

Book Journeys Author Interview - Oct 24, 2013

Dr. Angela Lauria with Mary Ellen Ciganovich, author of *Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire*.

“Whatever you’re writing about should be passionate to you at that time.” ~Mary Ellen Ciganovich

Angela:

Well, hello, everybody, and back to another episode of Book Journeys Radio. My name is Dr. Angela Lauria, and I’m the founder of the Author Incubator and creator of the Difference Process for Writing a Book That Matters. And every week on this show, we talk to authors about their experience writing their book, not – not just – not just so we can learn about the books and the authors, which is great, and – and a fun part of the show, certainly for me, but also for authors in transformation to understand what it actually takes to finish a book. So many people start the process of writing a book i – in their heads, some, their computers, and just don’t get to the end of that journey, and what I’ve discovered in – in m – my – ooh – nineteen years of working with people on their books is, there are some things that authors that finish their books have in common, and Mary, who is with us today, Mary Ciganovich, is the author – Mary Ellen Ciga – Ciganovich, I should say, is the author of *Healing – Healing Arts*? Is that the name of your book?

Mary Ellen:

Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire.

Angela:

Heal – thank you, Mary. So, Mary is here, and she’s going to tell us a little bit about her book and her experience, so that, hopefully, you can take something from that. You can learn to apply some of the things that helped Mary get to the end of her journey, to help you get to the end of your book journey. So, Mary, thank you so much for being here with us.

Mary Ellen:

Oh, well, thank you for the opportunity to be on your show. I really appreciate it.

Angela:

So, if you wanna follow along as we’re talking, you can check out Mary Ellen’s website. Go to www.askmaryellen.com, and she’s got some great information out there and see her book. But Mary, tell us about *Healing Words*. How did you come to write the book, and tell us what it’s about.

Mary Ellen:

Oh, it was a really unusual experience, Angela. I always knew, like any – like everybody else, that you have a book inside of you – a lot of people. And I always thought it would be on education, because I had done middle – middle school teacher for fifteen years, and I really

loved it, and so, I – but I struggled with writing on that subject. And then, one day – I just got – actually got into an argument with my husband, we’ve been newly married, and I was already teaching people – the spiritual truths that are in this book. And I knew that, if he comes with fear, and I come with fear, or we – goes back and forth and just is like gasoline on a fire, so instead of continuing the argument I simply took out a legal pad of paper and started writing. And the first one I wrote was on anger. And I wrote something like, “I am angry with you, no, I’m angry with myself, I’m projecting it on you,” and it just kept on going on and on. And then after I heard “anger,” I kept hearing these little vignettes – this is what it is. The book is seventy-three vignettes, everything from awareness to the faith and forgiveness. And I – this whole, long weekend, I just wrote and wrote and wrote, it was li – I just couldn’t stop. In fact, I think my husband was extremely worried about me, and after I wrote these seventy-three vignettes, I just took the legal pads I had, ‘cause this was back in 1999, and the book came out 2011 –

Angela:
Wow.

Mary Ellen:
– and that’s the whole long – ‘nother story. But I just put it on my computer and I walked away from ‘em. And I came back, and I kept – I’d cleaned the room, and I’d see the legal pads and one day I heard – ‘cause I tell every peop – body I didn’t write this book.

Angela:
Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:
My higher power wrote this book, I heard – I – I didn’t write it. I hear –

Angela:
So, when I – when I coach people, I usually call that your “inner author” –

Mary Ellen:
Right.

Angela:
– and we talk – what we talk about – when you’re really – when you’re really in the right place to write the right book for you, it’s almost like downloading it.

Mary Ellen:
Yeah. In –

Angela:
It’s like your book writes itself, when you’re in the right place.

Mary Ellen:

That is exactly what happened. And so, one day, I sat down on my computer – now, I don't think I had Word back then, or maybe I did, but I had a pamphlet program I put in there, floppy disk. This was way back. And so, I started transposing these in a vignette form, because that's the way the program was. And I had the title at the top, I had the vignette, and then, for some reason, I put "Amen" at the end, and ... went on to the next one, and – is – it was just an unusual – and then, I threw them all on the floor afterwards, and I said a prayer. And I said, "Okay, what order should these be in?" Now, I knew "Awareness" had to be first, because, without awareness of yourself, you can't fix anything, you can't change anything, you can't do anything differently because you don't know to do it differently.

Angela:

Right.

Mary Ellen:

And I also knew that faith and forgiveness had to be towards the end, because your forgiveness of the self –

Angela:

Mmm. Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

– is your culminating spot towards loving yourself, which is what we're all here to learn.

Angela:

Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

So – I kn – I don't know, it was just a very strange experience, but it was a great experience and it's been an awesome journey.

Angela:

So, tell us about – the – the – the – the – w – w – twelve years, I guess, between when you wrote your book and it was actually published. What – what was your publishing journey like, 'cause that sounds like it was slightly more challenging than your writing journey.

Mary Ellen:

I – it was, and – 'cause I had sent it off first to one publisher, and they picked it up and they were all set to do it, and we were – three weeks away from launching it, and it was a – what I thought was a good publishing house. It had a reputation, and so, has a reputation. But this, of course, was their subsidy branch – since I'm not – I don't have a background in writing, and so, yeah, I had to pay towards putting my book together, and at that time we paid quite a bit of

money, and three weeks before it was set to go out, they sent me an e-mail that they were going bankrupt and closed that part, and I could buy my book from ... house. And then, I was, like, "What?" And so, I just told them that –

Angela:

Was this way back in 1989? Did you – were you gonna do it right away?

Mary Ellen:

Yeah. This was back in 1999, or two th – might have been right in 2000.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:

The first subtitle for the book was *Healing Words: Life Lessons for the New Millenium*. But when that –

Angela:

Mm. Oh. (laughs) The millennium wasn't that new anymore!

Mary Ellen:

So, that didn't work out, and like I said, we've los – we'd lost quite a bit of money on that. And so, I set the book – the manuscript on the shelf, and I said, "God, if You want this to get out there, you're just gonna have to send me a publisher." So, at that time, we were living in North Carolina, we moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where we live now, and the book sat on ... shelf, sat on the shelf, and all of a sudden, one day – and I did not seek out publishers – all of a sudden, they started e-mailing me. And as they e-mailed me, I thought, "Well, okay, I'll answer it." And I had one publisher that I was interested in, which was Tate, the one that I – that did end up publishing the book, and the first time, I had sent the manuscript in from Tate, I didn't hear from them, didn't hear from them, so I thought, "Well, okay, I'll – risk and call them back," and she goes, "Oh, no, we don't want your manuscript, this is New Age, is this is that," and I'm – "Well, okay, thank you anyway," and – and I thought, "Well, I guess – meant to go with somebody else," so then I was set to go with another publisher, in fact I was ready to sign a contract, and the doorbell rang, and hear this FedEx on ..., and it's from Tate! And so, I called them, and I said, "Well, I think y'all made a mistake, 'cause of you turned me down." She goes, "Oh, no, was having a bad day that day, my computer crashed, we really want your book," and I had really wanted them to do it, because of some of the other authors I had seen, and friends I had and some of the graphics I had, I liked the way they did – a – a particular book, so I went ahead and went with Tate, but it was – interesting experience.

Angela:

And so, for you, the – the – the book sat on the shelf for a long time.

Mary Ellen:
Mm-hmm.

Angela:
Was there – was publishing always important to you? Was that part of what your vision for the book was? It sounds like you wrote it so quickly.

Mary Ellen:
Yes. No, I knew the book was supposed to get out there, because it – like I said, because it wasn't coming from me.

Angela:
Mmm.

Mary Ellen:
And I knew these were all truths, universal truths, that could assist everybody on their journey.
...

Angela:
Right.

Mary Ellen:
And – so, I knew it would get out there. I didn't actively seek a publisher – I was very busy doing other things, and I have multiple sclerosis, so I was dealing with that as well. And – so, I just w – waited for it to come to me instead of forcing the issue and looking for it. I guess, looking back at it, I wish I had, sometimes, we had been so burned by that first experience of losing as much money as we did, that i – we just had to get over that hill from that, first.

Angela:
Yeah. That makes sense, that makes sense. So, what are some of the things now – your book's been out for a couple of years –

Mary Ellen:
Mm-hm.

Angela:
– what are some – some things now, if you had to write your book over again, what are some things you wish you knew? Or if you were – are writing a second book, which I know is something you at least thought about, what – what are some of the lessons that you'll apply from the first?

Mary Ellen:

Well, I wish I knew more about the marketing end of the book, because I assumed, however incorrectly, that is – ‘cause I do teach people that ninety-nine percent of all assumptions are false – that I assumed that my publisher, once it was done, would put me out there and get me on that ... whatever to – get the book out in front of people. And they kept asking me for addresses that I wanted to send it to.

Angela:

Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

And I’m – “Well, okay,” – I had some - ..., but I don’t know ABC, NBC – all these shows, because I could get on those, and the story I have to tell that’s behind this book, because, like I say, between having epilepsy and multiple sclerosis – I’ve been on such a journey, and that the book is the culmination of me going through everything I’ve ... through in my life.

Angela:

Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

And I wish I knew more about the marketing end of it, because it’s a struggle –

Angela:

So, what are some – what are some specific marketing tips that you might apply, the next book you write, or that you would suggest to another author as they’re writing their book? What are some things you should know about marketing?

Mary Ellen:

I think – they need to ask whoever they’re gonna go with, to publish their book, “Okay, what is your marketing plan for me? Is it A, B, C, D,” because this – I feel like I was promised a certain things, and whether the book was sent to these people or not, I have no way of knowing.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:

Maybe it was – maybe it was sent to ‘em, and then the people didn’t like it. Okay – I understand that, but – not hurting my feelings at all. And – I need help getting out there. I get it out more through Facebook, because I post the “Truth of the Day” on Facebook, Mondays through Fridays, and I try to explain it, and then, that gets people interested, “Well, what else do you have to write,” and I say, “Well, I have a book.”

Angela:
Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:
And it's a five – got a five-star rating on Amazon right now, as far as I know.

Angela:
That's nice.

Mary Ellen:
And I did send some packets out recently, to – the *Today Show*, *Kathy Lee and Hoda*, and *Good Morning America*, and I sent different packets to each individual person, and I try to do the best – I try to think it through before I did it and put everything together, so hopefully I'll hear from somebody, and I really think this book – somebody's going to hear about it somewhere. Somebody's gonna hear your share and would say, "Hey, that lady said it really interesting. That *Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire* book – I gotta look at that, I gotta see what that says." And they're going – or they're gonna pick up a copy and go, "Wow! We need to get this lady in here."

Angela:
Yeah.

Mary Ellen:
And I really think it is – take off, and I think it already has started to take off.

Angela:
So, what are the pieces of marketing, in your opinion, that an author is responsible for, and where does the publisher come in, and wh – what parts of marketing does the publisher do, in your opinion?

Mary Ellen:
Well, I totally agree that the authors has to be responsible for their own book, because, num – number one, I'm passionate about this because I don't just believe in it, I know it. I know this is supposed to reach people. Okay. It's not just – and I don't mean to put anybody – his book down, it's not just a novel you can read one time. This book you could pick up every day of the week, you could pick it up five years from now, you could pick it up anywhere, it's something you could always turn to.

Angela:
Right.

Mary Ellen:

It's not just a one – read. So, I think you have to know your book, you have to know who your audience would be, whether it's children or teenagers or older people or middle-aged people, and you have to know where to market it, and what venues to go to – if – arts and crafts fairs in the fall, or if it's a – a lot of – my book will sell very well at a spiritual or a health fair.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:

Or at – the health club I – I work out every day, so I do the go to the different sports barns here in town, and – people come by my table, and since they know me and know my reputation, they go, “Oh, what did you write? Oh!” Or they'll come to me and they'll – one lady said – she was getting married. She wanted ten copies for her wedding pop party.

Angela:

Oh, nice.

Mary Ellen:

So, it's just these words of mouth, and as people read it, and they go, “Oh, my gosh” – and I've had so many good e-mails, and so many good letters, so many good –

Angela:

So, let's talk about that! Let's talk about what keeps you going. What are some of the – what are some of the great things that have happened to you since your book came out? What are some of the e-mails and letters and other ... feedback you've gotten?

Mary Ellen:

Well, I was a – luncheon last week, and a – a lady – it was a ladies' luncheon, and they were all going around the table saying what they did, and I said, well, I was an author and an inspirational speaker, which is what I do, I speak to groups, and they said, “Well, what do you write?” and I said, “*Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire*,” and this lady next to me turned to me, she goes, “Oh, my gosh, I've got to tell my mother.” And I'm, like, “What?” And she goes, “She gave me a copy of your book. She loves your book.” And I'm, like, “Oh, well, that's good.” (chuckles)

Angela:

Wow.

Mary Ellen:

So, it's just things like that, that come up, or little e-mails you get, or just little things that just keep you going, and think, “Hey. This is something that will live on longer than I will.” It's something that you leave the universe with as your gift to the world.

Angela:

Yeah. Yeah, the legacy ... that can't be underestimated. For sure. What are – are there opportunities that you have had, like speaking opportunities you've gotten, that you think you wouldn't have gotten if you weren't an author?

Mary Ellen:

Oh, definitely. I was able to speak to Girls Incorporated here in Chattanooga, they're just a wonderful group. I spoke to the Retired Nurses Association – just all kinds of different church groups – as people read my book, they go, "Well, will you come and speak here, will you come and speak there," and I go, and if they wanna buy my book they can, if they don't wanna buy my book, then that's fine, too. I just – because, for me, it's about getting the words across to people. It's about getting awareness to people. It's about getting non-judgement and getting out of ... and getting out of expectations and getting all these fears erased in our society, so – so we can have some peace in our lives.

Angela:

Yeah. Why do you think it's so important to you, to share these lessons? Obviously, there are things that you learned that were important to you, but why – why is sharing that important?

Mary Ellen:

Because I know that this is what God wants me to do. I know this is what my higher power wants me to do with my life. I – I just know that – and, actually, when I started to write this book and started to hear it, I – I talked to my higher power, and I call it God, you can call it the universe, whatever, and I said, "No, pick somebody else. They're not going to listen to me, I mean –

Angela:

Got it!

Mary Ellen:

– I mean, I've got two-inch nails and bright blonde hair, they're not gonna listen to me!" And I remember hearing, "No, that's why I put you everythi – everything that you went through in your life is to – for this. This is the culmination." And I just – I just have a very – this is my passion –

Angela:

Yeah. Right.

Mary Ellen:

– just like an artist would be passionate about painting. And if it's not your passion, then you shouldn't write. Whatever you're writing about should be passionate to you at that time.

Angela:

Mm-hm. And it's a long time that you have been focused on the same subject – this book has been out for awhile, but also has been – even though it wasn't published, it's something you wrote a long time ago.

Mary Ellen:

Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Angela:

What do you think is the message that – that keeps it fresh, or how do you keep the topic fresh?

Mary Ellen:

Well, these messages – let's see. To me, I keep it fresh by living it, and it's extremely hard to live all the things I write about. In fact, I'll be having a bad day, sometimes, and my friends at the club will go, "Mary Ellen, we've got a really good book you can read." (laughs) ...

Angela:

(laughs)

Mary Ellen:

And the one thing that keeps this book fresh, even though it was published – for the first time in 2011 – is because it's something that, like I say, it – it's – you' always gonna wanna read about unconditional love, you're gonna want to know about intimacy, you're gonna want to know about fear and awareness and the willingness and wishing and hoping and judgement, and all the topics in this book are things that will help anybody, whether you're a middle-schooler, a high-schooler, whether you're in college, if you're a new parent – wherever you are in your life, because of the book – a lesson –

Angela:

Because the lessons – now, because the lessons are so general, like they would help a middle-schooler or a parent, or – that's a big – variety, has that made it easier or harder to market, do you think? Do you think it would be easier if you were targeting – let's say, middle school students?

Mary Ellen:

Well, it's probably made it a little harder, because it is so broad that I have to watch what I say to one group or to another. A lot of these truths of the day – what happened, when I was teaching school, I would have a – objective, a factoid, and a vitamind on my classroom board for the kids when they came in. And the vitaminds were a vitamin for your mind –

Angela:

Mmm. Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

– will allow the truth of the day, or the – *Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire*, came out of these vitamins, like what you said ..., what you think about happens. And when you can teach a young person that, and then they can get that into their awareness, so that, when they see something, and they can step back and not blame somebody else but choose to see it differently, then what a difference that would make in their lives.

Angela:

Yes. Yeah. So – so, when you are talking about this message to different groups, like, as you mentioned, Girls Incorporated, which, I think, targets y – young women, high school age, maybe?

Mary Ellen:

Correct. ...

Angela:

Do you change the message for different groups, and is that hard or easy?

Mary Ellen:

I basically tell – I'll start off with the book, and then, depending on how I'll go, I'll usually interject parts of my story, so that they can see me as the person I am, instead of the person they assume I am, from what I look like.

Angela:

Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

That makes sense?

Angela:

Yeah, totally.

Mary Ellen:

'Cause a lot of times, you'll see somebody, and my neurologist'll – tells me all the time, they say – he says, "Mary Ellen, you're the healthiest sick person I know."

Angela:

Mmm.

Mary Ellen:

Because I look extremely healthy. But I work out every day, religiously, I am very strict about what I eat and what I don't eat, and I really try to practice everything that I talk about and everything that I write about.

Angela:

And if you wanna see what Mary Ellen looks like, go to askmaryellen.com and you can see her picture there, she does not look like a sick lady at all. (chuckles) You're very beautiful.

Mary Ellen:

Thank you.

Angela:

So, what would you – what would you want to tell an author? Obviously, you're really – you're personally really passionate about making a difference and making your life have – power and meaning and legacy and all that stuff. What would you want somebody to know, who wants to write a book, but, maybe, they're just – they're missing some piece or another they just can't seem to finish it, they can't seem to – get that burst of momentum that you had to get your book finished so quickly? What advice would you give them?

Mary Ellen:

Well, first of all, pick a topic you're passionate about. If you're passionate about dogs, write about dogs. If you're passionate about murder mysteries, then contemplate a murder mystery and outline it and – put it together – but do – you have to pick a venue, a path, a journey, that you're passionate about, that you can speak to the audience through your writing.

Angela:

Hm.

Mary Ellen:

And I think that passion – or, I know that passion is what will continue your writing experience in a more positive way, in a good way, in a real way. A – real help – real always fans for really enthusiastic about life –

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Mary Ellen:

– because that's what I truly believe, that when people are really enthusiastic about life, then they do generate good health.

Angela:

Absolutely. So, what parts of the process, from writing your book to publishing it, what – what was different than you expected it to be?

Mary Ellen:

Well, like I said, the marketing was definitely different. The time ...

Angela:

What did you expect the marketing to be like, and then, what is it like? Because I think, whatever your expectation was, it's probably very similar to what a lot of our listeners are thinking the marketing's gonna be like, so why don't you talk about, for you, what were you imagining, and then what' the reality?

Mary Ellen:

Well, I was expecting, "Okay, Mary Ellen, you've been booked here, you've been booked there, where there's a TV show, radio show, bookstore –" whatever, and I didn't hear anything from them, they would send me little things once a week or once a month, about where they sent my book out to, or where they sent my new book released to, but I wasn't getting anything on my calendar. So, then, I – took the bull by my own horns, and I went to the stores here in the Chattanooga area and said, "Hey" – people that knew me, and I said, "Hey, can I come here with my book?" – whatever. And then I would go and I would tell my publisher, and I think they got a little miffed with me, that I wasn't going through them.

Angela:

Hm.

Mary Ellen:

But my point was, you're not setting anything up, so I don't – I don't think any author, if they really want to get their book out there, needs to just sit behind and, "Well, my publisher's not doing anything for me." If you truly believe in your book, do something for yourself. It's just like anything else. And – I was let down at first, but then I had to realize, I had to take responsibility and say, "Hey – that was an expectation of mine." I teach people to get out of expectations, so, there it was in front of me. I said, "Okay. If I'm gonna get on *Dr. Oz* or *Today* or *Good Morning America* or *The View* or anything – I'm gonna talk, and I'm gonna talk to everybody I can, and if I have to drive up there myself, then I will drive up there myself.

Angela:

Yeah. So, there are a lot of people, a lot of, I'll say, vendors in the book industry that reach out to authors, particularly to self-published authors, with lots and lots of opportunities to spend money.

Mary Ellen:
Mm.

Angela:
How have you made decisions on what to buy and what not to buy?

Mary Ellen:
Yeah, I had a – an offer to come to New York and meet with all these publishers and all that kinds of stuff. Again, it was more money than we – we could afford. ...

Angela:
Mm-hm.

Mary Ellen:
If I could have done it, I would have done it, and I just couldn't. And we just couldn't risk again putting a big sum of money out there and not having any results. 'Cause there have been too many times when I've advertised, or I've done this, or I've done that, and I haven't had any results from it, so – you have to see, "Okay, this is a – a children's book. Okay, let's go to day care centers. Let's go to you – maybe to children's book for ..., maybe it's a children's book for middle school, maybe it's a chil – whatever it is, you have to know your market. You have to know where it will sell. I would not take my book into an elementary school, it's not just gonna work. I'd take it into a middle school, if it was – eighth – seventh, eighth grade.

Angela:
Right.

Mary Ellen:
Or if it was ... of the school but – public school, I can't take this into because there's too much –

Angela:
Right. So – and so, when you're making decisions about what – what to buy and what not to buy – you're thinking about your specific audience, or are there other – are there other criteria you use when you're deciding – hav – have you worked with anybody to help market your book?

Mary Ellen:
No, I have not. I may have done it, except for my publisher, who has done – I'd like to think that they did the best they could, but I don't know, I kind of have my doubts there, and –

Angela:

Uh-huh. I think a lot of people feel that way – about their publisher, it's a very – people are often – and I have a publishing imprint, so I know this up close and personal – but – I think people are often conflicted about what they think their publisher's gonna do for them and what the publisher actually does.

Mary Ellen:

Mm-hm.

Angela:

And it's hard to reconcile those things, but obviously your publisher has a lot of books and no one's gonna work as hard – to promote your book

Mary Ellen:

Yeah. No, that – that's correct, and – you hav – you can't make assumptions, and you gotta get out of those expectations, and you do it as much on your own as you can, or set it up beforehand with the publisher, "Okay, when the book comes out, you're gonna do one, you're gonna do two, you're gonna do three."

Angela:

Yeah.

Mary Ellen:

And this is – this is –

Angela:

Well, I think that – I think that's terrific advice – is really to think about – I have the Ten Steps to Writing a Book that Matter, and one of them is creating your masterpiece, and that is about finding the right publishing agreement for you. And there's lots of agreements out there, there's lots of – there's an infinite number of contracts, and so being really clear about what you want your publisher to do and – and getting that in the contract.

Mary Ellen:

That's correct.

Angela:

And really establishing that, I think that's great advice that – that a lot of people aren't aware of. In our last few seconds, any – final words of advice or wishes you that you would have for people that are trying to finish their book?

Mary Ellen:

No, I wish them all success that – and all the goodness that comes from writing a book, and all of the blessings that I've received, because I know it. That's been more than I could ever

ask for, so even if I didn't ever sell another single copy of this book, it would have been well worth it.

Angela:

Uh, beautifully said. Mary Ellen Ciganovich, she is the author of *Healing Words: Life Lessons to Inspire*, you can learn more about her at askmaryellen.com. Mary Ellen, thank you so much for being with us today.

Mary Ellen:

Thank you so much, Angela. I really appreciate the opportunity.

Angela:

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