

QQQ Nanci Schwartz

[00:00:00] **Nanci:** it's okay if you quit. Quitting doesn't mean forever. If you need to take a break, do what you need to do for your mental health.

[00:00:12] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries, Qualms and Quirks, the weekly podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from First Spark to day of publication.

[00:00:22] **Sarah:** I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas, and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk. Nancy Schwartz is an instructional writer by day, a science fiction author by night and a mom 24 7. In her small amounts of free time, she can be found gallivanting around Disney World, chatting about her favorite space opera franchise, or taking refuge from the heat in her pool.

[00:00:45] **Sarah:** She lives in Florida with her husband, son, dog and cat. So please welcome Nancy to the show. Hello.

[00:00:51] **Nanci:** Hi,

[00:00:52] **Sarah:** So we're gonna talk about your journey to publication today, and we're gonna start by going all the way back to the beginning when did you first start getting interested in writing and how long did it take from then before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:01:07] **Nanci:** So I actually didn't really write when I was a kid. I was kind of always interested in reading, but I, other than like an occasional story, I didn't write my own stuff. I, wrote a lot in high school, like papers, cuz I was in the International Baccalaureate, program and that required a lot of you know, English papers and history papers and that sort of thing.

[00:01:34] **Nanci:** And then when I was in college, I majored in. So that required a lot of writing as well. And I really liked writing history papers and all that stuff as much as, you know, one can enjoy writing academic work for grading. and then I went on to get my master's degree, which again was a lot more writing, um, including my thesis.

[00:01:57] **Nanci:** and when I finished, writing my thesis and I graduated, I pretty much. Did not want to do anything writing, uh, or reading for a long time. I basically watched TV and, read all the books that I missed cuz I was reading history books. and then a few years later, I had always been a Star Wars fan.

[00:02:24] **Nanci:** and then I kind of fell out of it for a few years. there was. Convention in 2010 in Orlando, a Star Wars celebration. And so I went cuz that's where I live. and it kind of like sparked my, wanting to get back into fandom and um, as many people do, I found fan fiction and I had kind of like read on and off over the years, but I wasn't ever really into it as much as I would have expected to be considering I read star worth books. I started reading it, got really into it. and then I decided, well, I also wanna write fan fiction. Cause that's, that's kind of the inevitable path that one take in fandom. and especially cuz my favorite character at the time had been killed. The way to deal with that is to write stories where they're not dead anymore.

[00:03:20] **Nanci:** so I wrote Fanfic for like, I wanna say two or three years, um, where I was just like heavy into Fanfic. And then, I got an idea for a story that I thought would be a great Fanfic, and then I was like, well, wait a minute. This would be a good book, like a original. So I kind of took the idea, played with it, and then I said, I'm gonna try to write a original book, uh, which was scary.

[00:03:50] **Nanci:** Um, I had just gotten divorced, so it was like, kind of like new time. I was like, well, if I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it now. Um, started writing that in 2012. and I finished it that year, so it didn't take me very long. Um, it was, it was not good. Um, and, that was, you know, 10 years ago So a lot of people say, well, like your first book is terrible.

[00:04:14] **Nanci:** It's awful. And it, and it was. But uh, the first book that I ever wrote was Robber Barons, and that was the first book that I published. So, not the same book as it was in 2012, but, so yeah, it was like 2012 and I started writing that book, and then I just kept writing until I got good enough to get serious about publishing,

[00:04:38] **Sarah:** Hmm. How did you learn more about the publishing industry? Like how it works, how to query, you know, how to do all that stuff?

[00:04:45] **Nanci:** pretty much Twitter, which is kind of why I'm, I'm sad about the, the current state. This is, uh, November, 2022 when we're recording of Twitter right now. But yeah, it was pretty much, I Followed a bunch of agents on Twitter, found all the ones that I could find, read, um, their stuff about queries and how to get published.

[00:05:09] **Nanci:** I read Query Shark, which was kind of what everyone, um, suggests that you read through when you're trying to write a query. But I, I really didn't know a lot of people who were like pursuing publication. Like I

kind of like met a few people, like on Twitter, but it was mostly like people I knew in the area.

[00:05:28] **Nanci:** I went to a few, uh, NaNoWriMo meetups for the area. But it really wasn't until I got into Pitch Wars, this was a few years later that I really got to know a lot of people. When I was first starting out, it was pretty much like Twitter reading, you know, reading agents and doing all the research that way.

[00:05:52] **Sarah:** Awesome. So after you finished writing that first book, can you break down for us the journey from there to signing your first book contract?

[00:06:02] **Nanci:** Yes. So as I said, I wrote Robber Barons in 2012. I queried that book in 2013. I sent out a query. It's actually the first query I sent out, um, was I actually got a partial request, which was like a huge, and it was like, good, well, it was like, wow. Um, this is amazing. Of course, it did not turn into a full request and I think I only got one more partial, and I think I only, I didn't even send out 50 queries before I, I, I push it aside.

[00:06:32] **Nanci:** I wrote another book, I think I wrote all of it? And then I decided it was not good and I didn't wanna edit it . So, um, so that only got one draft I wrote on and on, off and on for like the next several years. there were times when I just did not write at all. Um, I wasn't feeling it and I didn't push it, but I wrote about two more novels. Around, I wanna say around 2015 and 2016 was when I had finished those and I queried those as well. Again, didn't get far. The third one I had actually submitted to Pitch Wars, didn't get any, any requests. That was in 2017 and around 2016, I decided I wanted to go back to Robber Barons and try to see if I could salvage it. I still really liked the story. I liked the world and the characters. So that was in 2016 and the end of 2015 the Force Awakens, uh, star Wars, episode seven came out. And as I said before, I'm a huge Star Wars fan. I loved that movie so much. I, I'm not a fan as much as the next two.

[00:07:46] **Nanci:** and I was one of those people who really wanted Ray to be Luke's daughter, which is not the way the story went. Once I realized that's what was gonna happen, like that's the way they were gonna go, I was like, complained on with my friends on Twitter, you know, and I was like, Thought about writing Fanfic, and then I was like, wait a minute, this actually works perfectly with the original plot of Robber Barons

[00:08:18] **Nanci:** I'm like, I can rework this and make this book to be that idea where the hero from long ago has a child and has to live up to that legacy. So I. That's my story. That's where I'm going. I'm gonna do it. So I, I rewrote the story pretty much the only things that that lasted from that first draft to now is like character names and the name of the ship and like kind of the basic idea of the, um, it's not really magic cuz they're super soldiers, but the way, like their abilities work.

[00:08:59] **Nanci:** Basically that idea came into it. I, I like to tell people that when you're mad about some sort of franchise that you are a fan of, don't go and make pointless YouTube videos where you're screaming. Go and like write a book that's a lot more, it's a lot more productive use of your time and, um, it could get you published.

[00:09:23] **Nanci:** So that's what I did. I, um, basically rewrote it, uh, completely. You and I actually have a mutual friend, Alli Martin. she edited that original version before I submitted to Pitch Wars, which I wasn't going to, I was gonna like query it, but I saw that the pitch wars submission window was coming up soon and I said, well, I have a book ready.

[00:09:48] **Nanci:** I know this could have more, like, it could have more work done, so I'm just gonna apply. And I didn't, I didn't like expect to get anything cuz I didn't the year before. And I got a request and pretty fast. I think it was the day of the day I submitted cuz back then they were able to do that. And then, um she requested the full and then that was all I got.

[00:10:12] **Nanci:** So I wasn't like expecting anything, but that was all I needed was sent one request. I got in, that was 2018. We kind of reworked the book. I didn't, I didn't do a lot of rewriting as I know a lot of people like can write their entire books. Mine was basically taking out some of the POVs.

[00:10:36] **Nanci:** I had I think, seven points of view in the original book that I submitted, and I, I cut it down to. And I did a lot of work on like description and characterization and setting. Um, those are the things I don't do very well on. Um, it actually worked out really well. My mentor was Paris Wynters, who's a romance author, so

[00:10:59] **Sarah:** Hmm mm-hmm.

[00:11:01] **Nanci:** focuses a lot more on feelings and descriptions.

[00:11:04] **Nanci:** So that was like kind of the perfect fit to like help me. I always like joked that every comment was like, but what are they feeling? And I was like, I dunno what they're feeling, what they're saying. Listen. That was 2018. Uh, we had the showcase in 2019 which is, I know you've had a bunch, several people from my class on your show before. It's awful, but great at the same time because it's like everyone coming together to commiserate on How How awful it feels. But, and then also like congratulating everyone for all their requests, while you're kind of like, well, I didn't get that many.

[00:11:43] **Nanci:** Even though they tell you don't compare to everyone else, but you do. I was actually really happy with the number of requests I got because I was warned adult science fiction does not do well in the showcase, so I tempered my expectations. I really just wanted a revised Revised manuscript that I could query.

[00:12:05] **Nanci:** And I knew a lot of the big agents in science fiction didn't really participate in the showcase anyway, so I was like, well, I'm just gonna be ready to query. So that's what I really wanted out of Pitch Wars. But I was happy with my request, sent them off. And then nothing you hear the chirps and it's. Everyone else it feels like is getting an agent or a publishing deal, and you're kind of like in silent land and

[00:12:35] **Sarah:** really funny, I'm just gonna cut in a little bit here because I think people feel that way. Like, oh, everyone's getting more requests than me and other people are getting deals and I'm not getting deals. But then if you look at the actual numbers, it's like 20% maybe of Pitch Wars mentees are getting agents within a year after the showcase.

[00:12:53] **Sarah:** But for some reason it just feels like everyone

[00:12:56] **Nanci:** It really, it really does. It's, it's hard not to compare, when you have people who are getting it, like the first day that you are sending queries out and you're just kind of like, whoa, like that's insane fast. But that's really the aberrations and you just have to go into it knowing that. But I, I, I kept sending out my queries.

[00:13:21] **Nanci:** A lot of the agents that I was like sending, uh, sending queries out took a long time to respond. So I kind of was like, okay, well, what am I gonna do now? I, I'll start working on another book. I did that. I kind of was trying to figure out what I wanted to do from there. Like, did I wanna like keep sending out more queries or was I done with this book?

[00:13:43] **Nanci:** What did I want? And then that was in the summer. I think it was August when they had the next round of SFF Pit on Twitter. I wasn't able to do the a round in earlier that year because it was before the showcase, so we weren't allowed to do anything with that, which I was kind of like bummed about. I was like, ah, I really wanted to participate

[00:14:11] **Nanci:** But the next time they have it, maybe I'll have an agent by then , that's where you like put the clown hat on. You're like, ah, you sweet Summer child . So I said again, it was kind of like the same attitude I had with Pitch Wars. I'm like, well, I have a pitch because that's what you make for pitch wars.

[00:14:30] **Nanci:** So I'll just, you know, use that and then craft like one or two variations. Send them out. Like, what, what else do I have to do? So I did I think I got like maybe one or two agent likes and I got a, like from Aethon books, which I hadn't heard of before. At the time they were like pretty new. I think they were only in existence for like a year.

[00:14:54] **Nanci:** I was like, oh, okay. Like I was never. Thinking of submitting to a small press. Um, I kind of was either thinking like traditional publishing, get an agent, you know, submit to big publishers or self-publish, like those were the kind of like the two ends of the spectrum. I hadn't ever thought about like small presses and submitting myself.

[00:15:17] **Nanci:** So I was kind of like, oh, like that's an interesting. Route to take that I hadn't ever thought of. Mike Mammay, who's on Twitter and was involved in Pitch Wars as well, uh, he was a mentor that year. He put out on Twitter that he, you know, if people had questions about requests to get in contact with him, he helps run the event.

[00:15:38] **Nanci:** So that's why he was like putting out that offer. And he specifically called out Aethon books cuz he knew the person who ran it and said, if anyone has any questions, let me know. So I messaged him and I was like, Hey, I got a request. Can I ask you questions? He sent me like a huge, long email.

[00:15:58] **Nanci:** Like he's one of the most helpful people that I've come across in my journey to publishing and was like, you know, they're, they're really good I like their approach. They do audio, which you need to have in science fiction or else you're leaving like huge swaths of money off the table.

[00:16:15] **Nanci:** I submitted to them. they asked for the full and then they offered, like, pretty quickly on the book, and they said they wanted, uh, it to be a trilogy, and I was like, uh,

[00:16:29] **Sarah:** Yeah,

[00:16:30] **Nanci:** um, okay. . And they were like, well, do you have any other ideas? And I was like, well, yeah, I, I do, of course, because I think kind of everyone who writes science fiction or fantasy, like has an idea in the background for like a series . But I hadn't written anything yet, and I was like, well, can I, can I do this? Like, can I, can I write another two books? because also important to know, in August of 2019, I was six months pregnant. Pregnant. Um, so I knew that in just a few months time, I was going to lose all of the time in which I had to write.

[00:17:10] **Nanci:** So I was like, what do I do? Like this is what I want. I'd always dreamed of doing a trilogy. And I knew the way that traditional publishing worked , I would be lucky to get like a duology but probably not a trilogy. I was like, well, what, what do I wanna do?

[00:17:27] **Nanci:** What, like, what avenue do I wanna take? I did nudge all of the agents who had my partials and fulls. some of them, They requested more. But eventually everyone, you know, everyone passed. And I was like, okay, well do I wanna, do, I wanna go ahead and accept? And I decided, I did.

[00:17:46] **Nanci:** I really wanted it to be a trilogy and it was kind of like the thing I didn't expect to happen. it ended up being the best thing that could have happened for my publishing career. , especially because , I thought, okay, well I'm gonna write book two before I have this baby. Um, and I did, I wrote a draft of it.

[00:18:08] **Nanci:** It was not good, um, because I was like barely sleeping at that time. my brain wasn't working cuz you are exerting all of your energy into growing another human inside of you. but I finished it and I said, okay, cool. I'm gonna revise when I'm on maternity leave. And that was also a very stupid moment because, I wasn't sleeping and basically spent the entire day sitting on the couch watching love is blind, and hoping my baby would sleep and eat and crying, the whole day.

[00:18:43] **Nanci:** Um, and I was like, well, you know, eventually he's gonna asleep. Eventually I'm gonna go back to work and if all else fails, I can at least work for an hour on my lunch break. You know, revise this book. I went back to

work on March 5th, 2020, and, um, you can guess what happened immediately after that. I was in the office literally four days before they sent us all home.

[00:19:11] **Sarah:** Um mm-hmm.

[00:19:13] **Nanci:** And then I was home for a year, which was amazing and wonderful and I hate that it took a pandemic, to get me to have a year home with my child. But, I wasn't doing any work then. I don't think anyone was. I was like, I, I can barely focus on my actual work. the world is too stressful.

[00:19:32] **Nanci:** and Aethon was great. I was basically like, I can't write right now. I'm sorry. I don't know when I'm gonna get this to you. And they were like, that's fine. We're a small press. We're not beholden to a schedule. When it's done it's done. And I was like, thank God, I signed with them because otherwise I would've been like freaking out and so stressed.

[00:19:54] **Nanci:** but eventually I got back into writing. I started writing again, uh, like the following year. it took three years from when I signed my contract to where the books to come out, but. With the time I actually wrote, it was really like only a year and a half that it took me to write the two books.

[00:20:11] **Nanci:** So I was actually like pretty proud of myself for getting that done. the way they publish is they like to publish them all in quick succession. so I knew like I wasn't gonna have the first book out and then have time to write the next two. So it was kind of like a push, like, okay, you gotta get these finished so then you can have them come out. so it was like a nice, kick in the pants. But yeah, it was, uh, not expected in many ways. , both the publisher and, you know, I don't recommend trying to publish during a pandemic and having a book about doing a pandemic. It's not fun.

[00:20:48] **Sarah:** Yeah. All right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:20:56] **Nanci:** this was the one I sent specifically to Aethon so it has the Sff pit stuff with it.

[00:21:01] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:21:02] **Nanci:** Thank you for your Sff pit request for Robber Barons. As per your submission guidelines, I am pasting the query letter below and attaching the first 50 pages of the manuscript. I am also including links to the pitches for your reference.

[00:21:16] **Nanci:** Victoria Antti never wanted to be a super soldier. Despite the genetic enhancements inherited from her father. She'd rather spend her life fixing starships free from familial expectations. Then her father and his comrades vanish on a mission to find a lost war ship leaving her the last super soldier in the galaxy.

[00:21:34] **Nanci:** Now she must flee from planet to planet in order to evade government agents like her estranged mother, who want to use her as a pawn in a simmering interstellar conflict. To escape yet another capture attempt. Victoria reluctantly joins her uncle's salvage crew who are attempting to complete her father's mission, but when clues surface that her father might be alive,

[00:21:55] **Nanci:** she realizes the enemy isn't as clear as she originally believed. Victoria must choose whether to disappear again, to avoid sparking another war, with her mother fighting for the opposite side, or embrace her super soldier leg legacy to save the only family she has left. Robber Barrens is a multi POV space science fiction complete at 99,000 words with series potential.

[00:22:18] **Nanci:** It would appeal to readers who enjoy the crew camaraderie of Becky Chamber's Wayfarer series and the political machinations of the Expanse series. The manuscripts was workshopped in Pitch Wars 2018. I received a masters in history from the University of Central Florida. My short fiction has appeared in Plasma Frequency Magazine, everyday fiction, and the anthology contact Light 2015, silence in the Library Publishing.

[00:22:43] **Nanci:** I co-founded the Tashi Station blog and Podcast Network and have been a panelist at multiple conventions, including moderating author panels with Timothy Zahn and Chuck Wendig. Thank you for your time and consideration

[00:22:54] **Sarah:** all right. Thank you for sharing. So you talked about it a little bit, but how has your experience been since sending that contract? Especially let us know if you found any of the publishing process surprising.

[00:23:07] **Nanci:** I think most of it was surprising just because I hadn't ever considered small presses, like I said before. I was lucky in that I had a really good group of friends that I made through Pitch Wars who had agents, had publishing contracts and, you know, kind of like let us in behind the curtain and like would tell us things in confidence about

[00:23:33] **Nanci:** when they queried and got the call with their agent and then when they went on submission. Twitter is very helpful for like, getting basic

information about querying and the publishing process and the submission process. But a lot of people don't talk about it, personally.

[00:23:48] **Nanci:** The advice people say is to like, don't talk about, you know, your query, like your responses on Twitter, don't talk about going on submission on Twitter. You know, just kind of like keep that in your, like group chats and stuff. So it was nice that I had a lot of people who were going through that, that I could, ask questions or who would tell us the problems they were having with publishing or their editors or stuff like that. I was lucky in that because I was with a small press, they were very easy to get ahold of. I just kind of would send an email and they would respond really quickly. And, you know, I didn't have to wait very long to get my edits back.

[00:24:30] **Nanci:** And especially cuz I didn't have an agent, I was working more directly with them than, you know, I didn't have like a kind of person to go through, which was good and bad at times. cuz I'm not the most assertive person, you know, I, I've learned to just, you know, just send, just send the question.

[00:24:45] **Nanci:** They're not gonna laugh at you. I think I've learned a lot with my genre specifically. There are a lot of small presses out there for science fiction, um, and a lot of the, , books that I see specifically on Amazon cuz that's where, we publish a lot of the books that are like the best selling in the categories my books are in are indie presses or small presses or self pub.

[00:25:14] **Nanci:** it's been really interesting to see how genres differ so much. I think that's something that's really, useful when you like, find a group of other writers or you find mentors that are in that genre. So you can kind of like see what is the best, avenue for you to go down because it's not gonna be the same depending on. If you are a, contemporary YA author, you're probably not gonna want to self-publish because bookstores are, big where those books are discovered. Whereas, other genres, especially adult science fiction is more like eBooks and audio books and that's why.

[00:25:55] **Nanci:** I said before Mike was insistent, you need to have audio or you're gonna lose so many sales. So it, it was just really interesting to see like a whole other side of publishing,

[00:26:05] **Sarah:** Cool. It is time for the quick round. I call it author dna. Are you a pantsner or a plotter?

[00:26:14] **Nanci:** Definitely a plotter. I am a Capricorn

[00:26:16] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an over writer or an underwriter?

[00:26:20] **Nanci:** uh, underwriter. I leave out a lot of description and feelings the first round.

[00:26:25] **Sarah:** Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

[00:26:28] **Nanci:** I prefer to write in the morning, but by necessity, I have to write at night.

[00:26:32] **Sarah:** When starting a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else first?

[00:26:40] **Nanci:** Usually it's a concept, with maybe a little bit of a plot. but the characters usually are the last ones to come.

[00:26:47] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:26:49] **Nanci:** Neither I drink either water or coke.

[00:26:52] **Sarah:** When writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound

[00:26:56] **Nanci:** I write to Spotify playlists.

[00:27:00] **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?

[00:27:05] **Nanci:** I like to try to get it right, as much as I can the first time around.

[00:27:12] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft.

[00:27:14] **Nanci:** I resisted Scrivener for a long time, but I am finally on the Scrivener train but I revise in Word.

[00:27:22] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:27:25] **Nanci:** definitely revising.

[00:27:28] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:27:30] **Nanci:** I write in order.

[00:27:31] **Sarah:** And final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:27:36] **Nanci:** I am an introvert.

[00:27:37] **Sarah:** So now we're gonna talk about the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey, and were they realized, or did you overcome them, or how did they shake out?

[00:27:48] **Nanci:** I think like most people, it was kind of a, am I a good enough writer? writing is very, um, independent. When you're first starting out, you're kind of like, you know, working by yourself. You have no idea if what you're writing is good enough. and then you start sending out your work to people and figuring out like, is it good?

[00:28:10] **Nanci:** and it's also hard when you're first starting out cuz you have to find people to send your stuff to, you know, you have to make other writing friends, and kind of like the whole process is. Well, you have to find out a, if what you wrote is good enough, then you have to query it and find out if an agent likes it enough to take it on.

[00:28:30] **Nanci:** And when you're first starting out, kind of you think, well, if an agent doesn't like my book, then it must suck. But as you spend more time working with people and like writing, you realize, okay, you can have the best book in the world. And an agent still might not want it because it's not what they represent, it's not what they can sell.

[00:28:53] **Nanci:** and then if you get an agent, you can submit it to a publisher and it might be just like another book that they have scheduled and or, oh, that's not hot right now, so we're gonna pass on it. So it's very much accepting how much luck and timing is involved with publishing, and learning to do.

[00:29:14] **Nanci:** Everything I could do in my power, to write the best book I can and kind of leave everything like, not to put it on me. one of my good writing friends, is, Lisa Mia Smith. She has a book coming out next year she, talks a lot about setting realistic goals and how. The difference between a goal and a dream, and that a goal has to be something you can accomplish by yourself.

[00:29:39] **Nanci:** so I had to learn, okay, you can't set a goal to get an agent because that's not up to you. I write my query, my goal, my goal is basically to query my book, to send out a certain number of queries. And that's all I can do. I can make it the best I can be. I can research as much as I can. I can get the manuscript as good as I can do, and then I, I just have to step back and believe that it's going to either find where it needs to go or it's time to move on to another book.

[00:30:14] **Nanci:** And I think that's really hard for a lot of authors to accept, and it was really hard for me to accept. I had a really hard time thinking about when I initially. Whether I wanted to go with a small press or not, because I was like, I don't know if I'm competent enough to go forward without an agent.

[00:30:35] **Nanci:** I didn't know if I wanted, to have someone reading what I was doing and validating yes, this is good, you know? obviously, that's not the sole purpose of an agent, but for me, I knew that was like kind of where I was coming from. I wanted validation even if you have that, you can get a horrible review and think I'm the worst author ever.

[00:30:58] **Nanci:** What am I doing with my life? ? so it was really just learning that I didn't have control over certain things and what I did have control over that is what I could work on. and once I did that, it was a lot easier to be confident in that I knew what I was doing. And when I didn't, when I knew that there was a problem, then I could be like, okay, I need someone to read this and tell what you think is wrong, . It was a lot easier to pinpoint like things that were wrong with what my writing was when I just gained more confidence. And, you tell people who are new writers, Oh, querying sucks. Oh, submission sucks. And all of that. And it's kind of like, I always feel bad because it's you're kind of like discouraging people almost.

[00:31:49] **Nanci:** It feels like, but you have to realize it's just, it's hard. and even now, especially with you know, the effects of the pandemic, agents are overworked, editors are overworked. It's just a, supply chain backlog. people had books come out and then, they just kind of went nowhere.

[00:32:09] **Nanci:** yeah, it's, it's just accepting what I could do with my craft and then moving forward.

[00:32:18] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for the third Q of the podcast. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:32:29] **Nanci:** like I said before, I write to Spotify playlists and I know like I'm not the only person to ever do. But I realized that I actually really need to have that, part of my process, or I can't write . because I was having really hard time working on book two and I realized you don't have a playlist for this book yet.

[00:32:49] **Nanci:** You need to make one. And I did. Cause I would like listen to it in the car even when I was not writing and it would kind of just get me in the mood, to write that story. and so once I did that, when I sat down to write, I was like, okay, I can just turn it on and okay, I'm good.

[00:33:03] **Nanci:** I'm good to go. you know, other people will sit and like brainstorm for the day. for me it was just kind of like getting me into that mood. So I learned like I actually really need to change or I can't wait.

[00:33:15] **Sarah:** When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:33:21] **Nanci:** I it was just, um, so I know a lot of people will say this is like, not the answer you should give, but, um, spite .

[00:33:31] **Sarah:** It's literally the second most common answer on this podcast,

[00:33:35] **Nanci:** That's good. Uh, spite. I had a person who, um, told me like, I could never hack it as a writer. and so I decided that I was gonna prove them wrong. I really just wanted to prove that I could do it.

[00:33:52] **Nanci:** Like, first it was like, I wanna, I wanna prove I could write a book. and then I'm like, okay, I wanna query a book. And then I, I just, I then I just kept going. there were a lot of times when I did not write. There was like several years where I just, I, I didn't have the brain power to do it. I had other things going on.

[00:34:12] **Nanci:** but I always came back to it. like, I'm not the kind of person who I says like, I have to write every day, or, you know, I, I feel an itch to write. there's a lot of days I don't feel like it, like I'm tired, I just got home. You know, I had a hard day at work. But, in the end, like I love telling stories and.

[00:34:30] **Nanci:** having the finished product for me is it makes me feel very proud. Like as cheesy as it sounds like. I have, my, my background on my desktop is like my book covers and I, I put them on there to like inspire me to finish. Now it's like you did this, you wrote three books and that are publish.

[00:34:51] **Nanci:** So you can go on and write other books. and I tell people, you know, it's okay if you quit. quitting doesn't mean forever. If you need to take a break, do what you need to do for your mental health. if you're not feeling it, don't push it. Like most writers aren't doing this fulltime. it shouldn't make you miserable. Like if you're not enjoying it, you should try to figure out what you can do to make it more enjoyable. and that was me like last year or the year before last when I was like, I can't write with all this going on. And it was just if I, if I pushed myself, I don't know if I would have ended up with the books that I have.

[00:35:31] **Sarah:** Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you might like to share with listeners so maybe they can avoid making the same ones?

[00:35:41] **Nanci:** I mean, I think everyone queries too early, . Um, but I don't know if that's necessarily a mistake because it's like, it's Practice, I guess, you learning to write a query, um, you know, sending it out there. I wish I had been more involved early on in like, trying to find critique partners and other writing groups.

[00:36:03] **Nanci:** Like, I had people local that were like really great friends that I, had always trust to read my stuff. I was very much kind of a watch things from afar on Twitter kind of thing, and didn't really get into like the writing world, until I got into pitch wars, not even before I applied.

[00:36:22] **Nanci:** I really encourage people to find your people, and stay with them. One of the things I appreciate most about my writing group is that we're all in different parts of our careers and we all write different genres. some of us have, you know, published for like major publishers have gone on book tours.

[00:36:46] **Nanci:** and then there's me and a few other people who've been with small presses. So we have a whole breadth of experience that we can like, help each other and give advice. it's nice seeing there's not just one path to publication. there's lots of ways that you can do it and get your words out there, because in the end, like that's really the thing that pushes us all right, is cuz we want people to read our stories.

[00:37:10] **Sarah:** All right. Kind of similar question, can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:37:18] **Nanci:** So, this might sound counterintuitive, but it's to learn not to follow certain advice. I follow a lot of, you know, people on Twitter and a lot of authors. and they would do like Twitter threads where they would describe their writing process or how they write. It's very helpful to hear how other people do it, but when you are a new writer, I feel like you can kind of like take that advice as gospel and think you have to change your process to be like theirs.

[00:37:52] **Nanci:** I did this with certain people who are saying like, just get, just get the book down, write it, get, finish it, and then go back and, so I tried, I tried to do it. I tried to bang on a draft as fast as I could, and that just did not work for me. I would finish and I would hate what I wrote and it would really discourage me from wanting to edit it.

[00:38:14] **Nanci:** and then I realized I need to take my time and write. I need to make sure , I know the plot beforehand, for book three of my trilogy, I spent a whole month just brainstorming it and like writing my outline in Scrivener so when it came time to draft it, I pretty much had a draft zero already.

[00:38:35] **Nanci:** and like some people, they need to just push through, like they need to just get it done or they'll stay on it forever. They'll, they'll play with the first chapter forever. So for some people that advice worked really well for me. It did not. I think one of the best things you can do as a writer is to parse advice that you find and find out what works best for you.

[00:39:03] **Nanci:** one of the best pieces of advice I read was, from Chuck Wendig who said, like, writing advice is bs. a lot of it's crap. But there a lot of it is useful. So you just kind of have to figure out what works and what doesn't. I think a lot of times people are insecure with their process and insecure themselves as the writer, so they're gonna try to mimic what other people do, and it might end up hurting them in the long run.

[00:39:32] **Nanci:** So.

[00:39:33] **Sarah:** Knowing Chuck, he probably didn't say BS though

[00:39:37] **Nanci:** Nope. He didn't . He absolutely did not.

[00:39:40] **Sarah:** Yeah. All right. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own, and you've mentioned some of them, but who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:39:51] **Nanci:** well I mentioned Mike before, so I have to mention him again. Dan Koboldt was the other founder of Sff Pit, so obviously. That's where I got my book deal, so I have to shout them out. Haley Stone was another author for Aethon and I sent her some questions. she was very helpful with, you know, answering all my questions and in deciding like to accept their offer. their Paris Winters was my, um, pitch war mentor. She was great, still to this day, like I know I could ask her a question and she'll, answer. everyone from Pitch Wars, including you, are involved in my, my class year. So I would, I would not be there. I have a Slack group that I still talk to people in that group every single.

[00:40:38] **Nanci:** we have writing sprints still. They've been super supportive. They were like some of the first people I told when I got pregnant

[00:40:46] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:40:47] **Nanci:** I was really fortunate. I, I mentioned in my query that I used to do a Star Wars podcast and so I met a lot of, star Wars authors through doing that podcast.

[00:40:59] **Nanci:** a lot of them were like very supportive and very helpful along the way. a few of 'em I mentioned in my acknowledgements, Chuck was one of them. Uh, Delilah Dawson, Jason Fry, uhJanine Spendlove. She's a really great friend of mine. and she was, really helpful early on when I was starting out writing.

[00:41:19] **Nanci:** There's so many other people I can't think of. Um, Martin, I mentioned her before, she's like a wonderful editor and was like, has really like, been helpful in making me figure out like what my downfalls are as a writer. I think like one of the like greatest things you can have as an editor is just tell it to you straight.

[00:41:36] **Nanci:** Be like, listen, this is not good, but you can make it better .

[00:41:41] **Sarah:** Before you go, we learned a little bit about Robber Barons from your query letter, but is there anything else you wanna tell us about the series?

[00:41:48] **Nanci:** it shares a DNA with Star Wars. Um, it's a military science fiction. The first book is kind of like, mainly focusing on Victoria, who's the main character. It's multi pov, so it has like her mom and some other people who are kind of like searching for her.

[00:42:06] **Nanci:** Like the first book is kind of like the search for her. the second two books, show the larger, galaxy we meet, some other, characters that, end up, intersecting with her journey. and it's really a lot about family, both found and blood family. I love stories that focus on like generations and like kids trying to live up to their parents, and both parents like failing their kids.

[00:42:37] **Nanci:** I wrote the book before I became a parent, I wrote the first book before I became a parent, and I started the second one. and then after I became a parent, I was like, oh, wow. I empathize with the parents in the story a lot more now than I did before . it was really funny, like when I started it was like, even despite the age difference, I, I was like, kind of identified most with Victoria.

[00:43:03] **Nanci:** And then by the time the series ended, I identified most with, the Admiral Paron, who is kind of the main person in the, colonial military. and she has a son who's in college and kind of like their conflict is one of the other parts of the story. So I was like, not consciously putting in like a mother son dynamic.

[00:43:27] **Nanci:** As I was writing, I'm like, oh yeah, you're basically fast forwarding like 20 years to what you imagine your relationship with your kids gonna be like. so it's just funny how like you change as you grow and write. that was the nice thing about being able to write a trilogy and write it over a period of three years is just see how different, my writing has gone.

[00:43:51] **Nanci:** And also like my life in general.

[00:43:53] **Sarah:** All right, Nancy, thank you so much for coming on the show today and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:44:00] **Nanci:** Thank you so much,

[00:44:02] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries Qualms and Quirks. You can find the text of Nancy's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books.

[00:44:12] **Sarah:** If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review on Apple Podcasts or Pod Chaser, telling your friends or sharing this episode on social media. If you're interested in supporting the show, go to patreon.com/sarahnicolas. That is a new link for this year, and that's Sarah with an H and Nicolas with no H.

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