

S2E3_Parenting and Writing: Practicalities and Possibilities with KJ Dell'Antonia

[00:00:00] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** The thing that has not changed for me is the need to protect the time that I need to achieve the creative goals. But the biggest barrier is always, there's always more to do in that busy household, so you have to make a concerted effort to set aside that time.

[00:00:23] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I'm your host, Kaitlin Solimine, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast.

[00:00:29] We hold conversations about the intersection of caregiving, creative practice, and capitalist production, as well as what it means to reproducing art while also being a parent in modern society. Find out more@www.postpartumproduction.com where you can also sign up for our newsletter.

[00:00:55] Today I am talking with KJ Dell'Antonia, who's the New York Times bestselling [00:01:00] author of *The Chicken Sisters*, *Inner Boots*, *How to Be a Happier Parent*, and the forthcoming *Playing The Witch Card*. She's the former editor of the New York Times' *Motherlode* blog, co-host of the #AmWriting podcast and a passionate bookstagrammer at @kjda.

[00:01:14] She lives in Lyme, New Hampshire with her husband and four children, and she has to go outside every day or else she and her dogs will go slightly insane. I appreciate that. We talked a lot about the practicalities of being a caregiver and a writer and the impressive journey kjs taken in navigating those roles.

[00:01:31] We began with a look at her writing work on parenting, specifically her editorial work at the New York Times. I personally was very grateful to her work way back when I had actually connected with her on a piece that I had written about an adoption process that my husband and I had undergone and. I felt very grateful for not only her editorial advice, but also her personal advice in terms of how to navigate writing about your own children, [00:02:00] writing about parenting and what happens when those narratives are made more public.

[00:02:06] And so we had started this conversation talking about that connection that we had had initially, and her editorial

[00:02:13] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** feedback that she had

[00:02:14] **Kaitlin Solimine:** given me way back when, which is probably about a decade. And then

[00:02:18] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** how that also had influenced her own

[00:02:21] **Kaitlin Solimine:** writing and editorial

[00:02:22] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** work.

[00:02:28] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Where do you find that sweet spot of being able to write about parenting without doing it in a way that feels like it disrespects your children's private lives?

[00:02:40] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Well, my role as I saw it, was always to write about, Society and parenting and culture and parenting, and I would very frequently gather my topics by like being at a dinner with a bunch of other parents and [00:03:00] hearing what we're worried about.

[00:03:01] I had to produce a lot of content, so I was often trying to think like, what are we thinking about? What are we worrying about? But I always try to approach it from a bigger, Angle. So if one of my kids was having, say a friendship problem mm-hmm. I didn't focus on, I don't know, sixth grade girl friendships.

[00:03:23] I would go, okay, well how can we back that up and what can we look at that is both larger and not identifiable and. When I needed to tell a fairly specific story, I would try to either A, wait timing, or B, I have enough children that sometimes if you knew me, you could guess which child was involved in a story, but if you didn't actually personally know us, you wouldn't.

[00:03:48] I really tried to focus more on. What outside my family was affecting us, inside my family and right about it [00:04:00] that way. One of the exceptions to that was that I had, I have two daughters and they used to fight really, really terribly and they are very heavily featured in the children fighting section of how to be a happier parent.

[00:04:13] And I had other people read that to make sure it was even. That it didn't suggest that one child was, was more of the problem than the other child. And I kind of knew they didn't care and they didn't. So yeah, that's kinda that, that was kind of the one. And we laugh about that really hard now. Like everyone, everyone really enjoys looking back on that, as painful as it was at the time.

[00:04:41] So, I dunno, I tried not to, they have a different last name than I do. I never used their first names. I don't even think their first names are in the book. I mean, they're probably, they're in the introduction, so you could certainly guess, but it would be hard to go. My goal was if you Google one of my [00:05:00] children by their name, you shouldn't find things that I have written.

[00:05:04] Now. Google is magical, and the truth is that Google has solved that. But that's not my fault. Like you didn't used to be able to find that. But now Google sometimes connects things just because Google has put two and two together, but it's been long enough. That doesn't really matter. Right. Right. That's not really advice for anyone else.

[00:05:28] That's just what I did. Given your kids a different name, not having the same last name. I mean, if you just think about everything from the perspective of if my future 14 year old finds this mm-hmm. Will they be upset? And if friends of my future, 14 year old find this, if enemies of my future 14 year old find this, can they use it against them?

[00:05:50] Like all that stuff mattered.

[00:05:52] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Yeah, it's a really good point. Yeah, I agree. I think so much in, in reading the work that you have done on parenting specifically, [00:06:00] I feel like it's been a really helpful reminder for me where I am now, especially with younger children, to continue to be empathic about their experiences.

[00:06:10] And I think so much of parenting often is about taking a step back and. Oh, my kid is doing this thing. That's super annoying, but really what they're asking for, really what they're trying to say is X, Y, Z. I find it that application to the writing about parenting to be really appropriate too, which I appreciate it.

[00:06:28] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Some of it is universal. Every toddler is annoying about whether they can have the specific cup. So I, I don't. That that doesn't matter. That's, that's all fine. Right, right. That's like a universal annoyance.

[00:06:47] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Speaking of the long view, I, I was curious, cuz I don't know if I know this. I would love for you to take us back in terms of your writing journey and how you got to be editing at the New York Times, how you've written [00:07:00] novels.

[00:07:00] I know that's a lot probably to cover, but if you were to give us. Crib notes a little bit on your life and how those moments have intersected, because obviously I'm sitting here with a one-year-old and a four-year-old and a seven-year-old, and I know that my podcast is specifically about that early moment and how to balance having an artistic, creative life with parenting and childcare and caregiving and all of that that comes with it.

[00:07:26] So yeah, I was curious to hear your story or how you would look at it now. How would you tell your.

[00:07:32] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** So when I had my first kid, I had a j o b job for about three months. Uh, no I didn't, you know what? I never had a j o b job cuz I got laid off like I intended to go back to my j o b job and I got laid off and it was one of the many recessions that have endured in the past 20 years.

[00:07:53] Mm-hmm. And then we move. Out of the city into a really small town in New [00:08:00] Hampshire, and my husband and I cut a very specific deal, which was. That I was going to try to make a writing career and we were gonna have the same kind of childcare that we might have if I was working outside the home, cuz I didn't wanna move.

[00:08:19] And I, I was not super thrilled. But we had to, but that move really changed my career prospects. So, you know, it was, it was. I mean, we didn't actually write stuff down, although that wouldn't be a bad idea, but we had very delineated, this is the childcare we're gonna have. This is what it is for. It is not so that I can achieve doing your laundry.

[00:08:42] You can do your own laundry. You're a big boy. And that is not even, I mean, I say that as though he needed that ki he didn't like we. Came into this as equal partners, but after we had that first kid and then had more children, you all know someone is saddled with the, [00:09:00] the primary load of taking care of those kids.

[00:09:04] And in order to make sure that it wasn't entirely me, we really had to have conversations because also, I mean this is 20 years ago, things are better now. They're still not perfect, but they're definitely better. So my point is we

had the convers. Like I had time that was set aside and, and I used that time with the goal of setting writing up as a career.

[00:09:30] It was not a hobby. It wasn't. Trying, and this is lots, lots of people were able to turn a, a blog into a career. That's not the way I went into it. I was trying to like become a freelance journalist, get paid four things that went into magazines and later into websites. I did have a blog, but it was, that was for fun.

[00:09:53] I was always trying to write stuff that someone else would pay for, basically. Mm-hmm. [00:10:00] All right, so, And this is long ago, enough ago that I was writing for actual print magazines, which doesn't really exist now. Mm-hmm. It kinda does. And then I moved into writing for the internet, and I guess I really had a very targeted approach to the whole thing because like I said, the goal was to get paid.

[00:10:23] I love Elizabeth Gilbert. I love Big Magic. And when she talks about are you gonna ask your creativity to support? I was like, like she hadn't said that yet, but I was absolutely, the goal was for this to be professional, so I mm-hmm. Approached it more as, what will people pay me to write about that I also want to write about more than what do I wanna write about and who can I get to pay me?

[00:10:52] Mm-hmm.

[00:10:53] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Interesting. How did that then snowball into where you are now? If you think about specific moments that feel important [00:11:00] to that journey?

[00:11:02] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** I think the specifics are that I was basically always asking people to take the work, to pay me, to hire me, to write things. So I went from, I just, I, I remember every time I knocked off a rung on my mental ladder of where I wanted to go, then I would stop even messing with that.

[00:11:29] For example, I was trying to do journalism. So if I wrote something for the local paper and now I can tell people I've written for my local paper, I stopped trying to do that. Cause you can easily get sucked into sticking at the level where you've had success. And that was not, that was not my goal. So if I were right now, Trying to break into getting a short story collection published by one of the Big five publishers.

[00:11:58] Just to throw an example out there. [00:12:00] Mm-hmm. Once I got a short story into a certain tier of publication, I would quit pitching those. I

would move up and start pitching the next one. You know, it was a very methodical approach to creativity, which I guess is, is a little strange. I'm feeling a little incoherent because what I do now is so different from, from what I did then, but it is all a part of it.

[00:12:24] I did a lot of things with the goal of establishing myself in the room with other people who did things that I wanted to do.

[00:12:35] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Hmm. I really like that as a framework. I hadn't thought that. That is the way that we can work and that I think we often do work as creatives, but don't think about it. I like how you're saying in terms of putting yourself in the room.

[00:12:48] Right. So to that end, I do feel like a lot of your recent work obviously focuses on productivity on, I mean, even your podcasts of AM writing. Right. It's a very active [00:13:00] statement in itself. It seems like a little bit of a fascination around what productivity is and what that looks like and what that means, and I, I could sense some of that even in your parenting work, but I am curious to know, you're saying now in terms of the work that you're doing now, because that's something that we talk a bit about here at the podcast, and I was really interested to hear how you define productivity, what that means, especially as it intersects with writing and creative work and what that looks like to you, and then how you're able to.

[00:13:30] Build a community around that. It's a heavy term in many ways, and so I was curious how that sits with you.

[00:13:38] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Oh, there is. So there I could, I could go so many directions with this topic. Mm-hmm. Because you're right, I am really interested in how to do the work. Like it's really easy to have the ideas, it's really easy to plan to do the work.

[00:13:52] It's a lot harder to actually sit down and as we say on the hashtag game writing podcast, put your butt in the [00:14:00] chair and get the work done. So I do, I spend a lot of time thinking. Okay, here's where I wanna be. What are the steps to get there? And this even goes back to the, the answer I just gave you to that question.

[00:14:15] I guess this is just the way that ye old gold star a getting student mind works, which is all right if I wanna be. Here and I am over here. What are my steps to, to do in between and what are the smallest possible things that I

can achieve? And you're right, that, that is probably reflected in my parenting work as well, because mm-hmm.

[00:14:40] The same brain that thinks, okay, I want to have a draft of a novel in three months. Have a draft of a novel, is not, that's not a useful goal, a useful goal. 500 words in the next hour. And even that is maybe not a useful goal if you don't, you know, the, the first goal is [00:15:00] what is this about? And, and who is it about?

[00:15:03] And is it a real story? And I mean, there's a lot that goes into that, but I, I, I'm really good about breaking those things down. And it's, I've done the same thing in other parts of my life, which is to say, okay, every night it gets to dinner time and I. Really unhappy because I don't know what to cook or whether I have the stuff that I would need to cook it.

[00:15:24] What is the step I can take to fix that? So I guess I'm definitely a person who looks at things and tries to break them down into the smallest steps that I can take to either fix them or achieve them. And I like doing that. I feel a little lost when I don't have that to do.

[00:15:44] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Mm. I'm curious if. Structure has changed for you over time?

[00:15:50] Did the steps change or are they always the same? When you're looking at, especially your work,

[00:15:55] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** the steps are always different. Yeah. So we're trying to [00:16:00] talk about maintaining a creative life when you also have a super active and busy household life for whatever reason. So the thing that has not changed for me, Is the need to protect the time that I need to achieve the creative goals.

[00:16:22] You can think about your creative work while you are driving, cooking, walking, standing by the sides of a sporting event. Mm-hmm. Any of that. But thinking is not enough. You have to have time to actually. Draw the thing or write some lines of the poem, and also thinking while in motion is not enough, you need to me at least, well, not, not even just to me, you really do.

[00:16:54] It takes designated thinking time. So sometimes the work is [00:17:00] an hour or 15 minutes, half an hour, 45 minutes, an hour, whatever you have sitting. A laptop or an open notebook or a blank page or nothing, but

definitely not your phone and definitely not the internet. Mm-hmm. And just thinking, well, what would that next step be?

[00:17:20] What am I trying to do? And then taking those next steps. But the biggest barrier is always, there's always more to do in that busy household. Doesn't. How old your kids are, what it is that you're dealing with. There's always more in your inbox. There's always more in the dishwasher, so you have to make a concerted effort to set aside that time.

[00:17:53] **Kaitlin Solimine:** It feels like the way in which. Thinking about your work and projects has a, I don't wanna [00:18:00] say chronology, but, but there's an end goal. Clearly. What does that look like and what does that mean? I mean, now that you've accomplished those things, like you said, I'm gonna write for the local paper, and I've done that check.

[00:18:10] How do you know that? That you're finished and that also that you've hit that metric, but does that metric change or, I'm kind of curious about how you define what is a successful outcome and what that means.

[00:18:22] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Well, I will always sit here raising the bar. So that is, that is, that is my personal personality flaw.

[00:18:29] We used to have a joke amongst a bunch of us writers that was just sort of like, I'll be a real writer when, and it's always something you haven't achieved yet. So there's kind of my counsel of perfection around goals, and then there's the reality of what I actually do. So I try really hard for the goal that I'm trying to achieve to be something that I can achieve.

[00:18:51] So for example, I can achieve, write a draft, write a pitchable draft of a book. I can achieve write a query [00:19:00] to send to agents. I can achieve pitch three magazines. I can achieve draft three poems or put six drawings on the internet by the end of the month, or four cartoons for Instagram. Whatever those those are.

[00:19:15] Mm-hmm. None of those require that someone else pick me. Or someone else take action, right? I cannot achieve, get an agent I cannot achieve. Mm-hmm. Traditionally publish a book I cannot achieve, get a piece into the New York Times or mm-hmm. The Atlantic. I can only achieve pitch right. Do I can achieve, find someone to help with, hire an editor, give something to an editor.

[00:19:42] I so anyway. You asked about goals, and I try to make sure that the goal is something that I can do without anyone else making a choice. The truth is that many of my goals are outside my control, but you don't get an agent unless you do the stuff that is within your control. [00:20:00] You're. Cartoons don't become a book unless you first put them on Instagram or whatever.

[00:20:05] That's, I'm trying to speak more broadly about lots of different kinds of creativity and not just writing, but yeah, the, the rule is, I have this fantastic book here that I love. It's really, it's old, it's like 30 years old, but it's called 78 Reasons Why Your Book may Never Be Published, and 14 Reasons Why.

[00:20:26] It Just Might. It's by a guy named Pat Walsh and he was an editor, but the number one reason why your book will never be published is that you haven't written it right. And I like live by that. I think about that every single day. One reason that my next book won't achieve this, that, and the other is that I have not actually finished it.

[00:20:49] So I'm, that's the only thing I can control is whether or not I've finished it. So, yeah. A good goal is one you can achieve even though your brain is going, yes, but I want all the other stuff [00:21:00] too. My

[00:21:01] **Kaitlin Solimine:** personal struggle right now is even when I'm sitting down, especially in this early season of parenting, that there's so many intrusions that depending on, and maybe because if I set a goal that is, for example, write 500 words today.

[00:21:15] On some days I may be able to do that. And on others it's zero because the childcare's sick and the kid is this and that, and you're pulled in all those directions. And so I guess what advice would you give in terms of those goals? Is it just like, is the wanting to sit down enough of a goal if it doesn't always manifest in the way that you want in that particular day or week, or?

[00:21:38] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Things are gonna happen. I think the question is how often are things happening and is there something you could do? You kind of have to ask yourself. Cause I think we know sometimes you really couldn't do it. And that happens. I mean, that happens to, mm-hmm. To everyone at every stage of life. But especially when you have.

[00:21:58] Little kids [00:22:00] sometimes it really was impossible. Sometimes you woke up and that kid had something and you had to go. You had to get the emergency doctor's appointment and you had to take them, and then you were in

the car and then you were at the baseball game and there wasn't anywhere, and you're standing up with a toddler on one hip.

[00:22:16] Yes, there are some days that are like that. Some days feel like that, but also you somehow watch two hours of. Some days your brain has melted and then you watch two hours of Netflix, and that's fair. But if five days have gone by and they were all that way and you watched 10 hours of Netflix during that time, I'm gonna, I'm just, I'm just gonna say probably maybe that could have been eight hours.

[00:22:45] And when my kids were that small and I was trying to write a book and break into this every. After the horrible, awful day of all of the things, I would sit [00:23:00] down with the laptop and I would ask myself as a mantra, every time, do you wanna read a book or do you wanna have written one? And then I would hack out some words and they were not good words.

[00:23:10] And that book has never been published, but hey. I got that sort of early draft out of the way. So I think you have to be both gentle with yourself when it can't possibly happen, and also hard on yourself, so, so if you get it done every day, except. This day, you know, if you're keeping a sticker in your calendar for every day you manage to write 250 words, or you manage to set aside 30 minutes to work towards your goal, and you got a sticker 20 of the last 30 days, then go you.

[00:23:46] If you didn't get any, then either your goal has to change or you have to change because people do do this under really difficult circumstances. Having little tiny [00:24:00] people in your house is a really difficult circumstance, but it's still it. It can be done. It's very hard to say that from this perspective because it sounds hard because I do not have an infant crying at me all the time.

[00:24:16] But I have had an infant crying at me all the time. Mm-hmm. And I have gotten things done, so I want people to hear that it is possible, but also, Not here, that you should feel bad if it's not happening, and there's also always the chance that this isn't the year for the goal. Right. Right. That's, I mean, that you just, you have to make that call.

[00:24:41] **Kaitlin Solimine:** Right? I think that's a really interesting point, although sometimes I also bristle at and I shouldn't, but I feel like sometimes there are things that I wish that I feel like I want to do. For example, I really wanna go on a residency. I haven't taken a writing residency in seven. I was pregnant with my first child, so [00:25:00] it was over seven years.

[00:25:01] And I also know that I just can't do that right now. Like for very logistical reasons I can't. So recognizing those constraints. Yeah. The bad

[00:25:10] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** news about that is that I still feel like I can't, like I look at those and I just am like, oh man, I know I would love to do that. And I am 21 years into parent.

[00:25:22] And I've never found it. And maybe that's just me. I know people that do. I do, but it doesn't suit our family life for me to go away for that. And that does not, obviously doesn't mean that I don't have plenty of support for my writing and plenty of time to do it, and plenty of it just. Ultimately, it's always a choice.

[00:25:46] This is the other thing that I have found to be really helpful for myself. I could, I totally could choose to go and do a writing residency, but I would be choosing to [00:26:00] miss things at home that I don't wanna miss. So when I say I've never felt like I could, I think the truth is that I've never wanted to choose that over the two weeks even.

[00:26:11] Some of that is like, I feel like I don't want things to go wrong and for me not to have been here, but that's a choice that I'm making. Right? Like I, I could totally pick it up and go. So when you think of it as like, okay, I'm choosing no residency, but also I'm not gonna sit and watch every one of your sporting events, some of them.

[00:26:37] I'm gonna be working while you play a supporting event. Mm-hmm. And I have told my children many. I've told them many times, if you're doing this because I'm watching, you're doing it for the wrong reasons. Like I don't, I don't care. I do. I want you to have a great time and play your sport, but if you are only out there cause you think you're pleasing me, we need to.[00:27:00]

[00:27:05] As choices. I find it very helpful.

[00:27:14] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I can't remember which podcast episode it was, but one of your guests was talking about the need to write a specific book that felt like I have to be the one to write this book. I think for me, that's something that helps me sit down and get work done because, mm-hmm. I think sometimes my personally biggest challenge.

[00:27:33] I am very lucky and very privileged that I have a setup where I have the ability to afford childcare assistance, that my children are in schools that are operating right now. You know, there's a number of factors that have. Brought

me to where I am, where I can say, I can choose to write, for example. And I guess where I'm going with this is, I think my struggle is that I do really also enjoy being with my children.

[00:27:58] And so it's like balancing out. I really [00:28:00] do enjoy so much of motherhood and I do also mm-hmm. Enjoy writing. So how do I balance that and how do I say that? The choice to sit and write this book matters because, for example, am I the only one who could write this particular book right now? Hearing it in that way, it was very empowering to me to say, oh, this does matter.

[00:28:19] Because I think sometimes when you are, especially in those early trenches, it can feel like, does the other stuff matter too? And how do you balance that feeling of wow. My children are growing so quickly and wow, I'm missing something, or I'm missing out on something. Right? With the meaningfulness of creative work, that sometimes can also feel really not meaningful, especially when, at least from my end, I'm writing literary fiction, it does not pay.

[00:28:46] So the idea of, as you said, are you going to ask your creativity to support you? It supports me, but not as much financially as I wish it would. I mean, I wish the world would support a wider range of artistic pursuits.

[00:29:00] Maybe that's not fair because it does support me financially in ways that, you know, have given me other opportunities that support me financially.

[00:29:07] Mm-hmm. Right? Mm-hmm. But I guess what I'm saying is it's less of a question and more of a just a statement of, I really appreciated that particular insight from the episode that you are hosting. Because it reminded me, I guess, that yeah, when you are just driven to get something out in a creative way, that there is likely.

[00:29:28] A reason for that, and there is likely an audience for that. So to that end, I'd be curious to hear in terms of the creative writing that you're doing now, what that looks like or what's really compelling you, outside of it supporting you? What else is there in the work that drives you personally?

[00:29:46] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** Yeah, I, I wouldn't choose this as a way to support yourself.

[00:29:52] It happens that my goals are traditional. There are definitely other totally valid goals around [00:30:00] creativity and yeah, making a lot of money is not really a great reason to get into this particular field. That's a terrible

reason to get into this field. So do not become a writer or journalist or an artist if your goal is make a lot of money, because that is extremely unlikely, so.

[00:30:18] Mm-hmm. What does my creative work look like right now? You know, I. Always wanted to write books. I love books. I love to read them. I'm extremely passionate about the kind of book that takes us out of our day-to-day life and gives us an escape and a look at other people's lives, and also maybe a way to look at our own thoughts and experiences, but mostly just lets us think about something.

[00:30:50] Else, something fun, live another life for a while. So I adore consuming that stuff. Therefore, I want to make it. And that is, [00:31:00] That's a really good way to turn something you love into a job, which is not always a good idea. But in my case, really, like I've just always wanted to write books since I was extremely, extremely small and many of the other things I have done have just been detours on the way to doing this.

[00:31:16] So, Every day, I'm, I'm just trying to work my way towards creating another thing to add to the universe of possible books that readers like me can choose from to have that experience that I have always loved so much. I just love being part of. The universe of people that write books. I just love 'em crazy about 'em.

[00:31:43] And what does it look like? Well, right now it, it, it looks like a lot of thinking, but I'm trying to think of my next proj. I'm trying to like pull my next project together, and it doesn't involve writing words yet, but I've learned that it doesn't always involve writing words, it just involves sitting.[00:32:00]

[00:32:00] What I'm doing right now looks like a lot of thinking, and it is funny because you have hit me at a moment where it's really easy for me to let all that other stuff that is in my life knock me out of the chair because thinking doesn't feel like work. It's very easy. And this is, we were talking about goals earlier and it's really easier for me to sit down when my goal is a thousand words, but when I wouldn't even know, like at this point I couldn't write a thousand words because I don't know a thousand words worth of what this story is about.

[00:32:39] So I have to set goals that are like, sit here and stare at notebook for 30 minutes, which is about as long as I can. Then, then get up for five minutes and then say, do repeat four times. That's the kinda. That I'm setting right now, because otherwise I can't get to the point where I can write the thousand words and this would be a really, [00:33:00] this is a really easy time for me to

suddenly be like, I know laundry, I know dinner has got to be cooked and, and groceries, they've had to be purchased and I can fill up.

[00:33:13] A lot of time. So it's a moment where to get my work done, I have to set time goals and turn everything else off and really stare at. And honestly, I haven't been doing a very good job of that lately. Mm-hmm.

[00:33:28] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I know, as you've said in podcasts and in your work as well, the idea of thinking itself, it can look less productive, so I really appreciate the way you're framing, thinking in emotive, sitting down 30 minutes of thinking.

[00:33:43] I'm kind of curious actually, what does that

[00:33:45] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** look like? It looks like me with a writing utensil. And paper writing things like what if he, what if she, I know she or, or then making a [00:34:00] list like believes this and then circling things and then putting lots of exclamation points next to them and then coming back to them the next day and being like, that is actually not worthy of even one exclamation point.

[00:34:13] So I do think with my fingers moving and I can't think with. Fingers on my keyboard and I can be typing this and sometimes I am. So I'll get out and out outline and I'll rewrite some outlining stuff. And I guess in the past I have written whole books in the process of figuring out what book I want to write, and I'm trying not to do that this time.

[00:34:41] I may or may not succeed. I may have to still have to write a whole book in order to come up with what the book is. Some of this is just me trying to figure out a, a more efficient process than writing 300,000 words in order to get to 90,000 words. [00:35:00] Mm-hmm. Yeah. I feel like I'm in, I'm proving the goal is to learn to do this both more efficiently and better, which are two different things actually.

[00:35:12] Mm-hmm. Like I could maybe write a worst book more efficiently at this point. That's not the goal. The goal is both like I could write something that

[00:35:35] hangs together. And is an actual story, but isn't a better story than I've written in the past, and I would like to do both. I would like to both write something better and deeper, and that hits you in the heart even harder. But I would also like to do that more efficiently. Those two things may not both be possible.

[00:35:59] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I am [00:36:00] curious too, cuz I know you mentioned this in a podcast I was listening to about the format of the work, right? That one could say, okay, this is the way I need to write this book or produce this type of creative work right now because it works for my life right now. Right. And I'm curious if that's something that you've.

[00:36:19] Engaged with or that you've seen others do that you felt like was really successful? Again, maybe we need to dig into that word a little more, but ultimately, yeah, I was just curious if that's changed at all for you, or you always work in a very specific format when it comes to your creative

[00:36:35] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** work? I do think that it changes and it's possible.

[00:36:38] It's just gonna change every time for every book. You can take any two years of my life and there's not a lot of consistency. So it's always gonna be different. This next two years will have features that the last two years didn't. Were always a different person writing a different book. So it's always gonna be a little different.

[00:36:59] And [00:37:00] it is funny cuz as a writer one gets frequently, so what is your process? I'm like, I don't, it's not really the same for anything. So I don't, I don't know if I. Maybe ask me again after I've written 10 books, maybe then I will have an actual process. At this point, I don't feel like I have a real process.

[00:37:22] At some point you get into a role and, and, and you have a process. But I think the answer to that question was, I think it changes because I change and my life changes and what's going. Around me changes.

[00:37:35] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I find that really helpful because one thing I've also been struggling with is that some days I just don't have, for whatever reason, the energy for a particular project.

[00:37:44] I have like maybe a handful of like this essay and this More YA Focus potentially book, and then this literary fiction and then this podcast obviously. And so there's certain days. I sit down and I had thought I intended to work on a particular project, and I'm like, no, I'm actually [00:38:00] really, my impulse is to sit with this project.

[00:38:03] But then on the other hand, I'm like, am I doing this just to avoid finishing anything? Like, I dunno. I mean, I've finished things so I know I can finish things, but I do sometimes worry about that. Right. Meandering feeling of

where is the creative impulse today. I was curious, cuz I know you do have a podcast and you are writing and if that is something that happens to you as well.

[00:38:26] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** I think the question is always exactly what you just said. If you finished things, then that is your process. If you. Have never finished a thing, then that is not your process and you have to find a new process. So that's, I mean, I, I sort of love that because, so if you're like, well, sometimes I like to work on this and sometimes I like to work on that, or I can only write in the morning, or I need to write straight through, or I need to go back and edit what I have previously written before I can write it all.

[00:38:58] The answer is, [00:39:00] have you finished a. Then, yeah, like that's working for you. Stay with it. And if you haven't finished a thing, then you need to look at your process and say, well, this is, this is not working. So you find a different one. That's not my process. I actually do better when I am only working on one, one thing at a time.

[00:39:20] Both my best work output and also my best feelings about my work tend to be when I'm really, really dug into a single project and I get frustrated when people want me to do a different thing, and I'm sort of having learned that about myself. I'm trying to set myself up better to achieve that because I sort of thought it would be more efficient to be like, well, I do.

[00:39:48] Like for half the day and then for the other half of the day, I do other things and I don't actually think that is how I work best. Um hmm. Eternally [00:40:00] playing with that, and sometimes you do have to do other things, but I do much better personally if I have one single. Primary project.

[00:40:15] **Kaitlin Solimine:** One thing that I find really commendable about, I've been speaking with you now and like knowing your work as much as I do. I feel like you seem really insightful, like you have a really nice connection to your inner compass of self-analysis, I guess, because I think that's something. Isn't always something that we have, right.

[00:40:34] Of looking at myself and being able to say, oh, hmm, yeah, this maybe isn't the best way for me to do this, or, oh, I guess this is the way that I'm doing this, right? Or just admitting that even to yourself, I find really refreshing. So I just, again, not a question, just, just a statement that it seems like it's working for you.

[00:40:52] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** I love that because I think so many of us have a process that we wish were different, like, mm. I would, I would like to

[00:41:00] maybe be able to work on X project in the morning and X project in the afternoon, but that's just not, it's not what makes me happy, and I don't think that I end up working best. And I feel like a lot of people are like, this person is really successful by writing for one hour every day, but.

[00:41:19] Seem to only write for five hours one day a week, so I must be doing it wrong again. It does kinda come back to, well, are you finishing stuff? In that case, you're doing it, right? But also sometimes it just, we are who we are. You can't, if you don't like to outline, you're not gonna successfully become someone who outlines your projects.

[00:41:40] If you hate having a set plan, And that just makes you angry. When you get up in the morning and past you has like set planned for you to do X, then you can't. You can't be that person, even if it seems like that would be more efficient or more productive. You have to be, we have to be

[00:41:58] **Kaitlin Solimine:** who we are. [00:42:00] It sounds like, at least in your process, in your practice as a writer and also as a parent, it seems like it's so important to just.

[00:42:08] Pause for a moment. You know, like take that breath when your child is doing something super annoying being like, I'm about to say something. I really know. I don't wanna say there's infinite amounts of examples of this, but I do think slowing down enough to see what process it is that is really. Working for you.

[00:42:27] And like you said, it may not look the same each day, but to that end, actually, if I could read one paragraph in your book about parenting, and I know it was published a little while ago, so if you'll like indulge me to go back to it and to just sort of sit with it for a second and then also let you respond to this particular paragraph.

[00:42:47] I'd love to hear how this feels for you. Right. So it says, our family lives will change. That's all the more reason to do everything we can to make these years as good while they're happening as they'll be in [00:43:00] hindsight, A satisfying family life is attainable and it isn't about raising great kids and churning them out at destination success.

[00:43:07] It's about finding happiness, real happiness, the kind you look back on, look forward to and live for along the. So I obviously think there's a lot to apply there in creative work as well, right? What. The destination and what is the way in which you're able to do the things you do now, that just felt very

philosophical to me, but it felt like a way of living and a way of existing, and I was curious to hear what that looks like now and as you continue to move forward through your parenting and writing life, what happiness even really means to you right now, or has that changed and what that looks like?

[00:43:45] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** I am always fascinated by how hard it can sometimes be to, to figure out what makes us happy. And that was the topic of how to be a happier parent. And it's the topic of my fiction as well. And yeah. So to [00:44:00] balance what will make future you happy with, what would make current you happy is kind of the goal.

[00:44:05] It's the job of every day and it's still true. And that. It's not the journey, it's the destination. On the one hand, it's a cliché, and on the other hand, it is an inescapable truth of life because the destination is not one we wanna reach. Sorry. It's just not like, you don't want, you don't wanna get the end.

[00:44:26] That's not what we want. What we want is what we got and mm-hmm. So I think that both in. My work and in my life, like I said, I, I am, I'm trying to constantly balance. It is, it is funny because to back up creativity and my particular expression of it at the moment, which is writing books, takes a long time, so to enjoy the [00:45:00] process is hard because the work is hard.

[00:45:06] I do enjoy it, and yet it's, and yet it's hard to sit down and maybe immediately would in fact enjoy watching that Netflix more so yeah, finding the pleasure, the happiness, the joy in, in the actual act of doing the work. I think what it requires is that you remember that you liked it the last time because somehow, I don't know about you, but somehow it never.

[00:45:32] It doesn't necessarily immediately sound more appealing than anything else. Like you said, Instagram is is always more appealing and I do sometimes wonder like if I had fewer of those other distractions sitting around, would it be easier sit down? I don't know what did a hundred years ago, was it easier to sit down a hundred years ago?

[00:45:52] This was the Instagram. I don't know. We don't have that as a choice, so.[00:46:00]

[00:46:00] **Kaitlin Solimine:** I often think about that too, right? Our privileged lifestyle of being in the United States of a certain socioeconomic class, of a certain race, where having that support gives you this space. But that space to

create can sometimes also be a restrictive space, and it really shouldn't be cuz it is such a privilege, right?

[00:46:19] So I, I often will check myself on that at times too. You shouldn't feel like, uh, oh, well I have this time and now I have to produce something that means so meaningful of it. And what does that meaningfulness mean,

[00:46:31] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** right? Oh yeah. You don't wanna put that burden on this time. And also I'm gonna, Go ahead and, and sort of push back on the word privilege a little bit around this stuff.

[00:46:41] And I'm loosely quoting Roque here. It shouldn't be a privilege to have things that should be accessible to everyone. The problem is not that you are privileged, the problem is that we have a system in which many people do not have the very basic things that they need. Right. So [00:47:00] we talk about that as appreciating our privilege.

[00:47:02] Yeah. Check where we are, but also. Every parent should have access to childcare and functioning schools. Right. That should not be a privilege. Mm-hmm. Like we should. We must never forget that that is not meant to be a privilege only according to a certain few. The goal is that we is, that we all have those things, so yeah, don't put the burden on your, on your, your babysitter time to create the most beautiful thing.

[00:47:32] Just

[00:47:46] **Kaitlin Solimine:** this conversation was very grounding and centering for me, reminding me why we do the work We. And also I really appreciated how much intrinsic value KJ finds in her writing work. As I currently struggle to get my [00:48:00] butt in the chair and to find value in the writing of the experimental literary fiction novel that I'm currently working on, this conversation refueled me as I hope it also has done for you.

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forward with a new cis. In which art and caregiving are increasingly valued and supported.[00:49:00]