

Book Journeys Author Interview - Mar 6, 2014

Dr. Angela Lauria with Dr. Patricia A. Farrell, author of *Fired Up: A Shrink's Musings*.

"Bestsellers aren't necessarily great books, and I wouldn't ... want to aim to be a bestseller, I would want to aim to be a really good writer and to say something worthwhile." ~Dr. Patricia A. Farrell

Angela:

Well, hello, everybody and welcome to 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 every week on Book Journeys we talk to an author about their experience – with writing, publishing and promoting their books. This week, we are lucky to have with us the author of six books – Dr. Patricia Farrell, Dr. Farrell, welcome to the show.

Patricia:

Thank you to be – nice to be with you.

Angela:

And your latest book is called *Fired Up: A Shrink's Musings*, and we are always wondering what psychologists are thinking about us and about the world, so tell us a little bit about – about *Fired Up*, what's it about, and why did you decide to write it?

Patricia:

Okay, well – over the years, I've had a lot of opportunities to really – to interview people – some of the people quite famous – Isaac Asimov – John Lennon – oh, I can't think of even all of them, but – a number of people. ... interviews with them, and – and I put – I decided that that would be good material that I could put into a book, and then I've done a number of articles in many – I send out press releases, I used to, anyway, which were really short articles on a variety of topics that I found of interest or use for people, whether they were in the field or they wanted to know a little more about the field. So, this book is really a compilation of a number of different – genres, I should say, and it really goes – it covers a wide array of topics, from - ... I go everything from, how do you know you're going to a person who really is qualified to help you, to – what was it like meeting John Lennon in Toronto with Yoko Ono at their hotel, to how – and this is, I think, for anybody who writes, this would be probably one of the best things to read, and it's a – it's an interview with Isaac Asimov, where he actually told me – took me in his apartment, which he had in the Oliver Cromwell Hotel in Manhattan, where he lived for years and years – took me in the apartment and actually showed me the physical layout of everything and how it was really all geared to him producing books at an incredible rate. When I met him, he had already written and published a hundred and twenty-five books, and after that I think he must have published another two hundred books before he died, and he was just the most incredible man, he did absolutely every single bit of the writing process himself. In other words, he had a number of electric typewriters because he typed everything, only one draft, never edited anything, one draft straight through,

and he worked on nine different projects at one time because, as he said to me, "Well, when I get tired of writing on one – I kind of feel like I – I've – I've written all I can for that, then I pull out something else." And he had a very strict writing routine, which I think J. D. Salinger also had a similar routine, in that he got up in the morning, at about six o'clock, he would make his own breakfast, he would go into the living room, which was really covered with books, he had a thousand books in the living room, that was his personal library, and he had this writing center set up with one of his typewriters and these nine drawers, each with a different – book that he was working on. Let me tell you, the books were unannotated Don Juan, he was writing a book on the – I think it was the – the Sensual Old Man or something, he was writing a book on some – he was just writing a book on everything. And he said, "I don't have a secretary, I don't have a typist, I don't have an editor, I don't have a publicist, I don't have an agent," and he said, "I don't go to lunch." (chuckles) So - ... "What do you do?" – "What do you do?" He said, "I work. I work from six o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. I take a break for lunch, I have it here, in – in – in my – apartment – and then I take a break for dinner and I just work straight through all the time." And I just – it was just so incredible, and then he said, "And I have to show you something, why I picked this apartment to be the one that I want," and I said to myself, "What di – what did he pick – what is it – what's the meaning of this particular apartment?" So he said, "Well, to the bedroom," and of course, I said to myself, "Oh, this is going to take an interesting turn."

Angela:

Here we go. Yup!

Patricia:

Right? But it – but it didn't, because he said, "You see? Now, the bed space is those two windows there on the front of the building." But he said, "Now, you see the windows, the two windows on the side?" I said, "Yes." He pulled up the shade and said, "You see what you see?" I said, "It's a brick wall." He says, "Absolutely right, no distractions." He said, "So, I keep the ones in the front down so I don't look out on the street, the ones to the brick wall, that – no distractions there," he said, "I minimize all my distractions." Right. I had wanted to take him out to lunch because I was working for a magazine at the time, *Publishers Weekly*, and I was amazed when he said, "No, no, I – I don't want to go out to lunch. Just come over and we'll talk." And he was a delight, I have to tell you, the man was a delight. And I spoke to him a number of times after that, and I spoke to him once, just maybe about six months before he died, and he – at that point, he was really thinking about – life is too short, and you really have to work and work at the things that you really want and achieve and just keep going at it and you're gonna get there. And it was – I – I'd sensed this change in – but the – but the happiness of the bubbiness was still there, every once in awhile it would punch through, and he was just – he was just a – such a memorable and brilliant guy, absolutely brilliant. And he said something which really stuck in my head. He said, "You know what? I can write a book on almost anything, but I can't write a book if nobody else has written a book on it before me."

Angela:
Hm!

Patricia:
He said, "Because I use all of those other books – yeah! Right! I use all of those other books as material or inspiration or whatever." So, he wasn't a plagiarist in any way, but he knew that – you didn't have to be in – the first one to write a book on something. He was very happy to be able to take any difficult material, and some of the material he's tackled was quite difficult, he took any difficult material and turned it into something that anyone could understand and appreciate and even want more of –

Angela:
Wow.

Patricia:
– because, as you ..., he started writing out science fiction, and – once you discovered –

Angela:
Right, that's ...

Patricia:
– once he discovered that that was – lucrative, he said, "It paid more money than I made as a professor at Columbia University! So – (chuckles) So, he ... all those little checks just kept coming in, and I decided I was gonna be a writer, I wasn't gonna be a professor anymore, and I quit."

Angela:
So, that's in the book, and was – and he was just the most interesting person, and then – I had an opportunity to speak to somebody who actually was the first – I believe the first inductee into the – Rock and Roll Hall of Fame out in Cleveland. Most people would say, "Wow! It's got to be a rock star, it's gotta be somebody who played with a big band." No, it was Alison Steele, who, in the New York area, probably all over the country, was known as "the Nightbird."

Angela:
Hmm!

Patricia:
And she came on, I believe around midnight, right? And – she was married to a fellow who did one of the original – TV dance shows for teenagers on television in this area, New York area, and I met her and she was just incredible, and I was just – I happened to be doing a TV show, and they said – I said, "Who's gonna be on the TV show?" And they said, "Well – we're gonna

have Alison Steele on, she's the Nightbird," and I said, "Oh, my God, I have to meet her!" and when I did – she was just the most gracious, most absolutely engaging person you'd ever want to meet, and she talked about her experiences in radio, and – and that was really quite a – an interview, I really remember that. And John Lennon, of course, ... -

Angela:

So, to write this book – so, to write this book, you actually took interviews you had done throughout your career as –

Patricia:

Sure. Mm-hm!

Angela:

– the – the basis of the content.

Patricia:

Absolutely.

Angela:

So, how much new content did you have to generate – as a – as a percentage of the content that is in this book that you had already created?

Patricia:

Well, I would say new content was probably everything, because I – I write quite a lot, I write a lot. So, probably, over the past five years – I would have written, I would think, between twenty and thirty, maybe forty articles a year in various places and for different things, and I would sort things out for that, so I – I don't – as I recall now, I didn't write anything specifically for this book, absolutely brand new content, I may have – I may have – taken one thing, and that was a very interesting article I wrote – on a – person in the psychiatric hospital, and – and the particular challenges that anybody in that setting has to face. And I did have to rework that quite a bit, but – I was very fortunate that I had an enormous trove of information and articles, as I think Nora Ephron said before she – once she was interviewed, just a couple of years before she died, she said, "You write things and you put them away, and some of them get used – ... get published, and some don't, and you take all that stuff, because that's all material, and you use it and you do not let it go to waste." So, that was my orientation, and I really was working on that book even before I absolutely fell in love with Nora Ephron's writing, and –

Angela:

Mm.

Patricia:

– it was such a loss for all of us.

Angela:
Mm.

Patricia:
But – yeah, but it was – I – you write – you write something, it's good, you believe in it, you don't throw it away, you may have to rework it a little bit to fit into a different genre, or to update it or whatever, but I don't believe that your hard work isn't worth keeping, and perhaps re – what they call repurposing – everybody's talking about –

Angela:
Mm.

Patricia:
– repurposing these days. So, repurpose everything you've got – use it! You've produced it, you've slaved over it, you've looked for material for it, you've interviewed people for it. Don't just throw it away, it's – it's – because what does that say? You're not producing junk, you're producing something that has quality, that has – that has use, and that you can re-use in an – maybe in a new way. Maybe you can put it into something entirely different, it doesn't have to be a book, it could be something else. I might spark an idea, but keep all that stuff, because – I go over some of my older stuff and I say, "Gee, whiz, ... I really like that, is that something I wrote?"

Angela:
Mm-hm!

Patricia:
It was so long ago, I can't – I can't remember writing it. But, yeah, there's – there's something –

Angela:
And have you done that with other – I know you've published five other books – had – have any of those books been from previous content you've created, or is this the first time you've done that.

Patricia:
No, actually, they – they weren't – actually, the first book that I published was with McGraw Hill, and it was *How to Be Your Own Therapist*, and I was really – and I still am – I'm really interested in producing something for people who were interested to know about therapy. How do I go about it, who do I go to, what can I expect, all of that, and I decided I would write a book that would help them understand, here's how you do it, this is what you ask, these are your rights – all of that. So – and that book was – actually, I had somebody who was a – a – co-author on that, who didn't get credit on the book, she's a wonderful woman who had

worked with – a psychologist in the past, but that was all new material, and – that was – that book took a lot of work, and – and took a lot of promotion, and – it was – it was a lot of – a lot of hard work. That first book was – was very hard, in fact, to get an agent, just to get that book written, and I – I had a slightly different slant on it. I sent out a – prospectus with a covering letter and – and my resumé, which, at that point, I had appeared on maybe three hundred – television shows and radio shows and been interviewed, all the places – I – I built that up, I knew I was building up to something. I wouldn't get a book until I had some kind of profile, and I built my profile up to a point that I was very strong, and I went out and began looking for an agent, and I have to tell you, when everybody out there knows, it's probably one of the toughest things you could do –

Angela:
Mm.

Patricia:
– because you get a lot of people who don't even bother responding, and you just go with the circular file –

Angela:
Right.

Patricia:
– and you other people who say, “Well – it's really not something I'm – I'm interested in.” I was fortunate, I'd – after probably, I would think, forty to sixty – packets went out, and everything went out – in – in a special envelope with priority mail, because I learned from being in publishing and public relations that you want your piece of mail to stand out, so you don't just send a letter in, you send it priority mail, but every one of those is gonna cost you four dollars, and not everybody has that kind of money, I didn't either, but I knew that that would make them look at it –

Angela:
Mmm. Mm.

Patricia:
– and I would get a little more consideration there. Every bit you get is going to be helpful. And – and finally, I got somebody who came back and said, “Yeah, I – I like this idea and I have a couple of people I want you to talk to,” and then we went on the process of going around and meeting publishers and talking to them about the book and this was, I think it was in June or July, and it was a hundred and four degrees, and that was just – you're running from one place to the next and trying to look crisp, and then – and bright, and – and you meet all these people, and then, a couple of them, you don't – decide, “Yeah, we'd like to – we'd like to make bids,” and you finally come to some arrangement, and then you go through that whole rewrite process, and constantly – back and forth and you begin hating your book - ...

Angela:

Uh, huh, yeah, heard that story before!

Patricia:

Yeah, y – you say, “I can’t read it one more time – this is just getting too familiar, and it’s – and it’s – I just can’t. I need new eyes on it, ...”

Angela:

I am now allergic to my book. Yeah.

Patricia:

Yeah, absolutely! Absolutely. And – then you – then you start going all over, and – and – doing all of the media that you can, and I was very fortunate, I got so – on some shows which they said, “Okay, you’re gonna be on the show to talk about this, but we’ll flash your book on the screen.” “Okay, great! I’ll come and talk about cat food if you want. Flash my book on the screen!”

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Patricia:

So, I really have to – you have to approach it that way, and – you – you have to do many things which – maybe you never wanted to do, or – think about J. D. Salinger, how popular was he? But he refused to go out and meet people and – and do publicity after his – after *Catcher in the Rye*, he felt, “Okay, that’s it, and now I’m just gonna write for me.” I don’t know, and his – he’s got some crazy – things in his will to ..., but some of his books cannot be published until I think twenty years after he dies.

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Patricia:

And he had – and – and he has – he had something happen to him, which I think everybody out there should also remember. Here is a guy who sold millions and millions of copies of his book, but he wanted to be in *The New Yorker* – who wouldn’t want to be in *The New Yorker*, to have a short story there? And he would keep sending stuff in and they would keep rejecting him. And he must have sent twenty-five or more pieces in, constantly, constantly, and they would just keep – sending very nice – these little rejection notes back, “No, this isn’t quite what we want,” until somebody came along and said, “Hey, wait a minute, look at this guy’s – look what he sent in! Yeah. Let’s publish this.” And that was – and that was after years – it must have been ten years or fifteen years that he tried, and he just did not give up, he doggedly kept doing it. And that’s what people really have to do – there are no ...

Angela:

So, let's talk about – let's talk about what advice that you would give, or have given, to – I'm sure, in the time you've been an author, you've met so many people who've said, "I wanna write a book" –

Patricia:

Right.

Angela:

– but they haven't been able to accomplish that goal. What's some of the advice you've given those people through the years?

Patricia:

Well – I think you have to do – the first thing is, unfortunately, you have to look – do a lot of – work that is – unappealing and rather dry and – this is – this is how you make your platform. You have to decide, "Okay, I have a book idea." Let's – one thing I hear all the time is, "I want to write a children's book" –

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Patricia:

– because we see all these famous people, they're not writing children's books, they ghostwriters who write these books for them, please. But they say, "I wanna write a children's book," well, that's a laudable thing. Now, what kind of children's book will you write? Will it be illustrated, or will it just be words, and what kind of book, will it have some kind of teaching – premise, will there be a – will it be a morality tale, will it appeal to which grade in school? Which child are you looking at? Now, you've got to go out and look at all the books in that particular area that have been produced in the past, let's say, year or two. You have to look and see what kind of sales they've had, you've got to see – where they are or – if they are on a bestseller list, you've got to compare your book idea to theirs. Have they already done it? You have to look at your competition even before you start writing this book.

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

Then, you have to now start structuring your book. "Okay, this is great, this is where I wanna go, that's how they went. I'm gonna go that way, I have a twist on it, and I think my twist is gonna make it different enough that's it's gonna appeal to that audience." And that may be true –

Angela:
Mm-hm.

Patricia:
– but that’s what you have to do, then – and then you have to start writing, and you – I – I’d say to everybody, it’s been said to me, and I agree, absolutely, the best way you learn to become a good writer is by reading good writing. Read all of the – of the really important books that have been produced in maybe the past fifty years. If you wanna write short stories, then go out there and read O’Henry and read everything you can find. Read everything that – all the classics. Read the language. Feel – look at how they used language in such marvelous, beautiful ways. Look what they – look what they’ve opened up for you. You are gonna take people on an adventure, you’re gonna be their guide. Think of this that way. First, read, and read intently, and make notes. How did they – how did they do this? I had a professor in college once, he gave us an English – assignment, and he said, “Okay, here is something,” and I can’t re – Saul Bellow.

Angela:
Mm-hm.

Patricia:
“Here’s something by Saul Bellow, ...” He said, “I want you to all read this, and now I want you to write something. Write your – an original story, and I want you to write it in Saul Bellow’s voice.”

Angela:
Mm-hm!

Patricia:
... And I handed it in, and the professor said, “Wow, you even outdid Saul Bellow!” (laughs)

Angela:
(laughs) You out-Saul-Bellowed Saul Bellow.

Patricia:
So, that was great, so – but give yourself – give yourself assignments, give yourself assignments that you’re gonna read a certain number of –

Angela:
So you – you have had the experience of working with an agent, working with a traditional publisher, wors –

Patricia:
Right. Mm-hm.

Angela:

– working with more of a boutique – industry publisher, you self-published, what advice would you give a first- time author for how to get their book – out into the world, how to publish their book?

Patricia:

Well, okay, I would say – cut your aspirations to something down to the realistic. I would say – just as I did in – in the media, create a platform. Get yourself some kind of credibility as a writer. Look and see if there are some places that you can begin to place – short stories, novellas, whatever they will publish, okay? Begin to pick out those niches that you might be able to fill something, right there. And do that! And anticipate you're gonna get a lot of rejections.

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

But you may get rejections from people who are gonna be very kind to you and are going to say, "I think you have a great idea here, I think you have a wonderful, clear voice, but I think what you need to do," and they give you some suggestions.

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

Well, run with that! Take that suggestion, do it over and resubmit! Tha – that's all, resubmit! And then, maybe they'll say, "Yeah! You did a better job," or, "Yeah! You did a great job, we like this. We're thinking of – we might publish this!" I would say start small, don't – don't start thinking you're gonna get a big best seller. Some of the people – and I have to tell you that there's a horrible – truism in the publishing field, a lot of people don't wanna admit this, but I found it out through a variety of channels. Some of the best sell – first of all, "bestseller" doesn't sell a lot of books.

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Patricia:

Bestseller – might sell two thousand books? That's a bestseller!

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Patricia:

You will see people go on television and say, "Well, I sold ten thousand books, ten thousand copies of my hard-cover book."

Angela:

Right.

Patricia:

Well, how many copies did you buy, right?

Angela:

Aah!

Patricia:

... let me buy their book. Yeah. And it gives them away, okay? And it gives them away to anybody. So, bestsellers aren't necessarily great books, and I wouldn't – I wouldn't want to aim to be a bestseller, I would want to aim to be a really good writer –

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

– and to say something worthwhile. In my books, that's what I try to do, I – I try to say something worthwhile, and I'm working on a couple of different things right now – and I had been thinking, I like – I like multimedia, and I like what self-publishing has done for me. It's given me a great deal of freedom. And the new media that we have available to us allows you to go and promote yourself. You don't have to spend a lot of money, but you know where you could go. You go to Twitter, you go to Facebook, you go to various other outlets and you begin sending them copies – you first query them. You send copies of your book out to reviewers or whatever, it's very hard to get your book reviewed, very hard to even – I don't care, they – people publish lists of reviewers. Take a look – take a look at who on that list actually will accept your book and take a look at it.

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

A lot of them don't. They say ... "I'm not looking at books anymore." "But why are you on the list?" "Well, I'm on the list because I'm ... books, but I'm not – I'm not looking at books anymore, so –"

Angela:

"I'm not gonna review yours."

Patricia:

Exactly! "I'm not gonna review yours, you don't bother sending it to me!" What I would like to do is – and I wanted to do this ten years ago, and the publisher said to me, and that was a major publisher, "Oh, we can't do that. We can't do that – no, I can't –" "But you gotta do that!" And I wanted to do it in a different way, the – the technology was quite different then. I believe, and only the major book publishers, e-book publishers, that they – what they call "bricks and mortar" houses, can do this, they have arrangements with Amazon. You can produce an e-book that is, they call it "enhanced." That means, you can include, in your – in your written book, you can include video, audio and various kinds of – of – Powerpoints or whatever. And I think that is wonderful. iBooks does that right now, they will – they make a template available to you, you can just – for free! – you can pick up one of their templates and start – writing immediately, on their template, and you can plug in all of your pictures and all of your video and you can do voiceover and do whatever you want! They don't have a very good royalty arrangements –

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

– and – they have a lot of restrictions on writers who decide that they would publish with them. Amazon does have that – that platform, but they don't make it available to independent e-book publishers.

Angela:

Mmm.

Patricia:

They only make it available for – Harper and Row – McGraw Hill, or Simon and Schuster, all the big houses. But I see that coming down the road, and I see that ...

Angela:

Yeah, it's there now, ...

Patricia:

It's like, for instance, children's books. If you wanted to write children's books, you know kids love visuals. You know they watch television, they use iPads, they use the – Smartphones, they are into the visual, they're not really into the written word so much, but you can incorporate both in an enhanced e-book, if they make that format available to us, I would certainly jump on it, if I had the opportunity. Think what that can do, and think that's only a few years away. I don't think that – that people like Amazon can afford to deny all of the talent that's out there that would be able to produce these really interesting books that would be i – instructive for the kids, that would be delightful – I think we're – we are now a – going to

appreciate a new wave in publishing ... filmmaking had the new wave in the seventies and eighties, they went to a totally different way of doing films. I think we'll gonna go to a new way of doing book publishing, but I think the first thing you've gotta do is, you have to establish your credibility as a writer. There are lots of people out there – you watch – watch television, they have all these programs about people who wanna sing. You know how many singers are out there? You know how many kids play on the local basketball court and wanna go to the NBA. How many of them never make it?

Angela:
Right. Yeah.

Patricia:
How do you make it there? You make it by either getting a coach or you get an outlet. You have to get some kind of name, I don't care if it's a local name, you have to be known in some way. You have to – you have to go out there and start selling yourself as a writer. That – that – you may not be comfortable with that, well, if you're not, you could probably – you could turn into the next Harper Lee. She wrote – one book, which was *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and then she ref –

Angela:
To Kill a Mockingbird, ...!

Patricia:
Yeah! She refused to do anything else. She refused – to me, that's – excellent book, I think it's fabulous, everybody should read that.

Angela:
If you're gonna write one – that's a good one.

Patricia:
... Ah! She was fabulous, but she refused to do any publicity whatsoever. Margaret Mitchell, who wrote *Gone With the Wind* – wrote every single day and put it in a trunk, and it stayed there for I don't know how long. And suddenly, somebody came to the house, or whatever, and they said, "Oh, you know, Margaret writes." "Really?" This person knew a New York book publisher. "Really? Well, give me something, I'm going back to New York, give me something and I'll read it on the train." And so, she went upstairs, opened the trunk, pulled out a chapter, gave it to him, he went to the ...when he got there ...

Angela:
And that was *Gone With the Wind*, right?

Patricia:
That was *Gone With the Wind*! ...

Angela:

Gone With the Wind, well that is the end of our time together, but Dr. Patricia Farrell, it has been wonderful speaking with you, you can go to drfarrell.net, that's two r's and two l's in "farrell," Dr. Farrell is the author of *Fired Up: A Shrink's Musings*, and we will be back next week on Book Journeys Radio, where we're changing the world one book at a time.