

## QQQ 4.7 Anna Lazowski

[00:00:00] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries, Qualms, and Quirks, the twice a month podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk. Anna Lazowski wrote her first picture book for a class assignment in the sixth grade and has been creating stories ever since.

[00:00:22] **Sarah:** Now an award winning radio producer, Anna has an MA in journalism from the University of Western Ontario and a BFA from the University of Manitoba. She lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba with her husband, two teenagers and two dogs. So please welcome Anna to the show. Hello.

[00:00:38] **Anna:** Hi. Lovely to be here.

[00:00:40] **Sarah:** So we are going to talk about your journey to publication, and we are going to start by going all the way back to the beginning. When did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:00:53] **Anna:** Oh, I think I've always been interested in writing. I mean, I honestly did write a picture book in grade 6 that my teacher then had me illustrate and she had laminated. So I think, and you know, I grew up reading everything. Because I didn't have the internet when I was growing up. But yeah, I read widely.

[00:01:08] **Anna:** I read everything. I had no limits on what I could read. So I read everything. So I've always been interested in writing and stories. And then I work as a journalist, but not in news. I've always worked like in personal storytelling, arts and entertainment, that kind of stuff. So digging into people and their backgrounds.

[00:01:24] **Anna:** So I think, I think eventually I probably would have found my way to writing. It took a bit longer because I didn't start till after my kids were Kind of a decent age where they could self entertain for a little bit. So it was, um, January of 2019. I decided, you know, I live in Winnipeg, which is in the middle of Canada.

[00:01:40] **Anna:** It's very cold here in the winter. So there's a lot of indoor time. So I was like, okay, this winter I'm going to. January, I'm going to start

writing and I'm going to see what happens. I knew nothing about publishing. I knew nothing about any of it. I was just like, you know, I'm just going to write, I'm going to see what happens.

[00:01:55] **Anna:** And so I started writing and I started researching because I, you know, research for a living. So I learned really quickly how complex and giant the world of publishing and agents and critique groups and all these things you don't think about. I'm just going to write a story for fun. And, uh, so I, Sort of digging into all that.

[00:02:16] **Anna:** So while I was writing, I was like part time writing and part time researching. How do you find critique partners? And what is query tracker? And what are agents? And how do you get to publishers and all that? So I was kind of doing them simultaneously.

[00:02:30] **Sarah:** So you mentioned that you were researching about querying and everything like that. How did you learn more about it? You know, what kind of resources did you use to learn more about how to query and everything like that?

[00:02:39] **Anna:** So I sort of, through Twitter, I mean, this was when Twitter was kind of still in its heyday, right, where there were tons of publishing people on Twitter, so I curated my Twitter feed, which I used before, but not really for a lot, just completely publishing. So everything I could, everyone I could find and follow that was writing like kid lit and agents and editors, I followed them all.

[00:02:58] **Anna:** And so I was using that. A lot for research because it was so there was so much engagement and so much information flying around and that actually led me to my first few critique partners as well. I joined 12 by 12, which is a, like, a membership thing for picture book writers where you get access to community and you get a bunch of information and people who will critique for you.

[00:03:20] **Anna:** So that opened up a whole other avenue of information for me. and then, yeah, I found Query Tracker and Query Manager and you know, I signed up for that and started using that and started reading Manuscript Wishlist and just basically anything I could get my hands on or someone told me about, I would fall down that rabbit hole for a while and figure out if it was useful to me or not.

[00:03:40] **Sarah:** Nice It's funny going back to when you were talking about it being cold and you starting to write, that's kind of why I started to write, too. I'd

grown up in like Florida and Texas and you know, a lot of very warm places. And I was placed on a project in upstate New York in, fall, which to me is like worse than any winter I've ever had. Uh, and I didn't know anyone. I was like, well, I'm not going outside. So that's when I started writing.

[00:04:04] **Anna:** It's very cozy. Yeah.

[00:04:07] **Sarah:** So then what happened? Can you break down for us your journey from then to sending your first book contract?

[00:04:13] **Anna:** Hmm. Yeah. So, I mean, I, I probably started querying too early like everyone does, you know, my first query letters probably weren't very good there and there wasn't much to put in them. Right. Cause I hadn't really done a whole lot yet, but I did query the, um, the first book that I wrote. As to a few agents to a few smaller publishers, it's like, well, you know how you're never going to get to a big publisher.

[00:04:32] **Anna:** So start with some of the small ones, see what happens, you know, I got nothing from some, I got form rejections from a lot of people. So I kept writing and, you know, getting critiques and, and I stopped querying that first book and. kind of moved on to the next ones. Everyone said your first book's no good.

[00:04:49] **Anna:** So I was like, okay, well, probably my first book's no good either. So we'll just keep going and just kind of started writing different styles. You write too long when you start writing picture books. So I learned, you know, shrinking those suckers down a little bit. Um, and I participated in some pitch contests.

[00:05:03] **Anna:** There was still a bunch of pitch contests at the time. So I was doing those because that was, you know, teaching you how to write super succinct, succinct little pitches, which I was used to doing cause I work in radio. So that was kind of a skill that I already had, which was kind of nice to fall back on that.

[00:05:17] **Anna:** and then eventually in June, so I started January, 2019 in June of 2019, I had accumulated a whole bunch of passes on a bunch of things already. And, um, PB pitch came up, which is the picture book pitch contest on Twitter. So I was like, okay. So I had already, I pitched one of theirs before, and I pitched a couple of other things, and I kind of dusted off a few pitches I'd used before, and I was like, well, I'm going to do these ones, but I'm not going to go back to that first one because it wasn't good.

[00:05:44] **Anna:** and then I was, you know, throwing my pitches out, waiting to see what would happen, and I was just kind of waiting for my son to come out, so I could drive him to school, and I was like, well, we'll see. You know, I have that other pitch and I really like the pitch and I like that book, so I'm just going to throw it out because I have it already and why not?

[00:06:00] **Anna:** So I put it up, and I got a like on it right away almost from Frances Gilbert at Doubleday and I was just like, holy smokes. Okay, so I got in touch with her and I sent her the manuscript and the query letter right away because it was, you know, I'd already queried it before to smaller publishers and about an hour after it, she confirmed receipt in about an hour after I sent it to her, she emailed me back and said she wanted to acquire it.

[00:06:26] **Sarah:** Wow.

[00:06:26] **Anna:** That was the first book that I wrote, and that was the one that I had parked because everybody said your first book's not going to be good enough. So, maybe not always.

[00:06:36] **Sarah:** All right, cool. it is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your query letter for us?

[00:06:42] **Anna:** Sure, so this is the query letter I just recently wrote to get my second agent. So I will read that one. So the agent that I wrote this to that I ended up signing with is the one who's addressed in the letter, so I wrote,

[00:06:57] **Anna:** Dear Jennifer, Unter With no library nearby, Bella looks forward to the Bookmobile's weekly visit. But when a flat tire knocks it off schedule, she's facing a week with no new stories.

[00:07:07] **Anna:** Inspired, she writes and draws her own book, one she can't wait to lend to her favourite librarian. I hope you will consider Bella and the Bookmobile a 457 word, heartwarming story about creativity and the importance of access to books. My debut picture book, T Rex's Can't Tie Their Shoes, was acquired by Frances Gilbert at Doubleday during PB Pitch in 2019 and published in 2021.

[00:07:31] **Anna:** With my previous agent, I sold two manuscripts to Kathleen Keenan at Kids Can Press. The first, Dark Cloud, just received a glowing review from Kirkus and will be out May 2nd, 2023. It was also selected by Colby Sharp as one of his favorite books of 2023. My second is also an SEL text, unannounced, slated for publication in 2025.

[00:07:50] **Anna:** My editor there is interested in more books in this series. I'm looking for a collaborative editorial agent who is open to authors who write across age groups. In addition to fiction and nonfiction picture books, and the first in a chapter book series, I've also completed two books in an early reader series called Lolly and Pop.

[00:08:08] **Anna:** The series is all about a swirly lollipop and piece of popcorn who help each other overcome relatable challenges and get out of sticky situations. I'm also working on a concept for a creepy middle grade I'd love to talk about with my next agent before moving forward. I have degrees in fine arts and journalism and currently work as a senior producer at CBC Radio.

[00:08:27] **Anna:** Thank you for considering my previous text, Light Up The Night. I hope this one is a better fit. Sincerely, Anna Lozowski.

[00:08:33] **Sarah:** All right. Awesome. I'm glad we have an example of kind of like a mid career query or, you know, not, um, not the first time. So that's, that's great. All right. So how would you say your experience has been since signing that first contract, especially let us know what surprised you along the way?

[00:08:53] **Anna:** Well, I guess I didn't know how long it takes for picture books to come out. And this is, you know, unique, especially to picture books, not so much for people who are writing novels, but I didn't realize, well, I didn't realize how long contracting takes.

[00:09:05] **Anna:** So, you know, you get your offer, you get your terms and conditions, your term sheet, you get all that. I think the contract took six months. The edits were done on the book before I even got the contract. And then the illustrating, you know, taking. As long as it takes, because, you know, it takes a long time to illustrate a book, obviously, but I'd never thought about that from the author's point of view, how long it takes to illustrate and, and, um, and even just how long it takes to get a book printed and shipped, and this is all during the pandemic, right?

[00:09:31] **Anna:** So, like, everything took even longer and, um, took so long for the books to get to the stores, even by the time, you know, publication day came in June of 2021, a lot of the bookstores where I live were closed, even just getting the books to libraries. Like, it took. It took about eight, ten months for them to turn up in some libraries because everything was just going so slowly and, you know, not the ideal time to launch books, obviously, at any point during the pandemic, but, it's pretty exciting to see your book suddenly appear in the mail at your door.

[00:10:03] **Anna:** Like, that's kind of a surreal experience. And I think the first time is really exciting. An extra special kind of moment because when you write a picture book, you know, the illustrations in that case, Steph LeBarris illustrated T Rex's can't tie their shoes and seeing someone else's interpretation of your work is like this incredibly powerful moment because you write half a book and then the other half kind of shows up and you're just get to enjoy the other person's interpretation of what you wrote.

[00:10:28] **Anna:** And that's pretty amazing.

[00:10:30] **Sarah:** Awesome. All right, it's time for the quick round. I call it author DNA. Are you a pantsner or a plotter?

[00:10:37] **Anna:** Mostly a pantsner, but occasionally plotter if it's a longer project. But mostly pantsner.

[00:10:43] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:10:46] **Anna:** I kind of go back and forth. I'm probably an overwriter, but I've learned to cull it back a bit.

[00:10:51] **Sarah:** Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

[00:10:53] **Anna:** Um, I don't have a preference. It'll, it's really whenever, yeah.

[00:10:58] **Sarah:** When you start a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else first?

[00:11:03] **Anna:** Uh, title for picture books, and concept for middle grade.

[00:11:08] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:11:10] **Anna:** Coffee.

[00:11:11] **Sarah:** When writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

[00:11:14] **Anna:** Probably like a little bit of background sound. I can kind of, I just, I can write anywhere, it just, it can be silent or loud, it doesn't really matter.

[00:11:20] **Sarah:** When it comes to the first draft, are you more of a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?



[00:11:26] **Anna:** I might get it down, but I also revise as I write, which I know some people don't like, but I can't help it.

[00:11:31] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:11:33] **Anna:** Um, I write in Google Docs for picture books, and I write in Noveler for longer. format, because I cannot for the life of me figure out Scrivener.

[00:11:41] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:11:44] **Anna:** I like drafting.

[00:11:45] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:11:48] **Anna:** I write in sequential order, but I do park things that are gonna, that don't fit in wherever I'm writing. I park them in a different spot in, in Noveler.

[00:11:56] **Sarah:** And a final quick round question. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:12:00] **Anna:** Introvert.

[00:12:01] **Sarah:** All right. Now we're going to talk about the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey? And do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them or, you know, how did they shake out?

[00:12:11] **Anna:** One thing when you first start, you just don't honestly know if you're any good, and if what you are interested in writing is something other people are gonna be looking for because you can be amazing. But if the market's like, we don't want this right now, it doesn't, it doesn't really matter. And I think we all have those projects where we're feel super passionately about them and wish someone would buy them, but it's just not the right time.

[00:12:30] **Anna:** And I'm hopeful some of those will come back. But I think, um, Yeah, it's just kind of feeling, publishing is such a weird kind of thing because there's a lot of unspoken information that you have to glean over time and people will tell you different things. So it's, it's kind of almost learning to be comfortable with you and where you're at and not really worrying too much.

[00:12:52] **Anna:** There's so much you can't control, like you basically control almost nothing. Once you write it, it's like, everybody else can kind of weigh in. So I think it's really, finding that confidence in your own work where you can take the endless rejections from agents, then from editors, and then from reviewers.

[00:13:10] **Anna:** And you can decide that, you know, you think that it's, it's good enough to keep going because it's, it's such a sort of aggressively vicious business. A lot of ways that I think people don't think about from the outside. It's, Oh, people write books and they publish them. And that's so nice. And it's really like, there's so many layers of rejection and self doubt and.

[00:13:29] **Anna:** stress behind the scenes. So I think really it's coming to terms with that and figuring out how to kind of make yourself comfortable with that. And I think it requires a level of confidence I hadn't really thought about before.

[00:13:43] **Sarah:** Alright, it is time for the third Q. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different, or interesting, or unique?

[00:13:51] **Anna:** Well, I mean, I really can write anywhere and I think that's because working in a Like a newsroom kind of environment where it's sensory overload, like you have to be able to, to block things out so like I can write in silence I can write --I think the first book that I got me my first agent I wrote at the kitchen counter while my husband was washing dishes.

[00:14:11] **Anna:** So it's one of those things where I think it's a good skill to be able to kind of just block things out and. and go into the world that you need to be in to do it. So I think that has worked to my advantage because it's very hard to find moments, you know, long moments of free time without people who need you or, kids and feeding them and pets and jobs and all that.

[00:14:31] **Anna:** It's snatching those little moments of time here and there. If you don't, can't dedicate like an hour or two hours, like if you can write in 15 minute chunks here and there, that's a useful skill.

[00:14:41] **Sarah:** Yeah, I think Jonathan Maberry was talking about how he can write anywhere, and he can write on planes, and I was like, oh, that's how he puts out, like, however many books a year, or ten books a year, or whatever he does. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?



[00:14:57] **Anna:** Lowest parts. Well, when I split with my first agent, that's a real low because I think even if you know, you know, it's nothing against the agent. Sometimes things don't work out, right? And I think, but you work so hard to get. to that place. And then when it's not there anymore, you're like, well, what if I don't get that again?

[00:15:16] **Anna:** You know, what if that was it? And I think that was probably the lowest part, and it happened kind of late fall heading into Christmas, so the querying journey, second querying journey for me, kind of ran through Christmas, where you know, it's nothing happens really in those months. So it took about six months for me to, to figure out that next step and connect with the second agent, but I think that's really hard because it's like you work so hard and then everything's just taken away.

[00:15:42] **Anna:** From you in a way, and it's, but I think in a lot of ways, and I know this happens to people all the time, and I've talked to other writers this happens to, but often it can be a blessing, like eventually you realize that it's going to be better, and I know a lot of other writers now that, that I'm connected to in different groups that are on the precipice of, you know, do I leave my agent?

[00:15:59] **Anna:** Do I stay? What do you guys think? Is this good or not good? And it's, it's really scary to it. take that leap, uh, for people. But so many, uh, writers that I know it's been, you know, when they've moved on to the next fit, it's been better. So I think it's, it's just kind of acknowledging sometimes that it's taking the leap can be okay.

[00:16:17] **Anna:** Or if the leap is foisted upon you, it can still work out okay.

[00:16:21] **Sarah:** Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you'd like to let listeners know about so maybe they can avoid the same ones?

[00:16:28] **Anna:** Well, I think the querying too early, everybody does. Like, even if they tell you, but you don't know, you know, we think you're ready. You might not be ready, but, um, so maybe that one. And maybe just, you know, it, it's finding the critique partners that get your work because you can get critiques from people that can be helpful and ones that aren't helpful. And I think it takes a long time to find figure out which ones those are, and which critique partners are the best fit for you. And I know critique groups evolve over time, and finding people to read your work evolves over time, and really kind of, you know, Picking and choosing the people that you want to get feedback from can, I think, streamline the process, can prevent you from changing things that you

end up changing back to later when you realize that this is actually, because I think a lot of people, and I did this too, I'm sure, when you first start writing and getting feedback, you implement all the changes.

[00:17:12] **Anna:** You're like, great. That sounds good, let me try that! And then at the end you have this weird sort of Frankenstein hodgepodge of it and you're like, and then you end up going back to what you had before and kind of working that. But I think skipping that step would have been helpful.

[00:17:25] **Sarah:** Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:17:30] **Anna:** Well, it's the most frustrating one, which is trying to be patient,

[00:17:34] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:17:34] **Anna:** which I think, I think a lot of people, like whether or not we're introverts or extroverts, I think a lot of people in publishing are kind of type A and we're control freaks. And it's really hard when so much of it is out of your control.

[00:17:47] **Anna:** And the waiting, and then, you know. The more waiting and the more waiting. So I think learning to be patient, which is basically impossible, but it's good to know that it's something that happens across the board with everybody. There's just like the level of waiting and publishing is something I had never experienced, especially working in journalism, which is like a daily environment or sometimes a minute by minute environment.

[00:18:07] **Anna:** I couldn't believe

[00:18:09] **Sarah:** Oh

[00:18:09] **Anna:** pace at which publishing doesn't really move that fast. so that was very eyeopening for me. So it's just kind of sinking into that and just knowing, like, don't expect to hear anything for a long time. But then sometimes you do, right? My My current agent, Jennifer, Unter who I'm with now.

[00:18:26] **Anna:** Like, you know, I was sending out a couple of queries. It was being very cautious with who I was querying that second time when I was looking for an agent. And I queried her once, once and it didn't work out. So I

sent her another one a little while later and she got back to me almost immediately. Right.

[00:18:40] **Anna:** So when you get those moments, you're kinda like, oh, great. Like it feels like you're not just kind of endlessly sending things out into the ether. But when stuff comes back quickly, it's a very nice surprise.

[00:18:51] **Sarah:** Yeah. All right. I call this the acknowledgments portion of the podcast. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. So who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:19:03] **Anna:** Well, I would say like my different critique groups, and there's a lot of different people, so it'd be hard to name them all, but critique partners are essential, especially when you're first starting out, because you're also sharing knowledge with each other, right? So I had a bunch of critique partners at the very beginning that I don't have anymore, because everybody's, you know, kind of road shift and goes in different directions, depending what's happening, or people stop writing, or, you know, go in a different direction.

[00:19:27] **Anna:** age category or whatever it is. But, you know, as you find other people along the journey, like they're really your, where for me it was, that was the lifeline. Cause you know, people in your normal life, you can't talk about publishing with, cause it makes no sense to people. So finding those, those little groups and those little pockets of people that you can ask questions or you can commiserate with and be like, is this normal?

[00:19:46] **Anna:** Or has this ever happened to you? Like you need some, Someone or some groups of people that can help you answer those questions. And sometimes those are like discord groups or, you know, Dropbox groups where you're sharing manuscripts or whatever. I never had in person groups, but I know people have those too, but it's just finding those kinds of people that, that was the biggest, I think, benefit to me because you need people who are kind of at your, Same level and then a little bit ahead of you to help you kind of figure out what's, what's going on and why things are unfolding as they are.

[00:20:16] **Anna:** And then you can kind of celebrate as each other kind of get those milestones, right? It's super exciting when you see people that you're kind of in a little group with start to succeed and start to advance. Like, that's amazing. And it gives you the, like, okay, this is possible. And then you start to feel.

[00:20:31] **Anna:** It gives you those little lifts. It's nice that you can, in this, it's odd that in, especially in the kid lit world, like this really sort of us against everyone kind of thing where it's like, we can all rise together and we can all support each other. And it's super nice. And there's this kind of camaraderie that is

[00:20:47] **Anna:** not something you find a lot, really. And if you can get into those groups, I think it's really, really beneficial to your mental health too, as well as you go through these processes.

[00:20:56] **Sarah:** Yeah. Before you go, Anna, can you tell us about your latest release?

[00:21:01] **Anna:** Yes. So my latest release came out in May of 2023. It's called Dark Cloud. It was illustrated by Penny Neville Lee. Uh, it was a UK based illustrator and it was published by Kids Can Press, which is based in Canada and, uh, it's a book all about a little girl named Abigail and it's a lyrical social emotional learning text that's all about depression and suddenly there's a dark cloud that appears in Abigail's life and we kind of follow her as she learns what that is, how that affects her life, how it has an impact on her family members too, and how she kind of learns to make peace with the cloud.

[00:21:38] **Anna:** And it's, you know, penny did this gorgeous job of illustrating this book, like it's absolutely beautiful, and it starts out with a lot of black and white and kind of monochromatic tones. And then little pops of color start coming in as the story goes along. And then by the, towards the end, there's, you know, these gorgeously colorful flowers in the, in the text as well.

[00:21:57] **Anna:** And you know, she's got a yellow bow in her hair and her dress has some color. So as she kind of comes to terms with. what her, her life is, because it's not a happy story. It's like, oh, and then everything's fixed. It's totally fine. But it's more like she kind of learns to understand what the cloud is, and then it changes.

[00:22:13] **Anna:** And sometimes it's not as big. And sometimes, you know, it's, she can get away from it for a little bit. But we kind of come to this sort of sense of, there's a comfort level for her. And it's really kind of captured really well in the illustrations. And it's that kind of magic that you get in picture books, like where it's, you really.

[00:22:29] **Anna:** Between the text and the illustrations you get the full story. So yeah, I was really happy with it. And we had so much fun working on, we

had so much fun working on this children's book about depression, but we really did like Kathleen Keenan, who's my editor at Kids Can't, like, she's so amazing as an editor.

[00:22:45] **Anna:** Cause she'll just like, she doesn't say, I want you to change this and this. So she goes, well, what about this? Or, you know, what, maybe something. And then you just, and then she just kind of leaves you to see what you do with it. And it's, it's this really. It's like a gentle kind of way of editing that I respond really well to.

[00:23:01] **Anna:** So it's been really, and I'm working with her on a, on another book that's coming out in 2026, but it's interesting when, as you work with different, well, even different agents, different editors, like just how people's styles are different and finding the ones that mesh well with you. So it's, it's really interesting because it's so much about this business is about personalities and combos, right?

[00:23:19] **Anna:** And if you had different editors, how different the books would be like, it's one of those things where if you think about it too much, you probably could kind of. Lose your mind a little bit, but, but yeah, so that's the, the most recent book is, is Dark Cloud.

[00:23:31] **Sarah:** All right. Awesome. Thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:23:35] **Anna:** Thank you for having me. It was a lot of fun.

[00:23:37] **Sarah:** Yeah. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, Qualms, and Quirks. You can find the text of Anna's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books.

[00:23:47] **Sarah:** If you enjoyed this show, I'd really appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review, telling your friends, or sharing this episode on social media. If you're interested in supporting the show, go to [patreon.com/sarahnicolas](https://patreon.com/sarahnicolas). That's Sarah with an H and Nicolas with no H. And if you're a published author interested in being a guest on the show, please click on the Homepage link in the description or go to [sarahnicolas.com](https://sarahnicolas.com) and click on the podcast logo in the sidebar. Thank you so much for listening and we'll see you next time.