

[Narrator] Welcome to The Wrighter's Way podcast, where we celebrate writers who have completed their books and inspire writers who haven't. Join Laurie and her guests as they talk about writing, books, and life in between chapters.

Laurie: Sponsored by the I Can Handle It, I'm a Teacher t-shirt. Find it at lauriwrighter.com. Hello and welcome to The Wrighter's Way podcast. I'm here with the marvelous Andrea, aka Andi Cann. Welcome!

Andrea: Thank you, thank you so much!

Laurie: You're welcome, thank you so much for coming on this with me. I appreciate it. We had to switch programs, so I'm really hoping both of us will be on the recording.

Andrea: Me too, me too.

Laurie: Okay, so Andrea, start off and tell everybody your history, your bio, you know, what were you before you were an author?

Andrea: Wow, okay. Well, I had a very busy and varied career. Spent a lot of time in sales, selling technology, and then spent some time in architecture as a director of marketing, and then owned my own marketing company. And then I went into healthcare and I became a, sort of an advisor and a consultant, internal consultant, for telemedicine. So, really kind of not your typical author path. I'm actually a professor at Arizona State University teaching healthcare innovation and technology, so it's a little bit not what most people would expect from a children's author. But there's this other side to me besides the analytical side that is creative and loves, loved being a mom. My kids are grown now. They're both, my son in one semester will be graduated from college, and my daughter will be graduated with her master's degree, so it feels really good. And I started the first, I wrote, when my kids were little, I wrote my first book. I mean, I've been writing since I was a little kid. I love writing, and reading, and Nancy Drew was my inspiration, I read 'em all four times each. And anyway, my dog is--

Laurie: I was gonna say, let's just tell people what you're doing.

Andrea: Yeah, if I look weird, it's 'cause my dog's like, play with me! Anyway, so, when my kids were little, I made up a story called Mr. Hooploops and His Amazing Glass, and I've always had a really keen interest in the arts. So, this is my dog, he's very excited about being on the podcast. Look at the screen, look at the screen. Hi, my name's Bo! Okay, you need to get down. Anyway, so, we, I wrote the story and I told it to my kids. Because I was really interested in art, I participated in a lot of teaching of art to students in my kids' schools, just as a hobby and as a volunteer. And so, I really loved Chihuly glass, and there was a Phoenix Art Museum sort of display and large installation, and so, I made up this story about a man who's a glassblower, and coincidentally I grew up in Ohio, in the Toledo area, where glass is one of the primary industries. So, my dad worked in the glass industry. I grew up going to Cedar Point as a kid, which is, it's like an amusement park, and they had glassblowers there. So, I almost didn't even realize how much it was in my DNA, this glass thing, but I wrote this book, and every year, my daughter's

like, mommy, you're an author! And then she got older and she's like, you know, 'cause you wrote a kid's book. And it's sort of like, I felt kind of a little guilty almost, like oh my gosh, I fooled her, 'cause it's not really published, it's just sort of written down. And so, every year it was on my to-do list, you know, publish that book. And finally, about a year and a half ago, I was looking at options to publish a textbook, and I stumbled upon self-publishing, indie publishing, and it was like this wondrous place, you know, like wow, I can, you know, create things, and publish them, and people might actually buy them. This is like a miracle!

Laurie: That's what I thought, what!

Andrea: I know! Well, and you know, there was always, for years, 'cause, you know, and I had actually, over the years, off and on, I would say, okay, that's it, I'm gonna be a write. And I actually had put some inquiries into publishers for different kinds of books, and I even had some successful queries, but then I'd be like, no, you know, for a variety of reasons, mostly because, you know, I had a pretty lucrative career that was very technical that I enjoyed, and I thought this is too risky. And anyway, so, bottom line is, I fell in love with it, and Mr. Hooploops and His Amazing Glass, this is my first one, and it's won four awards, actually, and it has been, up until recently, it was my best selling kid's book, and so I had some subsequent books based on it, like I had one called Mr. Hooploops Meets Rex: A Very Clumsy Boy. So, he's got, you know, he's got this big feet and he's in a glass factory, so.

Laurie: Oh, danger!

Andrea: Yeah. So anyways, so that's part of the story.

Laurie: That's wonderful! Do you sell them at Cedar Point?

Andrea: You know, I sell Mr. Hooploops is being carried, that book is being carried by, this is like, blows my mind, it's so exciting. It's being carried by the Murano Museum in Italy, in Venice, Italy, yeah. So, they bought, I sent them off to a number, I haven't approached Cedar Point yet, but I sent 'em off to a number of museums, because in the back of all the books is a, an explanation about artists, and gives, you know, examples of research, you know, people to research. And I sent queries out to a number of museums, and the museum in Murano, Italy said, hey, we wanna carry 'em in our gift shop, so.

Laurie: How exciting!

Andrea: I know, that was a nice moment, when that letter arrived.

Laurie: Yeah, I would think so. So, my next question is sort of about the feeling, so I feel like I don't even have to ask you, I mean. But a lot of people watching this are, you know, people who haven't written the book yet, so they're a little bit stuck in that feeling of overwhelm, maybe some frustration, and that vulnerable, you know, that really hard part where you have to put your baby out into the world. So, was it similar to that, or was it pretty easy?

Andrea: You know, I think I can relate to that feeling a lot because I'm trying to write an adult fiction book, and I have that same feeling. Like, I've started three of them, and I just can't quite get over the hump. I mean, I'm going to, I'm going to! But the kids' books, I had a different, almost a different mindset like, well, you know, this is just for my kids, and it's fun, and I never really, I mean, I thought this is great, it's gonna be my legacy, but I never expected to actually turn it into a business. I thought it would be more of a fun, you know, like hobby. But then, as I started to get into it, I realized, wow, there's really a business here, and not only that, but I love doing this. And so, I would say, for authors out there that are getting started, don't stop, I mean, don't let it stop you. I know, I mean, the feeling I have with the adult fiction books is, oh my god, is my writing good enough, is it gonna be good enough, is it gonna be like everybody else's? And for whatever reason, with kid's books, I kinda feel like, and I think it's because there's a combination of photos or graphics and story, that everything is unique, and even if it just appeals to one child out there, do it, I mean, just do it, because that will be a success. You don't have to be the new Dr. Seuss, or you know, Dav Pilkey, or Laurie Wright, you know? You can just, you know, and then see what happens. Think of it like taking the first step on a journey and you don't know where it's gonna go.

Laurie: Awesome, so you weren't so nervous about it beforehand. You're nervous about your adult books, but not, you weren't so nervous about the kids' books, but then you published them, turned it into a business, and now there's a museum in Italy carrying your books. And how many titles do you have published?

Andrea: I have 14 titles published. I have three series, and a number of standalones. Ironically my, once again, it's just one of those things that I never would've guessed, but I thought, Mr. Hoopie loops took off in the sense of I had a BookBug and I had a lot of downloads, but I had no inventory of any other books. So, it sort of did great, then nothing. Although, I did get a Kindle bonus, you know, but so that kind of encouraged me to continue. So, I added some other books. Alabama Oh is about a little girl who is a botanist and an artist, and the reason why her name's Alabama Oh is because I named her after Georgia O'Keefe, so I just thought of, you know, a nearby state, but it turns out that Alabama also means plant gatherer, so it kinda all worked out, yeah. It's really, she's darling. But she has not been very successful as a series, unfortunately, and I'm not quite sure why. But then I have the series What Makes A, so I have What Makes a Bird a Bird, What Makes a Bug a Bug. What Makes a Mammal a Mammal just came out. So, those are really fun because, as a kid, I was always really interested in science, and it's fun to explore and understand things. So, but my best number one seller still, by far, is The Magic of Friendship Snow, and it's a story about a little girl who is lonely and doesn't know how to make friends, and she meets a magic snowman who becomes her friend and then teaches her how to be a friend. And I have it translated now into four languages other than English, including Japanese, which is a challenge. I speak a little bit of German and French, and so I could kinda figure it out. I mean, I had professional translators do it, but I could kind of figure out what I was doing, like is this on the right page. But Japanese was, it's, wow. But it's out there, so it's thanks to the, shout-out to Julien on Amazon support, because he went way above and beyond yesterday. He spent hours with me figuring it out.

Laurie: Oh, wow.

Andrea: Yeah, they have really good support there, a great team.

Laurie: And I'm wondering, I'm just thinking to myself, you know, when reviews start coming in in Japanese.

Andrea: I know.

Laurie: You won't have any idea what, well, I guess you can use that auto-translator maybe or something.

Andrea: Right, no, I've thought about that. I've thought, you know, 'cause my tendency with, because I've been an entrepreneur my whole life, I mean, I started having businesses when I was five or six years old, you know, starting with lemonade stands, and then, you know, everything else, the mowing people's lawns, and taking care of things.

Laurie: So it's really in your blood.

Andrea: Yeah, it totally, I love being an entrepreneur. And so, one of the things as an entrepreneur that I do is I jump in first and ask questions later, so this is one of those situations. One of those situations where I've jumped in and I've gone, huh, hmm, well, if everybody hates it, at least I don't know. I mean, I guess there is the star ratings, but.

Laurie: Yeah, that'll be a good indication.

Andrea: Like, okay, something's wrong, I keep getting one and two stars, that's a problem. But it was so funny because, I mean, I didn't even realize that if, because of some of the Asian languages are read up and down and some are read side to side, and one of the conversion tools changed it to up and down, so I was like, is that the way it's supposed to be, or is that a mistake? Yeah, it was a mistake, but.

Laurie: It was a mistake?

Andrea: It was a mistake, Japanese is read, I think, right to left and not up and down, so. But it's like, those things that you don't even, and even the way they turn pages is different.

Laurie: It's backwards.

Andrea: Well, it's their way, it's different.

Laurie: You're right, I shouldn't say that. Backwards is how I see that, because they read right to left, so it.

Andrea: Right, exactly, so it's, but see, that's one of the things I love about this business, and it's one of the things I love about, about being all about literacy, and reading, and it's that it's a constant quest of learning, and growing, and evolving as a person, as a businessperson, as an artist, and as a citizen of the world, as corny as that sounds. But, I mean, you've had tremendous success with your books, and I was so inspired when I saw I Can Handle It in, I think it was, I don't know if it's Chinese or Korean, but you know, it was so cool to see that, and it actually is one of the things that gave me the idea. I'm like, oh my gosh, you know, of course you have an agent that's doing that for you, but with services like Fiver and Upwork, you know, it's not hard for enterprising people to find their own way.

Laurie: Yes, and you are very enterprising.

Andrea: Oh, thank you.

Laurie: So impressive. I couldn't handle it! I couldn't imagine doing that myself. Is that the best thing that you've learned, you would say, is just all these sort of different aspects that have gone into?

Andrea: Yeah, I think it's, what I love about the business is that, and what I love about writing also, is that there's so many different, I hope I don't tear up, but there's so many different aspects to it, and I love the fact, like, I just saw on Facebook that there was a teacher who took The Magic of Friendship Snow, and she read it to her class, and then she created little snowballs, and the kids sat around this mat throwing snowballs at each other, pretending to be friends. I mean, it's just like, oh my gosh, you know? I made a difference in the world of those kids that day.

Laurie: Yeah!

Andrea: It just made me feel, so that makes me feel really good. And then, you know, I get feedback saying, you know, my nieces didn't understand how to make friends, it was all about themselves, and then we had a conversation, you know, because of this book, and now they kind of have a better idea of how to go about making friends. So, there's that world changing aspect of it that I just love, and then there's the business. When I say business, I mean there's the process of learning about other cultures, learning about how, you know, books are read in other, and what's cherished. Like, sort of a weird aside, I wrote this book at Christmastime called Counting Christmas, and it was meant to be just a real basic book about, you know, one reindeer, two snowmen, and I used a really interesting sort of graphics. It's really fun. And they sold in France more than anywhere else. Like, the French people loved them. And you know, it's like, who know? Like, I sold I think one in the United States, and I sold 15 or 20 in France, and it was in English. So, I don't know if it was French, you know, families teaching their kids English, or if they just loved the designs, or what.

Laurie: That's interesting.

Andrea: But that's what's cool about this is that it's an international business, and there's other people like, I think her name, Pragma Tomar?

Laurie: Yeah, Tomar.

Andrea: She has done an amazing job with her books, and really introducing people to the culture of India, and being Hindu, and I love that. I mean, I love seeing these different, like, it kinda brings us together.

Laurie: Oh, I love that. And you know, love Amazon or hate Amazon or whatnot, I mean, we won't talk about Jeff Bezos, but it's really, it opens that global market for everyday people. Like, I am a regular, everyday person, right? And you're a regular everyday person, but here your books are selling in France, and a book you put together yourself and you did it, you know, you upload the files, and away they go, and the sell in France, you know, et cetera, and Japan. And to me, the possibility, and that's why, you know, a couple years ago when I first went into this, it was just mind-blowing, the possibilities, and you don't have to be super knowledgeable about the publishing industry, you don't need to have agents, or a team, or anything else, just regular people can do it and sell all over the world.

Andrea: Exactly, and I think, the one thing I appreciate about entrepreneurs like Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, and Steve Jobs, is that they have made markets. They have fundamentally shifted and changed the way business is done. And they were the first ones to conceive of the different things, right? And so, to them, in my view, they deserve the rewards, you know? It's an astronomical amount of money, but yet, think about the people that they employ, think about how it's changed. I mean, Amazon has completely changed the way people do business, and how they sell, and like you said, you and I, as people, can sell in Japan.

Laurie: Yeah, and it's because of Amazon the book business has completely, completely changed in the past 10 years.

Andrea: Well, and I think, you know, traditional publishing has such an important role, but there really is only so many people that can, I'm so sorry, somebody's at our front door. I'm trying to ignore it, but my dog is freaking out.

Laurie: You want me to pause?

Andrea: Yeah, can you pause for a second?

Laurie: Okay, so let's talk about, because I asked this very personal question of everybody because I like the regular people like us to have a good idea of how it's all gonna play out. So, how many dollar signs have your books earned? So how long, tell us, I don't know if we talked about how long you've been doing this for?

Andrea: About 18 months.

Laurie: Okay, and how many dollar signs about?

Andrea: Total, or per month, or?

Laurie: Per month, sure.

Andrea: Four dollar signs per month.

Laurie: Four dollar signs per month, nice. And is there any--

Andrea: But that's new, that's only been since November.

Laurie: Okay.

Andrea: November, December, December was really good for me, and November was too. November, December, and I managed to keep some momentum in January, so I've been really lucky and very--

Laurie: You haven't, okay, so pause. You haven't been lucky, you work your butt off.

Andrea: That is true.

Laurie: Let's just put that out there, you are working this as a business every day, full-time, you're hustling, you are churning books out. Yeah, you're not lucky.

Andrea: That's true, I don't wanna say lucky like, oh, it just sorta happened. I don't mean that, I mean that there are other people out there that are also working hard, that are also writing, and I'm fortunate because I do have a marketing background, and I think that helps me a lot. I also think, because I've run businesses before, that there are, I don't have as many hills to climb as some other authors. On the other hand, I think there are other authors that are probably more talented, so I mean, you know, it just kinda, like I said, I mean, I have yet to write a full-length novel, and there are people out there that are, you know, so, I mean, I love the children's books, and they are beautiful, and all those things, a variety of them are. My next mountain hill to climb is to actually finish a grownup novel.

Laurie: Good luck.

Andrea: Can I actually put out 60000 words, or 80000, or 110000? So, those are the people that I admire, like oh my gosh, how have you written so many words?

Laurie: So many words that all go together in a nice way.

Andrea: Exactly!

Laurie: Have you spent your money, your loads of money? Have you bought anything exciting, or do you use the money on anything really, you know?

Andrea: Mostly it's to pay off an investment in my business, to be honest. But I was able, I bought, my husband's a tech guy too, and so, I bought him a virtual reality Oculus Rift, I think it's called Oculus Go, and so, you put it on, and it's really interesting.

Laurie: Cool, for Christmas, did you get him this?

Andrea: Yeah, I did, I got him that for Christmas, so that's been fun. But I'm working towards, when I hit a certain number, when I hit five dollar signs every month, I am going to buy a horse, so that's my big, yeah, that's my big thing. 'Cause we have property for horses, but we don't have any horses on it yet. They're kinda pricey, but when I hit five figures, that's what I'm working towards, is to get a horse.

Laurie: Oh, I love that. Oh, good for you, yay. How exciting, send me a picture of your horse.

Andrea: I will, I will.

Laurie: Once it starts, right? Once the momentum starts, you're good. Okay, any last thoughts that you wanna leave us with, any last piece of advice for new writers, or your biggest ah-ha moment along the way?

Andrea: I think, you know, a lot of people have said this, whether it's Austin McLean, or Dawson, Mark Dawson, or a number of others, just keep writing, and keep writing, and keep writing, and keep writing, because Magic of Friendship Snow, I put it out last April and there were crickets. Like, I had no reviews, I had no sales, nothing. And then, I was really blessed, if you wanna call it that, or BookBug picked it up, and it took off from there. And I remember thinking to myself, this is a great book, why aren't people buying it? You know, it's so sweet. Like, oh well, onto the next one! And now it's my best seller, so you just never know, and so, just keep writing, especially, and I would say the other ah-ha thing is write what's in your heart, because if you write what's in your heart, your heart will connect with other people's hearts, and when hearts open, not only can you make a difference, but you can also make some money.

Laurie: Oh, I love it. Thank you, thanks so much for chatting with me today.

Andrea: You're welcome, thank you for having me, I really appreciate it.

Laurie: Oh, good. Okay, I'll talk to you soon when you get your horse.

Andrea: Take care, bye-bye.

Laurie: Bye.

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