

[Book Journeys Author Interview](#) - Dec. 8, 2016

Jenn McRobbie with Shari O'Loughlin, author of *Life from the Ashes: Finding Signs of Hope After the Loss of Your Child*.

"Oftentimes tragedy and trauma do make us better people. Then we find light, then we find new life, and when we can get to that place, you can do amazing things in life." ~Shari O'Loughlin

Jenn:

Hello, hello, hello, everybody! I had a little bit of technical difficulty, getting on today. So, I'm glad to have made it on time, and I see that Shari O'Loughlin, our - our author for today is on the phone. So, lemme just quickly go through our regular intro, which is, this Book Journeys Radio is a time to speak to accomplished authors who've gone from just having an idea for a book to a finished book and who are out making a difference in the world. And Shari O'Loughlin is definitely one who is making a huge difference in the world. Her book is titled *Life from the Ashes: Finding Signs of Hope After the Loss of Your Child*. Shari, welcome - welcome to the show.

Shari:

Hi, Jenn, thank you, nice to be here.

Jenn:

Thanks for - for bearing with me, and i'm sorry we didn't get a chance to chat a bit before we were on the air, but it's gonna make things super interesting, for everyone listening, I think.

Shari:

Great. No problem.

Jenn:

So, can you tell our listeners what your book is about and who it's for?

Shari:

Sure. Just about four and a half years ago, my fourteen-year-old son was killed in an airplane crash, and like most parents out there, I - I lived my life in - in a way that I had my days the way I wanted them, and ... felt a certain level of control over my life, I think, 'cause we all do, and - and it was beyond shocking to have, on a regular summer's day, the information come to me that this most tragic experience that none of us could ever fathom, ... want to imagine, actually had happened to me, and it was the last thing in the world I could have ever imagined experiencing. And so, the book itself is about both our tragedy, and what happened to us in that loss, but it's also a book of hope and healing, because the journey that began after that was horrendous and dark and the scariest things, really, a person can imagine, but unexpectedly, there was also miracles and beauty and different things that came with it that I wanted to help share so that - and this is who the book is written for, primarily, so that other parents who may

find themselves in the same circumstance might have help in ... alternative perspective of finding some hope along the way.

Jenn:

I - I can't even imagine the - the depth of the terror and sadness and loss, and was it hard to recall all of that, when you were writing the book? I mean, this is a really, ... tender topic, how - how did you access these memories without breaking down?

Shari:

Yeah. And, ... the adjectives you used are really good, they're really apt and appropriate, and I would just also say the shock - you can't imagine the shock of that experience as well, and quite a bit of the journey afterwards is just working through that experience that we don't really live in the way that we think. We have influence over our life, but we don't have the type of control we think, and sometimes life does shock us like that, in a way we can't imagine, so, in writing the book - I wrote it just shortly - right before the four year anniversary for us, and I'm not sure I could have written it any sooner. ... it was really painful, actually, going back through my story. That was an important part of it, was to share authentically, because it's - people can't understand the hopeless feeling and say - don't understand what we went through -

Jenn:

Right!

Shari:

- ... and I wasn't sure I wanted to write this book when I - I had to face going through my story again, but it's - knowing how much it might help people, knowing it was a book that, had I had access to, after I left my child, it would have helped tremendously - knowing these things helped me to go deep and go through and access those feelings and that's what kept me going, is - i - it - we kinda think of it as something that doesn't happen very often, but if you ... know so many organizations, like the Compassionate Friends organization that's out there and see how many people do lose a child, one of the most losses you can have -

Jenn

Right.

Shari:

- it's ... this, and so, I - knowing how that might help so many people allowed me to dig deeper and - and do that, and there was a cathartic process, or something that was ... therapeutic for me in doing it, I can't say that made it easier, but -

Jenn:

Right!

Shari:

- but there was some - some of that in there, so - ... that was a good outcome of it.

Jenn:

I can imagine, ... the - the catharsis - I think a lot of writers and authors, when - whether they write about something personal or not - or not, they definitely feel that catharsis, but I love how you were able to turn your pain into a message of service, Shari, that - that is phenomenal, to me, and I - I commend you on that, because ... I am a mother, and I - I cannot even imagine what the four years were like, and I feel very grateful that I have your book to let me know that there's so -

Shari:

Yes. Yes, and it - it's interesting, why you say, because I - I had a period - well, and I want to emphasize, I'm not done at four, four and a half years, ... grief of it - of - any grief, it's a long journey, but grief of a child, that's a forever journey and it - it comes back newly, every time you hit a new stage, that life was supposed to be one way and now it's not, so it's a journey. But helping other people certainly helped me on my journey, and that's one of the reasons I chose to write it. I remember, around fifteen months ... in working with my grief counselor, that I was ... at my end, and I remember just telling him - and I speak a little bit about this, in the book.

Jenn:

Right.

Shari:

I told him I - ... I cry everyday, I cry all hours of every day, I - I don't know where to go from this, ... I can't live this life, but - but I can't stop my grief.

Jenn

Right.

Shari:

It's - it's natural, there's - ... it couldn't be otherwise, and that started me on the path of gratitude and trying to find the hope and meaning, and I just knew, for me, personally, if I just sat with loss and loss and loss, I would ... - it would end me. I have two other beautiful children and I wanted to live for them and for us -

Jenn:

Right.

Shari:

- and why this path of hope helped me, if I can help some other people, that at least gives some meaning and something that I can contribute back that - that helps make something of this loss, in a - in a very strange way.

Jenn:

No, I don't think it's strange at all, Shari, but I - I think it's - it is a calling, I believe, that when - when a tragedy strikes, you are able to rise to that, all to help others, that - and upwards, in the process, we help ourselves, right? But, I - I just - I find that both fascinating and amazing, and I can't imagine - was there it? A definite time when you said to yourself, "I'm going to write a book about this?" Or did it just ... come up organically?

Shari:

No, not at all. It came up organically, in fact, I resisted it quite a bit, because -

Jenn:

Oh!

Shari:

- this is - ... this - this was sharing the most tragic experience and moments of my life, as well as one of the most personal and sacred, and so, when I started to feel this calling and hear it, I thought, "Are you crazy? No way am I sharing this information," ... I don't even like to talk about it much, ... share it, but if we are in tune with whatever you want to call it, a higher power or inner wisdom or soul, when things call, they call, and we can't ignore them, or we - and they will - we will be reminded, louder and louder.

Jenn:

Right!

Shari

So, as time went on, I've - I tried to embrace it, just say, "Well, why would I be called to write this and what might this mean," and the - that's something you and I haven't had a chance to talk about, ... Jenn, but I actually lost a sister, growing up, very tragically, as well. And this was a long time ago, it was in 1975, and times were very different then, it was a lot more of - at least, where I was raised, and the culture I was in, which was in the Midwest and Irish-German-Catholic and - and it was a lot more about - ... talk about those things, you just move on, you pull yourself up by your bootstraps and put that behind you, and there was a lot of pain caused by those sorts of interpretations, and I know the pain it caused my family, and I know the pain it caused others, lifelong pain, and - and what it did to my mother, to not be able to - to speak about or find hope or find meaning or find ... through that, and -

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:
- and that was some of my calling, was that, if I had experienced both of these things, I felt a - a calling to share with other people, there's a different way to do this. We can't help what happened, there's nothing that can change that, and -

Jenn:
Right.

Shari;
- and that's what ... parts, but what we do afterwards, and how we look at it and how we speak about it and how we find meaning in this world through it, that can be really different, so that's what helped me to answer the calling, when I thought, "Noo, not a chance, I don't wanna talk about this." So -

Jenn
Yeah! I - I don't blame you, I - I hope that you now, ... through the eyes of your clients and your readers, you find solace and - and in that grief - but ... for the loss of your sister, and - I don't think we've told the - the listeners your son's name is Connor, and so, the - the loss ... of your sister and Connor, and so, I - I just - I - how can you decide what to write, Shari? When there's - I would imagine there's a lot that you could have covered, that you chose not to. But how did you decide between ...?

Shari:
Right. That's a really good question, when I first decided to - and I spoke to Angela at the Author Incubator, about writing the book, I still wasn't entirely sure what it would comprise, and I probably had four books within that, that could have been written, and in talking - definitely. And in - and I think there's more to come, I'm sure, 'cause one book, definitely, doesn't - doesn't cover it, but in -

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:
Through Angela's coaching, and through talking and really thinking about it, I realized that there are many books written ... for the acute grief stages, there's a lot of resources, support books out there, how do you find the Compassionate Friends, how do you find grief groups around suicide or around tragedy or accident or whatever, and there's a lot of it in about the first year. A little bit, I think, like parenting, there's books galore about that first year after you have a baby, but then, beyond that, you're on your own a little more, in this ... -

Jenn
Right! Right.

Shari:
- experience as well. And so, there was not a lot out there about, how do you live with this long-term? How do you ... - how do you choose life, when you don't want to and can't find a way, but you want to, and what do you do with that, and also, what about the whole spiritual side, ...?

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:
There's all of these - there are many cultures who - who understand what happens after we die in a different way than our Western culture does, and so, after I lost my sister, ... - we're based in a lot of Western principles, it's ... they're gone, it's done, it wasn't meant to be, that's all there is, you put it behind you and - and there's so many other ways to see it, so knowing there wasn't much that I could find out there, I wanted to focus on after that first year, more about living and creating a life, a vibrant life, and I wanted to focus on more about, well, what really does happen, do we - is that relationship over? Why do other cultures ... speak about taking that relationship with them, and having ... inform their life and grow their life and enrich their life, and that was the two things that helped me frame ... what might go into this book, particularly .

Jenn:
Yes. Such a - such a good idea, taking all of the existing knowledge in the world, right?

Shari:
Yeah!

Jenn:
And it's ... your own situation, instead of ignoring it, like we often do, right?

Sheri:
Right, right, and there's so much richness out there, and we don't always have access to it, then we're really limited on how we see it, and it doesn't heal, it doesn't help.

Jenn:
Right. Exactly. Well, I - I was just looking at something amazing, and I realized that you wrote this book in one of the "Three Days to Done" programs that Angela - is this exact?

Sheri:
Yes.

Jenn:

Really true, you wrote this book in three days!

Sheri:

Well, four. We added on one extra day for me, because I was a new author, but done it in because this was really a big - a big book, and a big topic, so it was technically three days to done, which was four days, but still, it was - it was a ... thing as well. Yeah, when she told me, I thought, "I know you know what you're doing, but I don't think you know this one, yet."

Jenn

Yes.

Sheri:

... in a way, it was the only way I think I could have written this book, because this book is really - it's a love story to my son, who was a beautiful, amazing child, we - I should have - she said we didn't introduce him, and I want to speak a little bit more about his life, not just his death.

Jenn:

Please, do!

Sheri:

But it - it's a love story to him, he was an amazing - all of my children are amazing, there's not - he's not more amazing 'cause he's not here, there's no comparison to him right now because he's the topic, ... it's what led the book, but we had a beautiful relationship in life, so close, and he was a really old soul and a deep person and just someone that ... people always enjoyed being around and made you feel calm and centered and good and never really - ... he - he just led a really good life, and I never could imagine him not here, and similarly, I want to imagine that he - the airplane crash was a - a private airplane, he and his very close friend had gone on a four-day vacation to Sedona, Arizona, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the friend's father was a pilot, and they had four days of wonderful fun and amazing times and the plane crashed upon takeoff on the way home. So - yes. And so - also, all three were amazing people, and also - because - friend, who was also named Connor was also a - amazing and wonderful young man. If I digress just a little bit, I - I apologize, but ... -

Jenn:

No, ... like rushing at all!

Shari:

This - yes, so, very important information that just stuck in - ... put it in a strange place, but - this book is a love story to Connor's life, to who he was, to who he and I were as a mother and child, ... I had so many people afterwards, thankfully, say things like, ... "Nobody could ever doubt the love you two had for each other, it was evident in everything you did," ... I dug in - in

mudholes with him and I shared his ... on our backs, in a sleeping bag, out in the - in the middle of nowhere, staring up at the stars overnight and talking about the constellations and we ... them together, and the book is somewhat attributed to this beautiful love story that existed and I don't want to believe, and then, it's also a love story of my family and the community that rallied around us, and of my daughters, who are with me ... here, physically, now, and - and also a love story to my son in spirit and the relationship that continues, and as I do feel his presence in a way I never felt with my sister, because that wasn't the way we understood it, so it's a love story about all of those things, and -

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:
I don't think I could have possibly done any of that in the ninety-day program or the six months book writing or the two-year or the three ... that's just - there was so much to come out and it was deep and challenging and so, the only way I could have done it was a program like this, where I really set aside the rest of life for those four days, and I went in deep and I had to come in and out, but not really I would, if I had to stop and drive here and go to this meeting and do the laundry and do the dishes and go grocery shopping, I don't think I could have ever written ...
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Jenn:
Right!

Shari:
- book in that, anything less than than program, so. . . .

Jenn:
Yea - I can't even imagine that, but ... I - let's be honest, ... you wrote all of the meat in four days, but then, there is an editing process that takes place after that. How was that process for you?

Shari:
Definitely, there's an editing process, and I was grateful for that, because the - I mean, I - the four days was really a marathon, ... I was absolutely exhausted afterwards, the - ... happy as can be, but ... it takes everything from you, so the - thankfully, the program, the way it works is, you usually set it aside for two or three weeks before you can come back to it, and I really needed to do that.

Jenn:
Good.

Shari:

And then, when I came back, there were - there were so many things I wanted to do with it. There were definitely - but I - I didn't want any villains in the story, I didn't want - this book wasn't about accidents and investigations and and then fault, and what - i - it's just, it wasn't the place for it, there's nothing beautiful that grows from that, and it really was about all the Yeah, the amazing things that come, so I - in the editing process, I did a lot of trying to ... just refine that language and make sure it was always to spread beauty and good in the world and nothing less and honoring all around, and there was - I ... got the framework of the story, but I had so many beautiful anecdotes and stories that I wanted to put in, and that came in the editing process, where I went, "Oh, yeah, I forgot about I forgot about this poem and -"

Jenn:

Right!

Shari:

... many people to have more client stories and to enrich and to help people to get, not just from my point of view, but from the many other parents who experience some of the same things and find beauty and meaning in it, and that's when the book became richer. I went through that process, and - and let's say - ... the one section I - I couldn't edit quite as much was the beginning part, that's the story that - every time -

Jenn:

Ah, yes.

Shari:

Every time I read my own book, I cried and I just didn't want to keep ..., so I ... - did an editing of that, and also handed that over to someone else to review, and then, I kept at the other stuff, because it - ... a birthing, every time that I did it.

Jenn:

I - I can imagine, and I - I'm sure it's a - it's a form of birthing, every time you recall the story, for your clients or your readers or even our listeners here, so - so, give everyone a little bit of hope now, Shari, and - and let them know what's the best thing that's come out of writing this book.

Shari:

Okay, can I give two things?

Jenn:

Please! That would be - that is super hopeful, right there, I love it!

Shari:

Yes. Well, the - the two things I would say are this. One is - ... as I've said, sharing such a personal story was challenging, so even after I went through all of the writing and all of the editing and all the preparing, on launch day there was still a part of me that said, "Oh, my gosh, wait a minute, just kidding. I - I don't think I want to do this, can I ... off?" Because it's so personal and so exposing, and so, one of the most beautiful things that has come from the book is how many people it's helped. I've gotten so many mes - either personal messages or on my Facebook, or there's some at amazon.com, right in the review section, that I didn't even ask people to write and all of a sudden show up, and - and it was constantly the same message of, "Thank you so much for being brave enough to share, "Thank you, just helped me so much," "I - I - I live differently now, because of this, I see differently now, because of this," and what was really interesting was, it's not only parents who have lost a child. I have had so much feedback that it - anybody who's experienced significant loss, which is really all of us, in our time, we do, has found their own meaning through it, it doesn't have to be a book just about the loss of a child, and people found other - other parts as well, they said things ... "I really live my life to the fullest now, and - and live in a different way, both because I now understand how fast tragedy can happen and then your life changes in an instant without your permission, and because I see the beauty of taking steps when you don't think you can possibly get up again, and finding the beauty and the hope." So, that has been one of the most beautiful things to come, is - is - it took a lot of bravery, an immense amount of bravery, and I have criticism because of it, some people say, "Don't write a book about your son died, that's ... terrible," so -

Jenn:
Right!

Shari:

So - and I only did it for one reason, not for any exposure, not for any glory, but to help others - the type of help that wasn't there that I would have liked, and so, that kind of feedback, knowing how many people it's helped, and it's not even out in print yet, just is one of the most wonderful things. And the second thing, I would say, is - I talk a lot in the book about having signs from my son and being surprised at that. Again, and this, I mentioned, with my sister, we - we didn't even - ... it was never talked about again, the things were put away except a few pictures, and it wasn't at all seen in the same light, so that's a -

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:

- can be a - a tricky topic to talk about, because I didn't know if others had experienced that, and I wanted - I know, when I would go to a Compassionate Friends meeting, one thing I could say, for sure is, the parents who had experienced signs from their child were healing better than the ones who didn't and desperately wanted to.

Jenn:
Wow.

Shari;

That was clear across the board. And when I heard other parents talk, who had signs, I - I didn't think they were crazy parents who were just trying to create some sort of hope for themselves, and so, when it started to happen to me, I knew that I really wanted to share it with others, since I had experienced tragic loss in both ways, and one of the most surprising things was, as soon as I started to speak about it, boy, did people come out of the woodwork and tell me their stories, and many, many, many people have had signs from their loved ones and spirit, and not just children, their mothers, their fathers, their sisters, their friend who died tragically in an accident at sixteen, ... I - people just keep telling me these stories and want to talk about it and are grateful that somebody else opens ... talking about it, because it's the hope and healing that we look for, and we all need. So, those are two - two things that surprised me, ... really beautiful outcomes of the book.

Jenn:

Yup. ... I mean, that - that - it's - that alone, if - if anyone listening has a - has a sad or - or tragic story to share, ... those two things alone should, I hope, encourage you to get out there and - and write your story down, 'cause learning to see the light in not only your tragic - tragedy, but in other people - ... Shari, that - that's immeasurable, right?

Shari:

Yes, it is. It is, there's - part of the coaching work I do is helping - I - I - I do general coaching work of all times, but the specialty I do now is helping people who have experienced loss, trauma or tragedy, and it's two-fold, it's now ... the dark part of the journey, which is real and painful and can't be avoided, by any means.

Jenn:
Yes.

Shari:

But that transforming that pain into new energy and new directions and new life, and that's really where hope is.

Jenn:
Right.

Shari:

And the reality is, the darker something is, when we can go through it and fully experience it, no matter how much we are just trying desperately to flee it, but we can't, if we go through it and we really feel and experience it, when we do begin to move through it into the other side, there's amazing light there, and we actually are better people than before we started. So, I would never

say, "Take my son away so I can be a better person," of course not. I want my son right here, on my side. But without the choice, and that being my reality, both for myself and the clients I work with and the many parents I know from Compassionate Friends and the Children's Grief Center, who have lost children, oftentimes tragedy and trauma do create - make us better people. Then we find light, then we find new life, and when we can get to that place, which is what I help others do with my coaching, you can do amazing things in life and then it's not just about what happened to us, it's about what we do with that. What do we want to become when we can't change it.

Jenn:

Right. Right. I think that's - oh, boy, that's the key right there, who do we want to become? I think that - that applies to everybody, whether you have had a loss or you, ... stub your toe this morning. Who do you want to become to - today. So, Shari, can you tell the listeners how they can find you?

Shari:

Absolutely. My website is sharioloughlin. - www.sharioloughlin.com. It's spelled s-h-a-r-i-o-l-o-u-g-h-l-i-n. It's in a little bit of transition right now, but that's okay, it's - all the meat is there, you can get the My book is on amazon.com right now in e-book format, and the reviews there, you can read the background about it as well as the book itself, and it will be coming out in print in the new year. You can e-mail me as well, my e-mail is shari@sharioloughlin.com and I will answer e-mails, and I love to talk to anybody, as you said, who may want to find out more about how to make their circumstances and either navigate the dark pieces, if it's newer, or start to transform that energy into something new, or just who wants to talk about living life a little bit more aligned with our vision and goals, which is what we often choose to do after tragedy, because we ... see life in a different way.

Jenn:

Right. Although I have to tell you that I find a little bit of humor in the fact that you're - you say your website is in transition, and you're a transitional or transformational life coach.

Shari:

Yes, well, ... transformation right now.

Jenn:

She is ... for her transformation, people, so reach out. Shari, I feel like we could talk for days, and I'm so sad that we're coming to the end of our time, but I hope I can have you back on the show after your book comes out in print, so that we can tell everyone about the - the even larger impact you've been making when that time comes.

Shari:

I would love it. That would be terrific. I'm excited about it.

Jenn:

Great. Thank you so much, and thank you all for listening in to another episode of Book Journeys Radio, where we talk to authors about going from an idea to making a difference in the world using a book. Thank you so much.

Shari:

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