

[Book Journeys](#) Author Interview - Dec. 10, 2015

Dr. Angela Lauria with James Wilmot, author of *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*

"I love Christmas. I've always loved Christmas. So it's something I've been really fascinated in and the legends that I've heard in my life, like Santa Claus." ~James Wilmot

Angela:

Well, hey everybody. I hope you have your jingle bells out and your holiday spirit, because this is a special edition of Book Journeys Radio. I know that most of the time around here, we are focused on nonfiction. But I've a really special book I wanna share with you guys today and it is a Christmas book and so, as you are planning your holiday traditions - if Christmas is one of them, I think you will really enjoy hearing about this book, meeting my guest, and learning a little bit more about how he became an author. And so without further adieu, I'm very excited to welcome James Wilmot to the show. James, thank you so much for being here.

James:

Hi Angela. How are you?

Angela:

I am fantastic! So, tell everybody about *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*. What is this book about?

James:

Okay. It's a fictional Christmas story suitable for people of all ages, and it's all about how a young boy called Nicholas, who lived a really comfortable life in a town in ancient times. Uhm, through some strange twist of fate, ends up moving on to a frozen mansion in the far north with his grandfather. He overcomes lots of different adversaries and different, kinds of challenges in his life and he grows up to become the famous character that everybody knows and loves at Christmas. So, Father Christmas, to us, and Santa Claus, to you.

Angela:

Yeah. Exactly. So, you are in the UK where you guys, I know use that term Father Christmas, but this character of Nicholas in your book, was obviously inspired by Father Christmas, but what made you want to write this story? How did this go from an idea in your head to a book?

James:

Okay. I love Christmas. I've always loved Christmas. So it's something I've been really fascinated in and the legends that I've heard in my life, like Santa Claus (Father Christmas), you know, there's the kind of - the shiny, quite modern Norman Rockwell Coca-Cola version of Santa Claus, but then there's something much more ancient. I grew up in very, very rural Ireland, and it was always strange to me how, kinda, the pagan symbols of the old world would walk kind of shoulder to shoulder with the Christian symbols of the new world and certainly, Father Christmas is like that. It's something that's really quite ancient. So, I wanted to write a

book about that, I wanted to kind of include a bit of my own life experience. You know, I had a bad Christmas... and it changed my life. He had a bad Christmas too and it made him kind of the figure we all recognize.

Angela:

I love it! So, have you written a book before? Did you think of yourself as a writer? Did this come easy to you?

James:

I've always considered myself to be a parable writer. I went to university and I would struggle to produce assignments, but this story kind of burned away in my head for kind of a long time and it would play out like a movie in my mind. So, I think of scenes in my mind, like I was watching a movie about the story 'till eventually, I just sat down and put it all together in my head, until the whole story was there from start to finish in my mind. So, I sat down one day, and I just did it. I just put it all down, uhm, got a little bit bored halfway through, so I started at the end and I went backwards, and, uhm, I met myself in the middle. So, yeah, once I started writing, it was really very simple.

Angela:

And I know you have kids - in fact, one of them is on the cover of this book, and again, the book is *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*. You can find it on Amazon. So, were your kids an inspiration, and when you were creating the book, was it something you shared with them? Did you tell them the stories from the book?

James:

Oh, definitely. You know, I see the world through their eyes now as young children. Henry is seven. Rowan's ten. Yeah, I thought of them while I was writing the book. I thought of myself at the same age when I was writing the book. When we were on holiday, funny enough, I've been to the Arctic Circle. We went to Northern Finland and Lapland, the traditional home of Santa Claus, and I did a bit of research there and saw them in the snow and I saw how they kind of looked at the world through, the kind of, the frozen landscape and it was perfect. That was the real kind of inspiration. We came home from that holiday, and that's when I started writing it. And we went there again last year, just before the book was published, just to remind ourselves, and, uhm, yeah, it was perfect. They've been interested in the story, and Rowan was very, very pleased to be on the cover and they've read it a couple of times now and they've also listened to the audiobook as well.

Angela:

Yeah, let's talk about the audio book. So, the book came out last year, but you just recently released an audio book, or you're just about to. Tell us about that.

James:

Yeah. I wanted to make it a little bit different. The book did really well last year. It was in the top 5 domestic children's Christmas chart here in the UK and the top 10 in the States for most of December and that was fantastic. But I wanted to do something different this year. I wanted to reach out and maybe produce something that had a little bit more atmosphere than just the written word. I want to reach out, maybe, to - appeal to people who may have a barrier to reading, so, uhm... I work with a local college, and the media production students offered to use the... recording studio and produce an audio version, so I got all my children, some friends, my dad... We all kinda holed in this recording studio and we put together the audio book and I published it on the book's Facebook page.

Angela:

So where do... How do people get that? I want that. Where is that?

James:

[chuckles] All you need to do is just jump on Facebook, search *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*; you'll find the Facebook page there and the link to Amazon is the first post and the one just underneath is the link to the audio book, and some other images and pictures I've put together just to make the story a little bit more atmospheric - make it a little bit more cinematic 'cause I would love to see this be made into a movie one day.

Angela:

I love it! I love that you're creating that, uhm, visual and creating those huge divisions for your book. So, we will actually post... When we post the blog post link and the show notes for this, we will include this link to where you can get the audio. Uhm, so you can look for that on theauthorincubator.com/blog but while we still have some time with you, I want to talk about the process of writing the book. Did you experience writer's block when you were writing? I know you said you got bored and you kind of write it in one session, but how did the writing process evolved for you?

James:

It was definitely putting it together in the head. I put it all together in my head so I had a full story. As I started writing it down, new ideas came into play, so I'd include those, uhm, other things that work quite well in my mind, didn't work so well on paper, so I'd scratch those. Yeah, like I said, I've got about halfway through. I got a little bit tired of hearing the sound of my own voice, so I jumped to the end - to the end chapter - worked my way back and met myself in the middle, put myself through three... four drafts, sent the drafts to some schoolteachers I know, uhm, to correct grammar and spelling, and then the final draft went through and, yeah, the book went straight out... I didn't experience any block because I had the story mapped out in my mind and it's really weird because I... Like I said before, I never considered myself a good writer at all but since the book was released last year, I've released an awful lot more... I've posted on LinkedIn, uhm, regarding my day job. So I'm writing a lot more. It's given me the confidence to do more and diversify more, so certainly it started something in me that I didn't think I had, and it's working really well.

Angela:

So, a lot of people... I feel like a lot of people get an idea for a book. Uhm, maybe they're inspired by something, like Christmas, to them, and they get an idea, but they don't finish it. Why do you think you were able to finish this project?

James:

'Cause it's been kicking around me head for so long. I knew I have to do it. I have to, otherwise, I'll be one of those boring guys at parties, who would always say, "We'll, I'd nearly written a book, and I just need to finish it." I didn't wanna be that guy. I think I've told everyone I knew that I have this story in my head and I got tired of hearing myself say that as well. So, yeah, I thought, you know what, I'm gonna be the guy who goes to parties and says, "You know, actually, I have finished the book and it is published and it's doing quite well." So, I wanted to be that new guy and I pushed myself... and it would've been easy... Yeah?

Angela:

How has that... Tell me what that... Tell me what that's been like... Like what has it been like to go to a party and say you're an author now? Like how does that feel to have accomplished that?

James:

It feels really good. I've done... kinda walk in - introduce myself as James Wilmot, the author... That'd be crazy, crazy arrogant. But no. It's a nice... It's a really nice feeling in my mind that I've got a skill and achievement that I never thought... I always would've loved to have published a book but having done it, it feels really great. And now, you know, since the book was published last year, with the audio book this year, I want to kinda build and try different things as well, you know. Next year, I wanna release the book as an illustrated version as well. So, I wanna build - I'm not...

Angela:

Ooohhh...

James:

Yeah, that's my plan next year. I don't know if I've got another book in me just yet. I don't wanna read - write - for the sake of it. If I do get an idea, I'll get it down, but yeah, next year, I think illustrated version, definitely. I just wanna keep building on the story.

Angela:

I love it! So, is there anything that you wish you knew before you wrote this book? Things that you've learned in a year, since that the book has been out?

James:

I wish I knew how easy it was once I sat down and started doing it. I wish I knew, you know, ten years ago if I'd started writing stories and books, but I've... I would have done an awful lot more by now. So, in many ways, my only regret is I wish I'd started sooner, uhm, and I could've done more. Uhm, but uhm, yeah... I wish I knew how easy it was once you actually apply yourself and get moving on it.

Angela:

So, I think a lot of people get stuck there and there are lots of, uhm, there are lots of obstacles that I hear. People are afraid they're not a good enough writer, they say they don't have enough time, obviously. You've mentioned you have a day job, you've got two kids, like... I'm sure you didn't have more time than most people have. So, what were the obstacles that came up for you... from then you got the idea for your book until it was finished? What were some of the obstacles you had to overcome and how did you overcome them?

James:

Confidence, for one, because I just thought, you know, who am I to think I can try and write a book? I didn't think I was good enough, so confidence was definitely there. Uhm, the time. You know, no one has enough time for anything, uhm, but I made the time. When I was writing the book then, and when I was finally formulating it in my head, I was - it was a job I was doing, that I really didn't like... really stressful and time consuming, so it was a really nice catharsis, even though most of it was written in summertime. So, I'd come home from work to sit down... put the boys to bed, then I'd give myself an hour or two, and then I'd just start typing. I'd be - maybe take a break in the middle of the day, and just start typing, and then... It just kinda worked out. You just gotta find the time. It's like exercise. There's never enough time to do it, but once you start doing it, you find more time. Uhm, so... it's about just... you know, the bits in between. So sit down, keep the tab nearby and just keep going at it and eventually, it will... connect the dots and the story with the nonfiction piece you're doing, it just does come together. It will come together.

Angela:

Hm. So, uhm... So how... with the audio book... Uhm, how true were you to the book itself? Did you just read the book or was there some, like, uhm, screenplay- or radio play-aspect to it? I know you mentioned multiple people we involved.

James:

Yeah, we thought about doing it like a play, but there's not a lot of dialogue in the book. We thought about adding lots more sound effects, but that would've sounded really cheesy, you know, footsteps in snow... key turns in a lock... It would've sounded like the worst kind of murder mystery play from a long time ago. So most of the book is... the audiobook, is read by me, the narrator, word for word. But in the background, there are kind of environmental sound effects like... the sound of wind over mountain, the sound of Spring. Uhm, there's a really good soundtrack at the beginning, at the end. Uhm, my son Henry had some jingle bells that he played at key parts through the story, but the spoken word, the dialogue in the story, was cast

by friends and family. So, my oldest son, Rowan, who's on the cover, uhm, he played young Nicholas. My dad, uhm, who's a grumpy old man, uhm, he played Nicholas's grumpy old grandfather. So, it worked... really well. Some of Rowan's friends from school helped out, so it worked very fantastically.

Angela:

And what are some of the things that have happened as an author for you? Have you... Uhm, some of the things you might be, like, most proud of. Have you been interviewed on radio shows? Have you spoken about this on readings? Do you get emails from people about your book? Tell us about some of those experiences as an author.

James:

The principal of the college I work at, uh, gave me a big congratulations last Christmas, uh, because a lot of people at the college, uhm, bought the first copies when it was available online and really kinda gave it a boost. That was really flattering. He's a, you know, a busy, important man so he gave us some good praise that was... that was excellent. It was just... Most people that I haven't met before dropped me messages. I even got a message from THE Father Christmas who's up in Lapland, 'cause I gave him a copy of my book last year. He dropped me a message on Facebook saying, "Well done!" It doesn't get better than that. I'm also...

Angela:

Wow! I didn't know that one. That's great!

James:

I know. I'll tell you what. That's like meeting the big man. And a couple of days ago, there's a great animated film director called Tom Moore. He's an Irish guy. He's directed Song of the Sea and The Secret of Kells. I sent the link to him and he gave me a big thumbs up. So... yeah there's... I don't look for the reassurance and the... feedback, but it's great when you get it.

Angela:

Yeah, and I know you guys ran a campaign last year around Christmas and had the book at number one for quite some time in the UK. What... What was that... What was that like as a personal accomplishment? I guess not just being at number one, but having your whole family, really involved in that campaign.

James:

It was great. It was really good. I mean, there was a point for a few days last December, I outsold Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol and Tolkien's Letters from Father Christmas, and I thought, "You know what? There would never be a point in my life when I would outsell more copies of my little ebook than Tolkien and Dickens, uhm, but for a moment there, it was there and it was fantastic. It was an amazing feeling to check the chart and see it at number one on Christmas Eve. Uhm, it was fantastic! The boys put themselves out on Facebook and posted a couple of posts to, uh, to get clicks and likes and downloads and that worked really well. I

worked... I was a bit of a human shield. I was a bit of a cheap shot. I appreciate that, but, yeah, dressed them up as elves and put them on Facebook... Uhm, but it... Right now, it's not doing... It's not so high as I'd like. Uhm, it's just finished it's free download trial. It's gone back to paid status. I think it's in the... in about - number 75 in the UK chart - about 200 in the US. So, I wanna get it back up in the top ten.

Angela:

I love it! So, do you have a website for the book as well?

James:

Yeah. It's still a work in progress, I'd say. Anybody who wants more information... if they want to see the audio, uh, listen to the audio book, see the visual elements of the story as well, I think definitely go to the Facebook page. So, just uh, just search under *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*, or search for me, James Wilmot and you'll find it.

Angela:

Awesome, and so facebook.com/theboywhobecamefatherchristmas (all one word) and the book is also on Amazon, if you wanna help and make it a part of your Christmas tradition... How do you think having a seasonal book, uhm, has affected you as an author? Obviously this is... a challenging book to promote the hell out of in July, uhm, so what are the pros and cons of a book that really kind of - December is the time for book sales for you?

James:

Uhm, I guess the pros are that uh, you know, eleven months of the year is about as appealing as stale Christmas pudding, uh, but that's fine, it's given me eleven months to think about what we're gonna do or how we're gonna build on it, so, you know, we had the time to do the audiobook; next year I'll have the time to do the illustrations. Certainly the pros are, uh, having the time between seasons to work on it and develop it - and it gives, you know, as much as I love Christmas, as well, just for the time of year, it gives me a nice kind of focus to do something and be part of Christmas without the people too. Uhm, but in terms of maybe the cons, yeah, I mean, it's only really a feeling for one month in a year and the Facebook page - I've always promised myself I will leave it alone. I won't do anything out of season because that would just make me the anti-Santa, uhm, so I'd just leave it alone for eleven months of the year.

Angela:

I love it, especially the anti-Santa. Very cool! Well what advice - I'm wondering have people asked you, since your book came out or said, "I really want to write a book." I know that a lot of authors get that question, and what advice do you give to people who want to write a book but haven't been able to finish their project, or, maybe even started?

James:

Just do it. Think about it. Plan it. Take time in between day job and night job and family and friends and just put things down on paper to start the process so then it becomes quickly

addictive. Uhm, ask for feedback from friends and family as well. Tell them your idea so they'll be cheering you on as well. Don't make it a solo project. Get them to, you know, help you move forward as well. Uhm, find like-minded people. Uh, maybe go on a retreat and to spend time with other people who want to write a book, uhm, and uhm, and focus on that task, you know, with people on the same mission as you. I think that would be a really good way of doing it. Uhm, but just picture yourself with the finished product. Uhm, picture yourself with something online or in your hand that people will really enjoy, uhm, and that's the important thing. Remember that.

Angela:

And what did you do, uhm... Did you ever get advice from people during the creation process, maybe, that wasn't positive? Like what do you do when you get feedback that isn't a hundred percent supportive?

James:

I think you should always listen to feedback be it positive or negative - take it onboard then you choose to ignore it. Uhm, so a few people wondered why I was doing a Christmas book; a few people said why don't you do something that's appealing all year round and I thought, "You know what? This is my story. I'm gonna write this down. This is what I wanna do and it worked really well. So, you know, I'd say definitely listen to people. Take their feedback onboard and the, you know, choose to ignore it if it doesn't suit you.

Angela:

Mmm hmm, and, you know, you mentioned before, you have had thoughts uhm, at least, at some point, uhm, that maybe you weren't good enough, not as good enough writer - whatever the stories we all have - how did you get past that? What are some of the things that... We talked about... Nicholas's hero's journey to becoming Father Christmas, but what was your journey to becoming the father of this book?

James:

Uhm, I... It... It's just a lot of hard work. Just a lot of hard work - a little bit of imagination. Uhm, again, support from my friends and family. You know, they're encouraging me to do it. Uhm, you know, I think certainly anyone who is struggling to get something down onto paper could maybe look into getting a - if it's a real challenge - get a coach onboard to help them along a little bit more. Uhm, but uhm, yeah, I just uhm, kept pushing. I just kept pushing. I think you could get quite a lot of results to get it done in the end, but it's definitely worth it.

Angela:

I love it. Well I haven't listened to the audio version, but I'm very excited to get to do that. Uhm, we did, last year, do a reading, uhm, at Christmas Eve, and so now, we'll just have you read it for us, recorded. Uhm, but that is a part of our Christmas tradition, and I would encourage others to check this out. It's a great read for the family. It is a really fun additional tradition to add to your holidays, and, I think, you know, the real takeaway for me, uhm, from this, is if there is

something special and seasonal for you like Christmas is for James, that making yourself a part of that season, I think is just such a great legacy. Uhm, I am a hundred percent sure this book will get passed down to your grandchildren and great grandchildren and this story will long live past you, especially because it's tied to another tradition. And so there are so many reasons to be an author but I think this is a really special one in terms of family and legacy and it is a great story that I think will be part of other people's Christmases as well and already is. It certainly is at our house. So, James Wilmot, the author of *The Boy Who Became Father Christmas*. You can get that book on Amazon. Check out the Facebook page. James, thank you so much for being our guest today.

James:

Thank you Angela. Happy Christmas everybody!

Angela:

And yes, this is the Christmas season! I can't believe it's already here. We will be back next week on Book Journeys Radio and then we're gonna take a couple of weeks off for the holidays. I don't have another Christmas book for you next week, so you gotta go out and get a copy of this book. It's my only Christmas book that we have to share with you. As always, what I like to leave everyone in the show is just a reminder that our commitment at Book Journeys Radio and as a part of The Author Incubator is to changing the world one book at a time.