

[Book Journeys](#) Author Interview - Oct. 2, 2014

**Dr. Angela Lauria with Lee Gale Gruen, author of *Adventures with Dad: A Father and Daughter's Journey Through a Senior Acting Class***

*"The reader wants to see the real you. They want to see what really is going on."* ~Lee Gale Gruen

Angela:

Well, hey everybody. It's Angela Lauria here. I am the founder of the Author Incubator and creator of the different process for writing a book that matters and every week on the show we talk to an author about their experience writing their first book. And really, I do this because I think there's so much we can learn from people who have been there before, people who have walked this path and gotten to the other side. And for so many of us, writing a book has been a goal for a long time but we haven't been able to cross that finish line so I'm always looking for... what are some of the little secrets and tips and hints that help get people to the state of being an author. One of the great things of being an author is once you've become an author, you can never not be one. And so, uhm, it's really giving birth to a part of yourself that will be a part of your legacy. So this week, uhm, I'm really excited to interview Lee Gale Gruen. She is the author of *Adventures with Dad: A Father and Daughter's Journey Through a Senior Acting Class*. That definitely sounds like quite an adventure. Lee Gale, thank you so much for being with us.

Lee Gale:

Well, thank you. It's very exciting to be here.

Angela:

So, tell me about this book. What's it about?

Lee Gale:

Well, it's a memoir and it's about when I retired from my thirty-seven-year career as a probation officer and I started to take an acting class at a senior community center, just for something to do. And I quickly learned that I absolutely loved it. A short time later, my mother died and I invited my father. I was 60 and he was 85 at that time. And I invited him to the class with me and that started us on a three-year journey of attending that class every single week. I wrote all the scenes that we performed in the acting class showcases and all six scenes are in my book and my father and I bonded more than ever in our lives and then I went on to become a professional actress in my senior years.

Angela:

Lee Gale, this is such a terrific story that I have to send people to your website because the pictures are even better than the story. So, everybody needs to go to [adventureswithdadthebook.com](http://adventureswithdadthebook.com). So that's [adventures-with-dad-the-book-dot-com](http://adventures-with-dad-the-book-dot-com). Some of

these pictures are pretty amazing. Did you learn things about your father that you didn't know before through this process?

Lee Gale:

I think I did. Uhm, my father and I in a way had a love-hate relationship. All those years we loved each other very much but he was a very overbearing man who loved to get all the attention on himself. And I think that I learned that a lot of that came from his own insecurity as a child and ah, and an adult and that came from his own father, uhm, not thinking highly of him and not treating him well. So I gained a lot of sensitivity and understanding of my father and it helped me, uhm, overcome, ah, my own feelings of insecurity and to overcome my stage fright at talking in front of large groups, uh, now, I'm a professional actress. I never would have imagined something like that in a million years.

Angela:

Wow! What an amazing journey! How did you decide to turn this into a book and when did you decide to turn it into a book?

Lee Gale:

Well, about two years into our class, we were just sitting in a class, watching someone else perform and the class members absolutely adored us. We were the only senior father-daughter team ever in that class and the class members loved us, the audiences at the showcase loved us, they adored my father. He was the oldest member in the class and I just started thinking what a cute book it would make. It seemed to be a unique situation. I first thought, hahaha, I just first thought of just writing it for my children. And then I started thinking, "I wonder if the public would might, might be interested in something like this. And that's how it started, just sitting in class one day, next to my father, waiting for our turn to go up and rehearse our scene. That's where the idea came.

Angela:

And was there something that you envisioned for your book? You talked about, maybe one of your kids to read it but did you have a goal? I mean if people go to your website, they see you do a ton of PR and speaking and workshops and seminars. It's pretty amazing how you have been spreading this message and making a difference with your book. Was that stuff you envisioned before you wrote the book?

Lee Gale:

Oh, not at all. I had no idea of that. It's really taken on a life of its own. Ah, when I started writing the book and it was a very gradual process, I would get, I'd start, I didn't think about it for a few years and then I actually started writing it because, one day after a couple of years, I woke up in the middle of the night with half of the book written in my head. Ah, I had chapter headings, I had paragraphs. It was amazing, I hadn't even been aware that I've been thinking about the book. So, that forced me to get up and start writing it. I couldn't go back to sleep. So, as I was writing the book, things were coming out. I mean I was typing on my computer and suddenly, there were

sentences that I didn't even know I have been thinking about all those years. And you know, I talked about the wonderful things in the class, but I had lots of flashbacks about painful moments with my father when I was growing up and I talk about my own insecurities. I talk about my father's insecurities that I discovered or realized. And then I learned that, ah, once I found the publisher and got the book published, I learned that, as an author, I had to do an awful lot to help promote the book. So, all of a sudden, I became a guest speaker and giving book talks and it just evolved from there. Now I'm giving motivational speeches to seniors to help them find joy, excitement, and satisfaction in their life after retirement, just like I did.

Angela:

That's a great message. You actually talk about reinventing yourself as a senior, reinventing yourself in your senior years. Is being an author part of your reinvention?

Lee Gale:

Oh, by all means. I'm writing a blog now. I've been blogging for about a year and a half and that is the name of my blog, *Reinventing Myself in My Senior Years*. And my reinvention is first becoming an actress, then writing the book, so now I'm an author, and I'm also writing articles and I'm being paid for these things. My second paid article will be coming out soon on a well-known online magazine and I'm writing an article about seniors in Hollywood. So all of these things, one has evolved from the other and again I got a second career that I never imagined in my life. I was a probation officer for 37 years. That was my main career.

Angela:

This really does seem like the polar opposite of being a probation officer, I have to say.

Lee Gale:

It completely is. And I never had any aspirations in my life to do any of these things. Ah, as I said, I'd always had stage fright if I had to speak in front of large groups. That's a scenario for a lot of people. A lot of people have stage fright and it's a scenario where, if you don't come across well, you know, people can see your failure in a public place. And you know, I write about that in my book. It went all the way back to, when I was a child in grammar school and we had to give book reports in front of the class. And the other kids would, the other kids would laugh and tease and things like that. So I think that's where that came from.

Angela:

So, let's talk about writing. So you get, you're sitting in class, you get this I idea, "I'm gonna write a book." I am gonna get, life as a parole officer did not include a ton of writing of this style anyway. I'm sure you were doing writing reports, but not this kind of writing. So, how did you support that? How were you able to do it? Did you have editors? Did people help you? Tell me about the writing process.

Lee Gale:

Well, my first writing started when I was writing, or my creative writing started when I was writing. I started writing the scenes my father and I would perform in the acting class showcases. Ah, we were supposed to as class members, uhm, we were supposed to, ah, get scenes, professional scenes from books of real plays. And there just wasn't anything available for an eighty-five-year-old man. So out of desperation, I started writing humorous...

Angela:

You wrote it!

Ahaha! There are scenes really, there are dad and daughter scenes and I used my father as inspiration. I just took his own personality and kind of exaggerated it. And they're just ah, kind of humorous little comedy scenes that I wrote. So, that kind of showed me that I did have the ability to do creative writing. So, that was just sheerly out of total desperation.

Angela:

Confidence is still there.

Lee Gale:

Yes. Right, right. Hahaha! So that's what I did there. So...

Angela:

And then, talk to me about how you wrote the book. Did you write everyday? Did you maybe write for an hour a day or...?

Lee Gale:

No. That wasn't my choice. Either, either I didn't, I procrastinated and I didn't write at all, or when I got the bug, I wrote for hours. That's kind of, and also, I kept waking up in the middle of the night with ideas. I seem to do my best writing in the middle of the night in my sleep. So that was my process. I'd, when I'd get hooked, I just sit at my computer for hours. It was just pouring out of me, just pouring out. That seems to work for me.

Angela:

So, so did you write the book before you found a publisher or what was the publishing part of your journey like?

Lee Gale:

You know, as a combination, I wrote the book and it was very crude, you know. It wasn't edited. I didn't, I was so naive I didn't even know I was supposed to edit it and, you know, have it in real good form. I started, I found lists of publishers who were interested in my genre, which is memoir, and I submitted query letters to them and there were some, ah, I'm sorry, they were agents. And there was someone...

Angela:

Ok, that's what I'm going to say. Did you skip the agents step? But ok, so you were trying to find an agent. How did you even know to do that? Did you read books about publishing books?

Lee Gale:

I started reading books. Yes, I started reading books on what to do. I mean I had no idea. I've never done anything like this in my life and I started reading books and checking online about what you do. I also joined a couple of writers' organizations, where I met other writers and learned from them. I networked from them, I went to, uhm, discussions and panels. And that's how I learned. And so I started querying agents and some wanted to read some sample chapters. So, I sent off a few chapters, not knowing again that I was supposed to send them in pristine form. They were very crude and unedited and I thought, I thought the agents edited them. So nobody wanted to represent me. But I finally, ah, found a publisher. Do you want to know how I found the publisher?

Angela:

Yes, I would love to know.

Lee Gale:

Well, I learned that you really have to be ready because you never know when opportunity might fall into your lap. I happen to be reading a website that I, it was a chatroom for actors that I've to go read a lot and sometimes contribute to a discussion. And the discussion happened to be that time, *Do actors need websites?* So one woman who I'd heard of as an actor, said something about, "Oh you know, check out my website. You can see what it looks like." And I did. And right on the front page, she said, "My new memoir will be coming out soon, published by..." And there was the name of her publisher. So I, so I went to his website and looked through it and he had something on there saying, "Open for submissions." So, I thought, well I had my query letter already and I had learned that anything you send anybody as a submission has to be well-polished. So, I had polished it, I had read books about how to write a query letter and I sent off my query letter with just one, one or two keystrokes on my computer. And he loved the idea and, ah, that's how I found my publisher. And my book was...

Angela:

Wow! So, you never actually ended up going through an agent.

Lee Gale:

No, I didn't. He's just a small publisher. It's not a big house. It's a small boutique publisher on the east coast and, ah, I, he was just totally supportive of me. I loved working with him. Ah, I went on to complete my book and complete the editing. He had an editor who helped me with the copy editing. My, my, the whole journey of getting my book cover all was, you know, with his help. It was wonderful, it was a wonderful experience for me.

Angela:

And the way, I'm assuming the way that this works is that there's a sharing of the revenue from the book? Is that, or...?

Lee Gale:

Not in this case. He is like a traditional publisher. There is, I'm sorry, yes, you're right. There is a sharing of the revenue. What I meant to say was I did not have to put any money out of my own pocket. There are some new, new... Yeah, there are some new publishing models.

Angela:

So, what I think is interesting about this is, uhm, that, really, he was taking a risk on you because he liked your idea. You were taking a risk on him because maybe, he was a smaller publisher or different, maybe, than the type of publisher that you imagined. Uhm, but now, it seems like you both have a vested interest in the book being a success. So tell me what the distribution and marketing has been like. I know a lot of the marketing is on the shoulders of the author, uhm, and how has your publisher worked with you on supporting marketing efforts and how have they helped you with distribution?

Lee Gale:

Ah, the reality is that the publisher does a little to no marketing. Very, very little. He did a little bit. He's got it on this website. He did, ah, send it out to his email list. Things like that but I, I learned quickly that not only him, but the big houses too are not putting any money into marketing, ah, for unknown authors. So you have to get out there and beat the band yourself. So I learned all about marketing. All of a sudden, now, I'm getting books about marketing and getting on the phone, and calling places to book speaking engagements and, you know, putting it up on social media and things like that. I have cards that I hand out to anybody, anywhere that I can. I had doing talks and interviews all the time. Doing all that.

Angela:

So, let's talk about that. What are some of the opportunities that you have had because you're an author that you wouldn't have had, let's say, as a parole officer or even, you know, a senior taking an acting class who didn't have a book? What are some things of being an author has, has given to you or brought into your life?

Lee Gale:

Well, this new venture that I'm doing, ah, with, ah, giving, giving motivational speeches to, ah, to seniors and retirees about, ah, how you can find joy, success and satisfaction in your retirement. That, you know the fact that I'm a published author that, ah, is very significant. Uhm, the, ah, I've been interviewed a lot. I had a recent write-up in Marlo Thomas's new book. She wrote a new book called, *It Ain't Over Til It's Over*. And she, ah, profiled many different women of all ages who have reinvented themselves. So, I have five pages in her book, which is pretty exciting. So, you know, I've, I've had lots of opportunities. I speak when I, ah, when I wanna give talks. The fact that I have a website, the fact that my book is on the website and it tells all about it, and the pictures

and the book cover, and my synopsis of the book. I look like ah, I look very professional. People like the idea of what the book is about. So I, I easily book speaking engagements.

Angela:

That's very exciting. So, what, what are some of your, what are your, some of your favorite moments that you've had as an author?

Lee Gale:

Well, I think, ah, I love speaking. From somebody who had stage fright, now that I have gotten over it, I, ah, absolutely adore speaking. So, that is very exciting that I'm easily able to book speaking engagements and get up in front of audiences and speak. I love engaging with the audiences. I, I love the marketing process also. I mean, the fact that I can get on the phone and get to the right person and pitch myself, and sell myself, that's, that's really exciting to me. It's, it's just ...

Angela:

You're clearly a natural at that. Hahaha!

Lee Gale:

Hahaha! Well, it's...

Angela:

So what was, what, what has, what has been hard or what has been different than you expected, or maybe not the fun surprises but the less fun surprises?

Lee Gale:

I have no idea how hard it would be to do some of these things. Ah, I, it's not an easy thing. There's a lot of rejection. I'm making it sound like it's so easy. It is not easy. Many times it's not easy at all. And I have to live with the rejection and so, I'm learning to do that. And I like that a lot. I like that, just because I'm rejected one place, I can still go on and then, I find success in another place. You have to do that both as an actress and an author.

Angela:

And I'm sure you get the question all the time, maybe, from seniors but probably from everybody. What advice do you have, ah, for people who wanna write a book? I'm sure people will say to you, "Oh, I've always wanted to write a book." And what do you tell them?

Lee Gale:

Well, I, I have to be honest. If I had any idea how difficult the entire process would be in the beginning, I probably wouldn't even have started it. So, you really, really better wanna write a book. And I thought, "Oh, you know, you just write a book." I had no idea that you, as a new author, have to be forthcoming to find someone that has to publish it or get it published yourself, to do all the marketing, to do everything that you have to do. I, I had no idea that that was so, that

authors are expected to do that. Ah, in my case, it's brought to me something I never knew existed and I've been very excited about it. So I love the whole process. Another person of mine likes the fact that they have to get out and sell themselves. That's why we sell books.

Angela:

So, would you recommend that people, would you recommend that people kind of investigate the whole process beyond writing a book before they do it?

Lee Gale:

I'm not sure because that may discourage them. Uhm, I'm not really sure. I guess they should, I guess you should go into it more with your eyes open, which I did not. I didn't even know that it existed. I think you have to know as an author that you are expected to get out there and push your book. You are expected to do that. So, if you're frightened, if you have stage fright like I used to have, start doing things to help yourself. Go to Toastmasters groups and start learning how to talk in public. You're expected to do that. Nobody else is going to do it for you. That's the reality of it.

Angela:

Hmm, wow. Who are the people that helped you most on your journey? It sounds like your publisher was certainly one of them.

Lee Gale:

My publisher was definitely one of them. I think my son was one of them. He was always supportive of me when I get discouraged. You know, he'd say, "Oh, you know, mom. You know, you're doing great. You can do this." And he always was enthusiastic about everything I did. As a matter of fact, he wrote the foreword to my book, which I just love.

Angela:

Wow. That's so sweet.

Lee Gale:

And so, you need somebody who's going to prop you up when you feel down. You don't wanna pull in your life that are going to try to discourage you and tell you how stupid it is. Don't have people like that around you or if you do, don't talk about your writing with them. Definitely. So...

Angela:

Aha. So, we only have a, a couple minutes left. And I guess, what I'd love to hear from you just as closing words, is there any one, ah, favorite story you have from the book or lesson from the book that you can share with us? Uhm, I know people can get the book and read more about you at [adventureswithdadthebook.com](http://adventureswithdadthebook.com). Can you leave us with a little something from the book?

Lee Gale:

Well, I think, what was wonderful for me, the book to me as my personal book and the fact that it was a memoir, it was a catharsis. I didn't realize it was going to be that. It helped me pull things deep out of myself and look at them as I was putting them down on paper because I learned that the reader wants to see the real you. They want to see what really is going on. As an author, it's very easy to gloss over the painful things and not look at them but you have to be willing to reveal those things. And even in fiction, I think, when authors write fiction, they're really writing a lot from their own personal experiences and you have to be willing to reveal those. But the upside is that it's very cathartic to do that. It's very, it helps you grow and get healthier.

Angela:

Well, I think, that's one of the amazing parts of being a writer. It's a gift that you give to your readers and just as much as a gift that you give to yourself. So, love the concept of catharsis, but I think the most important thing is that, in this whole interview, the reader wants to see the real you. And I think that's true. Obviously, you're a professional actor. I think that's true of actors, true of writers, we can smell authenticity a mile away and if you can show your real self on the page, you will connect with your readers in ways you never imagined.

Lee Gale:

Yes, I completely agree with you and currently, I'm in the process of writing a screenplay based on my book, which is a whole different animal. And again...

Angela:

I love it! I wanna know who's gonna play you!

Lee Gale:

Hahaha! I'm thinking about it! I have a few ideas. I'm thinking about it.

Angela:

Well, Lee Gale Gruen is the author of *Adventures with Dad: A Father and Daughter's Journey Through a Senior Acting Class*. You can learn more about her on [adventureswithdadthebook.com](http://adventureswithdadthebook.com). Lee Gale, it has been so wonderful to speak with you. I feel like we got to see a little bit of the real you, or hear a little bit of the real you in this call. I appreciate you, sharing generously with our listeners.

Lee Gale:

Well, thank you so much. It's been a lot of fun.

Angela:

Alright. We'll be back next week on Book Journeys Radio.