

Laurie: Hello everybody. Thank you so much for watching this episode of the Writer's Way podcast. I'm here with Elizabeth. Hello Elizabeth, thank you so much for coming on with me.

Elizabeth: Hi, thanks Laurie for having me. I'm happy to be here.

Laurie: You're here on a really exciting day because this won't air today, but today is the first day of your Kickstarter campaign for your second book?

Elizabeth: My first Kickstarter, second book. So the Kickstarter is very new to me. I self-funded the first one which I was happy to do but yeah, so I thought I would try Kickstarter and see how that worked out for me.

Laurie: And so you're taking time out today on a day that you're probably feeling stressed and nervous.

Elizabeth: I am, you know what, welcome to my life. That's the story of my life these days. I just have this overall feeling of anxiety and stress so I'll make it through but thank you, thank you I'm happy to be here.

Laurie: Okay, okay so why don't you share with the people your background. Are you one of these people who has always been a writer? Do you have journals full of writing? or was it more inspired by a certain life event?

Elizabeth: It definitely was more inspired by a certain life event. I would say my background, I do have a background in marketing and working with a creative team. So just being a more creative person, I would say you know that's kind of my area, I'm definitely a more creative person being scientific. So I wouldn't say, you know being an analyzer. So I wouldn't say that this is a huge stretch for me. But I had the marketing background and like I said I'm more creative. As a life event, I did have triplets a few years ago, and a special needs son, who ultimately he ended up after a series of illnesses, ended up passing away in 2016. And today, May 2nd is the third anniversary of his death. So, I'm actually happy that I have things to focus on today. But he was special needs, he had cerebral palsy and some other medical challenges, medical things. And so, was very sick, passed away. So, we started a foundation which was one of the things that we did, the Ben Smiles Memorial Foundation. But I also wanted to create the children's book with my character in a wheelchair. So my son's name was Benjamin, you know we have Ben Smiles Foundation and then Ben's Adventures is the name of my book. So, the concept of my book is that it's about a little boy in a wheelchair, he loves life and has fun, and has adventure, he shows everyone that you can have joy even though you have challenges. That was the premise of my book. And so I just came up with the idea one day, and I thought, darn it, let's just do a children's book.

Laurie: Let's just do it. Let's just do a book. What a beautiful tribute.

Elizabeth: Thank you.

Laurie: I just think that's lovely and I'm just gonna move on because otherwise it'll be a bawl fest.

Elizabeth: I know, I don't wanna be a puddle over here so.

Laurie: Yeah, you especially. Okay, so I'll keep it to the other for both of us. I won't but, so you had the idea all of a sudden, I'm gonna write about, a bed book. and how long did it take you would you say?

Elizabeth: I started thinking about it. The first one published in Spring, May of last year, so May 2018. So I first started working on it writing on it, I would say like August, September of 2017.

Laurie: Oh okay.

Elizabeth: And so, I probably wrote it two or three months or so and then I actually for the first book ended up working with a hybrid publisher to help with some of the creative. They helped me along that publishing path. I've since broken with them. I'm a full indie author for the second book but I was grateful to have them to lead me down that first path because I didn't really know how to proceed and what was involved and that type of thing. Certainly today I feel more educated. I feel more experienced in the children's book world.

Laurie: Can you just explain what a hybrid publisher is and what they do because a lot of people listening are not at that point yet.

Elizabeth: Right so a hybrid publisher, they basically you pay for creative. I think of it as they're a creative agency and I pay for creative. They have a contract. I actually was not under the publishing portion of the contract, I was just under the creative development. I provide the idea, provide the story, I pay them a creative fee. Basically you're buying a book. It's similar, as an indie author you're going to pay an editor, you're going to pay the illustrator, the book designer. Working with a hybrid publisher in my experience was I buy the creative, they help edit it. They provide the illustrator, they put it together, they send it off to the printer.

Laurie: So do you have.

Elizabeth: But it's a lot similar. In my experience it was similar to being an indie author except now I had to find a separate editor. I had to find a separate illustrator. So instead of them handling the whole creative piece of it, now since I am fully on my own. You have to do all of the steps.

Laurie: All the hats.

Elizabeth: It's a lot of work for sure.

Laurie: So it was a positive experience for you working with them.

Elizabeth: It was, I don't really have any complaints. Like I said I did decide last summer to separate from them. Just communication and service issues and I thought well I could probably just do this completely on my own. There are some benefits for being in control of everything.

Laurie: For sure.

Elizabeth: But I decided to separate. But just from the creative aspect of it, it was very similar to just working with an illustrator and that type of thing.

Laurie: Got you and they took care of some of the stuff that a lot of writers don't really want to or don't feel capable

Elizabeth: Right.

Laurie: of when they're starting out.

Elizabeth: Right.

Laurie: There's just a lot that goes into it, it's overwhelming.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Laurie: Okay so now the second book. So the first one got published. It was a little bit less than a year.

Elizabeth: Yep.

Laurie: And then did you always want it to be a series?

Elizabeth: I did yeah and when I started thinking about it I probably listed out about 10 different scenarios or adventures that Ben can go on. And they're all adventures based on our own experiences as a family you know because I wanted to be about his life, not just made up stories. Which I might get to the made up stories once I run out of content. Or run out of things from our own life. The first book was about a dream of him going to the beach. I'm a beach girl I grew up on the East coast. We always had family vacations to the beach. And I live outside of Chicago so it's not an easy trek now to get to the beach but my kids. Even Ben, you know he died when he was three but he still had two different vacations to the beach. For me that was a locale that was important for me. And we had experience with and you know there's a theme in that book where the kids are flying kites. My husband loves to fly kites and they pick up seashells and kind of doing all those beachy things that kids and families like to do. So I mean the first book was definitely inspired by our experiences and then the second book is Ben. Well two things, he was able to be in pre-school for a year and he had a phenomenal experience. He was in an early childhood program and he had an IEP. An individualized education plan.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: And he had therapy in school and he had a really strong team that just fully loved him and did everything they could for him. And so I really wanted to honor his experience in school and so I'm dedicating this book to them. The scenario for the book is he's at school with his triplet brother and sister. He had so much fun, he loves his class. He loves all of his friends, he loves his teacher. He has so much fun he envisions it the circus. And so he kind of imagines a day at the circus. And again the circus, my husband loves the circus and loved to take the kids to the circus. So I'm kind of killing two birds with one stone here.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: With honoring my son's educational team and then also like the circus.

Laurie: That's cool.

Elizabeth: I know my husband when Ringling Brothers went under my husband was pretty sad about that. We replaced it with Disney on Ice.

Laurie: Oh well there you go.

Elizabeth: There we go, we have kind of an annual Disney on Ice event.

Laurie: Oh that's so cute that he likes that so much.

Elizabeth: Mmm-hmm.

Laurie: So in your experience there can't be that many books out there about kids in wheelchairs yet?

Elizabeth: No I mean I don't think so. You might come across a couple but certainly not in the mainstream of just kids book that you tend to see or the popular authors, really well known authors. I think you see it more and more. Or you're starting to see it more and more, just the idea of inclusion and diversity. And showing all types of kids and all types of people in children's books.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: I mean that's so important and so whether it's skin color or abilities or kids in wheelchairs. I was in Wal-Mart the other day and saw a doll with amputee like had a prosthetic leg.

Laurie: Oh.

Elizabeth: And I thought wow they're doing dolls now. But it's great that they're representing all types of kids.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: And all types of disabilities or abilities. You know it can be represented because I think that's important.

Laurie: I think that's so important and that's so great that you've provided that resource so other parents looking for I want a book with a child like mine. Now they're going to have a whole series of them.

Elizabeth: I think yeah that's part of it. And I also think it's important for kids that are typical kids that don't have disability or they aren't familiar with kids in wheelchairs. Maybe it becomes less scary, if they see the visible disability more then they're more familiar with it and less scared of it.

Laurie: Yes.

Elizabeth: I think obviously the niche market or the niche audience would be families with special needs. My hope is that type of book can be accepted with everybody because I think that's just as important.

Laurie: Oh absolutely like every teacher can use one in their classroom for sure. Preschool teacher the second book.

Elizabeth: Yeah and in the school events, I've done I won't say tons but I've done quite a few school events and I've had typical kids raising their hands and say oh you know my cousin has epilepsy. Or oh you know I know somebody in a wheelchair at church. I think kids are making the connection that they're people.

Laurie: That it's okay.

Elizabeth: I mean it's just people.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: You know they might have different abilities but that doesn't mean they can't be a friend or they can't play or whatever and that was my goal with the book.

Laurie: Fantastic, that sounds like an excellent resource. So you started the Kickstarter today. Do we have any illustrations already for the second book?

Elizabeth: We do yeah it's currently being illustrated. The cover is done, she's worked through a few of the spreads. It's not fully done yet but I've shared some images and graphics on my Facebook page and on the Kickstarter. I've done a couple videos to tease you know what the interior of the book is. But yeah I'm excited about it. She's done a really phenomenal job so far.

Laurie: Yeah and when are you expecting it will be out?

Elizabeth: The end of May well okay so printed. I think the book will be done by the end of May so my hope is by the time the Kickstarter wraps up on June 1st, that I'll be able to share the e-book with folks because every backer gets a complimentary e-book. So hopefully I'll be able to share the e-book. Now with the book printing and all of that I think it will be August before I'm able to actually ship books.

Laurie: Right.

Elizabeth: The printing and everything, that takes a little bit of time.

Laurie: Takes time, yeah.

Elizabeth: To get everything together. My hope is end of July early August I'll be able to ship the book out.

Laurie: Okay and how did you find your illustrator because the first time around the publisher found it so this time.

Elizabeth: He did yeah and what's interesting is I already had a developed character and with the publisher with their illustrator I went back and forth. Because it was based on my kid so I really wanted to love the illustrations and I wanted them to capture his personality and his joy and his smile and his round face and his curly hair. There are some things I really wanted this illustration to capture so I really pushed them. And we spent quite a bit of time on it last year with the publisher. And since I broke with them I no longer had access to the original illustrator. But I knew I wanted to maintain consistency and have the character be the Ben character that we had worked so hard on. One of the things that I asked folks to do. I explained the situation to them and said if you wouldn't mind, would you mind just replicating or doing a quick sketch of Ben just so I can see that you can do it and you can kind of match their style. And I had a couple people say no I don't want to do a pre-sketch and I'm like okay that's fine. That's not really what I'm looking for but whatever. I probably had four or five illustrators that did. A couple were not quite the Ben that I wanted and a couple really were. I actually found her, I reached out to illustrators. I started following them on Instagram. And a lot of the Facebook author groups that we're in. I just started following pages and commenting and Instagramming and Instagram is great because illustrators are constantly posting whatever their styles are, the different things they're working on, all their work in progress. For any author that's starting the process I would say if you don't have your illustrator yet follow the hashtag #kidlitillustrator or #childrensillustrator or #picturebookillustrator. Anything illustrator you know try to find someone that you like their style or maybe they have a variety

of different things. They're not stuck to one style. I thought that was pretty helpful. I mean you could get lost in Instagram going through.

Laurie: I have.

Elizabeth: Through there so much.

Laurie: I have, I covet them all. I'm like how many books can I write at once just so I can use.

Elizabeth: Right.

Laurie: They're amazing.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I would say if someone is first starting to search for an illustrator, start with Instagram. It's kind of my first piece of advise.

Laurie: And that's where you found yours?

Elizabeth: Just click around and see who you like.

Laurie: You found yours on Instagram this time?

Elizabeth: Oh no I don't remember, I may have. I follow her on Instagram. I may have reached out to her in one of the groups.

Laurie: Oh okay.

Elizabeth: But I mean you can click on websites. They all have websites and web portfolios.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: Yeah but I probably researched. I probably just clicked through without even contacting anyone yet for a good two to three weeks. I started a list of names and websites and who did I like and that type of thing.

Laurie: Okay so how long did the process take this time? The book's almost at completion as far as the creation of it. Was it faster than the last time?

Elizabeth: They're probably about the same timeframe because last year beginning of May I actually went with a publisher to Book Expo. Last year is when I officially released and that was a fun experience. But I would say and I spent more time this go round writing and I worked with a couple different editors. Because I wanted to write more rhyme and verse which is very very much a challenge. So I spent a lot of

time doing that. And going back and forth with an editor and poetry coach and just trying to get everything just so. I spent a lot of time on the writing piece of it. A fair amount of time finding the illustrator, interviewing you know chatting with people on the phone, that type of thing.

Laurie: Oh good, where did you find a poetry coach? I didn't even know that was a thing.

Elizabeth: Well I've been calling her poetry coach but editor with expert level poetry knowledge.

Laurie: Oh okay wow.

Elizabeth: Yeah I've been referring to it as a poetry coach.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: But I mean children's book editor with some poetry experience.

Laurie: Okay cool.

Elizabeth: Sorry my dog was jumping.

Laurie: I thought it was a kid I was like what is she doing?

Elizabeth: No I've got dogs, I've got puppies. I have one 10 month old and a five month old.

Laurie: Oh.

Elizabeth: One likes to scratch at the door so I just threw something at him, sorry.

Laurie: Yeah rather than yeah.

Elizabeth: Come here no no no no.

Laurie: If you want because we can.

Elizabeth: Okay one second.

Laurie: So let's talk a bit about bumps along the way. Has there been any big bumps that you want to share sort of how you handled them?

Elizabeth: I don't know I mean this go round where I'm controlling everything and handling the process myself. I don't know that I've had any major bumps. My one major bump last year was probably deciding I needed to leave my publisher. Once the creative was done once the book was done and the

book was at the printer, I kind of felt like you're all of a sudden not their priority. Because it's like the creative is where they're making their money. They're making a buck or two on the royalty side of things. It's like once you pay the creative contract and the book is done, there's less incentive for them to kind of promote your books from a publishers standpoint. So I went back and forth with them for a couple of months and then I just thought well forget this. Like I would rather do it all myself versus being mad at somebody else and I don't feel like I'm getting the service. So I think where you hear a lot of opinions or discussions just about the hybrid publishing model. I think I can absolutely see that but I think from my experience I decided to actually leave before I felt like this is a bad relationship. Because I could kind of see it going in that direction. I personally say I like to approach it as I bought their creative, I bought a book. And as an indie author, you're going to buy a book from somewhere. Unless you're an artist yourself, you're going to pay an illustrator to do it. You're going to pay an editor, whatever it is. I would say to answer your question I would say leaving them and then really having to start from square one with Amazon. And I had to buy the ISBN. There's some things i hadn't really.

Laurie: Oh.

Elizabeth: You know you have to kind of figure out because they've handled everything.

Laurie: Right so a big learning curve but maybe not necessarily bumpy but just like.

Elizabeth: Right right more of a learning curve kind of a process and the momentum kind of stopped for a second because I had to find a printer to print my own books. Because again another complaint I had with them was I had to use their printer which was incredibly expensive.

Laurie: Oh.

Elizabeth: So I thought well in my marketing background I know I can get a cheaper rate from another printer.

Laurie: Yeah where are you printing from this time?

Elizabeth: What's that?

Laurie: Where are you printing from this time?

Elizabeth: When I had to do a reprint last year I used Bang Printing in Minnesota. I have not officially jumped over to the China market. I know a lot of authors do but I was happy with the quality of Bang and their pricing seemed reasonable.

Laurie: Yeah and I like that they will warehouse it for you if you get a lot.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Laurie: You don't have to pay the shipping cost which is a lot.

Elizabeth: Right right.

Laurie: Yeah I haven't talked too much on the podcast about sort of that option because I myself find it so overwhelming.

Elizabeth: Right.

Laurie: It's one thing when you print on demand you know and you sit back and you watch yes it sells sometimes I guess it doesn't but that's what your concern is. Your concern isn't shipping and warehousing and duties.

Elizabeth: Right yeah. Well I still you know I'm not printing thousands and thousands at a time like some of the other authors are. So my warehouse right now is my dining room. Luckily we don't, I mean who uses a dining room anymore right?

Laurie: Who needs it? How many do you print about at at time?

Elizabeth: I printed 1500.

Laurie: Oh okay that's a good amount.

Elizabeth: Yeah it's a good amount, it was 56 boxes or something like that. So it was a pallet and a half or so. So I carried them one at a time into my dining room into the corner, they sit nicely and they store. It's climate controlled so I don't have to worry about.

Laurie: So then are you going to the post office quite regularly?

Elizabeth: I do so Amazon sends purchase orders every Monday. So typically Monday or Tuesday I'll box it up and make a trip to the post office.

Laurie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: But again with the volume I'm doing I'm not sending thousands at at time. Maybe a couple hundred at at time here and there.

Laurie: Oh well that's good.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Laurie: For anybody watching if that's the route that you're going, you want to use to Amazon Advantage platform. I think it's [advantage.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/advantage). I've talked to people lately who have gone through Seller Central or Vendor Central and that's not set up for booksellers. You don't want to do that. You want to do KDP or Advantage.

Elizabeth: Exactly yep.

Laurie: So any wise words of wisdom that you have learned along the way that you would like to share with somebody maybe just starting out?

Elizabeth: I would say if it's a dream to have a children's book, do it. Anybody there you're capable of it. You know figure it out. There's a wealth of knowledge online. There's ton of different groups, Facebook groups, Instagram, resources, I'd go on Twitter. I don't personally think Twitter is incredibly useful. But that was one of the things that was suggested to me is I need to have some interaction on twitter so I don't know.

Laurie: How's that going?

Elizabeth: Poorly I think I have about 600 followers.

Laurie: That sounds like a lot.

Elizabeth: Weil it's kind of discouraging because one day I might have 604 and then I go in log in and I have 599 and I thought I haven't even said anything, how did I lose six followers, like what?

Laurie: I think.

Elizabeth: I don't like the numbers where you know it matters if you lose a handful here and there because I notice. If I lose one follower I notice.

Laurie: Oh well from what I understand in the next six weeks Facebook has really got some big changes. And of course they own Instagram and they're going to put a lot less emphasis on followers.

Elizabeth: Okay.

Laurie: And likes so you don't have to worry about that anymore.

Elizabeth: That would be good yeah. I bookmarked an article, I saw something yesterday. I haven't read it yet but I think it's what you're talking about the Facebook changes we have coming out.

Laurie: Yeah yeah there really are some big changes. Okay so let's talk briefly about your Kickstarter because this podcast will air during both the middle I think of your Kickstarter. So where can people find you and what are their options to make this book a reality?

Elizabeth: Well it's on Kickstarter so if you go to Kickstarter and just search for Ben's Adventures or search under my name Elizabeth Gerlach and it should pop up. It's the only one I have. I do have a couple of early bird packages going on that expire on Saturday which obviously wouldn't make sense if we're airing in two weeks.

Laurie: Sorry you missed them.

Elizabeth: Yeah I have a couple of different options. There's a teacher packet option that includes a tote bag and a set of classroom books and PDF. So the activity packet, the bookmark and posters and those types of things.

Laurie: Oh.

Elizabeth: The buy three get one option if you want to get the new book plus last years beach book. There's an option to kind of mix and match the books.

Laurie: Oh that sounds great.

Elizabeth: There's an option to donate so if you don't have anybody with kids you know picture book aged kids. But still want to support, I would be most appreciative of that you can always do that. I'm donating books to Easter Seals which is where my son Benjamin received a lot of his therapy services. physical therapy, occupational feeding therapy, speech therapy, all of that were through Easter seals here. Obviously they're well known in Foxboro Valley here where I live. I've offered to donate books to them. All pre-ordered books that are purchased during Kickstarter in the month of May. So for every 10 that are pre-ordered I'm going to donate one to them.

Laurie: Oh well that's lovely.

Elizabeth: Incentive for people to buy a book and know that it's going to a good cause. Or there's an option to just make a donation and if you wanted me to donate books to your church or your school or if you had something specific I'd be more than happy to do that as well.

Laurie: So lots of options for people they can support you in however works for them.

Elizabeth: Absolutely

Laurie: That's wonderful and do you have a website or are you on Facebook?

Elizabeth: I am on Facebook, Ben's Adventures book on Facebook and then for Ben Smiles Memorial Foundation I have a Facebook page for that as well. Bensmiles.org is the website. Or ben-adventures.com.

Laurie: Okay awesome so I will include all those links so people can find you in whatever way is best for them.

Elizabeth: And elizabethgerlach.com. I have.

Laurie: All the sites.

Elizabeth: I'm all over the place, too many sites and too many pages to keep track of.

Laurie: Hard to keep track of.

Elizabeth: And I'm on Instagram so we all have pages on Instagram as well.

Laurie: Okay I'll share all those links. Thank you so much, I really appreciate you talking to me. Especially on this busy day.

Elizabeth: Thank you it's been fun.

Laurie: Yes.

Elizabeth: Thanks for having me.

Laurie: Okay thanks bye everybody.

Elizabeth: Bye, bye thanks.