

**Book Journeys Author Interview - Jan 16, 2014**

**Dr. Angela Lauria with Karen R. Koenig, author of *The Rules of "Normal" Eating*.**

*"I'm always marketing. I don't go out in a cocktail dress with a little purse without putting my business cards ... in it. I carry books in the trunk of my car. ... Because you never know when you're gonna have connections, you never know when people are gonna be interested in your topic." ~Karen R. Koenig*

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. Today – in – on Book Journeys Radio, we have Karen Koenig, Karen is the author of *The Rules of "Normal" Eating*, and – Karen, we're really excited to have you here today. Let's start off by talking about your book, what's the book about?

Karen:

The book is for people who I call disregulated eaters, they eat either too much, they'd eat too little, they go back and forth – they've been dieting a lot, and it's a book about how to reclaim and to reconnect to your appetite with four simple rules – for hunger, using foods you like, staying aware while you're eating and – stopping when you're full and satisfied.

Angela:

And – so, I know this is – this isn't your first book, right? You've written – have you written other books?

Karen:

No, it is my first, my fifth was just published so –

Angela:

Wow!

Karen:

– this – *the Rules of "Normal" Eating* was published in 2005.

Angela:

Okay. And – so, let's talk about that journey. So, your first book, you wrote in 2005, and since then you've written four books. Did you know – did you know, when you wrote the first one, it would be the beginning of something?

Karen:

I did not. I had been – trying to write screenplays and novels and – I did have an agent, and she said, "Why don't you write what you know?" 'cause – I – I'm a psychotherapist and I'm an

eating coach, and – I’ve had my own eating problems, so I said, “Okay, I’ll give it a try.” And – so, I wrote my first one, and I thought, “Well! I will help people reconnect to appetite –“

Angela:  
Mm-hm.

Karen:  
– and then, through my – my clinical practice, I realized that people couldn’t really follow these rules because they were emotional eaters, and they didn’t know what to do with their emotions, so I wrote a second book, which is *The Food and Feeling Workbook*. And then – I’ll get the order straight – then – I was fortunate that – W. Norton asked me to write a book for – the general therapist, on how to handle eating problems, and then I realized that people – particularly – most of my practice is women, were just so nice, it was hard for them to manage stress without food, because they were overdoing and they were pr – people-pleases and – p – people-pleasers and perfectionists, so I wrote *Nice Girls Finish Fat*, ...

Angela:  
Mm-hmm.

Karen:  
– and then – I realized that a lot of the issues that disregulated eaters have, a lot of the reasons they go from what I call “great self-care” to “I don’t care” –

Angela:  
Mm-hmm!

Karen:  
– is because they’re feeling mix – mixed feelings about – giving up food, about being healthy, about changing their identities, so I wrote my latest book, which is – called *Starting Monday-Seven Keys to a Permanent Positive Relationship with Food*, and I actually just sent it – my – what I think is my last eating book – to my agent – for her to find a – a publishing home with it. So – it – they’ve evolved as I’ve seen a need, and as I’ve learned and grown in my own practice, see what people really do require to overcome eating problems.

Angela:  
So, was writing the first book easier or harder than writing the subsequent four books?

Karen:  
No, that one was fairly easy, because it – was, I would say, the least complex.

Angela:  
Mm-hm.

Karen:

My last book, *Starting Monday*, is much more deeply psychological and clinical –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– and so, that was more difficult, the workbook was – also difficult, ‘cause I’d never written a workbook before.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

And – so, the first book – well, I – I guess, you’re saying – in comparison to your other books, I don’t know, it’s probably – I – I don’t have kids, but it’s probably like having kids, the – they’re ea – each one is easy and hard in their own way.

Angela:

Yes! Yes, so, what were some of the things that – would getting your first book, I would think, is a – is a big accomplishment. Once you’ve written your first book, you’re an author, that’s - ... you can be a two-time author, a three-time author, but you can never go back to not being an author.

Karen:

Yes.

Angela:

So, what were some of the things that you had to overcome to get the first book done? What did you ha – what were some of the big lessons you had to learn?

Karen:

Well, probably the same ones that most authors deal with. “Can I really do this?” “Do I really have anything worthwhile to say?” “Is this any good?” I – I’m pretty fortunate that – I – I think I have the happy genes, so I really don’t get caught up in ruminating and a lot of anticipating, I’m pretty much in the moment, and – I really enjoy writing, it’s one of my favorite things to do. So, whenever those thoughts – I sit down in the morning, and there’d be – blank computer screen, I would remind myself, “Oh, I filled it up yesterday, so I’m gonna be able to fill it up today.” So, I – I think, just the – the insecurity of it –

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

– “Is it going to be any good,” and “Can – am I really a writer,” and well – you call yourself a writer – when – just ‘cause you’re writing a book, or are you only a writer afterwards?”

Angela:

Mm-mm.

Karen:

So – I thought a lot about those things, but I – I can’t say it really got in the way, and I had time, I was very fortunate that I had – quit a full-time job to open my own practice, and it was very small at first, I had plenty of time to write.

Angela:

Well, so, what was your writing schedule like?

Karen:

I would get up in the morning, I have exercise equipment at my house, and – big on mats, so I would – have breakfast, exercise, write for couple – hours, maybe two or three, have lunch, if I had clients I would see them whenever – I have them usually in the afternoon or early evening – maybe go out and do some errands in the afternoon, write a little more, have dinner, and then – write after dinner, again.

Angela:

Mm-hm.

Karen:

I really, now that I’m sixty-six, I have a lot of trouble writing in the evening, but back then – even though it wasn’t that many years ago – nine years ago, it was – I could write ‘til eleven o’clock at night ... make sense.

Angela:

And so, you would have multiple writing sessions a day. What would you do if you didn’t feel like writing? Did you have some – some rules, or some games that you put in place?

Karen:

No.

Angela:

‘Cause every time ... you aren’t necessarily gonna want to write.

Karen:

Yeah, I – it was – well, I did other things, for instance, I was also in the winter, when I was writing that – I w – I w – I was a downhill skier, I lived in Massachusetts then, I live in – Sarasota, Florida now, but –

Angela:

Hm!

Karen:

So, if it was a great ski day, I would drive up to New Hampshire and skate.

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Karen:

And that was not a writing day. I – I'm not a "should have to / must finish" – I like writing enough, and I'm goal-oriented enough, and I was really curious to see what I had to say –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– and how the book would come out – I had a – a rough outline, so that was enough to motivate me. I was really – fortunate that, for the most part, when I sat down, I knew I – something was going to come out of me.

Angela:

Wow.

Karen:

So, ... to use any of those stre – tricks.

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Karen:

It's probably a – I w – I'm pretty driven. Once I have an idea, I wanna get it out of me.

Angela:

And so, with this book, 'cause this was your first one – how – did you have the agent before you started writing it?

Karen:

No – well, yes, I – I did. It's not a simple answer, I was taking screenwriting classes –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– at the Hilde Center in Boston, and so, I was taking them from a – a woman who was an entertainment lawyer who was teaching at Emerson College, which is a college of the arts. And – so, she was – I hired her as a consultant to look at my screenplays. And eventually – not that they weren't – good, but – I tried to write some novels, and she said, "Well, why n –" that's when she said, "Why don't you write what you know?" At that point, she was an entertainment lawyer, and she could function as an agent, and eventually she gave up doing the other stuff and now is a full time agent, so that's why it was a little complicated to answer, but I have the connection beforehand.

Angela:

I see. So – so, then, tell us about your – your actual publishing journey. When did you start thinking about how you would publish, was it while you were still writing, did that – that hookup, that agent – help inform your decision, how did you decide how to publish?

Karen:

Well, again – I was really fortunate that there – is an eating disorder publisher that's been around since – the eighties, Gurze Books, and so, they would be – they'd – it just made sense that we would approach them. And – my – my agent did, and they liked it. So, they were the agent for my first book, my second book –

Angela:

And did that lead to a publishing contract?

Karen:

Yes. Yes. And – I do – do remember – that – that whole journey of, "Well, they seem to like it, are they gonna offer me a contract?" In – and I – I remember, I was – a member of a – a professional group of eating – disorder therapists, and I was driving there, and I had just gotten word that – the contract was signed. And I was just screaming the whole way to the meeting, and I – it – I couldn't have gone to a better place to share information – with them –

Angela:

Hm.

Karen:

– because they were my colleagues in the field. So, that – that was really exciting, there is nothing like – well – and then, I remember when they were first del – when they were

delivered to – the house, and I opened the box, and there they were – and, so, that was tremendously exciting. And they liked me, and I had a bre – relationship with them, so when I had another idea for a book, we went back to them and they – they changed the format a lot, and – but then, they gave me a contract for the second book.

Angela:

And so, what was that experience like, working with a publisher? How much did your book – how much did your book change, how did the publisher influence what the book – what you thought it would be like, and what – what it ended up being like?

Karen:

Well, there were some – and the ft – it's the ft – the first book – w – they had me keep away from the weight issue and just focus on eating –

Angela:

Ah!

Karen:

– that – that it's really an eating problem, and – and I – I – I ... been practicing like this now for – for years – that weight isn't the problem, eating is the problem.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

So ... – you're not gonna get anywhere, it's focusing on the eating that helps. And so, they helped me really – codify that in my mind, and understand that. In my second book, I had written it very differently, and – that was the hardest book, it was hard writing – I chose seven emotions to write about, so that was just – difficult, it was very complex, complicated writing, to put clinical stuff in the way that people would understand, plus – I'm – known for – I always have funny subtitles, and there's a lot of humor in my book –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– and ... hard to make emotions funny – to engage people and to not take the whole thing seriously, so I think that the most input I got was on that second book, where we just totally revamped and reformatted it, I never thought that one was ever gonna get out.

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

That was hard writing. And then, I had two other publishers – in between, and – but I've kept up a great relationship with – Gurze, and so, when I approached them for this, my – my fifth book, it was a couple of years ago, it was right – after the – during the recession, and publishing was tanking, and – the book was – the way I'd written it was very heavy, and they said, "Well, work on it and come back to us in a while, and we'll consider," and they did. I reworked it, the economy got a little bit better, and they bought it. And they did ...

Angela:

Hmm! So, what advice would you give somebody who wants to work with a publisher? Did you have – was there something in your proposals that you thought was part of the key, was it relationships?

Karen:

Well, when you say, "work with a publisher," you mean with a specific publisher, or you mean in general – get a publisher?

Angela:

Just with a traditional publisher, as opposed to self-publishing.

Karen:

... there's a way to do a proposal, and my agent helped. She's terrific, and – so, do you want to do a really – up-to-date, thorough marketing analysis, and so, I think that's really important. For a first book, of course you don't have sales, but you maybe have other things you've written, and I'd – I'd written some newspaper stuff, and – I had just been writing all my life, so –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– I'm sure they're interested in that, and these days, more than ever, they're interested to know on – to know about how you're gonna market a book. So, for instance, in pitching this sixth book of mine – I included the marketing plan for – the book that just came out. And – I've also – over the years, I've worked with different PR firms, I – I now have had one, a couple of years, who do – public relations and social media and they're terrific.

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Karen:

So, I think publishers are very interested in that, they – if you're an author today – unless you have a huge fluke of events bestseller, you're gonna go out and peddle your wares.

Angela:  
Mm-hmm.

Karen:  
And, so, for – I ... my – my agent has said to me, 'cause I'm – I – not that I always liked doing it, but I – I do push myself, and I – I try to do talks and workshops and any interviews that I can do – that, she said, a lot of writers, they just – they're only comfortable with writing.

Angela:  
Right.

Karen:  
And – I am, I'm sure, you have heard this a lot, but if you are going to write these days – it pays to push out of your comfort zone and do some of the – the marketing stuff and let the publishers know that you're willing to do it.

Angela:  
Mm-hmm. So, let's talk about marketing. Most people, when they write a book, they're thinking pretty hard about how to write the best book possible, how to provide a solution, how to help people, how to tell interesting stories, and they usually aren't thinking at all about marketing, ... they're kinda thinking, they'll find a publisher and their publisher will sell their book for them. So, what are some – yeah, so that's not exactly how it goes. So, what are – some of the things that you have found to be – most – most crucial, most important to know, maybe skills you should develop even before you finish your book, in terms of book marketing?

Karen:  
The first thing is – what you said, just to know that y – you're going to be doing it.

Angela:  
Mmm.

Karen:  
That's – it – it is a myth. It's not that the publishing companies don't do anything, they certainly do, and I'm lucky because Gurze has a website – of eating disorder books, and – a catalogue that goes out to hundreds of thousands of people.

Angela:  
Mm-hm.

Karen:

But – it's really think – get – getting a book out of a library, buying a book on how to market your book, and there's plenty of those out there, now. And – I – I recommend that people put – marketing ideas in three categories. One that – “I would definitely do” – maybe it's give a talk, go – at the library, or – there are open markets here – farmer's markets, maybe somebody's comfortable going and selling their books at a farmer's market or joining a writing – marketing club. Then, the middle ground of things, “Well, I'm not really comfortable, but yeah, I suppose I could push myself to learn how to do these things,” and – for instance, maybe talking in front of large crowds, or e-mailing all your colleagues.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

... sort of shy, and then that third category is, “You know what? I – this is just something I really doubt I'm ever going to do.” And then, they can be clear with themselves, clear with their agent, and, actually, clear with the publisher.

Angela:

Right.

Karen:

So, that has helped me.

Angela:

I think that's great advice. And so, then – in terms of the commitment you make – you talk about your schedule writing a book, where you were – writing multiple – multiple hours a day for – for weeks – it was a significant thing in commitment. How would you compare that to the commitment you make promoting your book?

Karen:

That's a really interesting question. I guess I would say I do what has to be done – which is maybe the same thing as writing. If you're gonna write a book, you're gonna have to sit and – and do the actual imagining, thinking, writing, editing –

Angela:

Mm-hmm!

Karen:

– and – I'm – I'm – although I'm somewhat driven and goal-oriented, I'm – I'm really not a big planner, I don't – think a lot ahead about things, ... well, okay – when I was doing my own marketing – gee, what – what newsletters, like alumni newsletters, could I send an announcement about my book – or what places in town might wanna hear me.

Angela:  
Mmm.

Karen:  
And I would just brainstorm and wide – wide net, cast a really wide net. Lotta places would say they're interested and not get back to me, so – multiple phone calls – unless you're a born salesperson, which I sure am not, it's the stuff that writers find really yucky. But if – if – you either do it yourself or you hire people to do it or it doesn't get done. And I have a number of writer friends – one friend in particular who's written – lovely – memoir, and – for a number of reasons – she hasn't – been able to market it, and – so, I don't – we talk about it, and we get ideas from each other, so sometimes it's even getting support, and certainly helping each other.

Angela:  
Mmm.

Karen:  
I don't know if writers – I don't know how many people do that, but people have sent me, “Oh, I saw a place where –” or, “I met with some people who might be interested in hearing about your book,” and I will do the same – for other people, 'cause it's a lonely job –

Angela:  
Yeah.

Karen:  
– to do writing and the marketing. Wherever possible –

Angela:  
Yeah, I think that's a great piece of advice.

Karen:  
Yeah, well, like in Sarasota, that – we have – Sarasota Fiction Writers – we have the Author's Connection, which is strictly for self-published people, and they do a lot of stuff on marketing. It's probably harder if you live in a small town, but there's online networking, and –

Angela:  
Right! Absolutely.

Karen:  
So, it's really taking advantage of those things, and thinking of marketing as equal to writing, you're not done when you finish the book, you're not even done when you get the contract.

Angela:

Yeah. I think that's a big lesson that a lot of people just don't realize, they put the last word on the paper and they think that means they're done, but it's a journey, and it doesn't – it doesn't stop 'til you want it to – you – your book came out, what, almost ten years ago, now, eight years ago?

Karen:

'05, yeah, nine years ago, yeah.

Angela:

Yeah, and it's still a – a big – a big part of your – your whole package.

Karen:

I'm always marketing. I don't go out in a cocktail dress with a little purse without putting my business cards, and I have little cards with my books, in – in it.

Angela:

Yup.

Karen:

I carry my books in the trunk of my car. I – I'm almost always – I'm primarily a psychotherapist and – and eating coach, but when people ask me what to do, what I'd do, I always say, "I'm a writer."

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

Because you never know when you're gonna have connections, you never know when people are gonna be interested in your topic.

Angela:

Right.

Karen:

So, it's wearing your marketing hat all the time, except perhaps when you're sleeping.

Angela:

Mm-hm! Yeah, well, I definitely hear that, so, why don't you tell us, 'cause all this marketing stuff sounds hard, so, why don't you tell us about some of the – tell us "before and after" stories, what are some of the good things that have come out of being an author for you in the last nine years?

Karen:

Mostly, the – I would say, being a writer, more than being an author. I just have grown to love writing, which is – I blog twice a week, if I had more time, I might even blog more. I can feel the dopamine going –

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Karen:

– ... in my brain as soon as I – I sit down to write, so that has just been the – the greatest gift, to find something that – I derive so much pleasure from. Now, that doesn't mean that every moment of writing the book, when I'm sitting there, saying, "How am I gonna say this? I've tried twelve times!"

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

Not every moment is fun, but, overall – tremendous pleasure. I – started writing silly poems when I was – maybe pre-adolescent, adolescent, so I've always been interested in writing, so it's kind of nice to feel – "Oh! I've followed that through, all along, and I've gotten better o – on it," – but – but, for me, because my writing is so tied to my work, I can't see every disregulated eater in the world, but I can sure write for them.

Angela:

Mm-hmm!

Karen:

And so, it's part of my mission, of teaching people, stop dieting and bingeing, and to – learn how to eat normally, and I'm also fortunate that – three of my books have been translated into different languages –

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

– so – that's been great, because I'm part of – an intuitive eating movement, and there's really nothing better than spreading the word than writing a book that people are interested in reading and will learn from. So, that's been ... gratifying.

Angela:

And are there – are there alternate – are there – opportunities that you have had – I don't know – maybe speaking opportunities, or things that you think you wouldn't have done if you weren't an author.

Karen:

I – yes, I think so, I think it really gives my whole practice a credibility –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Karen:

– that I have – I've spoken at different conferences, and – the fact that I've written books to back up what I do just makes me a more attractive package for speaking.

Angela:

Mm-hmm!

Karen:

And – so, that – that's been really positive.

Angela:

And are –

Karen:

And – let me tell you, fun senior – I'm looking at my books, it's – it's just sort of fun! Just – just, "Hey, I've written a book!"

Angela:

Mmm. Yeah.

Karen:

I think we're supposed to not feel that way –

Angela:

Uh-huh!

Karen:

– "Oh, my gosh!" but – it is – it is fun.

Angela:

Yeah, for sure. And so, if you were to give a piece of advice, and maybe this happened to you at a – a cocktail party or something, or somebody has said, “Oh, I’ve always wanted to write a book.” If somebody came to you and said they wanted to write a book, it’s something that they ha – it’s a goal they haven’t been able to accomplish, despite trying – for some amount of time. What advice would you give them?

Karen:

Well, I took a writing class once, where the – the – the instructor, who w – was an author, sai – when people said that to her – “Oh, gee, I – I wanna write a book,” if they said it in an offhand way, they – they would say it, such as, “Well, anybody can sit down and do that,” and so she would look at whatever they do and say, “Well – I’ve always wanted to be a surgeon, too.” There really is that aspect of it, people like the idea of being a writer –

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

But I’m not sure everybody who says they want to write a book really wants to write a book.

Angela:

Mmm.

Karen:

So, the first thing would be – “Do you really wanna write?” And, if not – be – being a wr – you’re probably not destined to be a writer. But, that said, if someone really wants to write – I go back to – Anne Lamott and *Bird by Bird* –

Angela:

Mm-hmm!

Karen:

– ... book that talks about sh\*tty first draft. Just sit down and write.

Angela:

Right.

Karen:

And now, what I do, when I write, is, I take a week off from my practice, and that’s my job, to write a sh\*tty first draft.

Angela:

Hm!

Karen:

And – not – not care much about it, and – I've been able to – to do that – it takes me longer, now that I'm older – but – to – to – to write and play, it's – if it feels like work, I don't – I don't know. I don't like to do a lot of things that feel unpleasurable –

Angela:

Yeah.

Karen:

– so, I think that's really a key. Enjoy it! If not, maybe it's – yeah, go ahead.

Angela:

Yeah. Well, I think that's – yup, I think that's terrific advice, I – the best books come out of that place of play and getting the sh\*tty first draft done is – is a big part of it, so, thank you so much, Karen Koenig, for being here – you can find out more about Karen at karen, k-a-r-e-n, rkoenig, it's k-o-e-i-n-g at –

Karen:

n-i, ac –

Angela:

n-i-g.

Karen:

n-i-g. k-o-e-n-i-g.

Angela:

.com – so, karenrkoenig.com, Karen, thanks again for being our guest today.

Karen:

Thank you so much for having me, it was a great interview, I appreciate it.

Angela:

No – we appreciate you, and we'll be back next week, changing the world one book at a time.