book at a time.