

[Book Journeys](#) Author Interview - July 30, 2015

Dr. Angela Lauria with Jenn McRobbie, author of *Why Is She Acting So Weird? A Guide to Cultivating Closeness When a Friend Is in Crisis*

"When I think about the difference between those books, those manuscripts and my books, the difference is not just the genre. The difference is where my heart is" ~Jenn McRobbie

Angela:

Well, hey everybody. We are back at Book Journeys where ah... I had a little break last week, but it is so nice to have everyone back and this week, I am really excited to talk to you. Really... I think what the show is gonna be about for you is so much about how we think we have one book inside us and in many cases, there are three, four, five books, and part of your book journey that I think a lot of people dismiss the importance of, is really identifying one book that you're writing right now, and knowing that you can write other books, it's alright. Uhm, not what I always say, but books are kinda like tattoos; people who love tattoos tend not to have one and people who have books tend not to have one. But what happens, especially when we had a big event in our lives, or even if you're just a creative person in general, is that you have so many ideas, and a lot of times, you think it's one book and it's really like crowded in your head and you're trying to write and you write a piece of it - you write another piece of it and it's just not coming together and often not because you haven't figured out, before you start writing, what your book actually is. So the author I have the privilege of introducing to you today really went through this journey. I feel really grateful to say that some of this journey has been with me, but [she] really went through this journey of figuring out what this book wanted to be and I think it... I know it's surprised me and I know it surprised her. So, I'm really happy to welcome Jenn McRobbie. She is the author of *Why Is She Acting So Weird? A Guide to Cultivating Closeness When a Friend Is in Crisis*. So, hey Jenn. Welcome to the show.

Jenn:

Hi Angela. Thank you so much for having me.

Angela:

So let's just start off by talking about *Why Is She Acting So Weird?* What is this book about and who is it for?

Jenn:

Okay, so *Why Is She Acting So Weird?* is for the person who has ever tried to help a friend or is thinking about helping a friend and who doesn't know what to do and it's written specifically for people in crisis. But I've gotten a lot of really good feedback about the book that it's good for all friendships and when one friend faces sort of a major life crisis, and I'm more talking about cancer, divorce, job loss, death of a child, often our friends have no idea what to do and so I put it into a nice little compact book for everyone.

Angela:

Yeah, and I think what's so powerful about that is like there's so many books on... written about, like, romantic relationships, and like what to do in that book. Friendship is such an important part of our life that there's not a lot of... like most people don't go to counseling with a friend, like there's family counseling, couples... friends' counseling. It's like there are tons of books and programs you could buy if you're having trouble in your relationship, or even with... maybe with your, your mom, or your family, or gender, and definitely with your kids, but like... I feel like friendship is so important but it's this hugely, kind of, I don't know, underserved area, don't you think?

Jenn:

I do think so and when I was doing research, sort of, about this topic of friendship and how we can be good friends, I realized that a lot of books out there are books that help us learn to get friends but they don't let us help keep friends. And so, I really think my book, you know, I tried to write it from the perspective of how you can maintain your friendship and, you know, maybe even grow some new ones at the same time. But to fill that gap in, sort of the book knowledge of how do we maintain our friendships; how can we be the good friends that we really want to be.

Angela:

Great. It's almost like it should be easy like if your friend's in crisis, bring them a casserole and that should, you know, take care of it, or offer to give them a ride to the doctors, or something, and that should be enough.

Jenn:

Right, and often and the whole reason this book is titled *Why Is She Acting So Weird?* is that when we're in a crisis, all of a sudden, those regular things that we would normally do for our friends, they don't seem adequate, and so we start to think to ourselves, "Oh, my gosh! My friend is really acting weird," you know. How am I gonna handle this? What am I gonna do? How am I gonna help her? And often, we end up doing nothing.

Angela:

Mmm. Right. 'Cause you don't want to do something wrong or you don't want to make it worse, or, say the wrong thing, or complicate it when they're having such a hard time, and then...

Jenn:

Right. Right, and then if you're on the other side, you're the one in the crisis, you're thinking, "Why is my friend acting so weird?" and normally she'd just come over and talk to me, and God, she's acting like, you know, I have a tumor growing out of my face and she can't even look at me and so... Hopefully that's not your crisis, but if it is, you know, that might explain it. But ordinarily, nobody knows what to do and so, I found myself in that position, as you know, and I wanted to share what I learned, and that's really what this book is about.

Angela:

I love that. So, *Why Is She Acting So Weird?* is available on Amazon. You can also go to jennmcrobbie.com and there are two Ns in Jenn, so J-E-N-N-M-C-R-O-B-B-I-E dotcom. You can learn more about Jenn... Jenn let's start off by talking about what you wish you knew before you wrote your book.

Jenn:

[laughing] I wish I had known how quickly it was going to go once I started writing and I wish I had known that I didn't need to fear what was going to come out of me. Because there was a lot of fear, particularly when I settled on this topic, there was a lot of fear that I was telling someone else's story - that I wasn't telling my story - and so I worried about, "Oh, you know what is Aimee gonna think when I tell this one thing that happened between us and what is Craig, my husband going to think when I talk about how... it sucks to watch him struggle with my crisis and so I wish I had known that I have it in me to tell a story from my own perspective and that I don't need to worry about what other people think when I'm telling it from my voice.

Angela:

Mmm. Wow. And what do you think it was that got you through that?

Jenn:

Well, you were a very big help... I'm not gonna lie. But I think what got me through it was, first, finding the topic... finding the topic that was important to me, which was maintaining friendship, like I talked about earlier, and realizing that as I'm coming from the back place of wanting to help - that service heart, as you have called it. By coming from that place, people will understand - even when they're upset - people will understand where I'm coming from and why my message is important. And so, I... this is stamped down from that fear and realized that my intent is to help and just rely on that intent to carry me through - getting it all out on paper.

Angela:

Yeah. So this is obviously... Nobody could project it, but if you didn't have a book... you didn't have the support you had and you were like most authors who are trying to do it on their own, how do you think that particular struggle of, you know, telling other people's stories... How do you think that would've gotten resolved?

Jenn:

I think... I probably would... It definitely would've been resolved, because this was a really important topic to me and I had to realize that you can't share information with people without telling a story and that when you're telling a story, it necessarily involves people. And so, I think, had I been doing this on my own, it just probably would've taken me a little longer to get to that point of understanding that it's okay to get the story out, and then you could go back and look at it later and decide whether or not you're gonna hurt somebody so badly by telling a story - that you wanna take it out or change it, or whatever, I mean, I think a really good piece of advice that

you gave me during this process, at least in the beginning of writing, was that - just get it all out. "Jenn, get it all out. Everything that needs to be written, and we will go back and edit it later."

Angela:

Right. So, you know, one of the things that you said helped you and what I see happened, is that people end up, because of questions like that one, they end up in a spin cycle and they don't end up finishing. And so, one of the things that you said helped - got you through that - was understanding the purpose of the book. So let's talk about how you picked this topic exactly.

Jenn:

Okay. So when I decided to write a book, I thought I was going to write a memoir. So the basis of my crisis, uh, for the people who are listening was, I was diagnosed with breast cancer at 38 and my life was immediately thrown into crisis management, as you would imagine, and as I was thinking about the message that I wanted to share with everyone - from the messages that I had learned from that experience - I thought it was going to be in memoir format. So, to prepare, I basically started writing a timeline of my life that was filled with stories. It was just, you know, single sentences of little stories that I have to tell of things that happened to me and I really didn't concentrate on whether they were worthy or not. I just sort of read a long list that's close to chronological order as I could and the only reason I did it in chronological order is because I like that. It doesn't ascend my sense of order, you know, that way. So I just did it that way.

Angela:

Did it start in chronological order or did it start with you have the stories and then you put them into chronological order?

Jenn:

It actually started in chronological order.

Angela:

That's how you thought through it. Okay.

Jenn:

Yes. I kind of thought through... I was thinking through my life and sort of what had brought me to that exact moment where I was sitting in front of my computer typing out this chronological list of stories, and so I had that list and then when I stepped back and looked at that list, I actually found out that a lot of the stories that I wanted to tell were not about me, they were about my friendships. So they were about me. They were about how I interacted with other people, and then when the topic sort of began to take form in my head, I realized that, you know friendships were such a crucial relationship - in my entire life - not just during crises that that was something really important to me and that I really wanted to share with people.

Angela:

Mmm. Yeah. So... Okay, so you focused on the friendship piece of it and then did you know... Did you envision it as completed and did you know where you were going with it? You knew you were going to talk about the aspects of friendship during the crisis, so what did you know and what did you have to sort of go with the... go with the flow, go with the river your book journey's on.

Jenn:

[chuckles] So, what I knew I was going to do, is tell people how crappy people were during my crisis. What's... The first thing that came to my mind was, "I'm gonna tell everybody what the stories that leave people's mouth agape," you know. What I didn't know was that in order to tell those stories, I actually needed to be much more gentle with the topic and I ended up doing a lot more soul searching about my role in those stories than I had imagined that I would. So, you know, it's almost like I was looking at the topic from the outside in, you know, like "I'm gonna tell people how to be a good friend." But then, as I'm writing it, I'm like, "Oh man. There were a lot of times when I wasn't a good friend," and then I would realize that I needed to tell that story because that's where my reader was sitting, you know, feeling like they're not a good friend. So, that definitely came with the flow. I had no idea that was gonna come out in the book. It was very rough and scary, but I am so, so glad with how it turned out.

Angela:

So you said that one of the things you wish you knew before you wrote your book book was how fast it could go and I know that you've kind of, probably expected, your book to take even longer to write but once you got it, it was right there for you. So, let's talk about other books that you may have tried to write and what do you think the difference is. 'Cause I know most people have multiple... multiple manuscripts... most of... multiple books, even if it's only in their head that they thought, "Oh, I'm gonna write this book. I'm gonna write that book," and then they don't do it. So what's the difference between a book you finish and a book you think about?

Jenn:

Well, I have, for frame of reference, three partial manuscripts sitting on my computer right now, labeled 2007, 2008, and 2011, so I've tried this for many, many years before I was hit by... and what's interesting is all of those partial manuscripts are like fiction, flash, sci-fi novels and when I think about the difference between those books, those manuscripts and my books, the difference is not just the genre. The difference is where my heart is. So, my other manuscripts, you know, were being written from, "Oh this would be interesting and I think other people might like to read it." But when I wrote Why Is She Acting So Weird? that's - that's my heart on paper, you know, that... that's the message I really feel strongly about sharing.

Angela:

But what I hear right... like your heart, because when we're making, uh... I was going to talk about pottery. I don't know why. I've never done any pottery, but, if you're making like a bowl in

pottery... that's your heart in some ways. If it's something like you're doing. If you're building a, you know, bunk beds in your kid's room, like that's your heart - that's something you're doing. But I think the difference and, you know, tell me where I'm wrong here, but I think the difference is not just about your heart but about your reader's heart and about that fervent readership - about serving your reader, and not that entertainment isn't a form of service...

Jenn:
Agreed.

Angela:
...but when... Right! You know what I'm saying?

Jenn:
No, I know exactly what you're saying and I think you're right. What I'm trying to say is that when you are... and because, you know, like you said, people that write fiction and science-fiction, I mean, my entire bookshelf is filled with fiction and science-fiction and many of those books have helped me so much over the years like I don't want to say that self-help is the only thing where you can get value out of because I have made major value out of other genres, but for me personally, when I was writing this book, I needed to write the book that... I needed the catharsis and...

Angela:
Mmm. Interesting.

Jenn:
Yeah, and so, for me, where all of my emotions, sort of my personalness was tied up, it was tied up in my friends - my friendships and how they had changed since my crisis, and so putting that on paper was my way of bringing that catharsis, sort of, to the forefront for me. I think that same process can happen regardless of your topic and your genre. You know, it is what - message you have inside of you to tell people, and whether you choose to tell that, you know, in a children's book or in a sci-fi novel or in a self-help book, it doesn't really matter what the genre is. Totally, I think that's so true.

Angela:
So, were there cases in your work, in the writing part of your journey, where you got stuck; didn't know what you wanted to write; maybe had writer's block, uhm, or things that... A lot of times, writer's block shows up as, you know, medical things, or kid things, or your mother-in-law needs you to do something, so a lot of times, dizzy shows up, that's taking us away from our books, but that dizzy is really a kind of a form of writer's block or holding back from what's possible. Did that happen to you during your process?

Jenn:

Oh, yes. Almost every time I sat down in the beginning. I would sit down at the computer during - I was making writing my job - I would have a blocked time on my calendar and I would sit down to write and I'd start thinking about all the other things that I needed to get done. I needed to get done laundry; I needed to organize my kid's room; I needed to vacuum the living room; I needed to, you name it. I'd come up with sort of ridiculous things that I needed to do instead of write.

Angela:

And so, ah... So, so... What did you you?

Jenn:

So, sometimes, I would just write enough to get through and I would try to just get some writing on paper, and once I started writing, it would begin to flow. Sometimes, when I did that... But what ended up being most successful for me was when my mind would wander. I would just stop writing and go do whatever my mind had wandered to, and I was speaking the other day to people on how procrastination can actually be a message, and I told them the story of my book and how, when I was thinking about procrastinating guess how many words I was writing? Like zippo! Nothing!

Angela:

... that, so you know.

Jenn:

Exactly. But when I was actually procrastinating, I, you know, doing the thing I had been thinking about then, like folding laundry, the interesting thing is mind would naturally go to the book, and so I would sort of, you know, outline in my head the stories that I wanted to tell or I was thinking about - what I wanted to say and once I was done folding the laundry, I was like, "Wow, I am ready to write and I would sit down and I would be blazing fast, and so I would get, you know, a chapter done in a third of the time that it would've taken me to white-knuckle it through. So giving in to that procrastination in... many times, was the best thing I could have done.

Angela:

Okay, so how did you figure that out?

Jenn:

You told me to. [laughter] But...

Angela:

Because really, for most people, that is the most terrifying thing. It feels like, if you're on a diet and you give in to that cookie or that brownie that's on a plate in the office, kitchen, or something, like it feels like, "Well that's the end of the day!" Like that's... "Now I'll never gonna get back to my book!" and it's a terrifying idea to [be] sitting there and beat yourself up in front of your computer and not writing, actually, in some ways, feels safer.

Jenn:

Yes, it does. It feels much safer and it allows you those excuses to hide behind, "Well, I didn't get my book done because, you know, I had so much to do. I really needed to, you know, pluck my cat's tail hair and, you know, I needed to go pick up those rocks that had been my yard for ten days, you know, and so it gives you excuses, but when you give in to those excuses, and sort of, you know, the advice you gave me, and this ended up working for me, was, you know, set a times for like fifteen minutes and let yourself give into the procrastination for fifteen minutes, and then at the end of that, sort of evaluate how you're feeling, and like I said, you know, after that fifteen minutes, I'd come - for me, I'd have all of these ideas come up and I'd be ready to write. But there were certainly times when, at the end of that fifteen minutes, I was like, "You know, I don't think I have it in me today to tell the story."

Angela:

Right.

Jenn:

But then I wasn't just beating myself up about it because I'd actually gotten something done, at least. It might not be for the book, but I got something done that was on my list, like fold the laundry or, you know, do whatever. So, I didn't feel like a failure, that way.

Angela:

Right. Yeah, and what I say is that giving in to the procrastination is, there are two ways to do it. There's a way to do it where you'll feel like you're quitting and you're failing your book, and the way to do it where it's like, "This is working on my book. Working on my book right now is spending fifteen minutes doing the thing that's distracting me from doing my book. That's the most generous thing I can do for my book."

Jenn:

Yes.

Angela:

And when you have that slightly different mindset, it's not even a dramatic- you still need to procrastinate. Like it's not even dramatic. But just changing it to, "This is the most kind thing I can do for my book right now," is...

Jenn:

It feels...

Angela:

It's so powerful.

Jenn:

It feels like eating that cookie and saying, "Ahh, now I'm gonna go work out. And it's not beating yourself up for it but like seeing it as a reward.

Angela:

Mmm hmm!

Jenn:

Totally. Totally.

Angela:

Well, let's talk about - this interview's going so fast. I wish we had a full hour, but - What for you..? Your book... came out... When did your book come out? About four months ago?

Jenn:

March. Yup. March, 2015.

Angela:

Yey! So what are some of the best things to have happened to you since your book was written?

Jenn:

Oh, my gosh. So, I've gotten so many notes from people that have basically left me in, like a puddle of tears, because they've told me stories about how I have helped them be a better friend, and, uhm, how my book has helped them help someone. And so, whenever someone tells me that my book changed the way they acted or helped them reach out to someone who was suffering, I just... I'm pretty much on cloud 9 forever and ever, and so that's probably the single best thing that comes out of writing a book - is hearing people saying they like it.

Angela:

Right.

Jenn:

And the other really great thing to come out of that is, I've been able to now use the book as a way to start spreading these messages that I have about friendship, about how to take care of ourselves, more on a speaker circuit and that's something that is... I'm very passionate about, and so the book has helped me in both ways - both personally and in the business world.

Angela:

I love that. And, is there anything that has surprised you at the process? Things you thought would be different? You wanted to write a book for a long time, so, is there anything different about being an author that maybe you didn't expect?

Jenn:

You know, there's a lot of pride in it. It sounds weird to say that because, you know, you assume that when you write a book, that you're gonna be sort of prideful about it, but you know, I had no idea just how much it - how good it was going to make me feel; to have a piece of me - a book with my name on it and my face on the back. To have that out there in the world, uhm, that was - that is just - it's very hard to put into words how great that is. I think the other thing that surprised me was learning that you need to have, sort of your end goal in mind, before you even start writing the book, you know, that I wanted to be a speaker; that I wanted to help people with their friendships that I wanted to continue live coaching. You know, knowing those things before I even started writing helped me focus the topics, the... you know, individual stories in the book, and that it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be. [laughing]

Angela:

Awww, that's great. So, we've only got about a minute or so left, but what advice would you give to someone who wants to write a book like, you know, like you were a year or two years or three years ago, but they haven't been able to finish it? What advice would you like to leave them with?

Jenn:

So, the first thing that I would say is, "If you've even thought about writing a book, or if, you know, the heavens have aligned and you've started writing, then you are a writer. You need to stop telling yourself that you're not. Stop beating yourself up. You are a writer. And just because you haven't finished that book, you need... it doesn't mean that you're not a writer, but it might mean that the book isn't focused or it doesn't mean enough to you; that your heart's not in it and that if you can find out what's in your heart, you will get that book out, and it might not be what you suspected it. So figure out how to make your current manuscript mean something to you, or write a different book. But either way, you can do that.

Angela:

Yeah. I think people don't like to hear that. "No, but it is important to me!" and the thing is if it really was, it would be done, right?

Jenn:

That's right. That's right, and that's why I haven't written a memoir, because at the end of the day, my story, you know, my individual story, was - is not that important to me. What's important to me is, you know, sharing my relationships with everyone, and that's why this book's gotten finished.

Angela:

Right. Well, you can read this book. I know everybody has a friend who has faced a crisis or maybe you have faced a crisis and thought your friends acted like big jerks or didn't do enough, or tried to do too much and just drove you crazy, or wanted an update every fifteen minutes which made you relive all of - everything you were going through. So, whether you've been on

either side of a crisis - in crisis or someone going through it yourself, I know you will love Jenn McRobbie's *Why Is She Acting So Weird? A Guide to Cultivating Closeness When a Friend Is in Crisis*. You can find it on amazon.com and you can learn more about Jenn, uh, bring her perhaps to speak to your group about friendships and books and the journey of going through a crisis... jennmcrobbie.com. It's J-E-N-N-M-C-R-O-B-B-I-E. Jenn, thanks so much for being our guest today. It's been great having you.

Jenn:

Thank you so much Angela. It's been a pleasure.

Angela:

So we, ah... We will be back next week here on Book Journeys, changing the world one book at a time.