



[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts witty writing information and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content and establish you as a leader in your field.]

[I'm your host, Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that and have some fun with Emily Straubel today. In this episode, we talk about the routine of writing papers to pull you out of a funk; how sex and relationships can make you a better writer; and why it is important to diversify your interests and influences if you want to become that better writer. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat on the website at CraftYourContent.com/episode23.]

Elisa: Emily Straubel is a certified holistic health coach, columnist, writer, and speaker in what many would call a taboo niche. Her site, Red Lipstick Project, carries tags like “mind blowing sex” and “turn-ons for smart girls,” and explores topics from sex and love, relationship, entrepreneurship, femininity, and more. She also blogs on some slightly tamer, but still spicy things on her column for MaineToday called “The Sex Files.” Coming off her recent TEDx success asking the audience, “What turns you on?” and starting her newest project, Ten Thousand Turn Ons, Emily is determined to understand the inner workings of people's minds, talk about what others are scared to talk about, and share it all through her witty and intelligent writing.

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today, Emily. Is there anything I missed in there?

Emily: No, that sounds good. It's nice to have it all in one place.

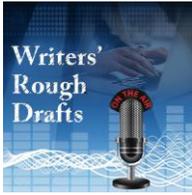
Elisa: It was fun to write it because, of course, I've known you for a while now (both of us being Portland, Maine girls) and so going around all to of your different places and accumulating it, I was like, “Damn, she really is as impressive as I thought she was!”

Emily: Yeah, I mean, that's all the writing stuff. The other creative stuff that I do, you know, I do a lot of like, floral design and pottery. I love working with my hands too, not just my computer.

Elisa: Very, very nice. With all of that creative stuff that you like doing, and I could be making a misassumption here, but I'm going to go out on a limb and say when you first started writing and getting more into like online publishing and branding and what not, you maybe weren't as open in such an “open” discussion topic, shall we say.

Emily: Yeah. I mean, I've been doing the writing for a long time. I did a lot of ghost writing, working with an advertising agency, so I really loved the idea of voice. I got addicted to the idea of voice really early on because I was taking on the voices of other people. You know, a lot of the executive that I was writing for, so these Mad Men-style men in their fifties and sixties. And it was really cool. I got to really explore that idea of voice. And when I started writing for myself, that came out so easily. Which was something that a lot of people struggle for and I've always sort of taken for granted.

Elisa: When you started that writing for yourself, how did you first figure out, like... so you figured out how you wanna say what you say—which, you're totally right, is a massive stumbling block for a lot of



people getting started—but, now that you know how you wanna say it, how did you figure out what to say?

Emily: That's a really interesting question. And it's hard for me to talk about writing without first talking about music. I was a super shy kid and I always had a really hard time communicating with people when I was younger. And so I started playing music when I was super young, and that was definitely like an emotional outlet for me. And I don't know if because I had that emotional outlet, like, I didn't have to rely on speech as much. That's kind of an egg and chicken situation. Or if it's because, you know, I wasn't comfortable with speech that I really leaned on my music. But I've always had this emotional outlet.

And when I stopped playing as much music in my early twenties, I kind of just naturally took up writing as like an emotional outlet. I started doing morning papers and just getting all of my thoughts down onto a piece of paper. And so when I started writing for my blog, it was almost like I was getting all the garbage out of my head first thing in the morning, with morning papers. Where you just write three pages of kind of stream of consciousness, everything that's going on with you.

And that was kind of my anti-depressant at the time. And so I would clear my head with my morning papers. And then around four or five o'clock at night, all of those things that I was struggling with in the morning would kind of come out with clarity. And so I would write them into a blog post, and it was always like, "Oh, yeah, all of the shit that was coming out this morning had like, this one purpose." And I'd be like, "I think this is how I feel about that." And then I would write it in a blog post. So that's kind of the progression of like, I had this crazy, ecstatic, emotional outpouring first thing in the morning. And then you have this like, you go about your day and you're like, "Oh, yeah, I think I was just trying to say this."

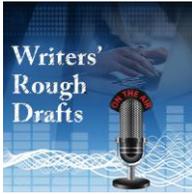
Elisa: With having such a kind of quiet, shy upbringing and not wanting to like, put yourself out there in so many ways, how was it when you first started blogging and all the sudden, you're now going from having these words—which are like your innermost thoughts—first thing in the morning to now hitting the publish button and sharing them with absolute strangers?

Emily: Yeah. For a long time, I actually didn't put my name anywhere on the website. I started writing Red Lipstick Project but not telling anybody it was me. And I just started promoting these blog posts, and be like, "Isn't this person's perspective... what if..."

Elisa: "This is the most brilliant writing I've read this week."

Emily: "How ironic, they had the exact same experience." And you know, there's a reason that my blog isn't called EmilyStraubel.com (although that's my own site). I just wrote because I needed to write it down. And it had nothing to do with any sort of ego about, "This is my thought and this is what I think. And this is my perspective." And you know, it was never a bully thing; it was always kind of a: "What do you guys think of this? Is this interesting to you?"

And every time I would write something, I just got this huge surge of people being like "that is exactly what I've been struggling with. That makes so much sense to me." And to be completely honest, that's the best compliment I've ever gotten, that may give a tiny piece of clarity with this thing that's been in the back of my mind for two years. So I just kept writing. And it kind of evolved from there.



Elisa: With the Red Lipstick Project, when you started the site... It's an interesting thing, because I think as much as you don't want to (especially at the beginning stages) like, put a whole bunch of thought, energy, and effort into like your brand and building the business and everything—especially when you're someone who just wants to write things. But when you first started Red Lipstick, what was your vision? What did you think you were doing there?

Emily: Honestly, I was just writing. And there was some sort of high that I was getting off of the way that it let me talk to people in real life. It really let me connect with people. A lot of people were reading my stuff and then I would run into them on the street and we would have really great conversations. So I really saw it as these, like, planting a seed of ideas in people's heads so with can have really great discussions about them later.

And that's still kind of what I see it as. And I think that that's why it's gone over so well with some people, is it's not, you know—it's not, "This is the way it is," or, "This is the way you should think." It's like, "Hey, how do you feel about this?" And it really lets people take ownership of the idea and spit it back to me.

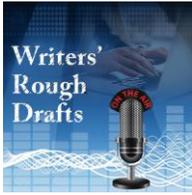
Elisa: Yeah, because your articles on there, they are not like really trying to convince anyone of anything or report on anything. It very much is like, "Here's my personal experience. Have you ever thought of doing that this way?"

Emily: Yeah. And one of the reasons I think maybe I started the blog is because there's so many "sexperts" out there and all of these "relationship experts." And there's something so ironic about the fact that in order to convince people that their site is good or that they have something to say, they have to convince people that the person doesn't know what they're talking about. Or that they are like "sex secrets that you can only get access to if you buy my eBook." And I just think that's kind of bullshit. Sex is something that we all share; but it just so happens that we very rarely talk about it. I'm not a "sex expert;" I'm just am willing to talk about things may be that some people aren't. But I kind of wanted to get away from that idea of like "expert" versus you know "student of sex."

Elisa: Have you ever had, as you talked about, like some people are nervous to talk about this kind of stuff or don't really like wanna open Pandora's box and see what's inside. And unfortunately, especially online, for a lot of those types of people, when they're kind of affronted with something that they're uncomfortable with, their reaction is to lash out in a nasty, nasty way. Have you had much experience being in such a kind of racy topic?

Emily: Yeah, a little bit. And I've had some are experiences with that sort of... you know, I only have a handful of haters. And it's really kind of nice being not an expert because of that, where my job is to listen to them. And usually, when people write me, (because they write me super nasty emails, I get those quite a bit), I'll be like, "Oh, that's really interesting perspective. Please tell me more about that. I wanna know where you're coming from."

And it's been really hopeful. There's been a lot of people who have really helped me steer my opinions in new directions. Especially because, I mean, to be completely honest, my perspective is so like heterocentric, because that is my personal experience, that a lot of times, I can tend to say things that aren't totally like across the board, completely open to everyone's sexuality and everybody's



perspective and everybody's life style. And it's not because I'm insensitive; it's because I have no idea what their life is like.

And so it's been a really awesome, them being like "You're sexist," or like, "You're not being very considerate or sensitive to my lifestyle." And I'm like, "Oh, that's so awesome. Can you please tell me more about that?" Like, "I want so desperately to know more about what your life is actually like."

Elisa: I love that. That's how I actually deal with a fair amount of my haters and decenterers as well. I don't necessarily adhere to the belief that everyone who disagrees with you online is trolling.

Emily: Yeah.

Elisa: I much more would rather, like, have them explain more. And as long as they can do it in a way that's respectful and so that we can continue having like, interesting and intelligent discussion about it, I feel like both sides end up so much better at the end, if you can open that line of communication rather than just being like, "You disagree with me. Hater's going to hate. I'm just going to roll on by, whatever, whatever."

Emily: Yeah. I totally think a lot of it comes from an emotional reaction. And I'm really curious about that emotional reaction. You know, I have a hard time just writing people off.

Elisa: Maybe it's a Maine thing.

Emily: Yeah. Totally true.

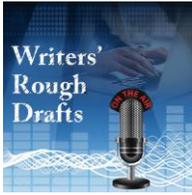
Elisa: I'm sure there's maybe one or two other people in the entire world that are the same way, but for now, we'll just assume that it is.

Emily: It's everybody here.

Elisa: So on your site, you don't even always write just about sex and just about that kind of stuff. One of my favorite articles that you've written, I think I single-handedly am responsible for like at least eighty percent of the shares on it, is your "How to start a relationship when you're fucking busy."

Emily: Oh, my god [inaudible] that sometimes. You know, it's hard to say out loud because it sounds so silly, but I'm very entrepreneurial. And I'm constantly starting new projects. I have a very hard time sitting still, creatively. I'm constantly moving in a different direction. And I came to this crossroads in my life where I was like, "How is it possible to keep living this way and also create the space and room in my life for a partner?" You know, I think this is something that happens to a lot of us, when it's really easy to fill the hours in your day and then complain that we don't have a boyfriend or we don't have a partner to live with. And it's like, you have to create the space first and then people will come in to your life. So really figuring out how to create a container for like a phenomenal relationship without sacrificing any of the things that I love, that was a tough process to go through. And it's something I work on all the time and I'm not very good at still.

Elisa: And the reason I love the article is very much what you just outlined there and even just beyond the entrepreneurial, like—just for anyone who's doing something that requires so much of their own like... we were joking before the show about like, the "first world problems." But like it's such a first world problem to, as you open the posts, be out to dinner with this amazing person and have them say like, "This is amazing. You're wonderful. When can we do it again?" And you're like, "I have a deadline



due for this. And I have a new project that's launching this time. And then I really wanted started reading this thing. So how's next Thursday?"

Emily: Yeah. It's really interesting and something I'm realizing (I don't know if this is in the article because I wrote that a while ago), is you also have to knowledge that a huge part of that busyness factor is to really wisely choose a partner. And it just slims the market, man, and that is just the reality of it. You know, choosing a partner who can travel with me, you know, I had the most amazing weekend with my boyfriend last weekend and we sat next to each other. And I wrote like ten thousand words and he got a lot of Excel... I don't know what he does...

Elisa: But does something that was really important.

Emily: There's some PowerPoint in there, I think. And being able to, you know, find a partner who can not *just* deal with that, but really thrive in that same space, that's kind of rare. And you know, it's hard to come by, but when you find it, you got to grab onto it, man!

Elisa: With the creativity, and another thing that you've talked about that you actually teach courses on this at college level, but like finding ways to find that creativity when you're blocked in different ways. I know there are a few you touched on.

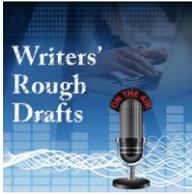
Emily: Yeah, I mean, I teach this class called Cultivating Creativity at Maine College of the Art. And I teach a bunch of retreats and things around that. Because there's something so amazing about this. I think that there are these people who are artists and they get really set up on pedestals and you know, you know that better than anyone talking to people. I mean, it's the whole purpose of your podcast, is like breaking down the pedestal that we put writers on. And there's this whole middle ground of people who want so badly to be creative and have so much passion and have so much drive, but can't really get their bearings as far as becoming a creative person or putting their creativity into practice.

And I just have like so much love for these people. And I've been working with them. And I do a lot of coaching around this. Because it touches every part of your life—your relationships, your job, your self-worth, your value—all of that comes down to it if you're not acting on your creativity, and that's just like sitting in your soul fermenting, that's not a good thing. So I teach this class. And what I've realized over the last couple of courses is that a lot of it is about managing your disappointment. And there's this really awesome talk that I heard by Ira Glass. Have you heard this? About "The Gap."

Elisa: I actually have it somewhere on the site. I absolutely love, love, love. There's a really cool video that we linked to that has the whole talk.

Emily: Yeah. So this is something I came back to recently and I was like, "Oh, this is totally why I teach this class." And it's this idea that people who are drawn to be artists or have that drive and they have that creative momentum, they have the passion but they don't necessarily have the talent yet. And that can be a really bad thing when you first start and you're a beginner. Because you can see how bad your art is; you can see how bad your writing is. Like, the whole reason you're driven to do something like writing is because you see these awesome writers and you're like, "You know what, I can do better than that. I know I can." But you start writing and you suck. Most people are terrible when they start.

Elisa: Exactly.



Emily: Yeah. And so it's really interesting. Ira Glass and this talk talks about the worst thing you can do is quit. Because you just have to understand that there's this gap and all you can do is keep making art. You just have to know that like, “Eventually, I'm going to close the gap. And my taste and how much I love and respect good writers, I'm going to become that good of a writer.” And I feel like I'm just starting to get closer to closing the gap. And it's only because I write all the fucking time.

Elisa: And we will link up to that on the show notes page (that video) that people can see it. I agree, it's sensational.

Emily: Yeah. And he says it much better than I do, obviously.

Elisa: I think you did a pretty good summarization. I'm not going to lie. Pretty good. Although you don't have the Ira Glass tone and intonation that only Ira Glass can have. And I just adore him for it.

Emily: I will work on that.

Elisa: New life goal: “sound like Ira Glass.”

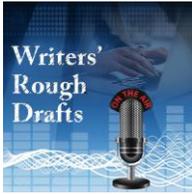
Emily: Yeah. So you know, in that class, I make them create a lot of art outside of their field. You know, people who are becoming writers, I make them do a lot of photography and painting and music. And all of a sudden, their writing gets a hell of a lot better. It's really amazing to watch, actually.

Elisa: What do you find are some of—other than this kind of fear of knowing how to make good art and write well, and do those kinds of things—what are some of the other kind of like obstacles that you see people struggling to overcome that they generally come to like a crossroads in your class at?

Emily: Comparison is a big one. When I first started, I was like, “Okay, who are you comparing yourself to? Tell me all the people you're comparing yourself to and we'll figure it out.” And what I realized is that people compare themselves to somebody, but they don't even really know who they're comparing themselves to. You know, they're like, “Oh, I'm going to be judged.” And I'm like, “By who?” And then like, “Write me a list of the people who are going to judge for making mediocre art.” And there's always these voices in their head. Or these kids that they went to high school with who like, used to judge them for making crappy art.

And when you break down that idea of like, “Who are you comparing yourself to?” and you lift that illusion that like, anyone gives a shit about your art as you're making it, and that you get to choose who you show your art to, it's kind of an amazing thing to watch people be like, “Oh, yeah, then I'll just write.” And it really lifts this cloud of, what we call, like, “Writer's Block,” because like you see yourself writing, and you also see yourself as somebody else reading it. And that duality really kills people. Does that make sense?

Elisa: That's such a good idea for a way to kind of, beyond even comparison, just like the judgment that comes with it and having you sit down... I've done it a few times. Although I'm just about as blunt as you are and no one pays me to be that way. So generally, it doesn't work as well in like regular conversations, but to say to people flat out like, if they are afraid that someone's going to judge everything that they are doing, like, “Great. Here's a napkin. Make me a list. Who's going to judge you? Whose opinion matters to you that much, that you are going to not do this because you are going to give them the power in this dynamic?”



Emily: Yeah and it's interesting; in the world of online writing and all these people who... we create these ideas that like, these people who are writing kind of the same stuff that we're writing, judging us, I feel like when I talk to other bloggers, they are like, those are the other voices that are in their heads, are these people who live in their niche, who they follow really closely. And they are like, "But if that person reads me, they are going to judge me for this." No offense, but that person is not reading your shit. And if they are, they're reading it because they're thinking the same thing. Those are the voices that a lot of times, with online writers, live in our heads. And if you really think about it like, dude, that person does not care whether or not you know are grammatically correct or you [inaudible] that they sort of had once.

Elisa: And to be quite honest, the people who do, like—I've been around this block long enough, that I've had a few run-ins with some online people that are in similar niches to me. And part of why I wrote the post that I wrote on my site a couple months ago, the "Seriously. Fuck Them." rule.

Emily: Oh! Yeah. Yeah.

Elisa: Like, "You know, I respect you as a human being. We've had our peace. And seriously, if you want to judge me or hate me for being in the same world that you are... fuck yourself. Honestly, I'm sure you're a lovely person and I don't wish you bad will, but I probably don't need you in my life."

Emily: Yes. But also, "Go fuck yourself."

Elisa: We're going to have to put an explicit rating on this episode.

Emily: Do you have any episodes that aren't explicit?

Elisa: No, I actually flat out make them all that way, because I'm like, "Dude, we're writers; we wanna use every single word that we possibly have at our disposal—including cuss words." And writers drink a lot of bourbon and swear like sailors, so.

Emily: I'm getting there. I'm three quarters of the way through a [?? 22:17] right now. It's about to get wild.

Elisa: Oooh, you live on the edge.

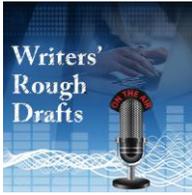
Emily: Mh-hm.

Elisa: Speaking of those online people that are kind of like judging and what not, one of my recent kind of laughable situations with sharing your stuff, we were talking about it before, is your recent course that you put out, The Soul Shaking Sex.

Emily: Yeah.

Elisa: When I shared it on my Twitter—because I have an analytics; I use Buffer so I can see the people who are like interacting with the tweets. And it was hilarious because it was like crickets on that tweet—no one responded, no one retweeted, no one favorited—nothing. But it was the highest clicked that week. And I update four times a day on Buffer, so.

Emily: Yeah, I mean, this is my life. And it's cool because, you know, when you first started blogging, I started taking it seriously and got all the analytics and things like that. And I started really tracking things



and giving a shit about, you know, who is clicking on what. But more from an ego standpoint than like a strategy standpoint, because it's totally valid.

But I really started getting nervous because, you know, people don't really comment on a lot of things. People don't always like, *like* things. It was really tough for me. I would write this really poignant piece and I will get no response—none. And then I would open my analytics and see that like everyone had read it and that it was getting like tens of thousands of clicks and views and things like that.

And I've just realized that what I'm talking about is so personal sometimes. And I'm really trying to not write about things in this community-oriented, sister love. And I'm just like, I couldn't do it if I tried. Or this like academic, like psychology approach to sex. You know, I just write in a way that I don't need people to respond to it. I'm just planting a seed, I think. And so it really taught me to shift my thinking.

I have these really poignant pieces that no one has liked and I'm a thousand percent okay with that because those people like, click through and have like, emailed me. I had conversations about it, like it's just not one of those things that like—my mom might not wanna see that my sister liked that. You know what I mean?

Elisa: Right.

Emily: That's totally fine. I do not judge her at all because I know that she likes it because we talk about it. Especially, dudes. Dudes more than anyone.

Elisa: I can see that. Especially dudes liking a girl on talking about like, sex. Like, it's one of the most frequent conversations I think I had in Southeast Asia, where everyone was like, tell me how girls think about these things. But no one would ever have that conversation out in public.

Emily: Yeah. And it's funny because I've had conversations about it all the time. Yesterday or the day before, I just wrote this really interesting piece about how nice guys are better being dumb, kind of in the BDSM world. And it one of my best friends, her boyfriend at work, somebody had printed it off and given it to her boyfriend at work. It was like on the kitchen table. It was like noted, like all circles around ideas... I was like, "That's totally fine. That's totally worth it nobody liking it on Facebook."

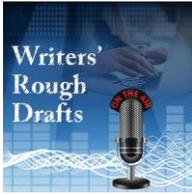
Elisa: "That anecdote right there just made that post worthwhile."

Emily: Yeah.

Elisa: On the idea of kind of writing these poignant topics and what not, because another thing that you do is write about sex and relationships, but kind of from that twenty-thousand-foot view that you're really kind of looking at a lot more of the thought process behind in and the motivations and the emotions, I'm sure being like, a holistic health coach for the years that you've done has given you a much more holistic view on such things.

Emily: Yeah.

Elisa: And one thing that you did recently, which I'm going to guess is a bit scary, but totally awesome was not only gave a TEDx talk, but gave a TEDx talk on a topic that you've been working at for a while, that kind of unveiled.



Emily: Yeah. I'm just constantly driven by curiosity. And almost all of what I will do here in my office is... you know, everything is asking questions for me. My work is all about asking questions. And so there's one question that has really become the center of a lot of my "work," is: "What turns you on?" And I'm so curious of what makes people turned on. And you know, it's so quick to be like, "Oh, this makes me orgasm. This one position always makes me orgasm." Or "I really like girls with green eyes." The way that people perceive that question even of like what turns you on, how differently people answer that question is so fascinating to me. The reason I started asking that question is totally selfish, in like, I didn't really know what turned me on, so I wanted to see what other people thought.

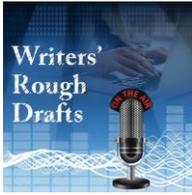
Elisa: That's a smart move.

Emily: Well, I wish I had more shame; that would be nice sometimes. And you know, by making it like a research project, I was able to get some really good answers. And it was really interesting. Obviously, the answers I've got have been really fascinating. And I have this site where I just let people submit answers. And actually, on the website, ninety percent of the submissions that I get ask me not to share them. And so I have just like email conversations back and forth with people after asking them what turns them on. And I get to dig a little deeper—which is nice.

And what I've seen over the past, whatever like, six or eight months of asking those people questions post TED Talk is not what they answer, but the way that they answer it. And especially men versus women in the heterosexual world of like, men often answer with like, in bed, what turns them on. What makes you orgasm? What gets you to a physically aroused state? And for women, it's more of this like—What makes me interested in another person? Like, what peaks my curiosity? What gets me in that state of seduction? And simply based on the fact that we respond to that question in such different ways, means that we're probably miscommunicating about how to talk to each other about how to make each other turned on. Does that make sense?

Elisa: It makes total... I'm in like, I'm in silence right now, because you just totally like pinpointed... I was thinking in my head how I will ever answer that if you asked. And like was making the laundry list of all of the attributes that attract me to people and make me interested in them. You know, things like confidence and being just so friggin' smart, it's ridiculous, and those types of things. Wherein, of course, that is such a break sometimes from the immediate gut reaction of like wanting some more physical things sometimes.

Emily: Yeah. When guys talk about it, it's all physical. So what I learned is to ask better questions. And now when I ask people like, "What turns you on?" and I wish I could go back and change this (maybe I will, who knows?) is breaking it down into like, "What feels good for you? What are you attracted to?" versus "what gets you in a place of arousal? What makes you physically, chemically turned on?" And then, "What makes you orgasm?" Because when you can answer those three questions, then you can communicate with your partner with like, "I love it when throughout the day, you like, do this to me. When you send me a text that talks about how smart and cool I am. That makes me feel good. That turns me on." But in a very different way than like, "We're in bed. I wanna get in the place where we're going to, like, bang super hard." Like, "I need to get turned on in that moment," that's a very different question.



Elisa: So true. And it's so interesting to me (and I know that it's interesting to you as well because you write about it constantly), but, how similar relationships are to so many business situations? And so many writing, and different things like that? Because, you know, that's another huge breakdown that I think people have when they are writing, is knowing what they want to say, and what's going to get them to the end results. But not really considering where the person that they're trying to interact with is at. You know, whether it's going to be a change of tone or whether it's going to be a new question or whether it's going to be a completely different approach, because you've got one person at like point x in the buying cycle and one person at point b.

Emily: Yes.

Elisa: So like one of them sends like sweet, cute little texts to you; the other one, you're like, "All right. So, can we throw your shirt up over the lamp or is that going to be a fire hazard?"

Emily: It's so true! And I got really nervous there because you almost exposed like my deepest, darkest writing secret.

Elisa: Oh, no!

Emily: I give people what they would consider, maybe like, super profound relationship advice. But it's usually the advice that I just read from a business book. Because I love reading that sort of stuff and I'm always like "that applies to relationships; let me re-write that in a different way." And so far, the only one that hasn't worked it is in the book *The Essentialist*. One of his core ideas is "less, but better." And that just simply does not apply to sex. It's like the only thing... I say "more and better" always—all the time.

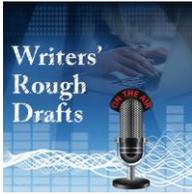
Elisa: I was going to say, I think everyone in the audience is silently nodding their heads.

Emily: So true. So yeah, I totally agree with that. I mean, for writers, being able to understand that and, in the same way, like when you're in a relationship, you have to show people affection in all of those three different ways. And marketing-wise, you can't just be like, "I'm going to be a really aggressive marketer," or, "I'm going to be really like soft, cozy, warming marketer." You've got to do all of those things. And you have to know when each of them is appropriate.

Elisa: I've talked about it a few times before; I'm very similar to you in my childhood and upbringing. I was like horrifically shy and really publicly awkward. I played a lot of music as well, coincidentally.

Emily: And we unite, eventually.

Elisa: My parents were legitimately talking about having me tested for like Asperger's or something because I didn't understand how social situations worked. And I didn't understand like, basically, why was everyone so different, when it would just be much more logical to just do things by a very rational set of decision making—which is a quirk that I'm continuously working on. But when I moved into the sales world when I got out of the University and I was selling life insurance, I frequently talked about—I like, poured myself into studying Myers Briggs tests and DiSC profiles and different things like that, so that I could actually understand what some of these different profiles of people were; so that I understood how I need to talk to someone who is exhibiting these traits or responding in this way. Because I honestly had no fucking idea.



Emily: It's so interesting hearing you say that. And on the flip side of things, you know, a lot of the reasons that I had trouble communicating when I was younger, is it was so easy for me to emotionally connect with people, and infer and intuit about what their intentions were, that I thought words were kind of silly and, like, useless. Because I already knew what they were going to say. I already knew how they felt just being super tuned in. I thought words were really... I knew exactly how I felt and I couldn't find the words to express it. Which is quite different from what you're talking about. It's so fascinating.

Elisa: Yeah, and then kind of what, but we both kind of ended up coming to the same... it does really breed this just insatiable curiosity when you have, you know—we're so lucky to have been so horrifically awkward and scarred as children.

Emily: That's right. I really value that today—after years of therapy.

Elisa: Right. After twenty or so years of like crying yourself to sleep at least once a week. It gotten to the point where that curiosity and that insatiable desire to connect and understand is what really fuels you to be such an eloquent communicator. And be able to write such things that no one else is thinking about, because truth is, no one is thinking about them. And especially: if they are, they are certainly not writing it.

Emily: Yeah. It's interesting, this is something that's come up quite a bit is that there a lot of people out there in the world who are, you know, when you talk about purpose and passion and like what are you supposed to do with your life, choose what's easier for you. Do what comes most naturally. If you're a good writer, do that. If you're a good business person, do that. Just do what comes most naturally.

And sometimes I wonder if actually it's the opposite for a lot of people, where I had to struggle so much to learn to communicate, especially using words that now, for people who are in the same situation, that you really can walk them through that same process in a very logistical way because I've been through the struggle... like, I've been in yoga classes with these little tiny, you know, twigs who just yoga comes so naturally to them. And I'm like, "But how do you do it? My body doesn't move that way. Help!"

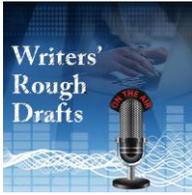
Elisa: "Help me bend like that thing that you're doing right there."

Emily: They're like, "You just do it." And really good teachers obviously don't do that. But I've taken a couple of classes with these bigger girls or older women who are, like, "You know, I really struggled to understand how to make my body move in that way. And here's one, two, three, four ways of like really making that step from struggling with it to really being able to like nail it." And I'm like, "Holy crap! That is so much more helpful!" And she's just like, "Put your leg over your head."

And so I wonder sometimes (and this is something that I'm just exploring), like, I wonder if whatever you've struggled with, if that's a good way... especially if you're drawn towards teaching something; you know, teach something you've struggled with, but because you are so much better at explaining the steps in between.

Elisa: Yeah. Well, it's kind of you know, the old phrase, "Those who can't teach..."

Emily: Yeah.



Elisa: Because in large part, because they have been through so much of it, that they maybe didn't become like the professional whatever, whatever, but they know enough about the journey and struggle of and all the logistics that are in it to be able to really share that with the world.

Emily: Yeah. They tore it apart.

Elisa: Well, it's another thing too. I mean, I think like the last year or so, this idea is getting more and more debunked, but that the whole "10,000 hours concept," that you have to put in ten thousand hours of work at something to be an expert. And when you talked about doing the things that you struggle with versus the things that come naturally, that's like the first thing that comes my mind, is people become experts at the things they struggle with because they have to work so much more on it.

Like, for a lot of the people that stuff comes naturally to, if they don't learn how to work at it, they don't learn how to improve it, they don't learn how to... I talk a lot about when I'm trying to explain to people writing routines and getting into the habits and things like that and reading a lot of other people. And clients are always concerned; they are like, "Well, if I start reading everyone else, then I'm going to be influenced by the world around me and I'm going to lose my sense of self." And my response is always, "Do you think Michael Jordan lost his sense of self as a basketball player by watching game tapes?"

Emily: Right. I think there's a balance there.

Elisa: There's definitely a balance between like, consuming way too much information and losing yourself, and consuming enough information to be able to improve yourself.

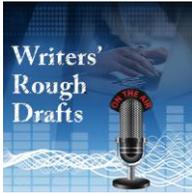
Emily: Yeah. I hear that. This is probably the first time I've ever considered this, but even as a musician, you know, music came so naturally to me. I hit a mega plateau when I was in college. I assumed I'd be a classical musician my entire life. And I hit a plateau, and you know, I was always just really good at it and I never had to work at it. And all of a sudden, I was good, but I wasn't the best. And in that world, there's a top one percent, and I have to be in that top one percent. And I didn't know how to take it apart and put it back together, the skill itself. And I think that whether you're good at it or not, you have to have that ability to take the machine apart, understand all the individual pieces and be able to put it back together and do that all the time.

Elisa: Yeah, because things are always the world around you is changing, what you're working on is changing, you're changing. You know, I love looking back at stuff that I've written that's like five years old or something. And I'm just like, on top of the way that the writing has improved, just the thinking and the ideas. And I'm like, "Really? I put that out in the world at one point in time?"

Emily: Yeah. Because you imagine writing what you wrote yesterday, if you hadn't written that five years ago,

Elisa: No. absolutely not. Again, because there's just so much change that happens that influences any sort of outlet or...

Emily: Yeah, I think that you know, when you talk about this 10,000 hours thing, I think the 10,000 hours rule is totally on point, but I think we consider it too narrowly. And we think "Okay, I'm going to be a writer. I need to write for ten thousand hours." I think it has to be ten thousand hours, but it has to be broader than that. I think ten thousand hours, you'll get really good at writing, but it won't make you



any better at like, having ideas. Which I think is more important than being able to write a complete sentence.

And so I think that if you just like back that idea out a little bit and say, “Okay, I need to have ten thousand hours of creativity.” Or, “I need to have ten thousand hours of business development-y stuff.” I think that when you put it all together, that ten thousand hours is a hundred percent worth it. And making sure that all of your little threads of ideas and threads of hobbies and threads of jobs and things like that, they all pushed towards the same goal. And they all helped words those ten thousand hours in like slightly different ways.

Elisa: Yeah. I love what you just talked about there as well. The whole fact that to improve as a writer, it's not just about learning how to write sentences better or learning like what the correct grammar is and different things like that and structures and styles. The way that people become better writers and the way that people continue being prolific in their writing, is they keep thinking of new ideas and better ideas and improving on whatever their last concept was.

And that's something that's really hard and very much a part of that ten thousand hours; if you're only focusing on the structure and the mechanics and not working on learning those new ideas and exposing yourself to new ways of thinking, it's one of the things that I love-hate about being online, especially social media. I find social media can be such an echo chamber for me. Because I've called my lists so much, because I only have so much time. But then I become very aware of the fact that I'm basically surrounding myself with people who think very similarly to the way I think.

Emily: Mh-hm.

Elisa: So like, how is that making me a better writer? How is that making me a better thinker if I'm just regurgitating the same things that everyone else in the echo chamber is screaming?

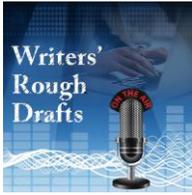
Emily: Yeah. When I became a serious writer—and there's this one changeover point where I was doing a little bit of freelance writing but I was doing mostly my own writing and coaching. And I was like, “I'm going to be a writer. I'm going to [inaudible] on my goddamn website.” And as soon as I started calling myself a writer, I really started focusing on the words I was using and I lost the ideas that I was having. And honestly, I mean, I'm a terrible writer. It's so bad. But if I can convey a single idea in a post, I'm like the happiest person in the world.

But I was just writing, you know, two-thousand-word articles and they were so flowery and they were like the shadows of an idea, but they weren't ever thought out. And they were pristine grammatically, but they were total bullshit. It was such bad writing. You know, I have to be really careful with myself to never consider myself a writer. Like, I think that whatever I'm going to be when I grow up, I'm going to figure it out by writing. But I'm not a writer; it's a means to an end for me. And as soon as I start thinking of myself as a writer, I become this like terrible writer. It's so bad.

Elisa: You just pull yourself up with a typewriter and a fifth of bourbon and a sweater and...

Emily: Yeah, it's really scary because I'll become like a Carrie Bradshaw in mind. And I'm like, “Oh, my god. This is the worst. Get me out of here!” People call me a sex writer, and I'm like, “No. Anything but that.”

Elisa: “I'm a writer who occasionally writes about sex.”



Emily: But it's not because of the ego in it; it's because like if I start thinking about that that way, I lose the ideas.

Elisa: Right. You become your own echo chamber. And I continue to struggle in it personally, and working with other people of the idea of the idea of like really niching down when you're building a platform and speaking to a very specific thing. Because it can become so easy to then get stuck at that place, and not be able to find a way to expand, which is really going to kill whatever potential that you have for building that "platform" or audience, or getting to the people who really need to hear you. Which is the way that I like to think of platform and audience, is always adding people who need to hear what you're saying.

Emily: Yeah. And you consider that like, a niche with this like, the idea of always like: "What's your niche and audience? That's a struggle for you?"

Elisa: Well, the concept I guess more in line of... and it's when writers are giving advice on kind of how to start out, it's always like, you need to drill so far down, that you need to specialize in this very, very specific type of thing. And just as hard as it is to like, build from scratch. It can also be—I would say as hard, if not harder than, to pivot from being a specialized niche for so long, to like expanding yourself to new ideas, to new horizons, to new people.

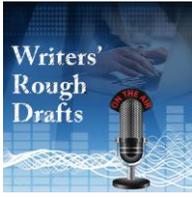
Emily: Yeah. I always try to keep up of a couple of freelance writings gigs on my back pocket simply for that reason. Not necessarily even for the money, but for the fact that having these challenges of like, you need to write about like commercial, real estate for the next forty-eight hours and we'll give you some money for it. I'm like, "This is awesome! This is a total different way of thinking." And I love doing that sort of thing.

And the other day, I came across another coach. And I love to hear what other people are doing. And just like, you know, "How's business?" and I was like, "it's good. I'm growing really quickly." And she's like, "But don't you have a side job?" And I was like, "What?" I have like eighteen side jobs. That's not the parameters of me not being successful. But I have to have that, or I'll go totally nutty.

Elisa: Right. I'm like, I don't even have words. I get so frustrated when people kind of put that down on people that, you know, I see it with a lot of entrepreneurs who do want to start writing more. And people are like, "Oh, yeah but you're able to be a writer, because you have this entire other thing that supports you." Like, "I am struggling the hard way to do this all on my own, just doing this one thing, and you have this other stuff."

Emily: I just started a really great coaching program for myself because I think it's really important for everyone to do, especially for people who just work for themselves, to have some sort of like mentorship. The mentor-mentee relationship is so incredibly important. And this is core idea came out of redefining success for yourself, which is something that we talk about and we always kind of throw that around. Like, "Oh, as an entrepreneur, you get to redefine what your own means of success is." And so it was like, "I wanna travel more," or, "I wanna spend time with my family."

But there's this weird idea of success, that like: whatever your passion is, you're going to only do that a hundred percent of the time, and that is what success is—when you stop doing things that you don't like. And so is just not realistic. I don't even think it's healthy in any sort of way. I think if your twelve-hour day job is something that you're passionate about, that passion wanes pretty quickly and



disappears completely for some people. And I don't wanna see it as: "I'm only doing this one thing and that means that I've made it somehow." Like, you know what, if I got a [inaudible] job right now, I don't feel any less successful.

Elisa: No. I don't feel any less successful and I don't judge the people who do as well. Like, (1) we've all got to eat. And we would like to not eat ramen noodles because as delicious as they are, they are not a sustainable full-time diet; and (2) it does go back to that, you know, it gives you different perspectives. And it gives you different ways of doing things that you just don't get when you only allow yourself to focus on one particular thing.

Emily: Yeah. I think I that there are parts of me that really want to work in a coffee shop. I spend all day in a coffee shop anyway, so I don't really need to, but my next writing project is a series of pornographic short stories about coffee porn. And so I kind of wish I had a coffee shop job just so I could just like, get to know who are the characters and know what it's like to really stand behind the counter. It's such a sensual relationship. And I'm so sorry for all the coffee shop people who are hearing me say that.

Elisa: Who were like, "You have no idea."

Emily: But I don't know what it is about it; I don't even like coffee, but like, there's something about the making of coffee and like serving someone. There's just like a weird, sensuality about it. And I kind of love it.

Elisa: When my business was first struggling when I was just doing freelance writing in like 2009, 2010, I had the same exact thought. I was like, "Well, my businesses is struggling. I need to do something on the side to earn money. I'll get a job at a coffee shop." Like, obviously because that's you know, it's such a writer's side gig. You know, being able to like on the down time, have my little notebook and be jotting and have like brilliant conversations with people who hang out at the café. But no coffee shop would hire me. And I was really disappointed. I couldn't even get a job at Starbucks. It was a sad state of affairs—and I waitress.

Emily: I always get stuck at like, "Oh, you want me to like make coffee? I can't stand the smell, man!"

Elisa: "We were so close to having something and then you asked me this thing. Why would I make you coffee here?"

Emily: "No, you can make your own coffee. I'll stand there, though. That would be so great."

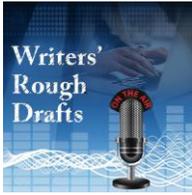
Elisa: Well, getting away from kind of the singular thought of things, we are going to move into the next section. And this is a fun little game that I like to play with folks. It's super easy. Over the two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions, and I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind.

Emily: Okay.

Elisa: We're going to get through as many as we can and get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of your writer's mind. Are you feeling ready?

Emily: I think so.

Elisa: All right. Let's go. Pen or pencil?



Emily: Pencil. I'm a lefty, so it gets messy.

Elisa: Mac or PC?

Emily: Mac.

Elisa: Coffee or tea?

Emily: Tea.

Elisa: Night or morning?

Emily: Morning.

Elisa: Good writing or correct writing?

Emily: I wouldn't know correct if I saw it.

Elisa: Noise or silence?

Emily: Noise.

Elisa: Lefty or righty?

Emily: Lefty.

Elisa: Weird or typical?

Emily: Weird.

Elisa: School or no school?

Emily: No school. Although I struggle with that one.

Elisa: Outside or inside?

Emily: Outside. Summer in Maine, are you kidding me?

Elisa: Clean or messy?

Emily: Clean. It's a Feng Shui thing.

Elisa: Teacher or student?

Emily: Student. Always.

Elisa: Town or city?

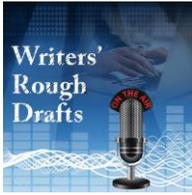
Emily: Both. I have to have both.

Elisa: Trains or planes?

Emily: I really like trains.

Elisa: Skiing or surfing?

Emily: Surfing.



Elisa: Fantasy or reality?

Emily: Are those different things?

Elisa: Love or money?

Emily: Love.

Elisa: Introvert or extrovert?

Emily: I like extroverts.

Elisa: Good content or good marketing?

Emily: Good content.

Elisa: Smile or game face?

Emily: Oooh, game face.

Elisa: Call or text?

Emily: Call. Always. I always call people.

Elisa: Money or fame?

Emily: Oh, god. I don't know. That's a really tough one. I'm going to go with money. I'm just going straight down the line. I want a million bucks.

Elisa: Be older than you are now or be younger than you are now?

Emily: I'm thirty-one; I love being thirty-one.

Elisa: Think before you talk or talk before you think?

Emily: I think before I talk, but I wish that I did the other.

Elisa: Have a dragon or be a dragon?

Emily: Have a dragon, obviously.

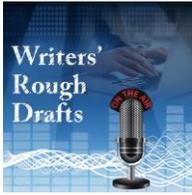
Elisa: And you can tell from our little buzzer that you have made it through till the end.

Emily: Yes!

Elisa: Thank you so much for taking the time to join me today, Emily. Where can folks find your writing and business?

Emily: You can find me at RedLipstickProject.com. My personal site where you can find me for coaching and things like that is EmilyStraubel.com. And yeah, all over the place.

Elisa: And we will have all the links, again, on the show notes page for anyone to find it. Do you have any parting thoughts? Any ideas about creativity or writing that you think people really need to leave the show with?



Emily: Yeah. I was thinking of this a while ago when we were talking about creativity and teaching about creativity. This idea that creativity is really a delusion, but it's a courageous one. That in order to be creative you have to live in this really brave and courageous delusion that you've created for yourself.

Elisa: That's deep.

Emily: That's the coaching in me. Don't be afraid to lie to yourself. But if you're going to lie to yourself, make it brave and silly and playful.

Elisa: That is a very good summarization for those of us who maybe did not quite go that far.

Emily: Thank you again for joining me. Have a great day!

Elisa: You too.

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[Outtake]

Elisa: Thinking better and writing better, and using sex to become a better writer and all of these things.

Emily: I know. We didn't even really talk about that. That's probably what I should have ended with: "The best way to get through a writer's block is to have sex."