



Nicola Slawson - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

INTERVIEW: Nicola Slawson

Parul: [00:00:00] Hello, writers. Hello, and welcome to the London Writers Salon podcast. I'm Parul, I'm your host, and I'm the co founder of the London Writers Salon, and our interviews are a chance for us to go behind the scenes, with a writer, to talk about the art of writing and the reality of navigating a creative career.

And today we have the honor of speaking with Nicholas Lawson. She's an author and journalist. Her book *Single*, which you'll see behind her, is out this week. She's also a member of the London Writers Salon. She attends Writers Hour. She's a Gold member. And we've been with her on her journey. So today we'll be talking to her about how she broke into journalism with no contacts, how she launched a newsletter, *The Single Supplement*, and grew it from scratch and landed a book deal.

We're talking about how she balances her creative portfolio of freelance journalism, writing a newsletter, and writing and publishing a book. I have some questions for Nicola, but in around an hour or so, we will open it up to the room for your questions. Do [00:01:00] chime in on the chat. I'm loving the enthusiasm for you in this room, Nicola.

Do chime in on the chat if you have any questions and we will get around to that at the end. Without further ado, welcome to the London Writers Salon. Nicola!

Nicola Slawson: Oh, thanks so much for having me.

An honor

Parul: What a journey to have witnessed you over, over time and for you to be in this place. I'm, Matt and I are both, and the team are just so excited for you where you're today much.

Nicola Slawson: oh much.

I literally couldn't have done it without the London Writer Salon so I couldn't be more grateful. .

Parul: That's so lovely to hear. So we have so much to talk about with regards to where you are today, but as always, we like to start a little bit earlier. I'm curious, what was your relationship with reading as a child?

Nicola Slawson: I was a massive bookworm as a child. I was the kid who would pretend to go to bed and then stay up with a torch under my duvet and finish reading my book. And sometimes I'd be reading my book and my parents would be talking to me and I just completely I couldn't hear what they were saying.

I even walked [00:02:00] down the street reading books, it's like, if I got into a book then I just no, I couldn't speak to anyone. And I would write stories as well. So when we got to school, we got to do little activities before the school day actually started. And I always used to write stories about a little bunny rabbit.

And then when I was a bit older, I I just kept going to the library. I'd always use my pocket money for books. But my dad always used to take me to the library. He used to go on a Tuesday.

And then, yeah, sometimes I'd go with my mom as well, but but yeah, I was a massive book worm as a child.

And then when I was about 17, I started reading newspapers. I

read magazines before that. I was a big magazine reader. But then I got into newspapers in my late teens.

Parul: And that brings us really to, to where you're part of your career today, is your writing has appeared in, you're a journalist, your writing has appeared in The Guardian, Huffington Post, The Observer, Sunday Telegraph, and so many [00:03:00] others.

But my understanding is that it was quite the journey to get here. How did you become a journalist? What was that path for you?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, so when I was at school, I wanted to be a journalist. I imagined myself as being a journalist on one of the I was obsessed with Just 17, J17. So I was imagining myself a magazine journalist.

But I just lived in Shrewsbury. I I come from my, none of my, neither of my parents went to university, nor did my sister. It wasn't expected of me. And So it was more expected that I stay in my hometown, and so I did end up going to university because I got involved in this arts centre.

And when I was at university I got heavily involved in the student radio and the student newspaper. And eventually I became the editor of the student newspaper. And then I just didn't know what to do after university because I didn't know anyone. And I couldn't afford to move to London at the time to be an intern.

So I just ended up my first job was actually in PR in [00:04:00] Brighton as an assistant. It was actually events that we were working in, and then I moved it, worked in the arts back home and would occasionally write articles. I wrote an article for the Arts Council website and sometimes I'd write articles as the marketing manager for an art centre and I'd write articles and the local newspaper would just print all of my words and just put someone else's byline on it and I was like, hey, that's not fair.

So it was, I was always thinking, oh, I really want to actually do it myself properly. And then I was living abroad, teaching English as a foreign language, just as a way to see the world, basically. And I had a blog and I just couldn't still get this idea of being a journalist out of my head.

And so I Googled how to get a job as a Guardian news reporter. That I think it was news journalist or something like that. And came across the Scott Trust Bursary, which is all about, so most people who are working in national newspapers in the UK, they've gone to private school, and then they've gone to [00:05:00] somewhere like Oxford or Cambridge.

And their parents are likely either in the media or in some kind of big industry kind of thing. In London, so It's a very sort of small group of people, and then lots of them know each other, and lots of them are related, and there's lots and lots of nepotism in journalism. And so the Scott Trust, which owns The Guardian, they have this bursary to try and diversify journalism.

And it's just for anyone who doesn't fit that kind of elite, private school, Oxbridge kind of And I basically made it my life's mission to get that bursary. So I moved countries and moved back to the UK. I

I

got myself an internship on Positive News, which is now a magazine, but it was a newspaper at the time.

And I lived and worked in a boarding school looking after teenagers. I would sometimes Be finishing my [00:06:00] night, like looking after the teenagers where I was on call at 8:00 AM doing the handover and then run running to get the tube and then going straight to work my internship in the day.

And sometimes then I was doing that over and over.

Parul: And when did your MA come in? So you went to the city?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah,

the Scott Trust bursary. They paid for my ma so I went to the interview and, managed

to get it. I told this story about like working in the boarding school and everything and they just thought it was Mad what I was doing.

So one of the reasons I got it, I think and So yeah, I started the MA in the September, the following September. So I've been in London a year. So yeah, I got this Scott Trust bursary and that opened doors for me basically because People in the Guardian know if you're a Scott Traspersary person. And

I was doing the MA and then I started to write a little bit for the Guardian on the side.

And then I was doing

a

few weeks work experience as well alongside my MA. So [00:07:00] yeah.

Parul: How were you getting those articles in the Guardian? Had you pitched them?

Nicola Slawson: So the first one I wrote was actually about

Local

journalism and

Different models for local journalism. And I think that I came into the Guardian for something, some kind of meeting, and somebody must have introduced me.

And they were like, Oh, what are you interested in? At the time I was writing for Positive News, and I was really interested in the media, writing about the media and how it works and everything. I just, I think I'd done something like a hyper local journalism thing for Positive News. So it was a similar article, but it was a broader piece.

And so it was a, it wasn't really a pitch. It was more just like a chat.

And

So that was the very first one. And I didn't know for ages if they're going to use it. And then I didn't know if I was going to get paid and yeah. So it was all very exciting when they actually did use it. And then I did get paid.

Parul: That's awesome. And did, and today I, do you have lots of contacts across the papers, which means you can pitch? Is that how you get [00:08:00] commissioned?

Nicola Slawson: So I once you start in journalism, because people move around a lot, so some of the people that I've written for, I've written for at the Guardian, then they might have moved to HuffPost, then I ended up following them, and then they moved somewhere else, and I wrote for them there, and then so one editor I've written for her at the Guardian, HuffPost, and Tortoise, and the other one I've written for her at the Guardian, HuffPost, and Evening Standard and then sometimes colleagues.

they might be reporters, but they might end up as editors. So some of the people who write for who work on the iPaper, for example, they used to be my colleagues people move around a lot, so you do get to know people. And then, The scary thing is, you still have to sometimes completely cold pitch someone, and especially when I'm trying to branch out, because I was known as a news

news

reporter for years, and then I've tried to make myself a bit more of a feature writer, lifestyle, opinion writer, and so that's when I've had to do the cold pitching, which everyone has to do [00:09:00] and, yeah.

Sometimes more successful than others, so

Parul: I have a few questions around this. So first of all, And maybe you have this, you're a gold member, so you might have people asking you there. But I'm curious if someone wanted to pitch, someone wanted to break into journalism, they haven't had the connections that you've now had, where should they start?

What's a good starting point for creating that network?

Nicola Slawson: So yeah, when I first I first actually pitched Positive News before I got the internship, and what I did was I just, read the newspaper and you get a feel for what they might go for. And another thing that I read in a book once was to go through a magazine or a newspaper and This is quite time consuming, but I did do it when I was first starting out, because obviously I did have this sort of inroad at the Guardian, but not at other places, and I've nearly always been freelance but basically [00:10:00] going through, say, a magazine, and you notice which sections are regular features, and then you might start noticing the same kind of names, and then you'll be able to see whether they're staff journalists.

So if they're staff journalists, then that section is usually going to be written by a staff. staffer, but then there might be other sections and you realise that it's completely different names each time and that's probably written by a freelancer. So those are the sections that you need to pitch to because that's where the editor will have a gap and they So if you just start randomly pitching and you haven't really tailored it, then they might not have anywhere to put it.

So it's all about helping the editor with their job, which is to fill the pages. And yeah, they'll have regular things that they just give to their staff to staff. reporters, but there'll be other bits that they always commission to freelancers. So I tried to get to know a little bit in different publications which bit was for freelancers to help the editor out basically.

And then and then the other thing you can do is obviously now [00:11:00] it's not the pandemic, you can ask to go for coffee with people. And so I did go for coffee. Does

Parul: that work because I feel like lots of people would be emailing an editor to go for coffee.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, I think I usually had written an article or two.

And so they got to know you a little bit, and then you might suggest Oh, I'm in near your part of town next week, or whatever, have you got time for a coffee? When I was in the Guardian, because it's such a massive place, that's what I did as well at the Guardian I'd Write a few things for someone and be like, oh, do you fancy a coffee?

Or sometimes they'd ask me, actually quite often editors would ask me and then you go with loads of ideas, but also I would always ask them questions like, oh which section, Which kind of regular feature do you find most that people aren't pitching for, or that you find most difficult?

And then the other thing is just like randomly helping them out. So sometimes they'd be like, oh, has anyone got an idea? We've got a big gap and we need it filling and they might email out to their regular freelancers, so I'd always try and like quickly get an idea and then, write it [00:12:00] really quickly so that they had, so they'd remember me because I was someone who was helpful.

Parul: I like that, I like the way you're building a network and actually that's something I was thinking about a lot as I read your book and I saw your acknowledgement section and I see how you interact on social media. I feel like you're someone who's really good at building a network.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah.

Parul: Yeah. And I definitely have some questions around that.

More broadly, but when it comes to this side of things, trying to build a network with journalists, has it ever worked for you online? Have you ever been able to create that relationship, maybe by having a virtual coffee?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah yeah, I've had Zoom calls with editors and also just getting chatting to people on, Instagram DMs sometimes,

Parul: So this is you following editors of the magazines and commenting on their pieces.

Nicola Slawson: I actually did that more on Twitter when I was using Twitter more so I'm not really using. But yeah, on Twitter, there was a period where just all the editors and journalists were on there. And then you start

liking things that they're doing, or, being interested, sharing their, [00:13:00] the things that they're editing, because you can usually tell what they've edited, because they'll start sharing that, and if,

I don't do it in a fake way. I'd always say if it was actually interested in whoever it was because I think it's all about being genuine and authentic. But yeah, I'm quite passionate about the networking thing actually, because I feel like a lot of people think, oh, networking is so cringe and gross.

Whereas I don't see it like networking in a sort of business way. I more see it as you're basically making friends and you can have fun and make friends. And Then end up helping each other out and also trying not to see yourself as like lesser than an editor because actually my experience is some people end up as editors and then they might be Freelancers again, and then they might be editors again and like you're always like once you've started in journalism You'll realize that people are always one or the other and they might switch So it's not like they're better than you because they've worked their way up You're helping them as much as they're helping you.

So trying to see it as more of an [00:14:00] equal relationship. And you can always tell the editors who are really good at that, who don't see themselves as more superior. And they're the ones you want to work with, obviously.

with,

Parul: Yeah, absolutely. I just went to the J. Pearl Literary Festival last week and I definitely approached it as trying to make friends rather than networking. How many people can I befriend? And then it's

Nicola Slawson: a bit more fun rather than, yeah, sometimes I go to like women in journalism events and you just feel like this pressure, like I should speak to people by the end of the night. And then I started going to this hacks and hackers event, which totally nothing really that I ever would write about, but it was all tech people and journalists.

But they would have really interesting talks and then afterwards, everyone would just try and make friends and it was called networking, but it was, I'd always make really good friends and end up having great chats and then those people might introduce you to someone as well. So you just never know.

Like it might be someone, yeah, a tech journalist or a tech editor, you're like, I don't write about that, but they might know somebody who does [00:15:00] do what you want to do. So

yeah.

Parul: And then on that same subject, there's an awkward part of. Networking stroke, making new friends, where sometimes someone doesn't respond to you fast enough or at all.

How do you approach that? So if you're asking, say there's someone

On a social media platform, you've approached them a couple of times and they haven't responded to you, at what point do you stop?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, I think sometimes you just have to think. very, I don't try not to take it personally, just think, okay, they're really busy.

Or sometimes you have that sort of thought in your head are they purposely ignoring me? Do they think I'm bad? But usually it's just people are busy. They might not. They might not like that approach, they might be more like email. Some people are now all on WhatsApp. Some editors will voice note me about an article they're thinking of commissioning me to do.

It's, every editor's different, whereas other editors would only do email. Or, some editors are quite old fashioned, would want you to pick up the phone. So yeah, it's just trying to work out [00:16:00] what each person wants. And yeah, not taking it too personally. Yeah. And also, it might just be a case of just keep pitching because you just haven't got the right.

you haven't got it right yet

because sometimes you just keep pitching and they can see that you're persevering, so they might give you a bit of a leg up and be like, yeah, that's the direction you might want to go in. My friend Donna Ferguson is good on that. She once pitched and pitched and basically said to them I would really love to write for this section.

I keep getting rejected. Is there any chance you could give me a few tips? And then after that it became like her top earner because she would just. She ended up

doing

exactly what they wanted and so they'd always commission her. So she's quite inspirational on that. I'm not as I give up a bit quicker than that, I think.

Parul: How many times, what's the most you've emailed someone to try and get a response?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, not that many times, maybe three max. Probably. But it's

Parul: served you well, you obviously do have quite a few contacts and you manage to secure freelance work.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, exactly.

I do stick to like the people I know when I'm [00:17:00] pushing myself to write.

for new places that's when you get that feeling like oh my god it's horrible putting yourself out there and And you don't know whether your idea is going to hit. And then sometimes you just get a yes straight away and you're like, whoa.

Parul: Because you never know what the other person's thinking on the other side.

It might just be the right time for them, the right moment for

Parul: them. You

Nicola Slawson: just hit the thing where they've got a gap and they need it filling. And then what you should really do is then you've got one commission, one article that went well, is then pitch them as soon as possible with something else, so that they remember you and they've got that thing, Oh, that person's really reliable there.

They're always coming with ideas. So yeah. How

Parul: many articles have you written to date? Do you have a sense?

Nicola Slawson: I don't know because I've also done a lot of news shifts at the Guardian where I would just be writing whatever and then I worked at HuffPost and sometimes would be writing six articles a day.

So I have absolutely no idea. So in

Parul: the hundreds and hundreds I'd imagine. Yeah, definitely.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah.

because I've been

[00:18:00] writing for The Guardian now for 10 years,

I

I think.

Parul: Wow, so from Googling how to become a Guardian journalist to, to, to being solidly in that area. Yeah.

Parul: And if you were to look at your body of work from what you remember are there any pieces of yours that did exceptionally well?

And if so, why do you think they did well? Is there anything you can point to, whether it's the hook, the way it was structured, the topic, anything that you can share?

Nicola Slawson: That's such a good question. I think that it also depends what you mean by doing well because I had, I used to write quite a lot for the society pages at the Guardian, which is like the social affairs section, which sadly doesn't exist anymore.

And that was one of my main clients or clients. I hate using that word when I'm freelance, but that's who I wrote for really regularly. And I wrote what once about a cafe and late night cafe for people having some kind of mental health crisis. And the idea was to reduce the number of people who end up in A& E.

When [00:19:00] they're having, they're feeling suicidal or they're having some kind of crisis. Because A& E is not, it's not a very nice place to be if you're, feeling that way. You want to be somewhere calm and comfortable. And so they had, started these cafes and they'd have professionals on hand to support, but also be peer to peer support.

Anyway, I wrote this article and then I had Me and the editor had so many people emailing to ask to be put in touch with the people at the charity that started it. And so then they emulated it in different parts of the country. So it wasn't read by like thousands of people, but it was read by the right people.

And those people did something to make a difference. So with that one, I think one, it was finding something A really good idea, a good solution to a problem that people know there's a problem. There were stats to back up how many people end up in A& E. And then they had the stats to show how much that had been reduced by.

So there was, research. But it was good case studies. So I went along to the cafe and [00:20:00] just sat there for a while. And then the charity would say, Does anyone want to speak to this journalist? And I was like very, I didn't want to be like, forceful, so I just let them come to me, and then, some of them just told me amazing stories about how much it helped, and then, so then you've got a good case study, and you've got that

thing that connects people to say, why it's important, and it's like an emotional thing so that was really important, and then it's also good pictures so that's obviously not something

I

would do, but if you know that Sorry if you can hear my cat.

So if you know that you've got a story you do sometimes have to think about how it look on the page. And if you had a story and you knew there was no way you're going to get any pictures, then that's going to be a smaller space on the newspaper, for example, or it might not get commissioned because they need.

This is for newspapers and magazines because it's different for online. They less, care less about pictures because they just use stock stuff quite often. But but it's just worth thinking about because sometimes you pitch a story and you could be [00:21:00] like, the charity got loads of good pictures or

This is quite a visual story.

So sometimes I mention that in the pitch.

Parul: That makes sense. And in terms of the structure of the article, of the pieces you're writing, and I recognise it will really vary depending on the kind of piece you're writing, but if someone generally comes to you with, say someone, one of your fellow London Writers Salon friends comes to you and has an article that they've written, a draft, and you're reviewing it for them, what would you be looking for?

What kind of things do you, what common errors do you see?

Nicola Slawson: A really good introduction that hooks the reader in and makes them want to continue. So that's the most important. Sometimes I write that last. And then you need to have whatever you're writing backed up. Why now thing.

So say that story, that was important because it was always in the news how often people having mental health crises would end up in A& E. And it was a new service and they'd just launched, they'd just done the survey to find out how much it had been reduced by, so it was a new [00:22:00] thing. So it needs to be

really relevant and so yeah, I was, if I was doing that kind of feature I would, yeah, start with the case study, so you start with the emotive, move into why it's important, then go into the expert.

Interviews, and then maybe weave in some more case studies, more personal stories. And then I usually try and link the introduction back to the conclusion. Sorry, back to the introduction. So that wraps up really nicely, like a little bow. And sometimes you can do it beautifully and it works perfectly.

And sometimes you're just like, Oh, this isn't working. So I'd

Parul: love to now move to talking about newsletters. Because it's something you've done, and actually didn't know this before, researching. You've actually, you've got your own newsletter, which is the single supplement, but you've actually helped a number of publications with their newsletter too.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah.

Parul: And so touching on similar territory of what makes a, I asked you earlier, what makes a good article?

What makes a good newsletter? When you're starting to set one up for, you've [00:23:00] done that for the Guardian, you did it for Positive News. When you think about the overall strategy, what are you thinking about?

Nicola Slawson: I

think knowing your audience and knowing your target audience is really important. Yeah, with Positive News they, they always loved reading the newspaper, but it's also,

it

was about highlighting all the different parts they might have missed and, We knew which articles they really liked because we knew the audience so well because it's really established.

So for that one, it was just more about a redesign. So it wasn't too difficult with that one. And

then. At the Guardian, I used to work on a lot of the professional networks, so the small business network or the healthcare network, so I helped with the newsletters for those. And again, it was,

it was,

yeah, about knowing the audience basically.

And Now I write, I haven't done it for a while, it's been on maternity leave, but I'm not, I was the lead writer of the Guardian first thing [00:24:00] newsletter for the U. S. It goes out in early in the morning in the U. S. and I'm one of the writers who writes it in the morning, here in the UK, and that was, obviously I'm writing for a UK, US audience

I have,

but I've always been interested in US politics and everything, so I found, I find that quite easy, but it was all, it was about basically looking at the whole Guardian and thinking what, People in the U.

S.

would

want to read first thing in the morning. So obviously they're gonna want the news, the headlines that affect them in the U. S. But then they might want a bit of international stuff. And then my favourite bit was the sections underneath where I was looking for the features and opinion pieces and more unusual, quirky stuff that I thought they might be interested in.

So yeah, it was about getting to know the audience and what they might want in their inbox because it's quite a personal thing to get a newsletter in your inbox and so you don't want it to be like all just sales, just click on this.

You want it to be something they really [00:25:00] like receiving and they feel like you've got to know them kind of thing.

So yeah, and that's the philosophy I use with the single supplement as well.

Parul: Apply this to myself, I might actually finally come on Substack after everyone, everyone has, I'm curious about it. What you've

Parul: talked about some of the questions that a person should consider.

What two or three questions should I consider as I start

Parul: up my own newsletter?

Nicola Slawson: I think that say you were starting it with the goal of building an audience, say for a book,

for example you'd want to make sure you're writing about something that's to do with your actual writing. So obviously, I write the single supplement, so it's everyone following it knows what they're gonna get.

So if

If you, so you could start, say, a newsletter about say you liked fantasy, you're writing a fantasy book, for example. So you

could do a newsletter that would appeal to readers of fantasy. So you could do like reviews of other books, for [00:26:00] example, or so yeah, just have a think about what a reader of your potential future book would actually want to read in a newsletter.

Because My, my readers, they are really now invested in what I do. So they don't mind so much of the, like what I'm doing with my book, for example, like the behind the scenes stuff. It's quite interesting to some of them, but some of them just want me to write about single life and single experiences.

And they don't necessarily want to hear about me, write my writing career and

the

kind of that kind of stuff. So it's about giving the reader what they really want, because yeah, you are going into that inbox. Yeah, that'd

be what I'd think about if I was launching one.

Parul: And so you set up the single supplement in 2019, and I believe it was off the back of an article you had written for the Huffington Post that got some attention, led you to think this could be an area.

What was your hope for it when you started? Who were you identifying as the audience? Was it simply single people who wanted to hear about single experiences? [00:27:00]

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, I had a slight, oh, it's, I started it because I was going freelance from HuffPost and I wanted to move away from news reporting.

So I was looking for a way to help me break into writing about other stuff. And I was inspired by Anna Codrariado, actually, who basically Did a newsletter about how you should start a newsletter on Substack and I was like, okay, give it a go and I had it in mind what, I want to do this and then I was persuaded to write this article for HuffPost about being the only single person in my friendship group and Up until that point, it was the last thing I wanted to write about, being single, which is so funny that I said it.

Because I did not talk about it, I did not write about it. I was like, I'm never writing that article, I'm not going to do it. And then eventually they wore me down. And then the reaction was so good that I was like, okay. I realised there was a bit of a gap in the market. Because I The people were, a lot of people were messaging me and emailing me and telling me their life story and that they hadn't, [00:28:00] they, at the time, a lot of the stuff out there for single people just assumed you were constantly dating, so it was just all dating stuff, or it just assumed, yeah, you're miserable and desperate, and I tried to with the HuffPost article, it was obviously about friendship but it was also about, how you feel in your life, when you feel a bit like you're left behind.

But it's also quite uplifting and positive as well. Because that went, did so well, and then I had all these people messaging, I was like that's it, I'm just going to do it. So I just announced that I was starting this sub stack. And then I just couldn't go back on it 'cause I'd announced it.

My audience, I guess I was aiming for other single people like me, but I also, my sort of, when I saw a slight agenda, I was hoping that editors with newspapers would read it as well.

Partly

one, because I wanted to

Change the conversation, which I did actually notice that people were commissioning, they started commissioning me.

So the second reason was so that they would [00:29:00] realize that I was a more diverse writer than just a news reporter because I'd got stuck as a news reporter because when I did my MA, even though I,

I.

was, top of the class for features. I had this feeling that you had to be a news reporter first.

It was almost like a status thing. Like to gain like a sort of respect in journalism, you should be a news reporter. And so I just started being a news reporter, even though I actually never wanted to be a news reporter. So yeah, I did start the newsletter as a way to help me.

break into other kinds of writing but I also wanted them to commission more stuff on being single that wasn't

solely

about dating.

Parul: That's interesting. So not only your direct readership, but actually those with a position of leverage or power in a way who might commission you. And actually we'll talk later about how the editors of your book actually were subscribers to your newsletter.

That's interesting how the book deal came about, but we'll get to that in a moment. I'm curious. So [00:30:00] the single supplement has now nearly 12, 000 subscribers. That's a. Pretty good sized audience. Looking back, do you have a sense on what has helped you grow that readership? Is it simply consistent output or are there other things you did that might have exposed you to a wider audience and brought you in subscribers?

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, when I first started I was very consistent. I quickly moved from monthly to weekly, because I realised that would help, because people forget about you otherwise, if it's, monthly. That has, that sort of midway through the, because I've been doing it for five years, but I had a year hiatus, and there were periods where, because I was writing the book, I just couldn't do two things at the same time.

I found it really difficult. But when I was really growing, I was in the, I'm going to grow this. I was doing it really consistently but the other thing I was doing was if I shared about it on social media I didn't share the link to the newsletter. I would say check your [00:31:00] inboxes so if it was something that was intriguing or something different people knew they had to subscribe to read it and then I would only share the link to the actual newsletter a few days later and I really think that helped because a lot of people I see will

put on Twitter and they'll just

I've written this newsletter and they'll share the link and so everyone I'm following them on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram are just going to click on the link.

They're not necessarily going to subscribe because they think, Oh, I just can see it whenever she shares it. So I was very.

careful

to always just put, check it, check it in box. And

Parul: then. And so can I ask, because now obviously we have the paid subscription, so people could do that. I've done that where people have put a link to an article and then I've started to read it, then realised it was behind a paywall and then had to make that decision.

So does that still stand if you've got paid subscribers, do you think?

Do you have a paywall?

Nicola Slawson: I'm experimenting with that still at the moment. So sometimes I'll put the paywall on and send it out. And sometimes I think I don't want to annoy people too much by doing [00:32:00] that too many times because they think they're getting a newsletter and then they're like so that's everything for me on Substack has been trial and error, so I just try it for a little bit and see what happens.

The fact is I do get more paying subscribers when I do that, but yeah, I don't want to annoy people who are never

subscribe. Yeah, so back to the other question. I then got quite good press, basically, and Emma Watson, famous Emma Watson, she doesn't know me, but she helped me out massively because not long after I launched the newsletter she made her comments about being self partnered.

And it just so happened that a Guardian journalist, called Lizzie, had interviewed me for an article about single positivity, and then

it

hadn't published yet, so it was about to be published. And Then Emma Watson made her comments, and so the article got quickly re topped with that as the hook.

So

there was this big Guardian article, and they put a link to the newsletter in the article, so people just, I had about a thousand new [00:33:00] subscribers within 24 hours, but I also was interviewed for a HuffPost article, I wrote for the Metro. All off the back of Emma Watson, because basically, they were like, who's talking about being single?

And being confident being single or, finding the joy in being single.

And

I'd just launched the newsletter and lots of my friends are journalists and be like, oh yeah, this person. So I was really lucky, very lucky. And then Sounds

Parul: like you put yourself in a lucky position too, by being persistent, by being very singular, focused on a topic.

When the topic became newsworthy.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, it was the first

Parul: point.

Nicola Slawson: It was the perfect point to write about it. And yeah, everyone knows, yeah, the other thing is, yeah, consistency, but also, yeah, I would always write about being single so everyone knows what they're going to get. Which I think has helped

Parul: How often have you had press?

Because if I look you up in the news, you are writing articles. in the newspapers. So is it simply you pitching articles or is there any other way you're drawing attention to your sub stack?

Nicola Slawson: So [00:34:00] sometimes I would then pitch articles because basically as soon as I started doing that, then I was allowed, not allowed because, but then I was seen as somebody who would write opinion pieces or features.

And so I would start pitching Which was really exciting, because that was exactly the kind of thing I always wanted to do, and I only did a little bit before. But then also I was guest on podcasts, I was guest on a really big US podcast called A Single Serving, which is Shaini Silver. She went behind a paywall, but When it was not behind a paywall, she would, she had 100, 000 downloads.

And so a lot of people found me through that, but I also did smaller podcasts because

sometimes

it's not about the bigger audience, it's about finding the right audience. And yeah, even with promoting the book, I've said yes to some smaller ones, because I know those listeners are really into this topic.

And so they're more likely to then want to sign up to the newsletter or or buy the book. So yeah, podcasts. And then I did do some radio interviews. I found that some of the radio interviews, they [00:35:00] didn't even mention the newsletter and some of them even got my name wrong. I was called Nicholas Swanson and yeah, one didn't even mention the newsletter.

So then it was a lesson in, okay, if I'm going to do it, especially because they don't really pay you, especially local radio I need to really stress that they have to mention the newsletter because it's pointless. And then I did bigger ones. So I was on a Jeremy Vine show twice and that got quite a lot of new people.

And I was on Women's Hour as well and that was off the back of an article I did for iPaper about the cost of being single, which sort of was in the news and everyone was talking about it. And so I was asked to be the person to talk about it on Women's Hour, which was like a dream come true.

Parul: Yeah, that's incredible. And we're going to talk about your book in just a moment. Just one final question on you being in the press. Are you using any resources to help place you in places? You've talked about people reaching out to you, but is there anything you're doing to find places to be to write?

So maybe I know that Harrow doesn't exist anymore. Harrow? [00:36:00] Yeah,

Nicola Slawson: I was on Twitter, I was searching like the journey request. hashtag. But I haven't done that for for ages. There's, but there's Facebook groups that I'm in for journalists. And there's also ones for people finding case studies.

Sometimes I'd be. in that kind of thing, or someone would tag me. And

Parul: what are these Facebook groups called? Because that might be interesting for a few, for you writers here who

Nicola Slawson: Oh, there's what, there's a really good one

Nicola Slawson: Lightbulb. I think you have to pay it, pay to sign up if you're not a journalist.

So if you're promoting a book, for example, you can sign up. And it's just a way.

of

being connected to journalists directly without having a PR in the middle. And I do see writers on there and they're talking about their book, but they might have a story around their book or even their newsletter, like whatever they're doing.

And they pitch, you pitch in the Facebook group, but you also respond to people doing case study call outs. And it's, I just think it's

a

really good one because it's [00:37:00] really busy and there's Pretty much loads and loads of journalists in there and they're always looking for someone to interview So if you're anything around your topic

Yeah, sometimes I'm actually jealous because I like sometimes I think I should join us like a real member rather than just a journalist So then I can talk about my newsletter and things so sometimes they do

A thing where they'll say

Who needs a guest for their podcast?

And people underneath are pitching themselves I can talk about X, Y, and Z, I'm interested in X, Y, and Z, and then people connect with each other to be guests on podcasts, or newsletters as well so yeah, it's a good one. Yeah, that's the only one I can think of off the top of my head, but but yeah.

You can share

Parul: resources with us and we can put it in the links afterwards as well, if there's anything else that comes to mind.

Nicola Slawson: Okay, cool.

Parul: I would love to talk about your book. It's behind you. It's beautiful. It's a brilliant book, really well written. It's all about being single and celebrating it and also the reality of it.

Sort of practical advice on what it means to be single in a world that [00:38:00] maybe is sometimes forces, forces the idea that you should be coupled up. How did you move from your substack to the book deal? What are the pieces? Or the steps that happened that led to this book coming out. And maybe we start with, at what point did you start thinking about the book?

How long ago was that?

Nicola Slawson: So when I first launched the newsletter, I just left HuffPost

HuffPost

and I went back into HuffPost to drop off my laptop and a journalist there said to me, Oh my God, it's great about your newsletter. So are you going to write a book? I was like, Oh, and then. The next day, a different journalist said the same thing to me and said that their friend had started a podcast the back of it.

So I was like, okay, interesting. See how it goes. And then it was actually a conversation with the London Writers Salon illustrator, Emma Wintershladen. She was just like, I just think that your newsletter should be a book. And we had a Zoom chat. In the pandemic. [00:39:00] So I was actually living at home, my parents, because I remember I was in the conservatory at my parents house having this chat.

We just brainstormed some ideas and I didn't do anything about it, but I just had it in the back burner. Carried on with the newsletter. I was so busy in the pandemic because I wasn't eligible for any support. So financial support. So I just worked, but I was also

also

Running weekly zoom sessions for people in the single community because everyone was quite isolated.

So I was just really busy. The Facebook group would take it off

Because I've got a Facebook group associated with the newsletter. And so it wasn't until the following year that I had an email from a publisher asking if I'd ever considered writing a book. They said they read my newsletter and obviously I was so excited and

but

I decided that

I knew that getting an agent was really important.

important to get a proper, a really good deal and to be a bit protected and I had no idea anything about publishing really, so I decided to use that interest as leverage to get an agent, [00:40:00] so I went to the back of my favourite non fiction books and saw who they thanked as their agent and then emailed them and I didn't put a proposal in, I didn't, I just literally said I've got this interest, I've got this newsletter and I've got this interest from this publisher could we have a chat?

Would you be interested in having a chat? And and yeah, then I, that's how I landed an agent, so it's great.

Parul: How many, and how many agents got back to you?

Nicola Slawson: I had Zoom chats with two, and I think about, but I had only started going through the list, and then

Zoe

offered to represent me, so I didn't have to go that far, so I know I'm really lucky, but But yeah, so I think she's the second one I spoke to, I think.

And some of them said, come back with a proposal. I could have done that and I would have done that if they'd have all said that, but I just thought I'd I'd see because I didn't know as well how much the publisher needed me to get a move on and write the proposal as soon as possible. So I didn't know whether, how it [00:41:00] worked.

So yeah, I was really lucky. And then I spent ages writing the proposal

and the, And my agent said, we're not just going to send it to that publisher. We're going to send it out to everyone. So I was like, okay, cool. And and then, yeah, I got the, got an offer. And in the end it wasn't the publisher that originally contacted me.

They wanted very much like a book that you'd see on sale at Oliver Bonas, like quite a gift, gifty kind of book. And. When I was doing the proposal, I just knew that wasn't kind of me. It wasn't what I wanted to do. So then what did you want this

Parul: book to be?

Nicola Slawson: I really wanted the book to be really easy to read and accessible because I think that nonfiction sometimes puts people off because they think that maybe it's too research heavy or too academic or it's just, you know It's not as light or easy to read as like fiction, and I wanted as many people as possible to read the book.

And also, I [00:42:00] find reading other people's stories the most powerful way of, changing my mind about something or learning about something. And so I really wanted it to be story heavy. So I was inspired by Conversations on Love by Natasha Lunn. I was inspired by a book called Vagina, a Re education by Lynne Enright which is very well researched, but she tells personal stories in such a beautiful way.

That it's just an amazing book. And also Elizabeth Day, How to Fail, so it's That's all like a theme and then stories and then interviews so her personal story mixed in with interviews

and

Yeah, so that's what I really wanted to do. Because I could have done more of a journalistic kind of thing.

Really research heavy. And I think people might expect that from a journalist. Especially when I was more of a news reporter at the time. But I just find it, you feel so much less alone when you're reading other people's stories. So I wanted to tell personal stories. Yeah, my own and other people's.

[00:43:00] And I think some of the publishers would have preferred it if it was more self help. When I got some of the rejections, because I got rejected by quite a lot of people. Yeah, they were more oh, I think it should be more self help. So these are the

Parul: publishers you're saying you got rejections from the publishers once it went out on submission?

Is that right? So

Nicola Slawson: So I,

it had an auction day, actually. And then I asked, I don't know why I did this, but I asked my agent to just forward me all the rejections. And she put them all in one email. Just one email, and I read it. Just before I was about to meet my friend who I hadn't seen for two years and she came running up to me like, Oh my god, and I just burst into tears.

I don't know why I did that. Ha. But I just was so intrigued. What are they saying about me? And some of the feedback was quite, interesting. But there was some bits, I was just like someone said she doesn't have the

reach no, the audience of Dolly Alderton or Elizabeth Day.

And I just felt don't you want new voices? Because I think you can't have the reach of Elizabeth Day or Dolly Alderton, unless you get a book deal. It's that [00:44:00] vicious cycle kind of thing where, which comes first. And so that was frustrating. So I was like no, I don't because I'm a book deal, do I?

But then other bits, it was quite interesting to me, but some of it was just like, they wanted more, yeah, self help or they're just execs said no, didn't want to book on being single, wouldn't sell. No audience for that, so I was like okay, hopefully I'll prove them wrong, but then, the editor, Headline, who got the, had the gaming book deal she already read the newsletter so that felt good to me, because I was like, she gets me.

She

reads the newsletter, she knows what I'm all about. And so that felt, yeah, that felt really good. Plus she's a friend of Tiffany Philippou, who's a writer friend of mine. Who I think must have told her about the newsletter. So yeah, that felt good as well. Because you, if especially you're telling personal stories, you want it to end up in the right hands.

You don't want to you need to trust that person so yeah. And then I got the shock of my life when my editor said, Oh, I've sent it all, I've sent it off to the editors in [00:45:00] New York. And I was like, had no idea that was going to happen. I didn't write the proposal with that in mind. It wasn't written, I didn't rewrite one with a US audience in mind.

I had no idea that was going to happen. I was like, okay. And then And yeah, I was actually on a gold writer's check in when I got the book deal from Penguin in the US, so

my

face was like this. And Matt was leading actually. And yeah, so that was one of the best moments of my life.

Parul - LWS: That's

Nicola Slawson: also that editor read my newsletter and she she was single.

And

so she read it as a person who was actually single. And had this Zoom chat and she wrote this letter and it was just it's just the best. best person, like literally found the right editor for the book. She was so passionate about it and yeah, I felt so lucky to have got her because she literally was my audience, [00:46:00] which she was the editor as well, and actually quite a lot of the Penguin team are single. The publicist and, quite a lot of the marketing team, when they introduce themselves on the call, they're like, I'm actually single. And I was like, yes! It's great.

Parul: And I think back to the scene you described when you were like, I'm not going to write about.

Being single, that's the last thing I want to write about. And yet you've helped all these people, like all these marketeers and editors at publishing houses who clearly wanted to read your work and wanted to bring this to a wider audience.

Nicola Slawson: Can't, yeah, I can't believe it. It's like having a single tattooed on my head because, I have to talk about it all the time.

Even just, stuff in my hometown, someone will mention, oh, she's writing a book. Oh, what are you writing about? I have to be like, yeah, I'm writing about being single. And then they're like, some people are. I don't know what to do with that. And other people just assume it's about dating. They assume I'm, Carrie Bradshaw writing about men and dating.

And it's, it's very much [00:47:00] not that. It's got a chapter on dating, but it's about all the different ways that being single impacts your life. That was, another thing, it's I didn't want to put the dating chapter too early because I didn't want people to get the wrong idea about what the book was about.

And so I made the decision to put it later on. And there was a bit of a back and forth about, oh, should we move it forward, should we move it back? And I was like, no, I really want it to be back.

I'm glad about that. It's my own

personal

personal thing as well, because, that's part of my brand is that I, the newsletter, I don't talk about dating really, hardly ever.

Because I just think it's, it dominates the conversation everywhere else. And

Parul: on that subject

Parul - LWS: of

Parul: being single and what you do write about, and something we emailed a little bit about, was the reality of

Parul - LWS: writing

Parul: and being single, and what that means for a creative person. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about, for you, what has helped you, what would have been the challenges and the positives of writing?

being a single creative. [00:48:00]

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, I've been thinking about this loads lately. I remember when I first started out in journalism I met two writers who were writing their

first

book and they both separately completely didn't know each other. They both said they couldn't have done it if their husband hadn't basically bankrolled them while they were writing it.

And I just thought, Oh, Great, is that how it's done? And, I had thought about writing a book before, had a few other ideas started a few books but I found it really difficult to work on it while also being a freelancer who relies on all,

My own income is the only income, and it's, and I'm freelance Yeah, I found it quite difficult to do that.

Obviously then I started my own sort of side hustle project, The Single Supplement. And when I got the book deal, I You know, I knew that I was getting some money from the advance, so that helped because then I was able to take some time off freelancing. But then more practically, I, you hear about [00:49:00] writers who are like, in the back of their, in their acknowledgements say, Oh, my partner or husband, fed me for like the three months it took to write this or whatever.

They brought me endless cups of tea and I obviously was just, by myself in my house and you go a little bit nuts when you're writing a book and especially if you're doing one on a deadline and you've got to just get it done which, because with non fiction you write the proposal first and then you write the book, so it's a bit different from writing a fiction book where you might be doing bits and bobs here and there.

I had to meet this deadline and

Parul: How long did it take you to write the book?

Nicola Slawson: I did all the interviews and then didn't leave myself very much time. It was just like doing my dissertation all over again. I think I wrote the book basically in three weeks. Like this mad three weeks sprint of just locking myself away, not seeing any friends or anything, just working non stop.

But then it, the structure was all wrong. So that draft, it was very much the worst, terrible [00:50:00] draft. And there were holes everywhere because I went for that method where you write the bit that you find easiest to get you into the mood

of

of it. But actually that ended up being that there were bits all over the place and I just got lost.

And it was only when writing the book that I learned about Scrivener, is it? And then I was like, it's too late for me because it was just all over the place. So if I was, I actually joked that I could write a book about how not to write a book because I did it all backwards, but then I had to do this sprint of just writing writing, and then I'd get up and dance to either Olivia Rodrigo or Bruce Springsteen, and then go back to writing, and then

and then the second and third draft, I still consider that

The writing because they were very early drafts, and then I basically finished the book in March 2023, but there was just all these delays and the

publishing

got put back, kept getting put back needed restructuring.

The U. S. have really long lead [00:51:00] times so it's really hard to know how long it took to write, because for me it's, Felt like it took so long to write, but

but there were sprints, if so yeah.

Parul: So what would you do differently for your next book?

Nicola Slawson: I think now I've written a book,

I know how to write a book.

Although I'm sure every book will be different because, I was, I did more than 50 interviews for the book, and I think that sometimes that was a bit ambitious. , I was just doing so many interviews

I'm really glad because even the interviews that didn't make it into the book, they helped inform the book.

So it wouldn't be what it was without those interviews. But yeah, I would have more of a plan of which sections I was gonna write. It was also like other people's schedules 'cause I tried to schedule the interviews. and then work on that chapter after I'd done that interview. But some people then cancelled, or they were sick, or they couldn't do it because they were on holiday, and so it got all out of sync.

I did actually hire a PA, a virtual PA, to help me [00:52:00] schedule the interviews, because I do have ADHD, and that It just felt like a total nightmare to me, there's the admin of all of that, which I'm really glad about because that was really helpful. But yeah, I wish I'd made a bit more of a plan

of

which sections to start on.

Parul: Was that not in your proposal? So in your proposal you'll typically have the outline. Yeah. Did that structure not govern how you wrote?

Nicola Slawson: You would think, but then I should have done it step by step, but because I was like, oh I fancy writing that chapter because it's easiest, or I'm passionate about that one so I'm going to start there, I

just jumped all over the place and then got myself in a muddle. But maybe that was just how I had to write it because I did, it did help me writing it. Or sometimes I do an interview with somebody and it was so amazing, I'd want to start that chapter, so I just start writing that chapter. And I think maybe if I just had a system, a better system of keeping track of it. Maybe my system was okay, it's just when I came to then knit it all together, that's when it [00:53:00] was really stressful. Because there were holes and gaps where I'll come back to that later, because that's quite a difficult bit to write. So I think it was just more of keeping track of what I'd done.

I wish I kept more of a track of what I'd done. And that's why using one of these platforms might have helped me. And then I could have known where the gaps and holes were more easily and then I could have knitted it a bit more together. But yeah, it was an experience writing the book. It was really difficult for me.

I thought being a journalist, it'd be really easy. It's just like writing a really long article. But and also I realised midway through writing when I was writing that first chapter that the chapter, the proposal outline. It didn't work. It wasn't working because when you start writing a book, even I thought that this would only happen with fiction, that they take on a life of their own.

But my book took on a life of its own, partly because of the interviews I did. So I didn't know what they were going to say. And then they'd end up sparking something and partly because it did end up being a bit more memoir than it was going to be. So then I ended up telling [00:54:00] more of my own stories, which, also led places.

And then also by the end of. The first chapter, I realized that I'd missed a crucial element of being single, which was being newly single and heartbroken. And that was just because I hadn't had my heart broken while I was writing the newsletter, so it just didn't occur to me to

to

do it. And it was only when I finished, I was like, email my editor, I was like, There's something really missing here.

It's and now that's one of my favorite chapters, the heartbreak chapter. I love it. It stands out

Parul: actually. That's the thing that really stands out is just how heartbreaking you were.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah. I think that's when it became a bit more memoir than it was going to be. But then I love those bits, so I'm really glad about that.

So yeah, then I had a whole new structure and then the structure changed again. So lots of the editing was just changing things around and trying different things out as well. And also like the US editor, she really wanted to give me space to really think about what I wanted to say.

And so she wanted to give me more time which at the time I was like, I just [00:55:00] wanted to get the book out. And especially cause I've got ADHD and I've got that kind of like instant gratification thing. I was like, Oh, I don't want to do that. I just want to get the book done. But actually, I'm so glad she forced the space on me.

She's I think you need a bit more time to think about it and that let it percolate.

percolate.

And then some things, cause it did take on a life of its own. Then I went where it was like interesting, but I wrote so much. It was almost, I can't believe how, I can't, we had to cut a lot, so I could have written a book basically double the size.

So that was the other problem that I wrote way too much, which is a problem of mine in my journalism as well. I always have to make sure I cut before I send to the editor. But with the book, I wanted to make sure The editors knew what was there, so they could help me choose which bits to keep.

So they saw the whole lot of it, and then we worked together to I was just going to ask

Parul: you what helped you edit it, but it sounds like your editorial team

Parul - LWS: actually

Parul: helped you.

Parul - LWS: narrate. It's a

Nicola Slawson: and I [00:56:00] had to

There was one bit where I was asked to merge five chapters into one, which was really stressful. And I was like, how is that ever going to happen?

happen?

And then towards the end, when I was really having to cut a lot and piece things together, different chapters, I did print stuff off and I cut pieces of paper with the bits of the chapter and then I would take bits from that chapter to make a new chapter.

Does that make sense? So I had it all over the dining room floor. And I was just moving bits here, there and everywhere and then like making a whole new section. So that was towards the end. That was when I was pregnant actually. So I was like leaning over and then. I'm spoiling the end of the book.

Parul: It's a brilliant book. Just a bit of a time check, probably have another four or five minutes for me, and then we'll turn it over to audience questions. I'd love to,

Parul - LWS: love to,

Parul: to circle back to something I talked about earlier, which is that I feel like you're very good at from outside. It looks as though you're very good at creating [00:57:00] community.

In many ways, networks and communities, and you've spoken about even just, with journalists, how you feel, you think of networking as making friends, and it sounds like creating connections. I sense you do that in the writing community too and we talked about this earlier, the acknowledgements page was actually a lot longer, and you wanted to thank so many more people because you've brought so many people along this journey with you.

Yeah. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about this, because I sometimes wonder. Particularly people who are new to the London Writers Salon, or maybe people who have been here for a little while but aren't sure how to find their tribe here. And I feel like you're very good at that. Now you're a gold member too, which obviously helps a little bit because we do there's more containers, more spaces for you to meet at.

What role has the writing community played for you? And maybe we start there. What role has it played for you in this

Nicola Slawson: writing

Parul: journey? Absolutely.

Parul - LWS: I [00:58:00] think

Nicola Slawson: know other writers, but it's so good to be with other writers who are also You know, lots of the writers in the writing community are on different stages, but it's good to find people who are on a similar stage to you and then you really bond because you're you're starting out together and You can really encourage each other, but it's also good to learn from people who are a bit further along from you as well.

So yeah, when

I so I was a Gold member, but then began to make good, quite good connections with some of the group. And some, one of the group one person in the writing community suggested setting up a writing group to share work that was very informal and very gentle and

So it's like a critique group, but very gentle.

We called it the Feelings Cafe and it's through that I started sharing chapters of the book or sections of the book and

That was [00:59:00] so good. Just like the encouragement very gentle critiquing . And also they obviously got to know my writing, so sometimes they would know when they, I was being, I was holding myself back.

There's a writing coach, Susanna Rigg, as a member of the community, as she would always tell me to tell my truth is truth. And that became a post-it note that I had on my, my Mac, but my iMac and think that like just

having

that someone who gets to know your writing and really is like really supporting you and really wants you to succeed is just so valuable.

But that just came from somebody messaging and just being like, Hey, it's Dion. Do you know, does anyone want to have a little bit of a critiquing group? And it was just on a private message. I was like, yeah, okay. But then there's other writing communities that I become part of.

In, before I found out at London Writer Salon, I was in the, there's a, there was a [01:00:00] coworking space called Clean Pros for Writers, and I was in the nonfiction writing group and we met every Tuesday

and. And it was about five sessions or something like that before the pandemic hit and then it shut. But we were in the pandemic still emailing each other and having Zoom chats.

And then, yeah, I joined London Writers Salon. And years ago I did an Alvon course and we also had an email chain. Yeah, I think it's about but staying in touch with them and getting, circling back and not letting those

connections

die and putting yourself out there a little bit to say, hey, fancy.

Sometimes I had a Zoom chat with someone just to think, you've got Rachel Blackmore's book behind you. I had a Zoom chat with Rachel just to bounce some ideas. You had

Parul: three copies of her book.

Nicola Slawson: Perfect

Parul: my bookshop is a bit, I need to get your book on here too.

Nicola Slawson: Oh, perfect for that yellow one there. So yeah, and then we just had a Zoom [01:01:00] chat and just bounced ideas around. It's similar to the one with Emma Wintershladen as well. So yeah, I'm just I just love meeting other writers and now I've got actually writers in Shrewsbury. I moved back from London and I thought there's probably not going to be that many people around and there's amazing people.

There's Amy Bishall who wrote Spilt Milk and There's Annie Garthright, who's

written

written some really good historical fiction and they're based in Shropshire and we meet up for lunch every few months. And it was Annie who actually put me in touch with a bookshop, a local bookshop, who've now made my book the non fiction book of the month.

And I just, it's those connections because she then introduced me and bigged me up and my book up. So it is worth making friends with other writers. And also 'cause everyone just wants to support each other so it's so nice. It's it's just the most supportive. I think writers are just like the best kind of network of or community.

'cause you all are rooting for each other and I feel like when none of us in competition or anything like that doesn't feel like [01:02:00] journalism.

it

is, freelance journalists are actually really lovely and great, but there is still that little bit of competition because you are pitching for the same kind of, to the same editors.

Whereas writing, everyone's doing everything, all different stuff and so everyone's just rooting for each other and have you seen this opportunity? And then I try and obviously be as helpful as I can, if I see

anything that I think other people might be interested in sharing that. So yeah, it's just about making friends and being helpful, and then,

Parul: which is something you spoke about earlier with even in the journalist network, it sounds like a philosophy that you've taken on.

Nicola Slawson: Yeah, definitely.

Parul: And reading, reading your book and your work, I was very struck by how open and honest you were about how difficult the journey has been to both with,

Parul - LWS: journey

Parul: of being single or the sort of process of writing about writing about being single and also life, in general, whatever life has thrown at you.

And I, but I also sense you've done a lot of work on yourself. You seem to [01:03:00] constantly be Trying to address this and trying to, find a happy space. Trying to, as we all do, we all want to be happy. I'm curious about how you talk to yourself when things aren't going well. And when the rollercoaster is heading down, what do you say?

What do you do to help push yourself back up?

Nicola Slawson: I think that's when having writing community or friends. really helps because especially being single, you don't have somebody at home to just be like, Oh, I'm just really struggling. And to help you snap out of it. If you're just like, everything's terrible and everything's going wrong.

It can be quite hard when you, especially if you're living alone, you don't have somebody to help you bring you back to reality or normal. To help you self regulate essentially, to steal a psychology phrase. And so yeah, there were moments during writing the book and the proposal as well, where I just was like, I can't do this.

I literally cannot [01:04:00] do this. There's, it's impossible.

I'm

not gonna be able to do it. I even had times I was like, I'm just gonna have to give the advance back. I can't do it at all. And it's, I think it's, I think first of all, like obviously it's okay to feel that like that and it's okay. And also normal, like the more writers you speak to, the more you realize that everyone is sometimes having a massive crisis of confidence.

And so that was really comforting to, sometimes I join the gold check-in and I think I was gonna be the one having a sort of, a bit of a. Meltdown and then somebody else would be like, I can't, I can't do it. I'm really struggling and I wouldn't even say anything. I'd just be like, I just feel less alone.

Just that, and that's not just writers. That's all creatives I think. Because you are putting so much of yourself.

I

think even if you're writing fiction or maybe more you're putting so much of yourself. It's quite vulnerable. Obviously I wrote quite personal stuff in the book. But then I also wrote about times, I was [01:05:00] really having a really hard time.

And I think just in general not to do with writing. It's just having a good set of friends to

who

know you and can give you a bit of a pep talk helps. But then also learning to, learning how to, I'm going to steal a parenting phrase, learning how to self soothe, and learning what helps you when you're feeling really stressed or overwhelmed or panicky.

During the, I keep talking about the pandemic, but it's just because starting the newsletter and the books all tied up with what happened. But there was a poem, Hope is the thing with feathers. And during the pandemic I felt like such bad anxiety at one point. And I just repeated that poem to myself, because my favourite poem, and it just calmed me down.

So yeah, I think. Words as well, poems and stories also help, so even, yeah, when writing the book I would sometimes just read my favourite, I've got a book that I've been reading since I was a teenager it's not particularly I don't know, it's not a literary book, it's not a famous book, but I've read it [01:06:00] so many times and it's just like a

Parul: What is it?

Nicola Slawson: Coming Home by Rosamund Pilcher. So it's like this epic story across decades, it starts before the war. I don't know why, I just always read it and it's just It's just it's like coming home, it's called Coming Home, and it's like coming home, just find it quite soothing, to the point where I found out that it's actually on Audible.

And so now sometimes I go to sleep listening to it because before that I just had the book but now it's on Audible as well so that's great. So yeah, that's quite comforting to me. I don't know if that answered your question, but.

Parul: Yeah, it did. Thank you for that. It's yeah I really feel reading your work that feel like it's inspiring.

Just seeing what you talk, how you talk about the reality of what it's like, but then you've actually accomplished so much. Like we've watched you in the salon go through these ups and downs and here you are with a book out with, a really popular newsletter and so much more, no doubt.

Maybe one final question for me, and we must turn to audience questions.

What's next for you? Is this phase just wholly focused on [01:07:00] promoting the book, or do you have another book in mind?

Nicola Slawson: The

book I finished writing in March 2023, and then some, some people know, I then asked my friend if he'd like to platonically co parent with me, and now I have a baby.

And every, because it's, that's the epilogue, and somebody once said, I think there's a quote that's the first sentence of your book sells that book.

And then

the sentence,

last part of your book sells the next book. So everyone asks me like, obviously the next book is about having a baby. And, I wanna do it.

I've got it in mind to do it, but a part of me is do I want to do. Go there and be that, do a proper memoir because single is not a memoir it's got memoir elements but it's not a full memoir. Part of me just I've also got this idea of writing a screenplay based on the story so it's a little bit at arm's length from the actual story because I also was just thinking it may make a great TV show.

Plus, I think sometimes you can be more honest in fiction, which is something I've realised, because when you're writing non fi when you're writing [01:08:00] memoir you're telling, quite embarrassing stories, then you suddenly realise that loads of people are going to be reading them, and you're like oh yeah.

Whereas with fiction, I think you can really play with stuff. So maybe I'll be writing fiction. I don't know. I know the easy thing for me to do would be to write the book that everyone's expecting me to write. So like part of me is just maybe I'll just do it. And that part of me is always writing things in my head, parts of it in my head, which is a really important part of the writing process for me.

I actually write quite a lot in my head. So it looks like I'm procrastinating and doing nothing. But I realised that actually it's really important for me to mull things over. And sometimes I'm writing full. sentences. I've done it for my journalism as well. Yeah, sometimes I'm writing that in my head and then sometimes I'm like, maybe a fictionalized version would be better.

I don't know.

Parul: Whichever way you go, we'll be here to support you

Parul - LWS: We

Parul: and look forward to what happens. I'd love to invite the audience in. We have some lovely and amazing writers in the room. Please do feel free to turn your video on and say hello to Nicola. I'm sure [01:09:00] she'd love to see you here in the room. Some of your biggest fans here.

And if your camera's on, I might invite you to ask Nicola your question, if it's not, I can ask it on your behalf. Alright, we might start with Christy. Christy, your video's not on, I might ask it on your behalf. So in this, we've touched upon this a little bit, but maybe there might be some things for you to

Parul - LWS: to

Parul: expound on.

Did writing your proposal help you to write your book, and how long did your publisher give you to write the book? What was your deadline?

Nicola Slawson: So yes and no. So it did help in that when you're writing a proposal for a non fiction book you really have to think about what you actually want to write because it's alright having a sort of concept and an idea, but the proposal isn't such a helpful way to actually break it down and think what do I want to include and what don't I?

But like I said, Even a non fiction book takes on life it's own, so the outline for that did go out the window fairly quickly. But it was a useful [01:10:00] process and it was useful to do. So the UK editor wanted me to write it in six months. But I had. A lot of interviews to do. So a lot of that six months was actually doing the interviews.

So that's why I say I've basically wrote it in three months, but It was maybe three weeks in the end like this sort of I wrote parts of it's hard to explain but there's a bit all over the place, but

The US would have given me because I had them simultaneous book deals, so they were like, the US ones out today and the UK ones out on Thursday.

So quite a lot of the time you have a,

most

people would have a UK book deal and then later that it would come out in the US, for example. So once we realized that there were, I needed to do a lot more work on the structure after the first round. I was then given more time and that's when the publication date got pushed back.

'cause originally it was supposed to be the following summer. And then, yeah, so that's what happened. .

Parul: Great. Thank you for that. And thank you for the question, [01:11:00] Christie. Next up, Jody, you have a question If you'd like to ask it directly.

Parul - LWS: Hi

Jodi Hausen: Nicola.

Parul - LWS: I am so thrilled for you. Congratulations. Oh my God.

Nicola and I have been gold members together since 2020, I think, and I've watched the progress as far as Matt have, and it's just inspiring, you make me feel like I can do my own. With that in mind. Being a fellow journalist I'm working on my disability, about the disability book with photographs and all that.

And my question has to do with the interviews, I don't know how many you actually did, but how did you handle I know that when I write a news story, I feel like if I interview a bunch of people and then I don't use anything, I think it might be, They might give me information, but I'm not quoting them at all.

Like, how, did you worry about disappointing some of the people that you interviewed? And if so, like, how did you handle, I know you did because I know

Nicola Slawson: you. Yeah, I'm still haven't told some of the people that they're not in the

book,

So I was interviewed on

Jodi Hausen: I

Nicola Slawson: The other [01:12:00] day, and I had to tell her that part of the reason was I by the end of the editing process, I was close to giving birth.

And so I just got to the stage. I was just like, yeah, okay, we'll do that. It's fine. And so I wasn't until I was reading the audio book, I was like, Oh, that whole bit when it's a bit of a haze towards the end. And she was, I've just explained what happened, she was very gracious and she didn't mind at all.

But I think that sometimes when people are being interviewed, they know that, they're not necessarily going to make it into the book.

A

lot of people in the community, so I did quite high profile interviews, and then I also interviewed people in the community. And a lot of them email me, and I would have loved to include all of them, but I, just couldn't.

And some of them were quite similar, so I just had to pick out the one that told the story the best. But thank everyone for their time, obviously. And then make sure they know that it informed the book. I couldn't have done it without those interviews. It was really important.

Parul - LWS: Did you thank them in the acknowledgement, like not by name necessarily, but just say in the [01:13:00] acknowledgements, I interviewed,

Jodi Hausen: I

Parul - LWS: guess I'm just trying to figure out

Jodi Hausen: like,

Parul - LWS: how I might handle that.

It

Jodi Hausen: that

Parul - LWS: was already too

Jodi Hausen: up.

Nicola Slawson: too

long.

Parul - LWS: I know.

Jodi Hausen: All right.

Parul - LWS: Cool. Thank you. Congratulations.

Parul: Thank you. Thank you, Jodie, for the question, and thank you, Nicola. And that brings us to the end. Nicola, it's been such a pleasure to celebrate your journey here at the Salon. It's been wonderful watching you over the years, and no doubt there's more to come.

How can we support you at this point? How can anyone in this audience, or listening to the podcast later on, support you? Is it simply subscribing to the Single Supplement? Buying the book? So yeah,

Nicola Slawson: At the moment, obviously I want everyone to buy the book, but also I think that when I first started the newsletter, one of the problems that I did have was people didn't necessarily want to shout about a newsletter about being single.

So I see some friends whose newsletters would be shouted about, I'm reading this amazing newsletter. Whereas I get private messages being like, Oh, that was so good, which obviously is amazing. But it's part of the shame and the stigma. There's still that sort of embarrassment. So if you do read the book and you [01:14:00] do love it, please shout about it or do a review on, good reads or wherever.

Because I think that's something that's gonna still come up. People will private message me saying they like it, but that's, you need someone to tell their friend that they like it. , pass it to your friend after you've finish reading it. That's a free way to help .

Parul: Love that. Great.

Parul - LWS: Thank

Parul: you so much, Nicola.

And our lovely writers in the room, I invite you to unmute yourself. Let's give Nicola a round of applause. Let's celebrate her. Let's celebrate the wonderful work that she's done and for being here today.

Nicola Slawson: Wow. Thank you so much. It's

Parul: so

Nicola Slawson: true to be interviewed on the A List. Thank you, everyone.

Parul: Thank you so much, Nicola.

We'll be in touch. We'll see you on the other side. And for everyone attending, we're obviously going to send this and all the links afterwards. And there's a writer's hour if you fancy joining.

Parul - LWS: us.

Parul: that's what, where Nicola's been writing in half an hour. That's it. Thank you so much everyone.

Thank you, Nicola. Such an honor.

Nicola Slawson: Bye.

Parul: All right, everyone. See you [01:15:00] later, friends. Bye.