QQQ Jules Sherred

[00:00:00] **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.

[00:00:10] I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas, and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk. Jules Sherred works as a commercial food photographer and stylist, writer and recipe developer, journalist and outspoken advocate for disability and trans rights. His website, Disabled Kitchen and Garden, and his cookbook Crip Up the Kitchen

[00:00:27] were born out of the need to include disabled people in the conversation around food. So please welcome Jules to the show. Hello.

[00:00:35] **Jules:** Hello. Thanks for having me.

[00:00:37] **Sarah:** Yeah, thanks for coming on. So we're gonna talk about your journey to publication today, and we're gonna start by going, a little bit back to the beginning. And you have an interesting beginning.

[00:00:47] So when did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:00:55] **Jules:** this is a weird question because I've always been a writer, but I didn't really think of myself as a writer in the Canadian education system. So I'm Canadian and in the education system in British Columbia, creative writing is mandatory from like grade four to grade 12. And so we always had to do it.

[00:01:18] but I always found myself writing because I was non-verbal until I was over four years old and I would still be non nonverbal if I had my, way with it. And so that is just how I communicate is through writing. it's just easier for me. I used to get in a lot of trouble for my writing because I cannot make up names.

[00:01:42] I cannot like make stuff outta thin air. So in grade five we had to write a short story and I decided to do a science fiction murder mystery. And for the names, I used all my classmates names. And so I got in trouble for murdering my classmates. Um, I got in trouble from in grade four from my parent for giving myself a Nobel Prize in the middle of, of an assignment.

[00:02:09] My teacher loved it. I'm writing something right now and I was rereading stuff that I wrote in high school to kind of get back into a high school mind and I was good. And I'm like, when did I lose that? And I, because I was good. And then university came and I just, English was in university. I did not enjoy it.

[00:02:35] And then as life happened, um, so I took a pause from writing. in my early thirties, I wanna say I. Started working casually for a small publisher in Berny, British Columbia. And then I started, working in the geek entertainment world. And I was a book reviewer and interviewed authors and stuff like that.

[00:02:59] And I've always like all through that, I always have had a love of books and I thought one day I want I want to have a book on the bookshelves. And I didn't know exactly how that would look. And because I also have a background in marketing and have worked so long in the industry, it means it's all been almost 20 years now that I've worked in the industry in some form.

[00:03:21] I just couldn't come up with an idea that I knew would be saleable. and then I had my idea in 2020, and here we are today in 2023, with my debut book.

[00:03:32] **Sarah:** So how did you learn more about the publishing industry, like how it works, how to query all that different stuff?

[00:03:38] **Jules:** Yeah, so when I was a book reviewer, so I'm gonna back up cause I love the story and I'm not even sure Eric remembers the story of how we became friends. So I had my website, Eric Smith is whom I'm talking about, which is a agent that many of us know. Um, and he was a publicist with Quirk Books and I had my website, geeky pleasures that I was known for and I wrote, um, a little piece I had become aware of, A book about Star Trek and Zombies that Quirk had published.

[00:04:16] And I saw the trailer and I thought I was hilarious, but I thought this book is going to be horrible. I do not understand its purpose. And I wrote this out on my website and next thing I know there's Eric, emailing me and said, I saw this piece and I was wondering, would you like a copy? Because I think I can change your mind.

[00:04:35] And I'm like, I'm not going to turn down a free book. And um, so, uh, that's sort of my relationship with Quirk Books and with Eric. Um, that was so long ago, like, so long ago. And then he, um, left work and we stayed friends

afterwards and he became an agent. And so it was first like watching him sharing tips and stuff, um, either on Twitter or on his website.

[00:05:02] And then like just then like becoming part of that. Agenting adjacent world via Eric. And just seeing all those conversations happening around. Yeah, then I just started like falling down the rabbit hole of, well, I like what Eric has to say, I want to find YouTube videos with Eric.

[00:05:22] And then I would start watching that and it would just turn you know, how YouTube can fall, like create rabbit holes and just falling down these rabbit holes of video after video, after video of different agents and stuff, talking about how to get published.

[00:05:37] **Sarah:** Oh, nice. So then what happened? Can you break down for us your journey from then to signing your first book contract?

[00:05:44] **Jules:** So in 2020, The pandemic hits and it was a couple months into it. And those of us who are disabled and are chronically ill knew that it was not going anywhere. And I saw a lot of people developing disabilities or realizing they were neurodivergent as their, um, usual ways of coping and masking that they didn't realize that they were doing were no longer available to them cuz their lives had been completely upended and disruptive.

[00:06:16] And people were just having a really hard time managing and coping. And I had already existing a website called Disabled Kitchen and Garden that was all about how to garden and kitchen or how to garden, how to garden and cook while disabled. And it wasn't just recipes. It was like, here are some tips or mess, like everything, for how to manage the whole process of cooking and not just the act of cooking itself.

[00:06:46] yeah, I have this big database and I thought this, this is a book. I have a book here. but then it, it was, it needed to be more firm. I already knew how to write a proposal. I had been having to write proposals forever for, for work. And writing a book proposal is not all that much different than writing a marketing proposal or doing a research paper for any university.

[00:07:09] So I had those skills down. Um, and so I sat down and I thought really, um, long and hard about how this book will look. Doing the outline and the summary, doing the market analysis, all that stuff you need to do. Um, I wrote my proposal really, really quickly and it's a long proposal. I think my proposal is like 20,000 words, including the recipe samples, um, that were in it.

[00:07:33] So it was pretty in depth, like a really, really in depth to really show where the market is. that I knew my stuff that including my platform. And then I decided that it was time to query. Once I had that down and figured that part out and I thought, okay, this is a saleable piece of marketing material.

[00:07:54] I, I can, I can walk into any boardroom or walk into a bank, and a bank, would wanna finance me based off of my business plan. Cuz that's how I approach it is that's a business plan. Uh, you're trying to get a loan to fund your, your project. And so I just then started to oh gosh, query tracker is a must have number one and pay for the $25 a year for the membership cuz that's more than worth it.

[00:08:20] So I spent a good, once I had my proposal, I spent a good months researching every single, agent on query tracker who, who said they accept cookbooks. Um, and so I would do that. I'd go to their websites, I'd learn more more about them, and then I created number lists based off priority from zero, meaning the, the people I want to query first all the way down to nine.

[00:08:42] Like if I, if I query all these hundreds of agents, like the, the just like, based off of who I thought would be a best match for me based off of what I saw their per on their social media and their websites or whatever, right? So I prioritize that and then, oh, this is the part that I'm, I'm a little bit of, um, Hesitant to talk about because this is like, it was lightning.

[00:09:07] So I started off with five agents my rule was if the six week or eight week period or whatever is there, if you don't, um, hear me respond within X amount of time, consider it a no or any, I got a rejection, then I would query somebody new. And so this is the end of August, 2020. Um, this is my first round of querying. out of that first round, I ended up querying 15 agents. In that first round, it was from end of August, 2020 to December, 2020. So 15 agents, I got two R&Rs, five no responses. One very long consideration, like the agent, um, when I put in my proposal and my query letters, they're like, I can you, can you give me what you've written?

[00:09:59] Because in my first query letter, I said that I had approx, like I had 32,000 words already written. So they asked for that and they spent months considering it. And then they finally gave me the best rejection ever saying, I love this. I have a parent who's disabled. This really needs to be happened.

[00:10:14] However, I didn't feel like I connected with the, like I wanted more personalized stories. And I thought that's a great piece of, that's a great piece of

thing for me to know. and, seven short personalized rejections. So that's a great response rate, right? Like only five agents did not respond. And I'm like, whoa.

[00:10:35] uh, because I had the two R&Rs that also had really good information in it that like, yeah, that's, that's a good thing. Like that's missing. Like one of them was, there needs to be a chapter on cooking safely. And the other r and r was, I really love what you have. I really love your writing. I think this is saleable but you need to work on your platform a bit more.

[00:10:58] And once you have a bigger platform, please requery me again because I would, I love this and I think you have something here. and the other ones were basically the other rejections where I really like this. I think there's a market, unfortunately I am getting away from cookbooks cuz they're getting harder to sell Unless you're celebrity.

[00:11:16] I really wish you luck because it's really difficult to co publish a cookbook right now unless you're a celebrity chef. And I'm like, okay, thank you. Like I already knew that going in. But it was really nice to have that reaffirmation that this is difficult, what I'm doing. Is near Mission Impossible. Um, and then I had one rejection where, which was very ableist, where I dodged a bullet and that agent was like, I don't see the market for this.

[00:11:40] Um, disabled people are too niche of a market. I'm like, wow. Like, I'm like, 25% of the population's disabled. But if that's too niche, that's fine. So that was good. I mean, I felt good about that rejection too, like, ok. So I felt really good. I loved every single rejection that I got, and that's not the normal story, right?

[00:11:59] Like people, but I strive a rejection, especially ones that have really great pieces of feedback. So this was December, 2020, and I also knew that there was something in my query letter that could be tweaked. And I don't know why I felt that way, but I just did. I felt that there was something that wasn't working.

[00:12:18] my plan was to spend a month redoing my proposal to include, uh, to incorporate those pieces of feedback that I got from those three agents that really, really super helpful. And then to go out on querying again. And while I did that, a friend of mine, Eric offered to look at my query letter again,

[00:12:39] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:12:40] **Jules:** because I was having difficulties making a nebulous, like, this is how your query letter should be, like concrete.

[00:12:48] It was too nebulous for my autistic brain. And he is like, I'm gonna help you, like, send it to me and let's see what we can do. And my first query letter was actually, done with the help of a former agent, at Tobias literary agency, which is, they, they put a call out on Twitter saying if you're trans, cause um, she who shall not be named says something horrible and they're like, you're trans and you need help with your query letters, like, Dms and we'll help you.

[00:13:14] So that was, was my first one. And then my second one, Eric's like, okay, like here we go. And he sent it back with some edits. And like, you can, you can reject anyone you don't feel speaks to you, but this is what I think will even, like, it's good, but here's what will be better. And I had planned to start querying again in February of 2021.

[00:13:32] However, all of a sudden I was booked for like three surgeries in a four month period. So I, cause they all had three, like surgeries were all postponed. Yeah. 2020 because of the, the 'vid. And so I had to put a pause in my querying and then I decided in June I was recovered enough for my surgeries that I was going to go out and query again.

[00:13:57] And so I was going to do the same method. five agents as one. Rejected or did the six weeks, then I would add another one. And so I did my five and immediately like, so, and those five included the two R Andrs. I got one, rejection from one of the R&Rs. it was months later cause she talked to all of her.

[00:14:18] like all of her acquiring editor, her friends, trying to see where the market was. And she's like, I really, really tried, but unfortunately I don't think I can sell this. Like, I really love this and I wish I could, but I, I don't have the connections needed to sell this book. And I'm like, oh my God, thank you.

[00:14:34] Like I, you don't need to do that. Like, that was amazing. And like, that's when I knew I had something. Like that's when I knew, because agents don't take that time. and not because they don't want to, it's because they can't. Right. so, and then the other r and r I knew was going to be a while because it was, uh, an agent that I'm familiar with and I know what they're, what they're considering and, and how long they take with these things.

[00:14:58] I got immediately within 24 hours. Another one, like, please send me your, um, your propo, your please send me what you've written already. I love

this one form rejection and one that was still out there, so outta those five, again, a pretty good response rate. And so, um, I was waiting because the agent that I had the r and r with and the agent that was considering, that was too considering, and that was my rule.

[00:15:23] If I had two, considering it was gonna stop like the, and, and just wait as torturous as that is. so this was June and then in, um, August of 2021. I got bored waiting and I got it in my head. You know what, there's a lot of Canadian publishers that are traditional publishers that accept, non-agent, queries.

[00:15:44] So I'm going to query a publisher that I really, really like, to see if they're interested. And so I, I queried them and they responded back and they said, you have an amazing proposal. This is very saleable. We're not no longer publishing cookbooks. I recommend you, you query this publisher instead. And so that same day, I queried, that publisher and, sat with it.

[00:16:12] And then, September rolled around. um, it was the very last pitmad and I decided, so, you know what? I'm just gonna throw it into pitmad and see what happens. Another publisher, and two more agents requested that I send them my proposal and what I had written. So that is 3, 5 7, considering my proposal and I meant to stop at two.

[00:16:39] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:16:40] **Jules:** September rolls around. So this is August, September rolls around and the publisher that I, that was recommended I pitched to you, they said, your proposal's great. I'm, we're, I'm taking this to the acquisitions meeting. You'll hear back from us shortly. And or, and to the falls acquisition meeting, you'll hear back from us shortly, um, November rolls around in the email and Nove, and they're like, we're sorry for the delay.

[00:17:06] I'm like, it's only only been two months. That's not a delay. We're just letting you know that we're discussing your book next week. And I'm like, oh gosh, what? Like, this is, and then next week rolls around and I get an email saying that the publisher would like to talk with you. Um, are you available for a call later on this week?

[00:17:26] And then I signed my contract by the end of that week,

[00:17:30] **Sarah:** Oh

[00:17:31] **Jules:** su super, super, super fast. So like really fast this whole journey. And people will say, well, that's like two years. I'm like, no. Like the first August. So September, October, November, December, four months of querying, and then j June, July aug. So eight months total of querying, but I only queried 24.

[00:17:53] And out of that 24, I had 19 respond in some way. I had a 79% response rate, which is super fast. But yeah, the whole, that last with the help of Eric, like I don't think I would've sold it if it weren for the changes that Eric made to the query letter. Because the query letter is what made them want to read the proposal.

[00:18:13] The proposal was sound, it was getting them to read the, the proposal via the query letter cuz everyone who read the proposal is like, wow, this is amazing. You absolutely have something here. but yeah, it was like August, end of August and then signed contract, um, end of November. and then from, November to, no the, it was exactly one year to the date that the book went to print.

[00:18:41] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:18:42] **Jules:** is again, super, super fast. Especially for cookbooks. Cookbooks usually take three years, and mine was a year, but it wasn't even just that. Like I ha I wrote the, I had December off cuz we had to do a whole bunch of like, paperwork with the publisher doing like the intake, marketing server, um, questionnaire, all that.

[00:19:02] So, and my manuscript was due March 1st and my images were due April 1st. And so I wrote the book most of like, I had some of it written, but there was a few things that I, that I decided to change last minute after talking with the publisher during that, during that, um, call. And so, yeah, I wrote the book in three months and photographed it in a month, which is, Like bonkers. At least I, at least I know I can rewrite 50,000 words in three months. Like I am proficient. That's, that's one thing I know. And I was really like the, I only have one round of edits, no substantial, developmental edits. Just little minor copy edits. like that was like, well, we'll talk about that more in the surprise section. but yeah, it was lightning fast. Absolutely lightning fast. Like it's still No, no, none of that abandoned manuscript. I had the idea and I sold it basically overnight, and that does not happen. And it's, I still don't think it's real and the book is out and I, I, I, I just don't, cause this is not the story, this is not how it's supposed to go.

[00:20:12] It's supposed to be like, fraught with, with like, heartbreak and rejection and I didn't experience, I didn't experience any of that.

[00:20:21] I'm quite expecting, um, to, to have it like, have rough periods. Like I know that what happened to me was an absolute unicorn experience. Absolute unicorn.

[00:20:34] **Sarah:** all right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:20:40] **Jules:** Hello,

The kitchen is the most the most ableist room in the house. CRIP UP THE KITCHEN: REALISTIC TIPS, TRICKS, AND RECIPES FOR THE DISABLED KITCHEN – is a narrative cookbook for the one in five North Americans, including myself, who have developed a disability, and face barriers cooking using conventional methods and cookbooks.

Disabilities related to pain, flexibility, mobility, and mental health are the most common disability types. It's about time we had a cookbook that works for us. With how-tos and information like SALT, FAT, ACID, HEAT: MASTERING THE ELEMENTS OF GOOD COOKING by Samin Nosrat that will inform the reader's cooking beyond this cookbook, a novel approach to recipe organization like EAT YOUR FEELINGS by Lindsey Smith, and great nuggets of science and information like anything Instant Pot-related from Urvashi Pitre, this book will allow the reader to reclaim the "heart of the home" without having to spend $100,000 on a renovation to make the kitchen accessible.

The manuscript features original recipes, with final count expected to be around 50,000 words. All the tips and tricks are tested for mobility-related disabilities, including wheelchair use and loss of full function of the hands, and many utilize popular accessibility friendly kitchen appliances like the Instant Pot, air fryers, and bread machines.

CRIP UP THE KITCHEN: REALISTIC TIPS, TRICKS, AND RECIPES FOR THE DISALBED KITCHEN was born after becoming increasingly frustrated with kitchen gadget reviews that never mentioned benefits for the disabled, reading countless kitchen tips for the disabled written by abled people that were never useful, and trying a million recipes with unrealistic difficulty levels, cooking and prep times.

CRIP UP THE KITCHEN also focuses on the benefits--both physical and mental— of using appliances like the Instant Pot, as well as tips and tricks to make cooking easier for a variety of disabilities.

How cooking with an Instant Pot can help with PTSD

Recipes organized in a way that helps focus the ADHD mind

Flexible meal planning strategies for every cook

How to make meal prep easier as well as storage methods for less food waste

Informative recipes like butter chicken in 10 minutes, all while learning what “curry” and “masala” actually are.

As for me, I’m a gender nonconforming autistic disabled trans man based in Duncan, BC. I work as a commercial food photographer, writer, journalist, and outspoken advocate for disability and trans rights. I’m an official contributor to Getty Images, a staff writer for Fstoppers news site, a member of the Cowichan Valley Arts Council and local Chamber of Commerce, an instructor for professional photographers looking to expand their skills and is one of only a handful accredited food photographers with the Professional Photographers of Canada. I’m also the writer behind DISABLED KITCHEN AND GARDEN. My food-related businesses will be part of a Food Hub, partly funded by the government of British Columbia. I am part of the Island Good brand as a food and beverage-related service provider and artist. And the Canadian government is going to be featuring me as a success story in their Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program. The feature will go out to national and local media outlets and be spotlighted on YouTube, various Community Futures websites, various government agency’s social media channels, on the Government of Canada’s website. My words have also appeared in Wired, GeekDad, QuirkBooks, and more. I am a featured speaker at an upcoming photography conference with people from around the world attending.

In partnership with the provincial health authority, DISABLED KITCHEN AND GARDEN is becoming a physical space providing resources and a curriculum I am developing based on the website and cookbook. The partnership helps disabled people, providers and families explore their accessibility options in the kitchen for safe, healthy and independent living. This also comes with a built-in marketing campaign, thanks to another partnership with the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC), with my company being on public transit bus ads, print advertising, online adverting, and event

advertising, in between ICBC's logo and Island Health (local health authority)'s logo in a mutli-year campaign to raise awareness of this program.

In 2022, DISABILIY, CULTURE AND FOOD: AN EXHIBIT will launch, featuring my photography and the food stories of 24 Canadians. A conservative estimate of one million Canadians is expected to visit the online version of the exhibit. My work has been covered by the CBC, the National Post, Daily Xtra, all of Bell Media's radio stations, local news outlets, and Accessible Media Inc. I've run and won federal political campaigns and helped to elect the national leader of a political party. I'm also member of the Trans Journalists' Association.

Please find attached my proposal that also includes samples of my food photography. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cheers,

And then my name, and that's very long at the end about the platform.

[00:25:28] Very long. And that's the part I struggled on. And Eric's like, no, include it all. He's like, you need to put this all here, especially with American agents, because platform is number one. And if you like, there's no way to put your platform. In one paragraph and I was like, really hesitant. I'm like, dude, that's, that's a lot.

[00:25:48] And he is like, no, do it because you have all the, like your, all your important information is less than 300 words. And if they wanna nope out your platform and come back to it later, that's fine, but include it there so they don't have to read all, all $30,000 of your, or $30,000, all 30,000 words of your, proposal.

[00:26:10] Like they can quickly see it in three paragraphs there. And I was really hesitant. Cause my first bio section was one paragraph, and sure enough, when I expanded it to three paragraphs, I got all the bites in the world.

[00:26:25] **Sarah:** Yeah. Platform is so important for nonfiction.

[00:26:28] **Jules:** Yeah. So I mean, if it was a fiction, I would just do the one paragraph three sentences about me and it would be done.

[00:26:36] But yeah, so that was the thing that was, I think, really helped to get people to open up My proposal was to expanding on my platform, in my query letter.

[00:26:48] **Sarah:** Cool. So how has your experience been since signing that first contract? Especially let us know if there's anything surprising along the way.

[00:26:56] **Jules:** gosh, I think one of the surprising, I mean, there's a lot of surprising things. Like I'm currently in a press tour that is never ending and I was not expecting it to go on for this long. I'm like in week four of daily interviews. I hopefully is my last week before I get two weeks off before I started all over again for disability pride months in July. And so, I mean, it's a lot, especially for an autistic who would rather be nonverbal. another surpise was I think, and I probably should have talked about this, about things I learned was just how different, publishing is in Canada compared to the American industry. Cuz even though I had some familiarity with the Canadian publishing industry, having worked for a small press doing um, book packaging, I was mostly immersed in the American publishing, um, industry for my professional career.

[00:28:00] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:28:01] **Jules:** Even like independent publisher has a different meaning in Canada than it does in America. Or independently publish. Published like now, like in, I'm an indie author in America, means that you are like self-published. In Canada, an indie publisher is not, is not like either a, a vanity press or self-published, it is a non-corporate publisher.

[00:28:27] **Sarah:** Yeah. Well it started that way in the US

[00:28:29] **Jules:** Yeah. But

[00:28:29] **Sarah:** then self-publishing author started using the phrase indie. Yeah.

[00:28:33] **Jules:** it's still that way in Canada. Like they still call themselves like that and they work, like they have all the benefits of what is a small publisher in the us but they work in a traditionally published way. You get all the same media opportunities, all the same placement and opportunities in libraries and bookstores and all the, you get all the same.

[00:28:56] Opportunities as you would in, uh, a bigger corporate sense, except for they are more niche in what they publish and the advances are smaller, but then you get other benefits that you get from, like I had, I had a lot of say in, the book cover for my book. I had, like, I could, I, I could have noped the cover.

[00:29:21] I got to throw out the, um, style guide and create a whole new one. Like, that was one of the reasons why I signed with Touchwood. I would not have had that with, uh, or it would've been more difficult to sell one of the big five on, you know what, I want to write recipes in a completely new way.

[00:29:37] it would've been very much more difficult to sell that to one of the big fives than a smaller one who focuses were their main, um, nonfiction is cookbooks. and they write award-winning cookbooks, um, and they get lots of press. So like those things I think were not really surprising, but more interesting to be like, wow, like, um, I hear all these authors who, who are like published with the Big Five and they have almost no support when it comes to marketing and pr.

[00:30:08] And I don't, I have, I don't have to do anything unless I want to. Like I have, I have no obligations whatsoever to do any marketing or PR for my book. And if there's an interview I don't wanna do, I just have to say no because for whatever reason, and that's also a nice thing to have, is to not have that labor if I don't want it.

[00:30:30] oh gosh, the. selling out on Amazon Canada on Published Pub Day, and I sold out today on Amazon uk on the UK Pub Day. What, like, that was amazing. Somebody wasn't thinking at Amazon when they were stocking their warehouse for how many copies they need.

[00:30:49] so a big surprise was that not only is my book in the equivalent of Barnes and Noble in Canada, which is cool's, it's like cool's chapters Indigo. It's under the company Indigo. But each store, depending on what they were before they folded into Indigo, I'm in those stores across, Canada and like Barnes and Noble in us, they are now hand selected.

[00:31:15] What goes into those stores is not like it was in the, in the, in the before days. And I'm also front facing in some of the stores, which is really, really surprising and Wow. the amount of libraries that I'm on in North America are like, holy crap. Like, excuse my language. But that was like what? I have hundreds of copies of my book in libraries across North America and I'm in, I learned the other days that I'm in libraries overseas and that was like, what is going on here?

[00:31:45] Like this, this is not supposed to be happening. I am just this guy from a small town in Canada who decided in 2020 that I'm write and publish book. And what is going on. so I mean, those are like the biggest, cuz that was not what I had planned. Like I've already, I know just based off of library copies and selling out on Amazon, Canada and the UK, that I've sold more copies of my book than most non-fiction books sell in their lifetime.

[00:32:23] **Sarah:** Hmm,

[00:32:24] **Jules:** And I like my, my, um, metric for success would've been if I sold 300 copies, which is like the average, average number of copies sold for a non-fiction book.

[00:32:36] **Sarah:** Oh.

[00:32:36] **Jules:** Like, I set my bar really low. Like my, my, my expectations are like super low and realistic. And I know the publisher has more than that, right? Like we talked about all that stuff going into it.

[00:32:47] But just to save myself from disappointment, right? Like, I'm like, if I manage to sell and they give like the, an onboarding package to authors to also spec to set their expectations. And that is also the expectation that they set for their authors. And they're like, like, we're gonna hope we sell more and we're gonna push a book and, um, like do all the marketing and PR.

[00:33:10] And we're going to print more, but you need to know that, this is what the average non-fiction title sells. And so just like set your expectations accordingly. And so those were my expectations going in. And I figured like even though I knew I had a novel idea, a fresh approach, I had all those things that are needed to sell a cookbook, I did not expect.

[00:33:34] And I knew just based off my work in PR and media, I knew there would be a media appetite for it. I did not expect to be in week four post publication and still be doing daily interviews with media from around the world. So yeah, those are, it's a lot of surprises

[00:33:54] **Sarah:** Nice. before we do the quick round, do you wanna talk about how you got your agent?

[00:34:00] **Jules:** Yes. Oh yeah. So this is another thing because as people have noticed, probably I signed my contract without an agent. I was very lucky that I knew how to negotiate contracts and stuff going into it. I knew what to ask. So

that part was, I, I felt good about going into it. But then, as I was like gearing up towards publication of Crip Up the kitchen, another opportunity somewhat, somewhat represented itself.

[00:34:30] And, um, so again, I went to Eric and I'm like, I have Eric. Eric's the first person I go to. Now it's my agent to ask these things, but before, before I had an agent, it was Eric, uh, because that's what friends are for guys. Please do not pester Eric in his dms. You can, you can tweet him questions and he's happy to answer them.

[00:34:51] He, if he has a bandwidth, um, Eric is great that way. So is Sarah, just so you know. Um, but so I, I had a, I had an opportunity and Eric's advice was, okay, so if you're friendly with any, agents on twitter, maybe you can contact them and let them know what your situation is to see if they are interested.

[00:35:16] And I thought, oh, I am, I have a lot of mutuals that are agents on Twitter, but I don't wanna bother any of them. And I sat, I sat on it for like a week. I'm like, I can't do this. Like, that's not the rules I'm supposed to go through, like query tracker. And then I thought about it and then I, it dawned to me, wait a minute.

[00:35:37] There is this agent that I know has been thinking about me because they talked, like, they specifically mentioned that they had been, that they know a, a talented food photographer and that I, for like, it had come up in a different conversation. And I'm like, wait a minute, I know somebody who probably would not be inappropriate.

[00:36:01] So I slid into their dms and I said, Hey Sarah, I have this opportunity and please tell me no if it's inappropriate, but if you're, if any of what I was saying is interested to you, let me know if you would like to discuss it further. And so Sarah said, yes, I am interested actually. please email me at, and so, yeah, I emailed you and we had our conversation and I got my agent and the other opportunity didn't quite work out at this moment, but there's other things going on in my career right now that I'm being considered for.

[00:36:41] But that's, I think that's another way. I mean, I don't, again, I don't recommend sliding into an agent's dm. Unless you are fairly certain that it would be like you have to have a relationship with them. And I think you've had a few other guests that have talked about the fact that they knew agents and that have kind of helped them in similar ways, but, um

[00:37:03] **Sarah:** comes to mind.

[00:37:04] **Jules:** mm-hmm.

[00:37:05] Yeah. Um, so it's like, again, like follow, follow their, what their guidelines say on, on their website. But if, if it hadn't been for the fact that you had mentioned during one of the Wednesday write-ins that you knew a food photographer that, uh, when you were, when you were, talking with an editor somewhere that, um, you're like, I know a food photographer that's really good.

[00:37:27] I'm like, wait a minute. I'm that food photographer. So yeah, if I didn't know you had already been thinking about me for some stuff then I would never have done it. Not even though we have had a relationship for like a year and a bit prior to, to me, into your dms, it would never. Yeah, it just never would've been, in my mind, appropriate to do.

[00:37:47] **Sarah:** Yeah, I am also a compulsive rule follower, but

[00:37:50] **Jules:** Yeah, I mean that's the thing about this whole, my whole journey, none of it went according to the rules. And it makes me feel like I'm going to get in trouble at any moment for breaking the rules. Cause none of this is how it's supposed to happen and it's how it happened. And so there's always the exception to the rule and I don't wanna test that exception ever.

[00:38:13] So, I mean, it worked out for me and I would've been cool with a no, I'm great with rejection. I strive on it, which, which, I mean cuz a lot of the re rejection I get is like, comes with, with really good critiques that I can grow from, right? Like it's never, it's never mean or out malice except for that one that was dodging a bullet.

[00:38:32] and even then that was good, right? Like that, that showed to me that agent was not somebody I would want to work with.

[00:38:38] **Sarah:** for sure. That's why I tell people all the time, um, sometimes people ask me, will this agent get mad at me if I do X, Y, Z? And I mean, they're all, you know, they're very mild things. And I'm like, honestly, if they do get mad at you for that, then that's not the person you wanna work with.

[00:38:53] **Jules:** yeah, exactly. I was very, and I did that in my proposal too. Like I was very clear about these are my boundaries. These are things that I'm not willing to compromise on. And if these are non-starters, for you, I mean, I didn't use those words, but that was the, the goal, right? If the things that I put in

my proposal were non-starters for the agents that I was querying, then we would not have a good business relationship cuz these are things that are absolutely non-negotiable.

[00:39:21] **Sarah:** yeah, I had put, I had decided to put that I was disabled in my query letter when I was looking for an agency, because I was like, you know, I don't wanna work with an agency that would reject me because of that. So.

[00:39:33] **Jules:** Mm-hmm.

[00:39:34] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for the quick round. Are you ready?

[00:39:37] **Jules:** Yes.

[00:39:38] **Sarah:** All right. So this is called Author dna, first question, are you a pantser or a plotter?

[00:39:44] **Jules:** Plotter to the extreme.

[00:39:46] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:39:49] **Jules:** A just right writer,

[00:39:51] **Sarah:** Oh, Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night

[00:39:53] **Jules:** afternoon

[00:39:54] **Sarah:** when starting a new fiction project, do you typically start with character, plot concept, or something else first?

[00:40:00] **Jules:** concept and kind of a feeling that I want to impart

[00:40:06] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:40:08] **Jules:** coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoon.

[00:40:10] **Sarah:** When writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

[00:40:13] **Jules:** It depends if I'm stuck or not. I'm stuck. Silence. If I'm not stuck. Music,

[00:40:20] **Sarah:** Hmm. 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?

[00:40:26] **Jules:** get it right.

[00:40:27] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:40:30] **Jules:** Microsoft Word. Yes.

[00:40:33] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:40:35] **Jules:** Drafting,

[00:40:36] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:40:39] **Jules:** sequential

[00:40:39] **Sarah:** And final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:40:43] **Jules:** introvert.

[00:40:44] **Sarah:** All right, 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 do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them, or how did that shake out?

[00:40:55] **Jules:** My biggest qualm was, having either agent after agent or publisher after publishing wanting me to center abled people's feelings and that never has entered into it. I was even, like going into the promotional aspect of my work, I was really worried about being put in situations that were unsafe for me as a visibly queer, disabled person.

[00:41:26] And just like over and over again, having both my publisher and my PR person reassure me that you're allowed to say no. And if you're feeling uncomfortable about something, let us know and we will note it. So it was not realized. Um, I think that's, Me. Part of that was I, I set up those expectations and boundaries at the beginning of the relationship, but it was still one of those things where I worried because, these isms are so prevalent in the industry, I was worried that it would be like this project would never happen because of all those isms,

[00:42:03] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:42:04] 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?

[00:42:12] **Jules:** For the longest time, I thought the answer to this was no. And then it like dawned on me the other day that I, like, I have to write the entirety of something in my head before I can download it to a draft. Um, because the revision process like literally hurts my brain. I get physical pain during the revision process, is one of my fun neuro divergent quirks.

[00:42:32] yeah, I, nobody else does that apparently. and that's again, one of the reasons why I get it right. And that's different, I think. so, and it also allows me to write really quickly, like, I can, I can write 10,000 words in a day, no problem. If I have the energy to do it because it's already written.

[00:42:50] I just have to get it under my head. I've been known to write 30,000 words in a month. So that's good, but it's also exhausting when it's done. And another quirk that I didn't realize until recently, and it kind of leads to some interesting things for how I have to write visual scenes, is I have aphantasia, so I do not see visual images in my head at all.

[00:43:13] My head is a blank, black, gray void. and so it, it just makes for different processes while I am writing. And I kind of have to act things out a little bit physically as I'm writing some things to try and feel how it, how my body would embody that space. And then I get like sensory or, um, somatic, I feel things, I picture things somatically in my body and if it feels the ways that I want the reader to feel, then I'm like, okay, this is right.

[00:43:46] And I continue on.

[00:43:47] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:43:48] **Jules:** So I think that's different.

[00:43:49] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:43:49] **Jules:** Other than that, I think no.

[00:43:51] **Sarah:** I don't know if I write the whole story in my head, but I do. I have a, I let an idea simmer for like a year or two years before I ever write it.

[00:43:59] **Jules:** I mean, I think that's close enough. Like, and it's not like it's word for word. Sometimes it is. Sometimes I will write pages and pages and pages and I have a nearly idetic memory. So it's like once I see something or whatever, it's like in my head forever and I cannot let it go. And it's a blessing and it's a curse.

[00:44:18] So like there are some times I will rewrite entire passages over and over again until I am really happy with the wording or the way it makes me feel. Cause I want people to feel something when I'm

[00:44:30] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. writing.

[00:44:31] Mm-hmm.

[00:44:31] **Jules:** otherwise what's the point of it, right? Like I wanna rip out their guts and stomp it on the floor and have them like ugly crying and also like happy dancing.

[00:44:39] Like I want them to feel the full range of emotions. And it also makes for a very exhausting process. Cause like, it's kind of like method acting, but it's method writing. And I like, have backstory. I'm, I don't know, maybe this is like more of a thing to impart wisdom about my method. And this comes from my, I also have a, a theater background, and we would have to write entire biographies and back stories for our characters, um, that we were acting out.

[00:45:06] So we would have a real good understanding of their motivation. So I do that with my characters as well. Like they have pages and pages of backstory and who they know and like incidences in their, in their previous life that may inform the current whatever situation is. And so I always know, even if it's a character that you're only going to see for a chapter, I always know what is their backstory, what is their motivation and why they're there.

[00:45:35] And they're just not there to act as a prop. They're a full realized character, even if we're only seeing them for a chapter.

[00:45:45] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:45:45] **Jules:** I, I mean, I know, I know other ones who do that, but I'm not sure they, like, my outlines are sometimes 30,000 words and so my outlines are almost like a first draft almost.

[00:45:57] And then it's like, are only 15,000 words. And I'm like, only, but other people will be like, that's a big outline. I'm like, but that's like, I have a fully, like, that's how I work and, and that's why I am able to write the way that I do is because I really know my story inside and out by the time I'm ready to, to info dump it all into something that is a coherent story without like plot holes and stuff I need to fix later.

[00:46:25] **Sarah:** Yeah. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, whenever that was for you, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:46:33] **Jules:** I haven't had a chance to be really low, and, but I think overall, I think it was like the lowest part of my journey. If we want to talk from the very beginning and like getting in trouble for my writing and, and now I'm being celebrated for my writing, is I think it's just I have a compulsion to write and to communicate in a written form even if nobody ever sees it.

[00:46:58] And so I just think that. Having, even if somebody is, if I'm getting in trouble, there's always like little bits of encouragement from other people that have like that. I keep rep replying in my head over and over again and it's like, well, I wouldn't have, I guess still I'm not still not sure that I'm a good writer, which might be bizarre, but then I'm like, I probably like, I wouldn't have had like no copy edit, like no big, huge developmental edits if I wasn't a good writer.

[00:47:29] I've written multiple proposals and I've only had like maybe a line or two need, like maybe we want to like removed it. Like my, anytime I've sent something in for editing, it has been very minimal. I'm expecting that to change one day. Right? Like I still, but that has been my experiences, so I hold onto that.

[00:47:47] Like I still am not sure of my writing. I don't know if it's good. But these things tell me that at least I don't suck. And so that's enough to keep going, right? It's just reminding myself and undoing those messaging that is informed by trauma and be like, no, Jules, you're not, you don't suck. Like at least you're, you're passable.

[00:48:07] You sold a book like, and even before then, it's like people, like I was again reading my, I had, I have all these letters from my best friend in high school and almost every single letter they were asking me to write them a story or something. My English teacher, I have all these assignments with feedback from my English teacher and reading the feedback from my English teacher, I'm like, oh my God, I was good.

[00:48:26] Like, what the heck happened, Jules? I know what happened. That's a whole other story, but it's holding onto though, like I have those little reminders to be like, you know what? You were good then. You've had all this years of experience since then. You're probably a lot better than you give yourself credit for.

[00:48:44] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:48:44] **Jules:** So that's what keeps me going.

[00:48:46] **Sarah:** All right. Do you feel like you made any mistakes along your publishing journey that you'd like to tell listeners about?

[00:48:54] **Jules:** Yes, and that is accepting a quick publishing schedule. And I feel like that's the, a lot of people's dreams is like, of course you want your book to be like out within a year and a half because publishing is such a long thing and having like cookbooks are three years and mine was out within a year and a half.

[00:49:11] And it was only like, it only worked like it was very quick. But the problem was very, very quick is you have no time to stop and enjoy anything. Like I have been once, since I signed my publishing contract on November 25th, I wanna say 2021. I have not had a moment to stop and enjoy the process. I have literally been, yeah.

[00:49:33] So if I were to do it all again, if I'm advice, I would give people. Is to, and I, I did it to myself. They said, like, when they said we would like this in this amount of time, I like, ugh. I audibly gasped it. And the publisher was like, we can, we can delay it to this time if you want. I'm like, no, no, no. I just had it in my head.

[00:49:53] It would be three years. And so this is, I can do it. I know I can do it, but this is not what I was expecting. And even though I'm happy with it and it is done, I would not do it again unless I was given a significantly larger advance to make losing out on those moments that I wish I had time to savor.

[00:50:16] Worth it.

[00:50:16] **Sarah:** Hmm. Yeah. Okay.

[00:50:18] **Jules:** it's supposed to be fun. And it was fun, but not in the ways that a lot of people enjoy their debut.

[00:50:24] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:50:30] **Jules:** I mean, the learning and the mistakes are ha are parallel to me, right? Like, that's how I learn is by making mistakes. That's how we all learn, is by making mistakes. The biggest thing I learned was that, there are, there is room for lightning in a bottle. And even though you still need to set your expectations for the typical journey for the one that, that's like years occurring and then years of going to publication like that, you know, it takes five years, you know, that common wisdom and then six or seven years for non-fiction. you have to make room for surprises and things to not go according, especially if you are a chronic rule follower.

[00:51:12] because you need to be flexible. And they always tell you that things like things could be, pushed back or delayed. They don't tell you how to prepare for things when they're moved up. Cuz even my, my pub, international pub date got moved up and my going to print date got moved up. Like I had a lot of deadlines that got.

[00:51:33] Moved up instead of pushed down through the road. And it was really difficult for me to pivot. I did it, but I'm still, part of, my brain is still stuck in like September, 2022. Just because I, my brain has not, did not make enough space to be, to be able to pivot.

[00:51:51] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:51:52] **Jules:** A thing that I did that was really important and that my editor.

[00:51:57] Protected with absolute fearcity was I take the last two weeks of every quarter off and I do not do any work. No, nothing. It's been a little bit difficult now post publication. but she made sure that the whole entire production schedule was around my ability to replenish myself and have time off.

[00:52:23] I know that's a luxury, but I think that's something that if you can get in that first, meeting with your editor where you sit down and you talk about the timelines and all that other stuff and include your, include your agent in on this, if you're able, is to have in that publishing schedule, make time for breaks where you completely unplug from anything related to that project and even from writing in particular, and make room for doing something other than, because even if it's a more typical longer journey or a quick one, I think having that time is important so you don't burn out, especially if you're neuro, neuro divergent.

[00:53:09] Cause it's really easy to get caught up and lost in deadlines, and missing out on what's happening today.

[00:53:15] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:53:16] **Jules:** So that's my business advice.

[00:53:18] **Sarah:** All right. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. You've mentioned Eric and some others, but who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:53:29] **Jules:** so my partner was the biggest one. The book would not be possible if it weren't For him because, um, I only have so much energy and there was no way I was cleaning up after the mess I to make when I was recipe developing or doing images, and it was in the middle of lockdown, so I couldn't have my assistant there with me.

[00:53:49] So, I mean, there were days that I dirtied literally almost every single cooking dish in the house, and they would walk into a kitchen with dishes like overflowing and would have the igni initial shock and then just clean. So, would not be able to, like, I cannot sing his praises enough, for that. I mean like Stacy Graham, who's an agent, who was one of the R&Rs. and I give her acknowledgements, like she's the one who's like, I would really like to see a safety chapter in the book. And I thought that was like really, really, um, excellent advice. Jess Dallo uh, she's an agent. She's the one who rejected it because she, she didn't feel like she connected personally to the recipes and she wanted more recipes that came up, in her, childhood.

[00:54:41] But that, that gave me a little bit more direction for some of the food histories that I was going to include in the book.

[00:54:46] Amy and I can't pronounce her last name cuz it's, it's, uh, Italian. So a big thank you to Amy. Um, is it Gio Frida, I think you know how to pronounce her last name.

[00:54:58] **Sarah:** Oh, I'm, yeah.

[00:55:00] **Jules:** I, it's okay. I'm gonna spell it out and I'm really sorry, Amy, if you ever listened to this, but it's g I u F f R I D a and she is the agent who spent literally a couple months speaking with editors at different, publishers trying to see if she could find a publisher in the US cuz she was not familiar with the Canadian market. And her end advice was like, maybe you wanna like only

think about Canadian publishers, which I have no experience with, but I think like, she was like, she was the one who really was like, okay, I have something here.

[00:55:40] Like I, no matter what I, I'm not gonna give up on this book just because Amy took that extraordinary amount of time considering my proposal and doing all that legwork without a guarantee that, she would ever be my agent.

[00:55:56] **Sarah:** Uh, Jules, thank you so much for coming to the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:56:00] **Jules:** thank you for having me. This was fun.

[00:56:02] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, Qualms, and Quirks.

[00:56:06] You can find the text of Jules 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. If you're interested in supporting the show, go to patreon.com/sarahnicolas.

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