

[Book Journeys Author Interview](#) - Jan. 12, 2017

**Jenn McRobbie with Dana Ayers, author of *Confessions of an Unlikely Runner: A Guide to Racing and Obstacle Courses for the Averagely Fit and Halfway Dedicated*.**

*"You need to commit and you need to find some people to help you that know what you wanna do."* ~Dana Ayers

Jenn:

Hello, Book Journeys Radio listeners! Welcome. It's January twelfth and this is our second episode of 2017, and what better time to talk about running than in the new year, where I'm sure there's a lot of resolutioners out there. As you know, every week on Book Journeys Radio, we speak to accomplished authors who've gone from having an idea for a book to a finished book and out making a difference in marketing and in the world. So, today's author is Dana Ayers, and she's an author and a writer, and her book is titled *Confessions of an Unlikely Runner: A Guide to Racing and Obstacle Courses for the Averagely Fit and Halfway Dedicated*. Welcome, Dana!

Dana:

Thanks Jenn! Excited to be here.

Jenn:

I'm so happy to have you here, and I - I really think the timing is very apropos the year, because - I don't know where a lot of the listeners are, but here in Virginia, where I am, it's seventy degrees outside by now, and I wanna run.

Dana:

Yeah, it's ridiculous.

Jenn:

And I hate running, so, that is - that's saying something. Kitten, I always ask our authors to start off by just telling the listeners a little bit about your book and who it's for.

Dana:

Sure. My book is ... fitness memoir. It's half humorous stories that have happened to me in my journey with endurance challenges, being not very athletic myself, and it's half encouragement - half encouragement for people who look a lot like me, who feel like they might not be fast enough or thin enough or dedicated enough to finish a race or become a runner. So, that's - yeah, it's ... a little bit of both, entertaining and encouraging.

Jenn:

Entertaining and encouraging, that - that's pretty much the way fitness ought to be, in my opinion. So, what - what drew you to write this book, because you - you are ... self-professed,

you say you're not ... a crazy fitness person. So, what brought you to writing a book about running, or fitness?

Dana:

I had a blog for about four, four and a half years, and it was a personal blog, just ... sudden stories and adventures in my entire life, and I toyed with the idea of maybe turning it into a book one day, but I hadn't looked really seriously into it, and I was introduced to Angela through a co-worker out of the blue, and I - I thought, ..., "This is a publisher! If I really wanna do turn my blog into a book, now is a good time to try it!" So, when I talked to Angela, I said, ... "Most of my blog is either adventures in work, dating, travel or running, the adventure challenges," and - er, endurance challenges and she was ... "Well, you have to pick one of those, because there is no market for *Dana's Adventures in Work, Love, Travel, En -*" ... "*- Endurance Challenges,*" so - ... I'm very glad she told me that, and so - she was ... "What's the one topic that you have a lot of stories in?" and I realized I had a lot of endurance challenge stories, even though I'm not athletic and I am not that consistent, but over the years I've done a lot of races and I've had a lot of funny things happen, so I was ... "Well, I could definitely write about that," and then, the more I thought about it, the more I realized, that might actually be a gap in the world right now, because there's a lot written on being a competitive runner and how to - you'll get faster and how to train - all the training techniques -

Jenn:  
Right.

Dana:

- but my book is for someone who is a casual runner, so, someone who just wants to do it for fun, or who is just starting out, and there's not a whole lot out there for those people, so I realized that ... bring in that encouragement angle and it ... went from there.

Jenn:

Oh, I love that, and - and I think you're right, there's ... so much pressure these days to be ... fitter or faster or thinner or stronger, and sometimes we just need to use fitness as a way to have a little bit of fun or just do something different!

Dana:

Absolutely, I - I think that it's a good way to have a little weekend adventure, because I've done some really fun races, and it's a good - it's a good way to get away from my cubicle, ... friends, do something outside - yeah, so, I - I agree, I think - and it's free therapy! I found that running, in my training runs, just a really good way to clear my head, so I was - I've enjoyed it for that reason, too.

Jenn:

Oh, that's actually a really good point, that you can use even casual exercise as a way to ... clear your head and get your mind straight.

Dana:  
Definitely.

Jenn:  
Yeah, I love that. So, what brought you to endurance racing, then, ... I don't think anybody wakes up one day and ... , "I think I wanna do an obstacle course race or something," thought, what brought you ...?

Dana:  
I have a weird story, so, I - like I said, I'm not athletic, I never ran in high school or in college - I never ran a mile straight until college, and I was working at the White House when I first graduated college, and I was working in the Bush administration, and President Bush was an avid runner. And he was fast, he ran ... six minute miles. And he - yes!

Jenn:  
What? I knew he ran a lot, but I didn't realize he was that fast. Wow!

Dana:  
Yeah, he used to ... practically kill his Secret Service agents because he would have them run with him in Texas heat for thirty miles, they called it "The Hundred Degree Club."

Jenn:  
Oh, my gosh! ....

Dana:  
.... Right! He created a 5k race just for staff in 2002, and - how can you say, "No," to running with a Secret Service agent? So, I - I ... for it, and I've never ran a race before, but I was ... "All right, ...." And the First Lady walked it, and so, I was closer to her pace than I was to his.

Jenn:  
But you weren't last, right?

Dana:  
But I was not last, and I finished it and I didn't die, and then, after that - D.C. is full of runners, it's a good way to ... get rid of stress, very stressful city, so I - I ended up hearing from friends, ... many races after that. So, after I ... the one 5k and didn't die, I was ... "Okay, I can try other races," and it became ... a social thing, then, and then, my friend would be doing a 10k, so I would do a 10k, my friend would be doing a ten-miler, so I would do a ten-miler. That's ... how it built for me.

Jenn:  
So, you're saying peer pressure. You gave in to peer pressure.

Dana:  
More ...

Jenn:  
... Yeah.

Dana:  
“Well, if everybody’s doing this, I wanna do it, too,” and I started comparing myself to friends, ... - ‘cause at first, I thought runners all looked the same, and they would just be crazy committed people, and when I saw my co-workers, who might be a little pudgy or might be ... not as consistent, and they were doing ten-milers and half-marathons, then I was ..., “Well, I - I could probably do that, too,” I’d never really thought about it, and so, that was one thing I used, comparison, to ... look at other people who were out there and say, “Well, maybe I can get there, too.”

Jenn:  
That - that makes so much sense, and it - it actually ... makes me think about the author world, too, where ... - we always imagine that people are like Stephen King or ... major writers, and basically all they do all day is sit at their desk and bang out brilliance, right?

Dana:  
Yes!

Jenn:  
Did you have ... experience, were you just sitting down and ... banging out brilliance, ... hour after hour, or how did your writing process go?

Dana:  
Oh, gosh, no, definitely not. I agree, I think - I think - and that’s one good thing that I’ve learned through running, is to look at all of life that way, to think, “You know, there are exceptions,” ..., there -

Jenn:  
Yeah!

Dana:  
There’s a place there for me in places I didn’t think there was, so, yes, I - for me, writing was - my - my blog started because I was in grad school, and it was literally a procrastination tool for me, and instead of doing homework, I would just start telling stories. So, for me, ... -

Jenn:  
That’s so honest, I love it.

Dana:

Yeah! It was ... just to avoid doing writing that I didn't wanna do, doing writing that I did! So, then, when the book - I came up with the idea for the book, I'd already had quite a few stories that just needed to be massaged, so that's how ... me, ... I was starting totally from scratch -

Jenn:

Right.

Dana:

- but I just had to organize all that, add to it and refine it. So, I - ... and I work full time as a consultant, I work part time as a Navy reservist, so I was doing my writing early in the morning or on the weekend, so it's -

Jenn:

Right!

Dana:

If I can - if I can do it, I feel ... - anybody can do it, even if you're not Stephen King and ... your whole job.

Jenn:

Well - exactly, ... in - I think so many people believe that they have to essentially quit their lives while they're writing their book, and you're saying that you were - not only were you living your life, you're living a very full life, full of crazy endurance racing and two jobs and everything else ... -

Dana:

Yeah!

Jenn:

- able to get your book out.

Dana:

Exactly. And I'm not - I'm not gonna lie, my social life took a hit for a minute, but it only - ... Angela's program laid it out for you, and you - you see that it's temporary, and see that ... here's where you need to get half the book done, and here's where you have to get your prep ... - your layout done, it - it's finite and you can say, ... "Well, I may not be able to go out with my friends - without them for the next three months, but then, I'm gonna be a published author." ....

Jenn:

... right?

Dana:

Yeah! I was working out lots of reasons to hang out and celebrate, but - yeah, it's worth it to me to put - to put that as a priority for a limited amount of time, knowing that I could get there in three months.

Jenn:

That makes - that makes a lot of sense. Since you have a lot of - your books - I don't wanna call it "pre-written," but you already had the stories ... laid out, was it easy to envision the end result of a book, or did that make it more difficult?

Dana:

I think it probably made it easier, but I will say, when I first started this program, I vacillated often about the topic. So even though, at first, I was ... "Oh, endurance challenges." Then, when I ... I do ... "No, but I just wanna write about being a thirty-something female, single female, ... just living an adventurous life in general."

Jenn:

Right.

Dana:

And then, next week, I'd be ..., "Well, but I have a lot of travel stories, and that - ..." yeah, I - it took me a long time to finally settle and get peace about starting with endurance challenges, 'cause - ... I never thought that I would write a book about running. If I were ever to write a book about ... -

Jenn:

Right!

Dana:

- it's not at all what I thought I would write about, so - so, it took me a ... into that.

Jenn:

Why do you - why do you think that topic ... rose to the - to the top, to the ... - of all the various topics you had?

Dana:

I - ... see, I think I realized marketing would be easier, in the end.

Jenn:

That's a good answer.

Dana:

Because the - the Difference Prosel - program teaches you to think about marketing before you even write the book, and I knew that running, A, is ... topical for a lot of people, just like you said, new year's resolutions, with people trying to lose weight, that ... - it's just a universal topic, and then, running groups are an automatic marketing tool that I can tap into. If I wrote a book about just being a thirty-something independent woman, I ... - I don't know where to find those people, I don't know where they are congregating, naturally. I know where one or two are congregating naturally, so. . . .

Jenn:

Yes. Yeah, ... they're - they're ... easy to find. Right.

Dana:

Yeah, and they're - they're already established. There's groups you can - there's Facebook groups you can infiltrate, there's training teams that you can go speak to, and they're already established, so I actually intend to keep writing about different topics, but that's the piece that's been hard for me, ... think of where to find my audience - my next audience, if there's not established groups like that.

Jenn:

Right. Or to find those established groups, you're just - i - it's a little more legwork, I guess, to find those established groups as opposed to runners.

Dana:

Yeah, they're not ....

Jenn:

So, how has your book been doing among running circles? ... so many of us think of runners as ... the uber-fit ... twenty-five pounds ... marathoner - racers. How ... - how is the book, about ... a casual runner, how's it doing amongst running groups?

Dana:

It's done really well, and the running groups, I credit them to a lot of the book's success, because they started sharing it organically and making it ... go viral.

Jenn:

....

Dana:

I - I definitely think - ... there's a lot of mom running groups, where moms are just ... trying to get back in shape, and they look a lot like me, as far as time and ability, and so, I think they really resonated with it. Some of the more serious runners appreciate it just because I talk about the

universal love of the running community, and so they can - ... I - I think if you can get someone to take up fitness in any capacity, it's a good thing, ....

Jenn:  
Agree.

Dana:  
Obviously, I'm not telling people - I'm not telling people the - ... "You should train every single day, and you should go out with ..." - yeah, those thi - those things are probably true, but I'm - I'm not living that way, and I know a lot of other people are not going to live that way, so why not at least try it a little bit. So, there - ... I've had coa - running coaches say they cringe at the fact that I didn't train as much as I should have for some of my races that I write about.

Jenn:  
I'm sure.

Dana:  
But for the most part, people were ... "This is hilarious!" And I - ... everybody who's ever ran a race can relate to - to one of the things that's happened to you, and for the most part, I've gotten feedback from runners - casual runners, who say, ..., "It really helped me feel like I could be part of the community," and "It made me wanna try the next race," and "I'm so glad that y - you noticed here that I'm not all alone."

Jenn:  
..., I - I love that idea that - too, that, ... runners are an established community, but the people that are ... outside that community, it seems very mysterious, ... to people who aren't runners, and - and I love the idea that your book allowed people who are outside of the running community realize that they really are part of it, and they didn't even know that before. ....

Dana:  
Yeah, and the - and the - ... how welcoming it is.

Jenn:  
Yes, I think that - that's really powerful, it's ... this message of inclusion in something that ... a lot of people are ..., "Hoo, boy," ....., no desire to get anywhere. Even though you are -

Dana:  
Right! ... Yeah. No, absolutely. ... and I've seen people finish races who are ... disabled, or - or - ...

Jenn:  
Right! Yeah.

Dana:

- o - obese, morbidly obese - ... I've seen all types of people finish races, so I wanted people to know that, so that they didn't look at the community as exclusive, but that it is a place where everybody can do something and they will be celebrated.

Jenn:

I think that's so great. ... it's such an important message, when we're talking about fitness, too, because ... it's so easy to get discouraged when you're like us, when you're ... a regular person, ... and you wanna do something good for yourself, but ... feels intimidating, so I - I just - I love that, I think it's a really - it's a powerful message. Did you ever think you were ever gonna write a book? ... I know you started with the blog, but did you ever think that you were gonna write a book?

Dana:

It's funny, when I was a really little kid, I did wanna be a writer one day, and I'd write little books when I was little, but then, life got in the way, ... distracted in high school, distracted in college, I started a career path before I even realized I was in it, and you just actually thought about that.

Jenn:

Right.

Dana:

And I - yeah, I wasn't really speaking it out, but then it really started because of Facebook. I was posting funny stuff that happened to me, and my friends started chiming in, ... "Oh, this is - ... this is really interesting, you have crazy adventures, if you wrote a blog or a book I would read it." And that's literally how it sparked - it - it really ignited that in me in my adult life. So, I was ... "Okay, well, maybe I could start a blog, then, that might be a nice, creative outlet," and so then, once the - once I had the blog, that's when I was ... "Well, maybe I'll look in this - doing a book." That's how it ... for me.

Jenn:

Right. Yeah, so, ....

Dana:

And now ... book out, ... I've - I wanna keep writing books for sure.

Jenn:

Yes! Oh, I love it!

Dana:

Now that I've seen the first one, that - yeah, it's been such an amazing experience, so I definitely wanna keep writing now.

Jenn:

Aw, I love hearing that. Why do you think - so, what is it that enabled you to ... finish your book this time around, because I think a lot of people - ... they start blogs, they - they really want to write a book, and then they spend ten years outlining it.

Dana:

Yeah.

Jenn:

Right? ... I have four unfinished novels sitting on my computer right now, that - that I've never ... gone back to. So, why do you think you finished your book?

Dana:

I think because the - the program - the Difference Press laid out parameters, and it - it kept me from overthinking it, and so, it was ... "Okay, your - you will have a book at the end of three months, this is - you will have an outline at the end of this week, and ... you have to figure out what's going into each chapter, you gotta figure that out now," and just having an editor, a developmental editor, with me throughout was - ... it just ... made me comforted, but it was ... "Here's the - here is the world you're living in, don't drive yourself crazy by thinking of all these other things, ... now is the - is this chapter, and then the next chapter, and then the next chapter." And so, making it in pieces like that, and seeing the whole plan ahead of time, it was ... "Yeah, I'm go - I'm gonna have a book!" ... happen.

Jenn:

Yeah. .... You're so right, I think, really, the biggest ... barrier to anyone finishing a book, whether it's their first or their tenth book, is overthinking it. That's exactly what the problem is.

Dana:

Yeah, and I would - I would do that to death, ... I would do that with decisions all the time, I just - I'd go back and forth, and so, to have someone just lay it out and be ... "Nope, this is the par - trust the process," and then, to have a developmental editor give me constructive feedback, but also affirmation?

Jenn:

Right. ....

Dana:

Was key to helping me feel like I could go on and go on and go on until it's done.

Jenn:

Yeah, I - I think you're ... - you hit the nail on the head. ... a little bit of hand-holding.

Dana:

Yeah. Having someone beside you is key, for sure.

Jenn:

Yeah!

Dana:

And I would ha - and I would never have had the book I have now, had I not had people with me, because, ... like I said, I was spinning out of control from the beginning, not knowing which topic I .... And I wouldn't have thought about ....

Jenn:

You - your book would have been ... ten - your book would have been ten thousand pages, ... which is amazing, but ....

Dana:

And - and no one would have read it! No one would have read it, it would have been ... "Here's my life!" And everybody's looking ... my life.

Jenn:

I love that. Well, what was the best thing, then, to come out of having a book?

Dana:

Oh, God. There's so many things, ... I - I did a little media tour with it, earlier this year, I got to travel all over on TV, that was awesome. I - like I said, hearing from readers has been amazing, I've had people tell me their funny stories, ... secret funny stories, because they feel like they know me. And I've had - I know! - lot of people just tell me that it encouraged them, and that it literally made them sign up for their first race. And that's - that's amazing, to hear from a stranger, from ... other countries, sometimes, it's ... that's amazing. ....

Jenn:

That is amazing, that must feel so good!

Dana:

Yeah! It really does. Yeah, so, .... Yeah!

Jenn:

... didn't know - ... didn't know, going into it, that you were gonna be ... an inspiration to people.

Dana:

Exactly, yeah. That's - and that's what I started to say is, it makes me want to make sure that whatever I write next has - still has that motivational factor, encouragement side to it, because if

I'm just telling people funny stories, fine! But it's really that - that piece where you're getting - having something that resonates with them in their life, in something that they need, that's where it's really rewarding.

Jenn:

So, meeting your reader where they are. That's very ... start. I love that.

Dana:

Definitely.

Jenn:

So, was there anything that was different about writing or publishing a book than you expected?

Dana:

... there was a lot, I just - I had no idea what it was gonna be like, but - and I - I knew from the beginning ... - everything was different, 'cause I didn't even know what to ..., but the marketing being a challenge was - ... people told me from the beginning that marketing's harder than writing, but it really, really is. Marketing can just overtake you if you let it, so that's one thing that I've learned is to ... - at some point, I had to shut myself off, 'cause I was ..., "And I can do this, and this, and this, and I should put something on social media now, and I should put another interview." And after awhile, ..., "Oh, my gosh, this is gonna consume me if I don't stop," so, that's - that was something that I learned the hard way.

Jenn:

Y - y'know, and - a lot of ways, the marketing piece was very much like the deciding what your topic piece is, because you can ... go round and round in circles for years, thinking, "Oh, I can do this, I can do that, I can do this," and then you almost paralyze yourself into inaction, because you have too many ideas.

Dana:

... - yes, to - totally. So, that's one thing - I think I need someone beside me now, for that piece. I think that's what I'm missing now, is I - I just find some kind of - and I don't know what that is, if it's an agent or if it's a publicist, I don't know it i - what that looks like, but I think you're right, I think that I've ... - I have fun at myself around again, because I'm just on my own again.

Jenn:

Yup.

Dana:

So, it's ... I hired a publicist for a little while, and then I - I fired them, and then I was doing stuff on my own, and it's - and which social media platform to ... yeah, so I think - I think that's one thing that I need to solidify, is to - is my plan.

Jenn:

Well, I definitely think social media complicates things, because it makes it seem so easy, right? ... you're ..., "Oh, I have access to ... thousands of people! I'm just gonna put it out there!" But there are actually ... techniques and things that you can do to help boost where you appear in people's feeds and all that, and - I don't know about you, but that is - it might as well be ... advanced math, I have no idea what any of that means.

Dana:

Right! And, ... we don't have time! I don't have time to be an expert on Instagram and Twitter and Facebook and publishing and ....

Jenn:

Right! ....

Dana:

... have time to be an expert on all of it, so, yeah. And - and once you start a platform, it has to be fed! It's like a little greedy monster, ....

Jenn:

Yes! That is - oh, my gosh, ....

Dana:

I can only talk about running so much, ....

Jenn:

That is the best explanation I've ever heard of social media. "Greedy monster," that is exactly what it is.

Dana:

... I love - I love my followers, but you don't post consistently, they're - they're done with you, they're ... "You're boring me," ....

Jenn:

Right!

Dana and Jenn:

....

Jenn:

That's true. Well, the last thing I always ask our authors is, if there's someone sitting out there, listening to this podcast right now, thinking to themselves, "There's no way I can do what Dana did." What kind of advice would you give them that could help them get started today?

Dana:

I would say, you definitely can, because I didn't have any special knowledge of publishing or - or anything like that, or mark - ... I guess I have a background in marketing, but I think, if you get the right team, that's - that's what's gonna help you. And that takes some investment, so it's - it comes down to deciding if you really want it, then you need - you need to commit and you need to find some people to help you that know what you wanna do, so if it's the publishing, first find people in publishing, and then in the marketing, find people in marketing, 'cause you just - otherwise, you spin around, like you said, you'll be ten years down the road and still not have one, but it's totally doable!

Jenn:

Right!

Dana:

It's just, you need to get the right team.

Jenn:

Such good advice. Such good advice, well, Dana, I feel like we could talk for ... days. This is - this has - this has been such a pleasure.

Dana:

Thank you so much for having me, it's been so fun.

Jenn:

Thanks for being on, and ... I feel compelled to tell our listeners that Dana and I have been communicating with each other over social media for, gosh, probably a year or two now, and we've never actually spoken to each other, other than typing back and forth, so it's always nice to make ... real contact with someone that you've known over social media.

Dana:

Absolutely. And ..., if you can find a team you'd never meet them in person, it would still work, that's how it's - our work is different for us. Never ... totally works.

Jenn:

.... Excellent point! So, go out, find your team. If you're - if you're wondering how to get started, go out and find your team and realize that they can be virtual, and maybe one day you will be talking to them on a podcast or Book Journeys Radio about how you now are out there marketing and publicizing that book that is sitting in your brain right now. Dana, thank you so much for being with me on the show today.

Dana:

My pleasure, thanks, Jenn!

Jenn:

All right! See you all next week! Thanks so much!