

Laurie: Hi everybody. Welcome to The Writer's Way podcast. I'm here with author Katie Melko. Welcome Katie!

Katie: Hi, how are you?

Laurie: I'm okay today . Hot tech, hot mess, no. High tech, hot mess, I don't know. Hot mess, always though so it's nothing new. How are you?

Katie: I'm doing good. It's finally sunny, here. We've had rain constantly, so.

Laurie: Oh, where are you?

Katie: In Connecticut.

Laurie: Oh, okay.

Katie: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: I'm in Canada, and it was nice for a couple of days, and now it's rainy again but.

Laurie: The grass will grow,

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: And it's not snow, so.

Katie: True true.

Laurie: So I'm happy. Well thanks for coming on here. How about you start us off with who you are and a bit about your background and all that kind of stuff.

Katie: Absolutely. So like you said, my name is Katie Melko. I've been a dental hygienist for about ten years now, and my career was the inspiration for my first children's book that I put out. I fell in love with writing when I got my masters degree, 'cause if anybody has gone through higher education that's all you do. That's right.

Laurie: That's very right.

Katie: Yeah. And so I started off with trying to just write articles for magazines that were related to dental, and through my public health work with children, I had found that there was this unknown fear of what they were gonna be walking into or going through in their appointments. So all of my children's books have an educational background to them, to try to help kids work through those fears and anxieties. So that hopefully when they go to their appointment they aren't as anxious.

Laurie: Cool. How many books do you have?

Katie: On my second. I have one that's out right now and my second one will be out in the fall.

Laurie: Okay. And what's that one gonna be?

Katie: It's about getting your first haircut.

Laurie: Oh!

Katie: So it's about fear of your first haircut. Yep.

Laurie: Just for my kids.

Katie: Thank you.

Laurie: Oh my goodness gracious.

Katie: Yes.

Laurie: Yeah, so.

Katie: The barbershop is so cool and high tech. They have a TV in the mirror.

Laurie: Oh cool.

Katie: So it was super exciting,

Laurie: But it didn't do it, when was my son was three yet. It didn't help. Okay. So you had the idea. You're a dental hygienist. You did all the writing. I wanna do a kids' book. So how did you start that process? Where did you start?

Katie: So I had no idea what I was doing at all. One of the first things that I did was write down the thoughts that I had about what I saw. So their initial reactions, what triggered them to be crying, scared, upset, the emotions that they had and then their general end of treatment, roundup of how they felt. So I wrote all those things down and then tried to character build. And then that led me to putting in a

story. I wanted the book to be based in a school, because just with everything that's going on across the world, we have so many different ethnic groups and populations that we have all integrated together that getting treatment in school seems to be the best way to keep the kid in school and get them treatment. So that's why the book is based in a school.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: And that also was where I was working and where I saw a lot of the issues. You see that in private practice too, but they have the 'I'm with my mom' or 'I'm with my dad' or grandmother element that helps.

Laurie: Oh okay.

Katie: But when they're in the school, we're treating them one-on-one, by themselves. It'd be me and a little kindergartner coming down, or a first grader, only five or six years old, walking into a room with a bunch of equipment and noise. So I formulated all of that and I didn't touch it for about two years.

Laurie: Yep.

Katie: I put it away and things fell to the wayside and so forth. And after my dog passed away, I decided I was gonna take the book back out and I was gonna use dogs and cats as characters to honor her life.

Laurie: Aw.

Katie: And so that's why the book is called Roxie's Adventure to the School Dentist, 'cause that was my dog.

Laurie: Aw, so the dog goes to the dentist?

Katie: Yes, the dog does to the dentist.

Laurie: That's super cute.

Katie: Yeah, and I went back through and edited it and I changed names and all those things, and then I had now built somewhat of process so. I like to just put things down and don't touch them for a few days.

Laurie: Smart.

Katie: So I forget about them. Then I'll reread it. I have found myself, as an author, that reading my work aloud really helps me gauge how the flow is. When you write something and you're reading it with your eyes, if it's already ingrained in your brain, so for me if I don't read it out loud,

Laurie: I don't read my mistakes.

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: Yeah. And if you record it and listen back. That's a great tool as well, if you can stand your voice.

Katie: My husband has heard this book way too many times.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: Yeah and then after I've done that about, I would say two times, then I send it to my editor.

Laurie: Okay. And how did you find the editor?

Katie: So most of the people that I've hired have been from a Facebook group for children's book author and illustrators. And then I have done some on Reedsy, which is a writer platform where you can hire anybody to help with different styles of editing, proofreading, those kinds of things.

Laurie: Oh okay. How do you spell that?

Katie: It's R-E-E-D-S-Y.

Laurie: Okay. I'll share that in the notes. That's handy. And did you find your illustrator in the group, as well?

Katie: I did and it's been really interesting and awesome to work with her, 'cause she lives in England.

Laurie: Oh.

Katie: And I'm from the States so I was a little hesitant working with somebody, but it's been amazing and thankfully the internet and social media makes it so much easier for people to connect.

Laurie: It's a whole new world, yeah.

Katie: Yeah, so.

Laurie: Okay. So when did you start this process? So when did you? You wrote it. You didn't touch it for a couple of years. And then your dog inspired you to move forward with it. So when did that?

Katie: So in 2016 I wrote this book and I got it in my hand and put it out to the world in December of 2018.

Laurie: Cool, okay. That's not bad.

Katie: So my second book.

Laurie: That's not bad really.

Katie: My second book was a much quicker turnaround. So I wrote it in an afternoon, edited it a few times, sent it to my editor, and it'll be out in the fall. So now that I know the process and I've found my niche or passion with writing, it's accelerated the process.

Laurie: Right. And so really you said you put it aside for two years, so if you take away the two years, it's really only less than a year that it took you to write, edit, illustrate and publish. So was there any really big surprises along the way that you weren't expecting?

Katie: Yes. And I think that's very normal with any process that you're unfamiliar with or even any process that you might have some familiarization with, but it's still new.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: There always is gonna be, no matter how prepared of a person you are, things you're gonna miss or not realize you were supposed to do. So for me, I started all of this, found my illustrator, and started doing all these things, and I didn't realize how much money it costs for you to start-to-finish publish a book on your own.

Laurie: Can you give us a ballpark, just for people listening who have no idea what to expect, what you paid? You don't have to give me that much.

Katie: I'll explain a little bit of the money, but I've spent five grand when I did my first book.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: But I also started my own business to protect my own assets. I wanted everything to be under a business name, so, god forbid, if anything happened, me and my husband wouldn't have to sell the house. He would kill me.

Laurie: The poor guys. They've endured a lot.

Katie: I came home and I was like, 'So I'm gonna do this'. And he's always been very, always motivates me and inspires me when I get down, which has been great. He's my biggest champion, but I was like 'So it's gonna cost this much money.' and he was like 'What? What did you say?'

Laurie: My husband's like that too. 'You're doing what now? What?'

Katie: He always says to me 'You do so much for the both of us.' 'I don't even have to do anything.'

Laurie: Aw.

Katie: 'You're so motivated.' So I had to incur, of course, some costs to setup my business name, do all that kind of stuff. And then, if you want good product, you have to be willing to pay good money. And that seems to be somewhat of a back and forth, I would say debate on the Facebook group about a lot of people want things for free or really cheap, but they want quality work. I invested a good amount of my money in my illustrator and the company that printed the book, 'cause those were the two most important things. You can write a great book, but if you don't have something that's gonna draw someone to pick your book up, then you're not gonna sell it. So be willing to endure those costs, 'cause they will benefit you down the road.

Laurie: Yeah, I agree.

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: Nothing comes for free.

Katie: Nope. And if it does, it should come with a warning sign.

Laurie: You don't want it, if it does come for free. Yes.

Katie: Absolutely.

Laurie: Cool. So you weren't expecting the costs, the outlay.

Katie: And I'm a get-it-done-ifier. I like things done pretty rapidly, once I'm on my mission. So patience is a virtue, as they say. Be patient. My poor illustrator once a week gets the 'How's it going?' message from me. Because I'm so eager.

Laurie: Oh yeah. That was me too. I totally get that. No patience.

Katie: I wanted to see what she was coming up with and she's, my illustrator's bringing my work to life.

Laurie: Yeah, yeah.

Katie: I couldn't wait.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: So I've had to practice that. She gives me deadlines now when I message her. She's like, 'You will hear from me by this day.'

Laurie: No contact before that. I love you, but.

Katie: It's a nice way of saying 'Leave me alone.'

Laurie: Oh, that's funny. Okay. So were there any other big surprises?

Katie: I had no idea about copyright law, so I had to learn, educate myself about that. And getting your own IBS, ISBN number.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: I had no idea about that.

Laurie: Yeah, yeah.

Katie: I had to learn how to write a copyright page. When your illustrator and your printing company are asking you 'What size did you want your book?' 'How thick of paper did you want?'

Laurie: Yeah. It's like another language when they talk about the paper.

Katie: 'The bleeding size needs to be.' And I'm like, 'What?'

Laurie: Can't you just do it?

Katie: A lot of research to make sure that I was putting out a general size book that kids wanna hold. All of those things and once I accomplished all of that, and I started getting out there to try to get my book in certain places. The number one thing I heard was 'Do you have a plush?' And I'm like,

Laurie: Oh really?

Katie: 'No.'

Laurie: I have a book.

Katie: I have a book.

Laurie: Celebrate me. I have a book.

Katie: So the plushes are in the works.

Laurie: I saw them on your website, so is that what it's gonna look like?

Katie: Absolutely, yeah. I got the prototype and they're making them as we speak. It's just the way things are. Kids like to buy a book and a plush together and have it to hold and carry around, and since she said that, the more and more I'm seeing it. I'm like, 'Oh okay.'

Laurie: Okay. So where did you go for that? 'Cause people like, everybody wants a plush.

Katie: I use a website called Albia. And I did a lot of my research on there, looking for printers, looking for my plush. Just the place where it had a good reputation. It's really scary. That was probably one of the things I could talk about for me, was when I first found a printer.

Laurie: Yeah?

Katie: She was like, 'Here's the wire transfer number.' 'Go to your bank and give this to them.' I was like, 'No.'

Laurie: That's not cool.

Katie: No. That's not good. So I had a really bad feeling about it and I pulled back from that printer. So my advice would be to stick with your gut feeling, if it doesn't feel good.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: Trust your instincts. Trust your feelings. But I ended up using this website and it's great, because it protects your money, so some companies don't use PayPal, you pay them directly through this website. Some companies use PayPal.

Laurie: What was the website called again? 'Cause I'll include it for people who wanna know. You said Albie?

Katie: Yeah, I will spell it for you.

Laurie: Is it Alibaba?

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: A-L-I-B-A-B-A.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: Dot com.

Katie: And they have an app, so I use the app a lot of the time.

Laurie: Oh okay.

Katie: But that has been a great way for me to communicate too, with them in China, because time zones and all that stuff is completely different.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: So I used that website to find, and then I would go to the Facebook group and say, 'Has anyone had any experience 'with this company before?' And that makes me feel better, 'cause again, you're a world away from these people that you're working with. Having a direct person say, 'Yeah, use them.' 'They were great.'. It's definitely a load off on the stress factor of what am I gonna get when it gets here?

Laurie: Am I gonna get anything? How many stuffies have you ordered?

Katie: Five hundred.

Laurie: Okay. Cool. Can I ask how much?

Katie: They were \$2.90 a piece. And you pay for the shipping. And the shipping is, is a higher cost, but.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: The more you buy the less the product goes down, on the product price. So I got five hundred of them. Like I said, it was \$2.90. I used, if anybody's interested, it's like Go GoToy, I wanna say. Let me look it up really quick for you.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: Gotatoy. All one word. G-O-T-A-T-O-Y.

Laurie: Okay. G-O-T-A-T-O-Y. Yeah, because I know people will be interested, for sure.

Katie: And you can look on my website or any of my social media. I've posted it. It's so cute. It's so soft. It's so squishy.

Laurie: Oh yay!

Katie: I gave it to my, she's gonna be two soon, when I first got it, and she fell in love with it. And I was like, 'Wait you can't have that back.' 'Cause it cost me a lot of money to make that one.' 'When the rest come, you can have one.' 'But you can't have this one.'

Laurie: You can have one of the \$2.90, not the hundred dollar one.

Katie: You can have those ones.

Laurie: I totally agree with you. Cool, okay. So where do you sell your books? Mostly based on Amazon? Do you sell in person to people?

Katie: I sell it in person, in a little boutique downtown, a small business shop, in my hometown. I do sell the Kindle version of my book on Amazon. I'm just not, whether it's me, in my advertising lacking capabilities, 'cause that's a whole nother thing you have to learn, how to market yourself, market your product. I don't know if it's that or not, but Amazon is just too expensive for me. I'm just too small right now, I think. Maybe once I get more books out. I'm paying forty dollars a month to post one book and if my book doesn't sell.

Laurie: Do you have an Advantage account? It sounds like you have Seller's Central account, maybe. Or a Vendor account, maybe.

Katie: So if you have an Advantage account, I was told you have to, they'll ask you to blanket ship them a bunch of books.

Laurie: Yeah, but not like ten, or twenty, or thirty.

Katie: And it's what, \$199 a month, a year or something like that?

Laurie: I didn't think there was a cost.

Katie: Oh yeah there is. It's, I wanna say, almost 200 dollars a year.

Laurie: For the Advantage account?

Katie: Yeah, so I just do the Kindle right now and sell it on my website.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: I'm hoping once my second book comes out and the plushes are here that I can utilize Amazon a little bit more. Barnes and Nobles requires you to have a distributor and, like I said, I just feel like it's I'm just too small at this point.

Laurie: Right. It's harder to get into the bigger doors, but you see a lot of people probably and have one-to-one contact with people where you can show them the stuff, you can show them the book.

Katie: So you have to, Barnes and Nobles, the one that's in my, that's closest to my home was interested in having me in for a meet-the-author reading but you have to sign up with them. So they were like, 'You would to pay.' Basically I would have to put all my books in a warehouse and they would take from the warehouse. They don't allow you to ship personally from your home.

Laurie: Oh.

Katie: I'm not doing a warehouse right now.

Laurie: Hey, it's just me.

Katie: I just need this little square of space in your warehouse.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: So that's the stuff that I'm, hopefully down the line I can totally do and get into, but right now, it's just.

Katie: Yeah, but right now you're just starting out really. It's been published for five months.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: It's just a lot of steps but once you learn them, they're not that difficult. And then once you learn them, you know them. It's a journey.

Laurie: Yes, yes. Absolutely it is. I've taken a lot of courses.

Katie: Oh okay.

Laurie: Pinterest courses.

Katie: And Instagram courses on how to corner market yourself and key words and SEOs.

Laurie: Oh good. Good for you.

Katie: Google Analytics and all those things to try to get my bearings.

Laurie: Yeah. And then after a few months, like I said, it clicks, I think, a little bit more. It's so overwhelming at first and then it clicks as you go. Well good for you. So what would you, what would you say to people who are you, maybe when you wrote your book, you had your idea, and then you let it slide a little bit? You two years ago. What advice would you have?

Katie: So I don't know that I would change anything, for me personally, because I'm so attached to the fact that my book has my dog in it. And that probably wouldn't have happened if I had done it immediately, but don't. If you've written something and you believe in your work and your message, don't wait. Don't. I know what it feels like to get discouraged and to feel like you don't know where to go. Join a group of people who are doing the same kind of things you are. And if you drop a message like 'Zero motivation today.' 'Don't know where to turn.' 'I'm having a really bad day.' The people in those groups are great. They lift you up. They give you advice. They may ask you some hard questions 'Exactly what are you struggling with?' But everybody is so eager to help. It's a great community. I don't know how many times I go on there and I'm like, 'I don't know what this means.' 'Please somebody enlighten me.'

Laurie: I agree, 'cause everybody's going through the same process, but there will be somebody who's a step ahead.

Katie: Yeah, for instance, it was about a month ago now, I went and did a reading and nobody showed up.

Laurie: Oh!

Katie: Not one person. Okay? And it was gut wrenching for me. I was embarrassed. I was mortified. And I took it really personally, like it was about me and my book.

Laurie: Okay.

Katie: But at the end of the day, I came home and I wrote on that Facebook group. 'I had a book reading today and no one showed up.' 'And I'm mortified.' I wanna say I got over 270 comments.

Laurie: Holy moly!

Katie: From this group, telling me like 'Keep pushing forward.' 'You can't let these things stop you.' 'It's happened to me before.' Authors that are big deals have gone through these same things. And it was really helpful to hear. Okay I'm not alone. I'm not the only person this has happened to.

Laurie: Isn't it incredible the support you can get from a Facebook group? Five years ago, it would have been like, 'What? Facebook?' And the comradery. It's just incredible how you can connect with people.

Katie: That are all over the world.

Laurie: Absolutely.

Katie: If you use social media for the tool, like that, it is so beneficial.

Laurie: Yeah. If you find the right group of people, 'cause I'm sure there's some out there that wouldn't be as helpful and supportive, and I'll share the link, but the one that we're in together

Katie: It's incredible.

Laurie: It's amazing.

Katie: And they're always like, 'I did this.' 'You should check this out.' This is how I met you and connected with you. They're always so eager to share their success points too. 'This happened for me.' 'You should check them out.' 'It was a great resource or great connection.' 'It's helped me on so many different platforms.' So nobody is greedy for their own success. Everybody, for the most part, in that group wants everyone to grow, exponentially, as well as they are. And that's, it's refreshing. Especially in this type of world that we live.

Laurie: That's true.

Katie: So when I got home that day and I felt like that. I was like, 'That's it.' 'I'm never signing up for another reading again.' 'This was terrible.'

Laurie: Yeah, yeah.

Katie: And after reading all the comments and stuff, I was like, 'Okay.' 'I had my pity party.' 'Let's go.'

Laurie: Oh good.

Katie: Dust off your knees. Just get back up and let's keep hitting the pavement. Sometimes that's what you have to do.

Laurie: Yeah. Yeah. I feel like people in real life are so busy, for better or for worse, and whether it's real or whether it's not real or whatever. But it's really hard to get people out of their houses. And for something so, everybody's online, so I feel like the money is more online and connecting with people on social media. And I feel like, especially as creative types, we have a love-hate relationship with being online. And there's all the fear-mongering and stuff like that, as well. Like, 'Don't come to my house and kill me' 'if I put a YouTube video out there.' But that's not really what's happening.

Katie: And if people want to listen to you, they will. You're gonna reach people so much harder than you will somebody else. Somebody might really need to hear your message today. There's some times when I see posts and I'm like, 'How did they know I was feeling that way today?' You know what I mean?

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: So it's great that people share their success stories, their horrors, their good and bad and ugly. And you have to have a thicker skin too, with this kind of work. Not everyone's gonna love everything that you put out there. And some people are ugly.

Laurie: Some people are mean about it.

Katie: Yeah, they're really mean about it.

Laurie: Yeah, yeah. Some are born destructive.

Katie: I truly believe you have to believe in your own work in order to succeed. If you believe in what you're doing and your message and you're passionate about it, that will be your light to fuel you through your journey.

Laurie: Oh I love that. Thank you for sharing that. Okay. So we'll wrap up but will you share your social media and your website and that, so that people can look you up and find you?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. So if you wanna follow my business it's @12pawspubllc. And I'm on Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. Pretty much them all.

Laurie: Why 12 paws?

Katie: And if you wanna follow me personally it's @katie3057.

Laurie: 3057.

Katie: Yep. And my website is www.12pawspub.com

Laurie: Okay, so why is it 12 paws? Sorry, I'm just curious about the 12.

Katie: You'll see once you start looking at my social media that I have two dogs right now.

Laurie: Yeah.

Katie: And Roxie was the dog that I lost so that's the twelve.

Laurie: So you have three. Got it. Okay.

Katie: Yeah.

Laurie: Cool. Well thank you so much for chatting with me today and I wish you the best of luck with the book.

Katie: Thank you so much.

Laurie: That's coming out in the fall. And I hope people look you up and look at that adorable plush.

Katie: Aw. Thank you.

Laurie: You're welcome. Okay, bye everyone.