

QQQ 4.9 Jocelyn Rish

Sarah: [00:00:00] Welcome to Queries, Qualms, and Quirks, the twice a month podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas and literary agent, Sarah N. Fisk. Jocelyn Rish is a writer and filmmaker who loves researching weird and wonderful animals and sharing what she learns.

Sarah: Her first book was Battle of the Butts, about 10 animals that do weird things with their butts. Her next book moved to the other end with Battle of the Brains, about 10 animals with mind blowing brain abilities. She lives in South Carolina with her adorable dog. So please welcome Jocelyn to the show.

Sarah: Hello.

Jocelyn: Hi, Sarah, thanks for having me. I'm so glad to be here.

Sarah: Yeah, thanks for coming on. So we're going to talk about your journey to publication, and we're going to start by going all the way back to the beginning. When did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

Jocelyn: All right, well, if we want to go back to the beginning, we're going to go way back. Now, [00:01:00] I was always one of those girls with the book in the hand and the backup book in her purse, but I actually never thought about being a writer. That was not one of the things that occurred to me. That wasn't something, I don't know, it was just, it wasn't something I thought regular people did.

Jocelyn: You know, it You know, fancy people did. I don't know. So, but it turns out when I look back there were some signposts along the way. So like way back in sixth grade there was a contest For writing a story or writing, I guess, an essay about shopping wisely, wisely was the word. And, uh, I ended up winning.

Jocelyn: I was one of the 10 winners in the entire state of South Carolina. And I got to meet the South Carolina governor. There was a big fancy to do at the governor's mansion. I met the South Carolina governor and I won a 50 savings bond. So it's the first time I ever won any money for my writing. But again, still didn't dawn on me.

Jocelyn: This is something you could do. Then fast forward to ninth grade, in English class. We were doing a unit on creative writing. And so he, the English teacher gave us various prompts and stuff, and kind of let us do what we wanted. And I wrote this very dark and gory story, because [00:02:00] that's what I like.

Jocelyn: So I wrote a dark and gory story. he ended up reading the, reading it out loud to the class. He's like, y'all have to hear this story. And so he read it, but he didn't tell anybody who wrote it. And so he asked, after it was done, everyone was like, Wow, that's amazing! And then he's like, who wrote it?

Jocelyn: And everyone's naming off, you know, the kind of quirky guys, and the guys are into that heavy metal and the dark stuff. And then my crush, who happened to be in the English class, he's like, it was Jocelyn. I know it was Jocelyn. I was like, A, how did he know that? Because I didn't think he even knew I existed.

Jocelyn: But he was right, it was me. And my English teacher came and he plopped it on my desk. And everyone was like, Why does she write this story? She's so, like, quiet and doesn't say a word. And so shy. And um, so

Sarah: You always gotta look out for the quiet ones.

Jocelyn: I know, exactly, right? And so that was like my first brush with, like, you know, kind of, you know, Really feeling like people are like, whoa, still did not click, did not do the things it's supposed to do, that this is [00:03:00] where you're supposed to be meant to be.

Jocelyn: And so went on high school, college, not, not a whiff that I wanted to be a writer. I, uh, I was a psychology major in college. my minor was computer science. And so when I graduated, I started working for a software company. And kind of climbed the ladder really quickly there. And kind of my mid late twenties, I was miserable.

Jocelyn: Like one of those things like dry heaving on the way to work, miserable. I hated it so much. and so as I sat there every day, my mind was just off, like on these stories, creating stories in my head. I'm like, it finally hit me. I'm like, wait a minute, maybe this is something I should think about a little bit more.

Jocelyn: Uh, so I signed up for some writing classes at the local college. and then in 2004, 2004, so now we're like 20 years ago, for real. 2004, I signed up

for the, uh, Writing for Children and Teenagers at the Institute of Children's Literature. and worked through that, you know, I was learning all about the process.

Jocelyn: Then in, uh, 2006, I completed my first nano, and that was so exciting. I had [00:04:00] a novel, a friend had told me about nano, and I did it, and it was amazing, and I was just riding this high. And so, you know, now I've taken some classes, I had some, you know, Some written stuff under my belt. I'm like, okay, I think it's time to take it to the next level and figure what this whole publishing thing is about.

Jocelyn: It's the next step. So I was like, what, what, how?

Sarah: That's perfect, because that's the next question, is um, how did you learn more about the publishing industry, like how to query, how to go about it, everything like that. Oh

Jocelyn: had been doing, going to my library, going to bookstores and gotten some of those, you know, big old chunky books about, you know, with, you know, The market guides and that kind of thing, but it's so overwhelming and it was like, I don't, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. And, you know, this is back in snail mail days, right?

Jocelyn: and so I guess it was an early 2007 my aunt, uh, my mom's mom's huge. She's always been a huge supporter of my writing. And so she had found a pamphlet in a bookstore about a day long writing conference where she lived, which is about three hours away from me. And so she's like, why don't you come up here, stay with me, and go to this writing conference.

Jocelyn: And it was a kidlit conference too. [00:05:00] It wasn't just a regular writing conference. It was a kidlit, kidlit conference. Because I, at that point, I had kind of, I wanted to write YA young adult was my, that was my thing. I love writing, reading it. So I figured that's why. I want to write it. Um, so I put it there and, um, you got to, it was one of those things where you paid for critique, so I had submitted a story, roaches, weirdly enough, about, because I was terrified of roaches, and it was this kind of like, funky story about roaches, and, um, it was, it was a story that one of my, um, one of the, um, Classes I've taken at the local college.

Jocelyn: The instructor just said wow. She's like I read this She's like I just knew you were a writer. So I'm like, oh, this is so cool. I'll get in front of an

agent It's gonna be the best thing ever And so, uh, I went there and it was early in the morning sat down with him and he was he was Very excited about it.

Jocelyn: He's like he had a lot of great things to say about a couple things He's like you probably need to tweak he's like now, would you mind he's like i'm doing a session later today Would you mind if I use this as my example and i'm like, okay Well, this sounds pretty [00:06:00] awesome. Okay. Yes, please. Let's do that.

Jocelyn: So go in there and I go to the session and sit down. He decides this is when American Idol was super popular and he decided that he was Simon Cowell from American Idol and proceeded to rip apart, just shredded it. Just, I mean, just in the most sarcastic, cruel way that you could. And I'm just sitting there like. And so I'm hearing people around me say, Oh my gosh, I hope that, Oh, but poor writer. Oh my gosh, this is so horrible. Like I hope she's not in here. And I'm like, yeah, I told you. So yeah, that was super fun. And, uh, so that was kind of my first experience with, uh, traditional publishing. So it was awesome. I loved it.

Sarah: my god. I know no one can see me, but I'm literally just sitting with my head in my hands.

Jocelyn: It was the best thing ever. And so, um, yeah, it was, it was, yeah, it was, it was a very, it kind of, I mean, in a [00:07:00] way, I guess it was good because I mean, it just, Put you into the boiling

Sarah: Nothing would ever be that

Jocelyn: it's gonna be hard worse than that. Right, you know, so And I was able to laugh about it mostly at the time It was I didn't cry which is good Because I'm kind of a crier especially when I get mad and I was mad because he had led me to believe he really enjoyed it and really like I mean, that's what he said during the critique and He even kind of afterwards, I kind of went up to him because he had my hard copy.

Jocelyn: That's one of his hard copies. He had my hard copy with all his notes on it that he was supposed to give to me from my critique that I had paid for. And so I'm like, I went up to him and I'm like, um, can I get my notes? He was like, he was like, I hope it wasn't too bad. I just wanted to make it entertaining.

Jocelyn: I was like, okay,

Sarah: will point out though, like, for those of you who weren't around this time, this time period in publishing, this was like a thing that agents did, is they like, snarkily critiqued query letters and stuff on Twitter and everything. And, um, now it's like [00:08:00] taboo, like you're not supposed to do that, but that was definitely a thing that people did back then.

Jocelyn: Yeah, yeah. but I will say a lot ended up coming out of that. It was good because I had never heard about SCBWI before. And so SCBWI had a booth or something. So I, I learned about SCBWI, and I found, um, a local critique group through that. Like, you know, I got the, all the literature for SCBWI, found a local critique group.

Jocelyn: That was a group I attended for like, I think seven years we stuck together, you know, um, and now one of my best friends is one of the women I met there. And so, a lot of good things came of it. Including the trial by fire. So,

Sarah: Goodness. All right. So then what happened? Can you, can you break down for us your journey from then to signing a book contract?

Jocelyn: So luckily that did not happen. Send me away forever with my tail tucked between my legs, even though it felt like it at the time. But, um, you know, I just continued along. I had a whole bunch of short stories. you know, I was, I kept participating in NaNo year after year. And so I was submitting short stories to contests.

Jocelyn: I won one finally, [00:09:00] and it was exciting. And I got. several hundred dollars and my, it was published and it was exciting. my nano novel, I entered the Amazon, one of my nano novels, I kept entering the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Contest from again way back when and kept making it, you know, pretty far along.

Jocelyn: I never made it to the final rounds, but enough that I was getting some really good feedback from judges and stuff, so that was great. And you just kind of plug it along, plug it along. You know, I was doing kind of the right things, but not as aggressively as I should be. Like, I started blogging at that point, so I wasted a lot of time.

Jocelyn: I don't want to say wasted, because I met a lot of lovely people. But I was spending more time blogging When I should have been writing and getting my stuff out there. Um, and you know, in part of the blog, I entered a lot of contests for like pitch contests and that first line contest, first page contest.

Jocelyn: And I kept doing really well on those. And I got a lot of contact with agents and all of them were like, this is great. But they'd read the full and be like, I really love it. But it was always, I really love it. But it was, so it was, I was getting like getting felt like I was getting close, but never getting all the way.

Jocelyn: And so I kept, [00:10:00] I just kept doing that rather than, like, taking the plunge that I should have taken. because it was such a small sample of agents and, and, and opinions and stuff. And so, So I kept, so I just kept turning rather than doing, then moving forward, I guess, kind of just turning the same, the same little area rather than pushing forward.

Jocelyn: but in 2013, it was my second nano and the one I, the one, my Turner that I've been working on, on and off on for ages. so that was my 2007 nano. And so in 2013, so that many years later, yeah, it actually won the SCBWI work in progress grant, uh, for contemporary and all of our young people. And I was like, This is it.

Jocelyn: This is it. You know, I've arrived. This is going to be it. and so right after that, um, Pitch Wars came along. So I, I submitted to Pitch Wars, uh, and at that point, that was when you had an alternate, um, that the mentors could pick alternates. And, um, luckily my alternate, uh, was one of those that went all the way in, you know, she read the whole thing and.

Jocelyn: So I went, you know, a [00:11:00] whole round of revisions with her, she was excellent with Fiona, she was excellent, and I got some interest in the, in the, uh, showcase. And so, uh, again, I just, you know, every time anything's happened, I'm like, this is it, this is it, this is it, and then, you know, I got, uh, I think several full requests and one of those turned into an R& R.

Jocelyn: And so I spent a lot of time on the R& R, which I did not feel in my heart was right, but I did it because it was an R& R from a really great agent. Uh, so I spent a lot of time working on that. And then she read it. She's like, thanks, but no thanks. And so like I wasted a little, and I knew it too.

Jocelyn: You're like, I knew it, that her suggestions, I just, I knew it wasn't right. And you, that's one, that's one of the hard lessons you learned that. My gut knew my heart knew and my head's like, no, she's so good. You have to do what she says. Um, so, you know, it's just those kinds of things over and over again.

Jocelyn: And so then I started again, pitch Wars again, same novel, which again, I should not have done. I should have had something new to go in, but I

got another, I was alternate again, again, [00:12:00] another, Mentor that was super awesome. And, um, she took us both along the same way. She did the same thing for both her mentee and for me.

Jocelyn: And we became all three of us came very close. So that was a lovely experience. And the 2014 group was a super close group. We have a Facebook group and a state. I mean, to this day, 10 years later, we're still exchanging news. And so that was a huge, it was one of the best things I did for creating my community. These, uh, group of writers who are supporting each other and just being there for each other. And so that was, that was great, but same thing, you know, some requests, but nothing fully materialized. And I, I think at that point is when I finally got brave enough to like send out a whole bunch of queries. I queried almost every, every YA agent available at that time.

Jocelyn: And, um, you know, it just ended up, it, it was no dice. So, you know, then, I wrote a, finally broke free of YA, and I wrote a middle grade novel, and I was really excited about that, and, um, so I [00:13:00] finally queried it in 2017, and again, lots of requests, dice, wasn't there, so it's 2018, now we finally got to 2018, and, uh, I read a tweet on Twitter, you know, middle of the night, I was On Twitter when I should have been doing like literally anything else and I saw a tweet and it said it was a picture of A manatee the cutest picture of a manatee a little pudgy little manatee and it said did you know?

Jocelyn: manatees control their buoyancy by a cycle of endless farting. There, that's a fact you know now. That's what the little graphic said. And I was like, what? I've loved manatees forever, and I've never heard that before. And so I googled it, and not only is it true, but as I googled it, I found like all these other interesting butt facts popped up about other animals.

Jocelyn: It was like, you know, BuzzFeed little articles and Wired articles that had this little snippet about the manatee fact with other funny butt facts. This is what I'm like. This [00:14:00] is the coolest thing ever. I was like, okay, well I have to do something with this. And so then started to be like, well, I don't write picture books.

Jocelyn: Cause clearly this is going to be a picture book. This is not going to be, you know, YA for sure. Um, I don't write picture books and I definitely, definitely do not write nonfiction. So what am I going to do? So I, I, you know, I, I. Different things went around. I thought about writing a little, uh, fiction story about a manatee who's embarrassed because he keeps farting and learns his lesson that it's, you know, just thing after thing.

Jocelyn: And I was like, I'm like, no, I think it has to be nonfiction. So I get all these other animals in here. And so I finally hit on the fact that I want it to be like a reality show going back all the way back to Simon Cowell, right? And so I was like trying to brainstorm all these things like American butts and.

Jocelyn: But idols and like all these things where it could be like, give the animals are showing, showing off their talents, you know, through their butts, you know, through these reality shows. And finally I hit on battle the bands [00:15:00] being battle the butts. And I was like, it was like one of those moments. I knew, I knew, I knew that was it. As soon as I got the title, I didn't have a book at that point, but as soon as I hit battle the butts, I knew that was it. And so, um, trying to figure out what that looked like. And, wrote it and there you go.

Sarah: you went on this mission with that?

Jocelyn: Yeah. And it was, it was great because like I had the idea and um, I had written, I, I signed up right, right after I had the idea, because again, I knew nothing about nonfiction. I knew nothing about research or any of that stuff. And you know, when the universe reaches out to help you, I got an email from the highlights foundation that they were doing a class called the nuts and bolts of science writing and a retreat.

Jocelyn: And so I'm like, this, this, Things like something to be very helpful for me right now. So I applied and I got like a partial scholarship and I went up there and, um, it was the best thing. It was like, I learned how to do research cause I had no idea I learned, you know, but I had already done the first, I had the first three [00:16:00] sections.

Jocelyn: There's 10 animals. I had done the first three cause that's what I had to do to, you know, take it to there was I needed something to turn in. And, um, Jen Swanson and Miranda Paul loved it. They were the two, they loved it. And the editor that was there, Sam Gentry, she loved it. And she's like, finish, go home, finish this, send it to me.

Jocelyn: I love it. And I'm like, she's, she's a big editor. You know, she wants it. I've got to, I got to go do this. So it was, it was the, everything I needed to like lift me up. I knew what I, that was, I was on the right path. And so I came home, finished it in like just frenzy, frenzy of writing. And, um, yeah, so I queried.

Jocelyn: And, uh, I think. I was like, within a month of querying, I had my first offer, and so I ended up with three offers for it, I finally accepted, you know, my

author with, uh, Tracy Marchini was who I, with Bookends, is who I, I, uh, I accepted, and then, uh, she had no edits at all, and so it was in the new, the new year, uh, so as soon as the new year started, she sent it out, and by mid March, we had a preempt offer.

Jocelyn: We'd had [00:17:00] several, Editors that were interested and we, um, got the preempt from running press kids. And so we took it and it was just, after all these years of struggling to see it go so fast, I never thought I would, my, um, debut would be a book about animal butts, but there you go.

Sarah: How could you predict that?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Sarah: All right, cool. it is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

Jocelyn: Okay. All right. Dear agent, did you know manatees swim using farts or that wombats can crush enemy skulls with their rumps? Or that some turtles breathe through their derrieres? If butts make you giggle, then you'll laugh out loud while learning about a variety of animals with fantastic fannies. Battle of the Butts is a 6, 400 word non fiction picture book for older kids in the vein of the funny and educational books by Rebecca L. Johnson and Jess Keating. It presents 10 animals that have weird and wonderful posterior [00:18:00] powers. Explains what the power does to help the animal, and how each power works.

Jocelyn: While giggling and oohing their way through the pages, will learn about biology, chemistry, and physics. So it's a win for kids and their parents and teachers. After reading about each animal, fish that communicate through farts, beetles that shoot burning chemicals out of their bum kids are asked to rate its posterior power.

Jocelyn: Then, at the end of the book, they will decide on a winner and crown the ultimate king of keisters. I've been published in Highlights Magazine and The Post and Courier and have won several awards, including the SCBWI Work in Progress grant for my YA novel, the Highlights Fiction Contest, and the South Carolina Fiction Prize.

Jocelyn: Additionally, two of my short scripts won production grants and are now award winning short films. Previously a freelance writer for the MTV News website, I am now the interview coordinator for the Adventures in YA

Publishing website. Thank you for your time and consideration, Jocelyn
[00:19:00] Rish

Sarah: all right. Thank you. So how has your experience been since signing that first contract? Especially let us know if anything really surprised you along the way.

Jocelyn: Yeah, it was one of those things like, you know, you hear people say all the time about how slow publishing is, but you just really don't give it till you're in there. So like, I had the offer in mid March, and Butts didn't get published till November of 2021. And that was, you know, I mean, that was normal.

Jocelyn: That wasn't anything excessive. Um, I didn't get the contract to sign until September. So from March to September, before I got the contract, we didn't bring the, the illustrator on board. Like we didn't have an illustrator to November. I'm like, it had been almost a year at that point. And we didn't have an illustrator.

Jocelyn: and then I couldn't announce until January, 2020. And it's so funny. I was looking today, today in my Facebook memories today. Four years ago was the day the Publishers Weekly, uh, Publishers Marketplace, whatever, the announcement came out. So it was today, four years ago, that I was finally allowed to, to tell everyone about Butts.

Jocelyn: [00:20:00] So, you know, it takes forever. So, that was what the, I, I, I didn't get it. You hear it, but you just don't get it how long it takes. so that was like really the only thing, I mean, it was weird. Cause it was surprising, even though you'd heard it a million times, it was still a surprise because you feel it, you feel it in your soul.

Jocelyn: You're just ready, ready to see your book in your hands. Um, but other than that, you know, I mean, uh, you know, working with my editor was great. She's awesome. Alison Cohen at Running Press Kids. She's amazing. You know, she didn't have many changes. There's a couple of places we, uh, kind of, you know, went at it down because I had, it was a lot of, it was dense and it, uh, it still is, even though it's published, it's still pretty dense for our picture book crowd.

Jocelyn: But, she helped me find some places. We, it was like, do they really need to know that, that level of detail? so things like that, but it was a pretty easy process and, uh, she was great. And, uh, it's been one of those things that

it's been, it's been very weird ride with this. In general, because I've had a lot of personal things go weird.

Jocelyn: Like, so, okay. So 20 [00:21:00] years, I've been working at this almost. And then, so the day my contract comes in to sign for real, finally in September, I had to put one of my dogs to sleep. So I'm waiting at home for the vet to come and that was doing one at home visits. And I'm sitting there just kind of loving her on her kissing her.

Jocelyn: And I look at my phone bloop and I look and it's the contract and I'm like, are you serious? And so then fast forward to July of 2020 and my second dog had to be put down. And I'm at home crying my eyes out, email dings, and it's the illustrations are in the first time I get to see the illustrations for the book.

Sarah: Goodness.

Jocelyn: It's like. Okay, and so that was the weirdest thing because I'm like, they were delightful. David CRishton Hester is the illustrator. He lives in New Zealand and he is amazing. They're hilarious and cute and adorable. I mean, it's just, they were, they were so perfect. I was like, I would have been sobbing anyway, you know, looking at them and seeing, you know, him bringing everything to life.

Jocelyn: But then this added thing, and this is like, [00:22:00] Almost even worse, I, I, I hesitate to share it, but um, in June of this year, or 2023, I guess, my dad passed away, um, it, it was a, it was a, an accident, and it was, it was pretty traumatic, and I got home from the hospital, and I found out that Battle of the Butts had won the Towner Award

Sarah: Oh my gosh.

Jocelyn: from the Washington Library Association, so it's like, I

Sarah: The publishing world does not care what's happening in your personal

Jocelyn: know, I know, I was like, I don't want anything good else to happen with Wut, honestly, because everything seems to be tied with something horribly traumatic.

Jocelyn: So I was, you know, it's like, kind of was very downer to share, but it shows that, yeah, the publishing life goes on and, um, and then you have, you

know, in a single day you can have the highest highs and the lowest lows and you just kind of have to roll with it.

Sarah: Yeah. Alright, it is time for the quick round. I call it author DNA.

Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

Jocelyn: pantsier,

Sarah: Do you tend to be an [00:23:00] overwriter or an underwriter?

Jocelyn: overwriter,

Sarah: Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

Jocelyn: uh, night middle, deep in the middle of the night, I'm a total vampire.

Sarah: When you start a new project, do you typically start with a character, plot, or concept, or something else first?

Jocelyn: Concept. It's always a concept.

Sarah: Do you prefer coffee or tea?

Jocelyn: Coffee. Coffee.

Sarah: When writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

Jocelyn: Oh, silence. This has to be so quiet.

Sarah: When it comes to the first draft, are you a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?

Jocelyn: I'm a little of both because if I'm in the groove, I'm just typing as fast as I can get it down, get it down. But if I'm struggling, then it becomes I pick at every single word as it drips out. So, a little of both.

Sarah: What tools or software do you use to draft?

Jocelyn: Uh, I'm a total word girl from way back, you know, since I'm old school.

Sarah: Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

Jocelyn: Whichever one I'm not doing at the minute. So if I'm drafting, I just wish I already had words there to fix. If I'm revising, I want the rush of [00:24:00] drafting. So

Sarah: Do you write in sequential order? Do you hop around?

Jocelyn: it's like a sequential

Sarah: And then final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

Jocelyn: extreme introvert. Like I'll probably need a nap after chatting with you.

Sarah: Well, it's almost bedtime. Well, not for you. Not for me either. I'm also a night owl.

Jocelyn: yeah.

Sarah: All right. It's time for the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the worries that you had on your journey and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them or how did they shake out?

Jocelyn: Yeah, I'm, like, I'm someone who's struggled with anxiety my whole life, I think that's a common thread among many writers. Very, very anxious. So pretty much everything has been a qualm or a worry. Um, but I think the biggest one is something I kind of alluded to earlier is the fact that, putting off the querying for real.

Jocelyn: Like, I just kept dabbling, like, what do you call it? The productive procrastination? Is that it? You know, that I was like, doing those contests and those blog giveaways. And so my work was getting in front of some people. And so I felt like that was enough because some [00:25:00] people were seeing it. And, I was scared to put my work out there, seriously.

Jocelyn: Because if I took that big, the final step and started querying, and didn't get an agent immediately, then of course I was a total failure. And all those years of effort were a total waste. and so I just kept putting it off. But I mean, you know, I finally got to the point where I'm like, this is ridiculous.

Jocelyn: You know, you're not gonna progress if you don't actually query for real. And so, you know, I finally put it off. And so I think if I had done that earlier, things would have progressed faster because one, I would have gotten the feedback much, you know, that once you get all the rejections, you know, okay, no one's taking it.

Jocelyn: You got to move on. And so instead of just dabbling and fixing and you know, tweaking instead of like major rewrites, just tweakings that aren't making a difference, you know, I think if I'd gotten the full round of rejections very early on, then I could have moved on earlier, but I don't know that I would have moved on to nonfiction, you know, that was a much different journey.

Jocelyn: So, you know, where would I be? Who knows? But, and I think, you know, and then once I got it out there and saw, got the rejections, like, it [00:26:00] hurts, of course it hurts, you know, you hate hearing it, but it did not destroy me. I was, you know, still there. I could still, you know, move forward, and I could keep going, and I knew I needed to keep going, and so I think if I'd done that. Years earlier, you know, I, who knows, who knows where you'd be, but I think I could have pushed myself harder in the beginning. Um,

Sarah: right, it is time for the third Q. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that is kind of different or interesting or unique?

Jocelyn: not really like, I don't have any like major process. The big thing is, is that I'm a huge procrastinator, just, just a massive procrastinator. Um, and I find it very hard to write it without a deadline, which makes it hard to write, when nothing's contracted or anything. yeah, that's why I love nano.

Jocelyn: I've always loved nano because. It's an external deadline. I agree that there's nothing hanging on it because it's just yourself, but with the whole community doing it, you feel the pressure. And so I've written, I think, what, four or five novels at this point through Nano that I know I wouldn't have without, you know, um, and so even with butts, once I had the idea for butts, I was just kind of [00:27:00] like, Oh, this is fun.

Jocelyn: I think it's going to be funny. I need to figure it out, blah, blah, blah. But I don't know that I would have sat down to write it if I hadn't had the highlights deadline, you know, I had to submit something for highlights, which made me do the three chapters that I had to submit, you know, so I got that out there.

Jocelyn: yeah, it's bad. I don't know, is that a quirk or just a terrible, terrible habit? I'm not sure, but, um, yeah. So I really struggle to write without a deadline, so I need to figure out, figure out a way to get my way past that. Um,

Sarah: All right, when you were in the lowest parts of your journey, whenever that was for you, what do you think kept you going and why did you stick to it?

Jocelyn: you know, it's one of the things that's been, you know, like I've alluded to, the rollercoaster of all the things, you know, that, and each time I just, I'm stubborn, you know, I've always been stubborn. Just, I just, you know, If you tell me I can't do it, of course I'm gonna think I, I can prove, I wanna prove you wrong.

Jocelyn: I, you know, I'm gonna prove you wrong. And so, um, you know, and so even though that thing, you know, with the agent way back when was devastating, I'm like, no, I'm not gonna let him win. I have to keep going. and, you know, each rejection that came along, I was like, I, you know, I believe in the [00:28:00] story. I have to keep going.

Jocelyn: Or I, you know, I feel like I have some talent I need to keep going. One of the big, you know, continuing the roller coaster, uh, in the summer of 2021, I ended up in the ER with heart issues. I had heart palpitations. I was having heart palpitations and they got worse and worse and worse. And, um, so I went to my, uh, GP and she did the EKG and she's like, um, you need to go to the emergency room right now.

Jocelyn: I was like, right now? She's like, should I call an ambulance for you? And like, it was literally across the road. I could have walked much less driven. She's like, would you like me to call an ambulance? I'm like, Wait, it's really that, it's that bad? She's like, this is not good, you need to go to the, Okay, I was like, oh, okay.

Jocelyn: And so, you know, after, and all the testing and stuff, It, it, it was anxiety, you know.

Sarah: Oh wow.

Jocelyn: I mean, so, I'm, you know, It's one of those things, you hear the opposite story, So many times people are having serious health issues, And all the doctors dismiss it as anxiety, And so mine was the opposite, you know, That it was anxiety, and the doctor was like, Ah!

Jocelyn: But that summer I was preparing for my [00:29:00] debut to come out in November. Uh, my first feature film was coming out in mid October and I was trying to write the second book, battle the brains. And so I was doing all three of those at the same time. And I just like, yeah. So that was a super low point. I'm like, I don't know if it's, I don't know what I want to keep doing this.

Jocelyn: If it's, you know, I'm literally, I literally in the hospital,

Sarah: Yeah. Mm

Jocelyn: and you know, I had to either put me through the, you know, I had, you know, several weeks of testing with echo and, uh, wearing the heart monitor and all kinds of stuff before they're like, anxiety. So I was like, I don't know that this is what I, I don't want to be like this.

Jocelyn: And so that was rough, but it just,

Sarah: mmm hmm

Jocelyn: a kind of, I think, a rare storm of those three things coming together all at one time. you know, got past it, I made it, and then, you know, this, the happy times, you know, the book comes out, the movie comes out, the second book is written and turned in, you know, and then it's all happy.

Jocelyn: So, I'm just gonna figure out, hope the ways don't all happen at the same time so you just totally get swamped and overwhelmed.

Sarah: do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you'd like to let [00:30:00] listeners know? So maybe they can avoid making the same ones.

Jocelyn: Yeah, I thought, yeah, I kind of already, I, I, uh, I guess stepped on myself there because I talked about that I query too late. You know, most people say they query too early. And I definitely queried too late. I should have been pushing myself harder rather than just going in circles and circles and circles.

Jocelyn: Um, so I think, you know, it's just a big part of, um, I think the thing you need to do is find a community that can help you. You have the people you trust read it and be like, Yeah, you, you've done all you can do, get it out there, quit, quit messing around. My dad always said, pee or get off the pot, you know, so you just got to do it and say, you know, get, make sure you have the community can support you and push you, and listen to them.

Jocelyn: Cause I did have a community pushing me, but you know, I was like, so, you listen, listen to the people who are telling you and have your best interests at heart. So

Sarah: Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

Jocelyn: definitely experiment with your writing. Um, That was such a huge thing for [00:31:00] me. again, never did I think a picture book, especially never nonfiction. Nonfiction was never, I didn't read it when I was young. I was always a fiction girl. but because I was willing to, I had this idea and I was willing to just completely throw caution to the wind and try something new and it, and it worked out.

Jocelyn: and another thing I have done in the past that, um, I would, there's the New York, wait, hold on. I was at New York, Midnight, New York, Midnight. They do all kinds of contests, and so they do these things every year, and you do have to pay an entry fee, so that's a little bit, you know, it's a barrier for some people I know, but you get assigned to groups, and each group gets assigned, like, a genre, an object, and a location, and then you have to write either, you know, you can enter for flash fiction, you can enter for a short story, which is longer, you can enter for 100 word stories, and um, there was a big chunk of time I was entering those all the time.

Jocelyn: It was pushed me because I had to write a historical fiction. Never would I write a historical fiction. I wrote science fiction. Science fiction is not my thing, but I wrote a science fiction and by pushing [00:32:00] yourself and trying these new things, you discover strengths about yourself and your writing and weaknesses.

Jocelyn: You know, I know historical fiction, not my, not my genre. I can feel very confident now having tried it. Um, and so I think because I did that, I was. I felt better about jumping to nonfiction once I had this idea, whereas I'm not sure I would have been brave enough to jump if I hadn't been experimenting with these other, other places before.

Sarah: Interesting. I'm curious because I know they do the 24 hour

Jocelyn: Yes, yeah, yeah.

Sarah: that as well?

Jocelyn: I haven't, I did the screenplay one one year, I did their screenplay, I've never done the actual film one because I just, I couldn't do that. Um, but I did their screenplay one one year, that was fun.

Sarah: Alright, 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?

Jocelyn: Well, first, shout out to, um, my, uh, agent, uh, Tracy Marchini, and then my editor at Running Press, this is Allison Cohen, uh, they were both, uh, very supportive and amazing, especially at getting butts and brains [00:33:00] out, I don't know how I would have done it without them, my current writing group is, we call ourselves the Sasukas, and it's, uh, Kathleen Fox, Rebecca Petruck and uh, Kimmy Kynard and the four of us.

Jocelyn: We've been together for ages now, and we used to be a lot more, of course, before the pandemic. We got together about once a quarter for uh, for little uh, uh, weekend writing sessions and stuff, but um, they've been such a amazing support group. and then uh, the Picture Book Scribblers and 21 for the Books are two different book groups I joined for getting my picture book out there, and uh, one, 21 for the Books is a debut group, and then Picture Books Club Rose was a bunch of people at various different places and uh, it's been amazing supporting each other and reading each other's books.

Jocelyn: And of course my family. I don't know, I would have, I would have definitely wouldn't have made it without my family. Um, you know, all of them have been so supportive. My dad, when he thought I was absolutely bonkers for quitting my high paying Software job to write full time. He thought, Oh boy, I got, I got some [00:34:00] lectures for that, but, uh, he, he, you still supported me anyway.

Jocelyn: Uh, he was such a big fan. and then my mom has always been my copy editor reads everything looking for the every misplaced comma. And then, uh, my brother and sister also are, I'll read everything for me, but, um, especially they're always there for the, brainstorming, bouncing ideas section. So they all, all of them have been very, very supportive.

Jocelyn: So I couldn't, I certainly would not be here without them.

Sarah: Wow. All right.

Sarah: All right, Jocelyn, before you go, since we already heard about battle of the butts, can you tell us more about battle of the brains?

Jocelyn: Yes. once we had Battle the Butts all worked out, it was, uh, we, uh, went back to Running Press Kids to see what body part we wanted to work on next, and I, uh, submitted a proposal with several possibilities, and we decided it was best to go to the other end of the animal and go for brains. And so, Battle the Brains is about ten animals with mind blowing brain abilities, uh, that was So fun.

Jocelyn: That was so fun to [00:35:00] research because I had no idea. I mean, animals, I know animals are incredible. I've always loved animals. I'm a huge animals girl, but reading about some of the studies and things they've discovered about these animals was just, I think mind blowing because my mind was blown. It was amazing.

Jocelyn: Um, and it was, it was much harder to write than butts because for battle the butts, you, you, you learn, okay, they do this, they have this thing they do and they know why and they know how, so it's easy, you write it. But with the brain stuff. It's just this whole thing about, you know, the levels and what makes, and then what's intelligence versus kind of just habit and nature and, you know, and, and trying to figure that out and, and why they do this.

Jocelyn: And is there something going on behind just rote processes and all this stuff? And it was, uh, it's just so much more out there and, and I could have, Easily, you know, it was so hard to narrow it down to the ten I included because there were so many more. I wanted to include who do amazing things, but [00:36:00] you know I was trying to get into a nice balance of the different uh species and stuff, but yeah It was so much fun to write and uh Not as funny.

Jocelyn: That was hard too because I wanted to be funny. And so I was always feeling very, that was where Alison came in and was a total, my editor, and was a total champion because I was always like, Alison, I don't, it's just not funny. It's not funny. She's like, but yeah, but it's so interesting. It's like a different kind of entertaining.

Jocelyn: And so what I was feeling very Down because I'm like, it's not funny. I can't figure out how to make it funny. And she's like, it doesn't matter. You're making it interesting. And that's what we're trying to do is make these facts interesting for kids. And so, uh, she was huge at helping me through that challenge.

Jocelyn: I know, right? And

Sarah: So what you're saying, which is really surprising, is that brains are more complicated than butts.

Jocelyn: Brains are less funny than butts. Um, yeah, but

Jocelyn: but it's been interesting, you know, going out and doing like visits with kids. Like, I assume like every school [00:37:00] visit I would do or every, you know, interaction they'd want me to read, but almost more than when I do these like visits and stuff, almost more, it's about half and half.

Jocelyn: And the kids want to read about the brains. And they're just absolutely fascinated by the brains. And I was, I just figured it would just be 100 percent across the board. Any school visit or if anything would be butts. But now it's been about half and half. And the kids really love learning about these animals too.

Jocelyn: And how, you know, they're the same and different. And I, I have been very surprised at the reception from the kids. About how much they really are interested in the thinking processes of the animals.

Sarah: thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

Jocelyn: So thank you for having me. It's been so much fun.

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

Sarah: If you're interested in supporting the show, go to patreon.com/sarahnicolas. [00:38:00] That is Sarah with an H and Nicolas with no H. And if you're a published author interested in being a guest on the show, please click on the Homepage link in the description or go to sarahnicolas.com and click on the podcast logo in the sidebar.

Sarah: Thank you so much for listening and we'll see you next time.