

QQQ Brian D. Kennedy

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And there's, I don't think you can ever really get over that.

[00:00:13] **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. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas, and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk. Brian D. Kennedy lives in New York City with his husband and their miniature schnauzer.

When not writing, he can be found working at an LGBTQ nonprofit and obsessing over all things Dolly Parton. A little bit country is his debut novel, so please welcome Brian to the show. Hello.

[00:00:45] **Brian:** Hi.

[00:00:46] **Sarah:** Hi. 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 then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:01:01] **Brian:** Yeah, I would say I was always interested in writing, uh, even as a kid. Or just drawn to creative pursuits. You know, I was that kid instead of like selling lemonade in the summer, I was writing short stories and setting up a table to sell those. Um, yeah, but it was always sort of just like a hobby or, you know, a fun thing.

and then I did like poetry in high school. I did in college. I was a theater major and I wanted to be a playwright. And then I started, hit my twenties and I just didn't know what I wanted to do. And, you know, I had a day job, but it wasn't very creatively fulfilling. Uh, and it really wasn't into my, in my mid thirties that I was like, I like writing.

I feel more creatively fulfilled when I'm working on that. and what if I did pursue that as something that wasn't just a hobby but a career? so I signed up for like my first writing class as an adult. You know, I had taken

[00:01:52] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:01:53] **Brian:** courses in college, uh, and outside of that a little bit, but, and it had definitely been a while, so I would say that was probably in my mid thirties and from the time that I took that first class and decided, Hey, maybe I can be a writer, maybe I can write a book to when my first book actually came out, it was probably about 10 years.

[00:02:11] **Sarah:** So how did you learn more about the publishing industry? Like how it works, how to query, how to go about it, all that stuff?

[00:02:18] **Brian:** the first class I took was actually a non-fiction essay writing class. Uh, so that's sort of where I started. Uh, I'm not sure really why I started there, probably. Well, this was like, it was like the late aughts. And, you know, blogging was really big back then.

I'm, I'm embarrassed to say like I had a personal blog, so I think that's probably where I got back into the habit of writing and that's what led me to take that class. but it was at a media company called Media Bistro here in New York City and they offered a bunch of different classes in, in different genres and different types of writing.

And so I took a couple other ones. that's sort of where I first learned, you know, how to market yourself, how to write a query letter, a lot of the ins and outs of publishing because they were taught by either, published writers or some agents. Uh, so I really learned a lot from my teachers there.

And then outside of that, you know, also in, in this day of age, so much of that information is online. And I think part of the reason I never pursued writing, as a career earlier, cause it just didn't seem accessible to me. I was like, I don't, I don't know what that's about. I'm not someone who could feasibly do that cuz I just didn't know how, how it was done.

But now, you know, with sites like Query Tracker or absolute right, a lot of that information is available at your fingertips. so I learned a lot just from being online. Social media, Twitter, meeting a lot of writers on Twitter and hearing their stories helped to sort of helped me realize what to do and like what was maybe normal and what wasn't as normal.

So yeah, it was just kind of a crash course of, those two things.

[00:03:47] **Sarah:** It's funny that you say that cuz I've been talking to friends lately about how when like I started writing and really exploring the industry, like in 2010, 2011, Some of that stuff was just starting to come online. It was like few and far between. And now it seems like there's so much everywhere and to the point where some of it is like there's too much and you don't know who to listen to.

Right. And I just had that experience today. Like literally before we started recording, I was working on a project and I Googled publishing myths cuz I was like, what are the things that people are saying are publishing myths and everything that came up in the Google results, almost everything was from a vanity press saying like kind of scammy things.

You know, like, oh, traditional publishing, just wanna steal your ideas and steal your money. And I'm like, wait, what? So now it's like the opposite. Writers have to be careful about what of the many sources that they're actually listening to.

[00:04:43] **Brian:** Yeah, that's true. And I feel like especially on social media, like on Twitter, there's the same conversations happening every couple months. We just cycle through them and you know, people are always gonna have different opinions. So you do sort of have to be careful who you listen to.

[00:04:58] **Sarah:** Yeah. So then what happened? Can you break down for us your journey from getting serious to signing your first book contract?

[00:05:05] **Brian:** Yes. So, uh, originally because I was sort of looking at non-fiction, I wanted to do, I thought I would do a non-fiction book cause that just made the most sense to me. I hadn't been, uh, writing a lot of fiction. So, I wrote a book proposal for a non-fiction book. It was a memoir, not like a memoir, like a story of my life, but like a non-fiction story that was true.

and wrote the proposal for that. I took a class on how to write a proposal for a non-fiction memoir, and I started querying agents and uh, I would say this was probably 2010. And I sort of say, so I've had, actually, I've had, three agents. I'm currently on my third agent. And my experience I kind of say was like the Goldilocks experience because the first time I did it, I queried everyone, every agent I possibly could.

The second time I did too few, and the third time I feel like I did the right amount. but for the first one, yeah, I, I was sort of just, You know, I tried to be careful. I tried to pick agents who had similar books, written by their clients and

would be, I thought would be a good fit. But when I wasn't getting a lot of responses, you know, you start to panic and you're like, okay, who else can I send this out to?

So basically any agent that said they represented non-fiction memoir I started sending to, and I, I think it had to be at least a hundred agents total, like. Maybe 113 and it was like the hundred and 12th person who said yes. Um, and at that point it felt really great. Like someone was finally like, yes, I can see this as a book.

I would love to work with you on this. so of course, you know, I, I wanted to, to make that happen. and she was a good agent at a reputable agency. You know, I, I did sort of have some. Some doubt as to whether we were the right fit and whether her vision for my book sort of matched mine. And I think this is where I made my first mistake, because I kind of just ignored that.

I was like, well, if someone finally said yes, why would you know? I've been doing this, I've been querying for like, I don't know, nine months. Why would I not agree to work with the only person who wants to work with me? and it, you know, it wasn't a bad experience. Actually. We sent my book out on submission.

It didn't sell. She didn't do anything wrong. It was my fault for, you know, choosing her when I, when I still had some reservations. so, and at that point I had started, writing, uh, my first young adult manuscript sort of my villain origin story of why I started writing Ya is I was taking a nonfiction essay class and the teacher read my piece and then afterwards she was like, she's like, ah, it reads like a good YA book.

And like she, she said good, but her tone made it very clear that she did not think that was a good thing to be. Um, and that's, but that's when I picked up my first young adult novel. Because, you know, when, when I grew up, young adult wasn't as, as, as big of a genre or age category for, for the readership.

So I, it wasn't really something I had experienced as a teen. Uh, so I read my first one in my thirties and as soon as I read it I was like, I love that this is like voicey. I love that it's, you know, I. They can deal with heavy topics, but they can also be light and fun. And I feel like that was sort of my style of writing.

So immediately I was like, this is what I should be doing. I don't want to be doing non-fiction anyhow. I wanna start doing young adult. at, at that point with that agent, I said, you know, we, we parted ways and it wasn't a big deal. I just

said, I'm gonna, I'm gonna move on and, and try something else. Uh, and it was fine and I thought I had learned my lesson there.

But then I had, I had written my first, uh, young adult manuscript and by the time I finished that, I was ready to start querying. And this is the time where in my Goldilocks experience, I started out with a much smaller pool. I think I sent it to like 20, 30 agents. Uh, within the first couple of months.

And this time I actually was getting more responses, which felt great that, you know, people were at least telling me. They had read some of it and they had feedback, even if it was a no, they still, you know, talked about my writing, which felt really great to like, to learn from these agents. And some of them said, you know, they love the writing, but this is why they thought my book couldn't sell.

These are the problems they saw. And, and as hard as it was to like, hear that feedback, I, I actually agreed with it. I was like, oh, that, that makes sense why this book wouldn't sell. I don't think I can fix it. I think I should just start over with a new manuscript, which is, you know, it's very disheartening to, to spend so much time writing a book and then, and then try to have to shelve it.

But I, I couldn't disagree with the feedback I was getting. So just as I was getting ready to like shelve it and say goodbye and make peace with it, an agent that I had queried responded to me and she was like, I love this. Let's set up a meeting. Let's talk about it. I was like, oh, okay. You know, it can't hurt to talk to her.

And again, this was a reputable agent at, at a reputable agency. There weren't any huge red flags. but then when I talked to her, It became kind of clear to me that maybe our visions, again, weren't aligning, or that she hadn't even maybe read my manuscript as carefully as I would've liked. Um, and I made the same mistake again where I said, this is the one person who's saying yes.

And you know, the feedback I had received from other agents I shared with this agent. I said, here's what other people said. Here's why they said it wouldn't sell. What are your thoughts on that? And you know, she sort of agreed with some of it, but then she said, but I think we can fix it. I think we can, we can sell it still.

So again, I wanted to believe that because, you know, when someone says yes, it's hard to walk away from that. Um, and unfortunately that, that was not as good of a working relationship. She, was a very busy agent and it quickly

became clear to me that I was not a priority for her. you know, emails, the, the communication was really, It's the hard part.

Uh, I would send her an email and would not hear back from her for a week, and then I would feel very anxious about like, following up with her. And then I would follow up and not hear back for another week. And, you know, at the time, maybe I didn't know better. at this point in time where I'm at, I wouldn't let an agent treat me like that.

You know, I, it would be clear to me that that would be a situation to walk away from. but I definitely stayed in it too long hoping, you know, she'll be the one to, to sell my book and then if, if I don't have a good relationship with her, maybe she can just get me to the right editor and I can find a new agent later, which is not a great way of thinking.

You should not ever be telling yourself that you should be walking away from that relationship. But long story short, I stuck with it for too long and then eventually we parted ways. and I scrapped that manuscript. I wrote a third one, or I'm sorry, a second YA manuscript and found a new agent who is my current agent.

And that time you know, I, I started with a smaller pool. Um, I actually did, I pitched a, uh, Twitter pitch contest called DV Pit, which is for diverse voices, marginalized creators. Um, and I had some good responses to that, so I sent out more queries. So that time I think I created about, Maybe 40, 50 agents.

And then I had a couple of offers and I felt, I just felt like I knew more at that point of like the right questions to ask to trust my gut this time and like make sure I was going with someone who I felt we had a good communication style. I felt like our vision aligned for the book. and I've been with that agent ever since.

So it did work out.

[00:12:14] **Sarah:** Nice. So then, uh, you said you sold that book pretty quickly then after you signed with your agent.

[00:12:20] **Brian:** Oh, actually, no. It is, it's been, yeah, it was 10 years, uh, was a long time for a reason. Um, so that manuscript we did not sell. It was on submission, for, gosh, almost a year and a half, maybe two years. A very drawn out process. I, I think I wrote a manuscript that. Maybe had some problems. We were getting feedbacks from aj, from editors who liked the writing style, but didn't think the story was where it needed to be to sell it.

Uh, and it wasn't maybe something we could fix. I did have a couple R&Rs with editors, which is a revise and resubmit where they say, we'd like this, but we'd like you to work on it more before we bring it to acquisitions where we can try and buy it. and so I did that and it was, it was actually, you know, it was hard because.

It was a lot of work and ultimately it didn't sell, but it was really a great way to sort of learn to get feedback from professionals and to learn about my writing and like how to improve it. Uh, and ultimately we ended up having to, to shelve That manuscript, it did get to acquisitions, just never made it through.

Um, and at that point, you know, that was probably my lowest point of, of getting so close and it not happening. But then thankfully my agent who, who I adore and I think is really smart, um, she said, well, you know, let's take all this feedback that we received from these editors. Let's craft a new pitch for a new book that incorporates what they've told us about why this first one didn't sell.

And let's make sure we craft something that really addresses that so that when they say they like the writing, they can't come back to us and say, well, we can't sell it because of X, Y, Z. Like, let's fix X, Y, and Z with this next book. And that's what we did. And that one we put on submission and it sold like immediately, which was a total 180 from my first experience.

[00:14:07] **Sarah:** Yeah. You know, it's funny, even I didn't realize how many writers went to acquisitions, but didn't end up getting a book deal until I started doing this podcast.

[00:14:16] **Brian:** Yeah,

[00:14:17] **Sarah:** Yeah. All right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:14:24] **Brian:** Okay, so this is for the book that I pitched in DV Pit on Twitter that didn't end up selling, but it did get me my agent and when I queried my agent, she asked me to, uh, include the Twitter pitch in the query.

So that's the first part that I'm gonna read here. Dear Miss Spieler, thanks for favoring my DV pit tweet, Simon Versus plus Catfish. Coming out was hard, being out harder, especially when you're stuck in a small town and lying to your online crush. My young adult novel Marshall's Guide to Getting Out is complete at 79,000 words.

Marshall Polzinsky is good at hiding who he is. That's what happens when you grow up the only gay person in your small conservative Iowa town. Now that he's out, Marshall's ready to be his true self, except old habits die hard, especially online, where you can hide behind the anonymity of your laptop. Maybe it would help if Marshall had someone to connect with in real life.

But his best friend, Boomer is getting serious with his girlfriend. His dad has a shiny new life in Omaha, and his mom has her boxed wine. So Marshall turns to the virtual world, virtual world in the chat rooms on boyfriend.net. He instantly hits it off with Wes. A funny, smart, equally lone, lonely user. There's only one problem. Wes is a 36 year old living in Kentucky and he doesn't know Marshall is 17 and in another state, Marshall's not about to let a few white lies stop him from taking a road trip to meet the man he's obsessively been chatting with. And so with Boomer and Boomer's annoying girlfriend in tow, Marshall makes a few pit stops along the way.

Begrudgingly visiting his dad, sneaking into his first gay bar before arriving in Kentucky to win over West. At least that's the plan. But Marshall's been wrong before, after all, he always assumed coming out would be his biggest obstacle. He never imagined that learning how to be out would be equally, if not more challenging.

My writing has appeared in the Huffington Post and New York Press. I have performed with the Upright Citizens Brigade and at the Moth where I'm a story slam winner. Additionally, I've taken a number of classes at Media Bistro, including ya novel Writing with Kate McKean. My synopsis and first 50 pages are pasted below.

Thanks for your time and consideration. Sincerely, Brian Kennedy.

[00:16:28] **Sarah:** All right. Thanks for sharing.

[00:16:30] **Brian:** Yeah.

[00:16:31] **Sarah:** So how has your experience been since signing that contract? Especially let us know if there's anything about publishing that really surprised you along the way.

[00:16:38] **Brian:** Yeah. Uh, my experience, you know, it's, it's easy to say it's been good, and that's true, and it has, but I, you know, I'd be remiss if I didn't say it's also, it also can be stressful. It can be hard. Putting a book out comes

with its own stress of, of just worrying about, you know, reactions and is it going to, is it gonna do well enough?

Is it gonna do bad? so many things that you really can't control. It's sort of up to your publisher anyhow. And, and I think what you can do the most is focus on, on the writing. Um, but even that can be a challenge, you know, this is selling a debut novel. It's my first time working with a professional editor.

It's my first time having deadlines. I sold a two book deal, which is, is great. It's a blessing. Uh, but then that was my first time, writing a book on deadline cuz I had to write my next manuscript before the first one came out, or while the first one was coming out. So then you're also juggling, drafting a new manuscript or trying to promote your first one or trying to edit your first one.

So just, it's a lot of new things that are sort of thrown at you. you know, it's a challenge I accept and I want, um, but it is, it is hard. There's definitely, I think, a learning curve. How to manage all that

[00:17:44] **Sarah:** Yeah. It is time for our quick ground. I call it author dna. Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:17:50] **Brian:** plotter. Definitely

[00:17:52] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an over writer or an underwriter?

[00:17:55] **Brian:** overwriter

[00:17:56] **Sarah:** do you prefer to write in the morning or at night

[00:17:58] **Brian:** I am most productive in the morning,

[00:18:00] **Sarah:** when starting a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else? First?

[00:18:06] **Brian:** concept first, then character, then plot

[00:18:09] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:18:11] **Brian:** coffee, and it has to be hot coffee. I, I don't drink ice

[00:18:15] **Sarah:** Uh,

[00:18:15] **Brian:** I'm a, I'm a bad gay.

[00:18:17] **Sarah:** yeah. I'm like, oh, I as a bisexual pretty much only drink iced coffee. when writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

[00:18:24] **Brian:** Uh, sound. Definitely listen to music,

[00:18:27] **Sarah:** When it comes to the first draft, are you get it down kind of person or a good at right kind of person?

[00:18:32] **Brian:** get it right, but probably to my own detriment. That's why I'm so slow.

[00:18:36] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:18:38] **Brian:** I'm super old school. I use Microsoft Word.

[00:18:41] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:18:44] **Brian:** If I'm currently drafting, I'll say I prefer revising more. And if I'm currently revising, I'll tell you I like drafting more.

[00:18:50] **Sarah:** That's a lot more common answer than I expected it would be. Do you write in sequential order? Do you hop around?

[00:18:57] **Brian:** Uh, no, it has to be sequential.

[00:18:59] **Sarah:** And final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:19:03] **Brian:** Uh, definitely an introvert, but I think I can sort of trick people into thinking sometimes I'm extroverted.

[00:19:08] **Sarah:** Now we're gonna talk about the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries, you discussed some of them already, that you had on your journey, and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them, or how did they shake out?

[00:19:20] **Brian:** you know, I did talk about this a little, but sort of like the reception your book is gonna get. Like, this is my first time sharing my writing in a very public way. Uh, you know, I, I talked about having a blog before, but

even a blog feels very, uh, Protective and like And this is, you know, you're putting your book out into the world and, and a publisher is, is selling it to book sellers and libraries and schools, hopefully.

And it's just a much, you suddenly have a much bigger audience all at once, which is something, you know, I had not experienced before. again, you know, so much of that is out of your control. you try to tell yourself like, you know, obviously I, I don't think I'm a terrible writer.

Like if you, if you get an agent and a book deal, you must be doing a few things right. You know, so it's not that I'm so self-deprecating that I'm like, oh, I'm, I'm horrible. but you still have that fear of like, I could be better. I'm not good enough. My writing's not gonna be as good as these other writers.

And there's, I don't think you can ever really get over that. You just have to. Learn to tune it out or to not give it as much as, importance as like your, my anxiety at least wants to give it. so I would say, you know, as far as did I overcome it, I think I just found ways to, to manage it. good reads is definitely a no for me.

[00:20:33] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:20:34] **Brian:** Before it comes out, your publisher will usually put it on, uh, they'll try to get it out to advanced copies out to readers, through like Net Galley or Edelweiss, and people can start reading it before it's even published and like leave reviews.

And in the beginning you're sort of hungry for you, like, what are, what are people thinking of my book? You know, is it going over well? And then you start to read some of them and I could read. You know, seven positive reviews, but if there's the eighth one is like, says one little negative thing like that, I'm gonna feel that negative thing 10 times

as strong as I felt all the good things and yeah, it was, it was hard cuz you, it's also like you're, you're just one author in this whole sea of authors and you feel like no one's paying attention to your book. So even just logging on to good reads every couple of days and seeing if you have any new.

New reviews. It's like, oh good. Someone's reading it, someone's paying attention. But I just realized that was too unhealthy for me. And about two weeks before my book came out, I said, okay, I'm gonna, today's the day I'm

gonna stop going on Good Reads, at least until my book is published. If I can stay off it for two weeks, I can always go back and read those reviews later.

And thankfully, once my book was published, I, I never went back. I was like, you know what? I'm so much happier not knowing what people are saying,

[00:21:43] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:21:44] **Brian:** that I'm just not gonna allow myself to go back there. Yeah.

[00:21:47] **Sarah:** Yeah. Now it's 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?

[00:21:57] **Brian:** I mean, I don't know if procrastination is a quirk. I'm sure that's also not that uncommon. I feel like a lot of writers, most writers probably procrastinate in some way. yeah. I just, you know, it's really, I sort of have this like set routine of like wake up if, I mean, if I have nothing else going for the day, you know, I also work part-time, so sometimes I don't have a full day to write. But if I do have a full day to write, it's like I do have my routine of like, Wake up, have coffee, maybe read, you know, a chapter or two of a, of a book that's not mine. Go on social media. Spend way too much time just like scrolling, you know, through all my friends Instagrams and Twitters until I finally get, so, like, I exhaust all those avenues.

I'm like, okay, I checked everything. There's nothing left to check. I have to actually start writing now. So then, you know, then I'll, I'll buckle in and, and try and get some, some work done. But yeah, there's definitely like, you know, The morning snack, the mid-morning snack, the pre-launch snack, lunch, you know, mid-afternoon snack.

Let's make some tea. So like, anytime I can walk away for five minutes, I'm, I'm definitely gonna take advantage of that. So, yeah, I would just say it's hard for me to, to keep my butt in the chair most days.

[00:23:04] **Sarah:** That's funny. You're like, I'm gonna read the entire internet before I start working. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:23:13] **Brian:** you know, yeah, I think just wanting, loving writing, like I, I always say, or I tell people, The end goal can't be the book deal. And I know it's easy for me to say that cause I, I got the book deal, but like, if you want to keep

going, you have to love the process of it. And I know when you're in the middle of that, it's really hard.

And it was hard for me, you know, I was impatient too. I was like, I want an agent, I want a book deal, I want this and that. But if I didn't actually enjoy writing, I wouldn't have kept with it as long as I did. Because like I said, it took me 10 years to get that book deal and I could have given up a lot sooner if I didn't just love writing.

So I think I knew I was happier writing even if I didn't have a book yet than I was if I wasn't writing altogether. So just loving the process enough to, to stick with it. And, you know, once I, once I started querying and. Once my books went out on sub, even if, even when they didn't sell. Just getting feedback is always helpful.

You know, hearing that you're doing one thing right or someone enjoyed one aspect, you know, any positive reinforcement really helps you feel like, okay, I'm doing this for a reason. I may not be where I need to be yet, but like I'm making progress.

[00:24:20] **Sarah:** Yeah. You mentioned some of them earlier, but do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way you'd like to warn listeners about so they don't make the same ones?

[00:24:29] **Brian:** Yeah, I would, I would say, based on what I said earlier about my agent experience is like there are really no shortcuts. You can't try and cheat your way ahead. You know, even in querying, first of all, the agent has to love the book. There is no shortcut that's gonna get you an agent to sign it if they don't love the book or think they can sell it. but even then on your end, like you have to do what's best for your book and listen to your gut. And that's what I didn't do is I, I just listened to the first person who said yes, even though I had these reservations about working with, you know, those first two agents. And in, it didn't work out for me.

You know, I learned my lesson the hard way and neither of those books sold and. I'm sure I could have taped myself a lot of time and anguished if I had listened to my gut earlier. but in the long run, at least it was a learning experience. and I, you know, hopefully would not make mistakes like that again because I have learned them.

[00:25:20] **Sarah:** Yeah. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:25:26] **Brian:** Something I learned is it's just gonna take the time, it's gonna take, you know, for me it was 10 years. Um, I've heard people who, it's been 15, 20 years. You know, for me, I think it took three full manuscripts before I sold one. I know people who sold the first manuscript they wrote, and that's great.

I know people who took them seven or eight tries. There's gonna be one way that's right for you, and it's best if you don't compare it to, to what other people are doing.

[00:25:51] **Sarah:** Yeah, this is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. Who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:26:00] **Brian:** Uh, definitely other writers, and, and teachers, you know, those first classes I took. I took some workshops that were led by published authors and they were just so generous with like, sharing their knowledge. You know, I never, I was a theater major in college. I took a cute few creative writing classes, but I didn't, I didn't get like an MFA in creative writing or in writing.

And I, I think that's another reason why I always saw like, oh, I can't write a book cuz I, I didn't study enough about that. But really these, these teachers or workshop leaders were so great to sort of share what they had learned. And, uh, with me, and it was, it was really great to learn it that way. And then even outside of that, like if you don't have, you know, the means or financially you can't, you know, sign up for classes or workshops, meeting other writers, like I've met people off in those classes or off social media and we've traded manuscripts.

We've been, I've been in writing groups. And yeah, sometimes you might get advice that's not great, but more often than not, if you're with people who are sort of on the same level as you, trying to figure it out together, trying to give each other feedback, it's, it's another great way to learn, how to be a writer from other people.

And, you know, there's, there's friends that I met in that, in those first classes that I took, 10 years later, we're still friends. So it's, it's been rewarding in that way too.

[00:27:14] **Sarah:** Yeah. All right. Since your query letter was for a different book, would you tell us about A Little Bit Country before you go?

[00:27:20] **Brian:** Yeah, so A Little Bit Country, uh, came out in June of 2022. It's a young adult romcom, about two boys who spend their summer working at a country music theme park. If anyone's familiar with Dollywood, which is Dolly Parton's theme park, it's very much unshamelessly modeled after that. But it's about a boy from Chicago who wants to be country's biggest gayest, uh, superstar.

And he goes to work at the park for the summer, which is in Tennessee. And there he meets a local boy who hates country music because he thinks it ruined his grandmother's life, because she was a country star who had a falling out with the woman who runs this theme park. So of course, they meet opposites of tracks, sparks fly.

but then they uncover a secret about the past that threatens to ruin their relationship.

[00:28:08] **Sarah:** All right. Well, Brian, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:28:13] **Brian:** Yeah. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:28:15] **Sarah:** Yeah.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, qualms, and Quirks. You can find the text of Brian's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about him and his books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review, telling your friends, or sharing this episode on social media.

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