

## **Book Journeys Author Interview - Jan 23 , 2014**

**Dr. Angela Lauria with Laura Erdman-Luntz, author of *Awaken to Joy*.**

*“Whatever it takes, get accountability, just keep going, even if it’s five minutes a day, you will get it done.” ~Laura Erdman-Luntz*

Angela:

Well, hello, everyone 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 today, on Book Journeys Radio, we are featuring – Laura Erdman-Luntz, she is the author of *Awaken to Joy*, Laura, thank you so much for being here!

Laura:

Well, thank you for having me! It’s fun to be here.

Angela:

So, Laura, tell us about *Awaken to Joy*, I know it’s a very personal book for you – what – what’s it about?

Laura:

*Awaken to Joy* was written – inadvertently, I think that’s probably the best way of describing it. Right after my son was born, he was a very challenging child, to – to say the least, and my daughter was two and a half at the time, and – my son was really stretching my husband and I, he just – he – he was pro – m – medical terminology probably would have been “colicky,” so he cried all the time, I had a hard time, not getting enough sleep, and I found myself to becoming really annoyed, easily annoyed with my daughter, and just snapping at her – being very short-tempered and. . . . I talked to my family and friends about it, I was very upset – I don’t wanna be this way with her. I know her life has changed, I wanna be loving and compassionate and everyone always say some – some variation of, “Oh, you’re tired, it’s to be expected,” and I thought, “You know, I feel like I should – I can be compassionate and tired at the same time,” and –

Angela:

(laughs)

Laura:

And so, I – I thought, “Okay – what can I do?” And about that time, I remembered – I was watching – actually, I was watching Wayne Dyer on PBS, one of his specials, and he said, “When you squeeze an orange, you get orange juice. What comes out when you get squeezed?”

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

And I thought, "Oh, I'm being squeezed, and I do not like what is coming out."

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

And I realized ... it was not be the last time I was going to be squeezed! What I was going through, it's going to be other times in life when stresses came up, and what could I do to be a different person in this space? And so, I thought about, "Okay, well, what else can I do? I know I'm not gonna sleep, and from what I understand, I'm not gonna sleep for about eighteen more years." Well, thank – thank goodness I sleep more now than I did at that point, but I remembered something my sister-in-law had told me, that my father-in-law had – had u – had – had told them when they were little. It was actually – he was in – the Korean War, and it was something they used to talk about in the Korean War, with all of the stresses that occurred with being at war is, if you can't sleep, be sure you're eating, if you can't eat, be sure you're sleeping.

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

And something so simple, and I said, "All right, I know I'm not gonna sleep, but I can eat better," and actually turned friends and family and said, "All right, y'all, I have a two-week-old baby and a two-and-a-half year-old, can you help me by preparing some foods for me, make sure that we're eating really well," and we got about a month's worth of food from friends and family, it was just amazing, the outpouring of love, and I started eating more, and eating better, and I noticed a difference! It was so powerful, I started treating my daughter differently. I thought, "Wow, this is really great, what else can I do?" And I started – all these things came up, and I realized – my fa – my next lesson came from watching TV, I realized I woke up one day, feeling scared, and I thought, "Okay, what's going on?" and when I traced it back, I thought, "It's the TV show I watched last night, it set out some fears in me." And so, I started changing what I watched, I only watch things that left me feeling good, not – not bad – only – only like inspirational things, and I noticed a difference with my daughter, and I continued to look at things, and I spent about a year for myself, I looked at the things I ate – the things I – that would leave me feeling good when I ate, things that left me snapping at – at my daughter, in fact, I realized that white pasta, white flour pasta left both of us snapping at each other!

Angela:

Mmm!

Laura:

And that was something that I – I – we cut out of our diet, and it made a difference! It was – it was really amazing, all these things that were – that I was changing, and how much it was helping us. And – and I know, when we – where we started this, my dear, I believe, was you saying that this was a very personal book, and I said I wrote it inadvertently, and that was a long time ago, and this story, I know, it's a long story, but what happened ultimately was I was sharing some of these things with my yoga students, some of the things I was working on, and eventually, someone said, "Would you do this wi – with us?"

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

And I said, "I don't know what this is! What do you mean? What is 'this'?" And ... "All the work you're doing." And so, then, I said, "Okay, what if we did a year of living –" and at the time I called it "a year of living non-violently," because one of the greatest precepts of yoga is *ahimsa*, non-violence, and it refers to more than – physical violence, is what a lot of people view violence as, it's really being the opposite of compassionate.

Angela:

Mm.

Laura:

So, any time you're not in that – judgmental, or you're critical, or you're annoyed, or you're frustrated, or you're irritated, that's all – that's all violating *ahimsa*, that's non-violence precept, so I – I – I said, "Okay, what if we did a year of this?" and they said, "That would be great," and I created twelve different modules based on what I had done, and I spent three years taking people through it, and people kept saying, "It's a book, write it," I said, "No, no, no, it's not a book," "No, it's a book, write it," and about five years later, I said – woke up one day and said, "You know, I think this is a book, maybe I should write it!" And there's *Awaken to Joy!* That's where it came from.

Angela:

So, this is a story that is about – your – your experience, your personal experience with motherhood, but is it – when you wrote it, were you thinking of just helping mothers, or who – who were the people you wanted to help most?

Laura:

You know what? I – what I discovered, ever since writing it, because I am – I've been a life coach and yoga educator for over twenty-five years. My whole purpose in life is to help people and do it myself, study themselves, and learn how to evolve and grow by making conscious choices. And what I've ultimately realized is *Awaken to Joy* is, it's a first step towards

realizing, “I’m in charge of how I feel.” ... the first step, but you can keep taking it deeper. If I make some changes, I can actually change how I feel, I’m not a victim of my circumstances, I can make a difference in my life if I just change some things that go on in my life. So, I’ve found that it’s – it really w – was written initially for my students – their be – that they request, and that was male, female, single parents, childless, it was – everybody started reading it and saying, “This is making a difference. This is helping me awaken to my joy!”

Angela:

Yeah, so, this is what I love is, so many people that I work with, it – and a lot of them have experience like you do, twenty, twenty-five years of being a life coach, being a yoga educator, and they want to share what they’ve learned with everyone. They wanna make sure this message is gonna resonate with everyone, so they edit out their personal story. They edit out – talking about being a new mom, ‘cause they’re like, “Well, men won’t be interested in that,” or “Women in their fifties won’t be interested in that,” but I think it’s consistent that, the more personal you are, the more specific you are, almost in targeting an ideal reader of, let’s say – a mom who had her second kid, must be that specific. The more specific you are, the broader your audience actually is, that people are – maybe somebody with, and you just had their second kid, read it, and they think, “Wow, this is exactly what my brother-in-law is going through at work” –

Laura:

Mm-hm.

Angela:

– even though it’s a different situation, and they know how to recommend your book, they know how to connect with your book in a different way – if you are more specific. And I think, for a lot of people, that’s a challenge, I think in your – in your case, it sounds like you came to that – naturally, through – through teaching the course, and telling the story.

Laura:

Mm-hm.

Angela:

But was that something you were very afraid of, that people – might not resonate with you, ‘cause they weren’t in the exact, same life circumstance?

Laura:

That’s a great question! It’s funny, because I – all of my work is so personal. I always share my experience. I don’t have many secrets (chuckles) if any – come to think of it, if any – my students know all about myself, and I just feel like all of us have a little bit of everybody in us –

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

– in all of our challenges, and – it – it’s funny, I’m a white female, but there can be – a black male from a whole ‘nother country, and I completely resonate with his story.

Angela:

Right. Right.

Laura:

I just think there’s so much in each of us, and in sharing that personal stories, sharing the personal pain that I went through, and the challenges that I went through, I just – I feel like people resonate with you more than being the person with all the answers.

Angela:

Right. Yeah, I think that’s the thing is authors realize, “Oh, I need to prove that I am an expert, I need to prove this, I need to prove that,” as opposed to saying, “I need to show up, as me, right now, with the lessons I have learned, with the stories that I have, and trust that – my audience will take them the way that they are meant to take them.” And trusting an audience can be really scary for authors, especially new authors, trusting your reader, and I think this is just a really great example, so I wanted to take a minute to point that out. So, you wrote your book, and you have this advantage, you already had – clash, so you – had the maturity ... the book, so, in terms of writing the book, I’m guessing you knew a lot of what was going into it, what were some of the things that you didn’t know about writing a book, maybe, that you discovered after the book came out, or in the process of telling people about it?

Laura:

How much work it is! And I have since written two – I’ve written two more books since, and it’s not as hard as the second time, but that first one was – I had the giggles, ‘cause I was – I birthed two children naturally, and I have started a business, I opened a yoga studio myself, and – and written a book, so those four things, my first book, those four things, I have to say, are the things that I was glad I didn’t know the work I was going to be going into it, and I’m also really glad I did it. At the same ti – well – i – i – and I will say, too, the biggest thing that I ...

Angela:

And what do you mean by work, it was hard to write, or – wha – what do you mean – wha – what is the work you speak of when ... ?

Laura:

Well, here’s what’s interesting. I - you’re right, I had most of the content by the time I decided I was gonna write a book, and that was really nice, because I was forced to write a chapter a month because I had students waiting for the next module. I call them “modules,” because I included a whole – whole bunch of things, not just ...

Angela:

Which is a great way, everybody who's listening, fantastic way to make yourself accountable – to get your book done, tell people you will give them a chapter a month. You will be much more likely to write the chapter if there are people waiting for it. "Oh, look at the date, I guess I'm getting my chapter now." So –

Laura:

And you know what? My next two books, that's what I did, and I'm on my fourth, and I have a – an – a coach, this time, who's waiting for a chapter a month and it does the same – you're right, it's just – and I write really well under deadline, when it – when it's due the next day, I get very creative. So, that's when it comes out, very helpful. But for me, it's funny, 'cause I had it! I had it! I had all of the content, and, like you said, and I signed a contract for it in December, and I handed the final draft in, in April of the following year, so it was about sixteen months later, and I just – I thought, "Oh, my word, it is last little bit just took me –" and I think part of it, to be honest, was resistance in finishing it, 'cause I was so scared to release this and that's why th – the next two were a little easier. I'm sure some of it was my own avoidance of doing the work – but it also felt like I – I – whenever you move, you find this, you feel like you're almost done, and it takes forever to do those last few boxes – so much more than you think? And that's how I felt about finishing the book.

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

I – I already had the draft! I already had a really good draft, 'cause I had finalized the chapters before I had sent the modules, and I still struggled with those final – all the little edits, all the – making sure the format is good, and, ugh. That was – that was a challenge. But I think, a part of it, too – my next two books, the next two books, aren't as personal, they're more resource text manuals, and – this one was so personal. This one was so much my own story, that I think that was a big piece, and my fourth book is much more my own story, as well, so it will be interesting to see a birthing process of this one.

Angela:

So ... what the work was, so part of the work was getting it written. What were some of the other pieces of being an author beyond writing the book that you've discovered? In ter – go ahead. ...

Laura:

I discovered ... go ahead. No, no, no, please go ...

Angela:

I also talk about some of the other aspects of being an author – in terms of publishing, promoting – what – what else was in – the – under the – fit under the – under the title “author” for you?

Laura:

Mmm, there’s lots of people that said – e – even if you have a publisher nowadays, they expect you to do a lot of the – your own promotion. It’s definitely a different world for authors, nowadays, than it was even ten years ago – to be sure, and – and I remember my writing coach saying, “Okay, once you get your final draft done, you’re halfway.” And what she meant was, the other half is all the promotion, all the book tours, all the – all the speaking engagements I did – to promote the book. And I – I dedicated about nine-tenths ... a year to finish it, and a year to promote it.

Angela:

Mmm.

Laura:

And that’s pretty much what I did.

Angela:

And are there things about promotion that you learned with the first book that you were able to use with – with your second and third books?

Laura:

I think one of the greatest things I learned was to start early, and that’s the beauty of social marketing now, social media, that you have – we have this access to a huge audience, and now I have – I have a blog as well – a pretty large readership, and so, now what I do is, I start to release snippets and get people interested in the book, so by the time it’s released, it already has an audience that are – that are actually waiting for the book to come out.

Angela:

Yeah.

Laura:

And the other thing ... is, I can also see, I ask for comments. I – I start to gauge what’s getting – what’s resonating with people, what’s not resonating with people, what are they interested in reading, and I can start to shape my book around what my audience is looking for, the answers that they want, ‘cause that’s the what – why they’re reading is, they’re looking for an answer.

Angela:

And so, do you identify – before you write, what the problem is, what they need the answer to, or do you actually identify that as you're writing.

Laura:

I identify that as I write, and I'm – that's one of my creative processes, I'm so – one of those people who, no matter how much research I do, and no matter how much preparation, I really don't know what I need or what I want to do until I dive in. I have – I have started two major writing projects in the past, with the intention of going in one direction and it's ended up going in an entirely different direction.

Angela:

Ah!

Laura:

... that where my own interests lie. I – it feels like I'm writing fiction. I hear fictional, or novel writers talk about how they start – they start with one intention, but the characters need to go a different direction, and – they have no control over where the characters go, and I think that's fascinating, because that's how I feel about my nonfiction writing.

Angela:

Yeah, and so – so, in – in your case, you – have you self-published all your books?

Laura:

I have. So far, my fourth one, I'm hoping to find a publisher. That is my intention.

Angela:

Okay, so with the books that you self-published, did you know – one of the things that came up for me, as you were talking was that, when you're working with a traditional publisher, you really need to know a lot about your book in order to get that book contract, so there's less – maybe there's less discovery in some cases, especially for first-time authors.

Laura:

Mmm.

Angela:

And so, self-publishing, with that – with your style of self-discovery, m – makes it a little bit easier. What – what – why did you decide to self-publish, and what was that journey like for you?

Laura:

I ... self-publish, especially the first one, because already writing the book was a big step, and the thought of going through learning how to get a publisher, on top of writing my book –

Angela:  
Mmm.

Laura:  
– would have made it insurmountable for me at the time, I don't think I actually would have finished my book. ...

Angela:  
Mmm.

Laura:  
“Let's just do it this way.” Now, on my fourth book, I'm thinking, “No problem.” I'm completely okay with finding a publisher and working on that, because the writing the book itself – I – I don't have any fears around that, it's not that big of a deal.

Angela:  
Mmm. That's fascinating. So, w – so, how did you self-publish? What did you do?

Laura:  
I went through – can I mention the publisher that I use, 'cause I really did like them.

Angela:  
Yeah. Absolutely.

Laura:  
I went to Xlibris –

Angela:  
Okay.

Laura:  
– and it's just the letter “x” l-i-b-r-i-s, and they were fabulous, and I – I – it's funny, I feel that there's one of those synergistic things that happened with the universe, because I had received on an e-mail – how I got on their e-mailing list – I received several e-mails encouraging me to self-publish, and I had been contemplating doing this with this book, and I – I was thinking about it, and thinking about it, and thinking about it, and then, come November, they had a half-off-all-the-publishing-packages deal.

Angela:  
Mmm.

Laura:

All right, I'll do it, but I still was hesitating, there's that resistance that came up, and all of a sudden it was December first, and I called and said, "Okay, I can't believe I missed this," but surprise, now, they said, "Actually, we decided to extend it through December." And I said, "Done." It – it's the universe saying, "It's time, go ahead." And what I like about them is, with self-publishing, you pay ahead of time, you pay the lump sum at the beginning and – and then you get a certain number of services, depending on whatever package you choose, but they could have written me off for sixteen months, and they didn't. I received calls every six weeks or so, saying, "How's the draft going? How's it going? Is there anything you need from us? What can we do to support you?" And, of course, it was usually services that were paid above and beyond my package. Nonetheless, I was very appreciative, I felt like they could have written me off, they had my money, they could have walked away –

Angela:

Right.

Laura:

– ... up to me to finish it, and they didn't. They were right there, they keep encouraging me, and I think that's a gr – a w – a very strong possibility why I finished it, definitely in e – definitely one of the variables to – for me to get it done, because I hear – I'd see the call on my phone and think, "Ah, it's them again, I haven't done anything since our last call" –

Angela:

Mmm. Hm.

Laura:

– and then, I'd say, "All right, it's time." And I wanna be – I wanna say I got another chapter done the next time they call, 'cause I had the same person calling me, and I had my own rep and they would get to know me, and we would chat and talk about the kids and how you doin', and (coughs) – excuse me.

Angela:

Right. "And how much have you written exactly, ma'am?" So, in your case, you talked about paying – paying some fees up front, were there – when you were making a decision about which package to buy, what to spend money on and what not to spend money on, how did you make that decision, and are there things that you bought that you wish you didn't, or things you wish you bought that you didn't, how would you give – advice about that?

Laura:

That's a great question, too. I bought the base package because, at the time, I did not have big dreams for this book. I was really releasing it more for me, and to say it – finally say that I had written a book so I could be a published author, to get – 'cause I – I – I'm a speaker, I'm –

inspirational speaker, and to get speaking ... much easier to get speaking engagements when you have a published book, so that has been my intention behind it all along. So I didn't get any – I got – I purchased – the book is out on all the online bookstores, so Amazon and Barnes & Noble, and all – all the major online bookstores, it's there, that's one of the things that I purchased, and – think that was it. In hindsight, I would have purchased the editing help.

Angela:

Oh!

Laura:

I would not have purchased promotional only because I ... feel like my book – I have a pretty big following on – in the social media, and I'm not sure that their promotion would have really helped my kind of book. So, if they would take you to – they would take you to a book market – or you could take it to a book market – w – where most of the promotional things that you're paying for. So that wasn't something that I thought would help me, personally.

Angela:

Mm-hm!

Laura:

But as soon as I had purchased editorial help, I think that would have been very useful.

Angela:

And what was your editing process, was that something you did yourself, or did you find someone on your own and wish you just had their advice?

Laura:

I did – I did myself, and then actually, I have two English teachers in my life, so they both edited it, and then I got a professional editor –

Angela:

Okay.

Laura:

– so I've pur – I've paid for someone to help me get it final-finalized, after everyone had done their edit.

Angela:

What was the – what is the value of editing for you? What do you think you got out of – having those various edits?

Laura:

You absolutely need to have an outside person look at it, because you're – it – it is – especially when it's a personal book, y – and you know what's going on inside your head, you think things make sense and they don't to someone from the outside, because you know how you – you know what you meant, and that colors what you actually said. And I – I – I don't know if you've ever seen those – brain games, where they've switched the letters and numbers and words or letters in words and even put symbols in the middle of words –

Angela:

Oh, yeah!

Laura:

– and it's amazing how the brain can still read it? 'Cause the brain turns it into whatever it is the brain thinks it should be, and I felt that way very much ... my book, because I actually, ultimately, in the end, I think I wrote it for about seven years before I finally published it, between all the years of running the program and then years of turning it into a book, it was just so close to me, I couldn't even – I couldn't even begin to edit it myself. You need an outside perspective to be sure.

Angela:

Hmm. So, a – w – when did your first book come out?

Laura:

You know what? I'm not sure. Oh, what was it, about – six or seven years ago?

Angela:

Okay. So, in that time, what would you say are some of the best things to have come out of being an author, and maybe some things that surprised you, that you – that you didn't expect?

Laura:

I think, for me, personally, one of the best things was – it was stepping out of my comfort zone and being able to say, "I was an author" stretched me, being able to finish the book and then say I'm an author, and it was interesting, 'cause – I'll share with you that, even after I published it, I didn't feel like an author or a writer.

Angela:

Gosh!

Laura:

And somebody actually called me on it, I said, "I just – I – I – I'm not an author," or "I'm not a writer," and she said, "You wrote a book." And it was – it was very interesting, 'cause I just – I feel like a bli – I'm a very in – informal writer, I'm much more of a blog writer, and even then I have written about fifteen hundred posts, so I've written quite a bit, and I didn't see myself as

an author, and so, when I finally said – had the book in my hands and then I finally said out loud – I actually posted it on Facebook – “I’m an author,” it was so exciting. It was such a thrill, and it felt like such a great stretch for me – and I felt – well – i – it made the other – the next two that much easier, it was no big deal. I was just writing another book, it was no big deal.

Angela:

Yeah! It’s amazing how powerful claiming that – claiming that space, claiming that title, can be. If you were re –

Laura:

And ... some people may find that easy to say, but it wasn’t for me, so when I was finally able to say it, it was a nice little expansion of – of my own self.

Angela:

Yeah, I know ... a lot of – I think it’s hard for a lot of people ... expecting – some sort of certification from on high to say – “You’re an author now,” but no, not that.

Laura:

(laughs)

Angela:

So, we’ve got about thirty seconds, and in those – final minutes, what – what piece of advice would you like to leave somebody who wants to write a book – but hasn’t been able to cross the finish line yet?

Laura:

Keep going. Set up some sort of structure, get yourself away for a weekend, that’s actually what I ultimately did, despi – finish it, I got away all by myself for a weekend, and I put in twelve hours a day until I finally got it done. Whatever it takes, get accountability, just keep going, even if it’s five minutes a day, you will get it done.

Angela:

Great. Terrific advice. So, Laura, [lauraerdmanluntz](http://lauraerdmanluntz.com), and I will spell that for you, it’s l-a-u-r-a-e-r-d-m-a-n-l-u-n-t-z, [lauraerdmanluntz.com](http://lauraerdmanluntz.com), where you can learn more about *Awaken to Joy* and Laura’s other books, Laura, thank you so much for being with us today.

Laura:

Thank you for having me! It was delightful.

Angela:

And we will be back next week on Book Journeys Radio, where we are changing the world one book at a time.