

The Magickal Bard - Self-Discovery in Writing and Book Coaching

Margaret: Hi, everybody. Happy Friday, if it's Friday when you're listening. If it's not happy, whatever day it is. I am here with my friend, Dani Abernathy, who's a fellow book coach and Enneagram teacher, which is awesome. Enneagram is something that's so fascinating and I can't wait to talk to her about it, and the idea of self-discovery through writing and coaching.

So welcome Dani.

Dani: Hi, Margaret. Thanks for having me. Excited to be here.

Margaret: Thanks for coming. It's always a pleasure to talk to you. So, Dani, let's, let's talk first about Enneagram. How'd you get into this, this subject matter?

Dani: Um, I don't remember.

Margaret: Okay.

Dani: It's been a while. Uh, I just, I've always been interested in self-discovery and like personality tests, you know, all those things I've always been into.

And so, um, I had been into MBTI Myers Briggs. You know, which is the four letters.

Margaret: Right.

Dani: I found it like complicated. I couldn't remember the things. And like, I didn't fully understand the system and all those things. And so when I discovered the Enneagram, I just like fully embraced it because there's nine Enneagram types, which is still a lot.

But for me, they were easier to understand. And I felt like, um, the Enneagram is really about your motives. So like your desires and your fears, it's not only about behaviors, it's about why you do the things you do. And so I loved that. I felt, I learned so much about myself and about other people. And so, so I was into it, you know, for a while before I started using it in my coaching, but now it's, it's sort of the foundation of my book coaching that I do with clients and,

um, we use it both to help them discover themselves, more about themselves, and also develop their characters.

Margaret: Lovely. Lovely. I love, I love when we can use self-discovery tools for the writer and the characters.

Dani: Yeah. Right? Because you do that with Tarot, right?

Margaret: Tarot, astrology, numerology.

Dani: All the things.

Margaret: All the occult things.

Yeah, it's a lot of fun. So talk to me about your journey of self-discovery as a writer, and now you're leaning full into book coaching, right?

Dani: Yeah, I, I decided in January to stop writing fiction, at least for the time being. I'm sure I'll come back at some point, but, um, boy, my journey of self-discovery.

That's quite a question, right? So first of all, I'll say I'm an Enneagram type four, which is the, the individualist, the romantic, we are very interested in identity and self-discovery so I'm maybe the type that's like most likely to kind of lean into that fully. So, um, I think my own journey of self-discovery...

I mean, it's a lifelong journey, right? Um, I think the biggest thing for me has been in the past decade. Uh, I used to be an evangelical Christian and I was a missionary and, you know, it, it defined my life. And then at the end of our missionary time, um, we moved back to the States from Germany and I was, I was having kids and Trump was being elected and all these things were happening.

And I was like, I don't know about this, this religion, you know, like there were so many parts of it that felt oppressive and just bad to me. And so over the past, you know, few years, it's really been a journey of like, I don't think I believe this anymore and what do I believe? Um, coming out, I use the term coming out, coming out to our families.

My husband also left. We left Christianity together and coming out to our families was terrifying and it took us a long time to do but, um, around that time I also got on Lexapro to treat a decade of depression and anxiety. We told our

families we weren't Christians. I had my birthday. It was the beginning of a new year and I just felt like that was actually, at, the end of 2021.

And last year was this year where I felt more myself than I ever had. And I was like, releasing all these things and all these fears that had just guided my life for so long. And I decided I didn't want to be afraid of myself anymore. And, you know, like, So I just feel like

for so long I was afraid of discovering myself. I, I thought I was, but I really wasn't, or I just had a lot, a lot more to sort through before I sort of got to, to the deepest layers of myself. And in some ways I feel like self-discovery is coming back to yourself, you know, coming back to your truest self.

Margaret: Oh, I just got chills when you said that.

It takes so much courage to do what you did. And, you know, for anybody. Anybody who's just like at the first steps of self-discovery it can seem really scary because it's...

Dani: Yeah.

Margaret: You have to come face-to-face with not only what you like about what's going on in your life, but also what you don't like. And...

Dani: Yeah.

Margaret: There's, there's, there's no way to just do one or the other. And still have it be self-discovery.

Dani: Right. Right. self-discovery involves like the hard, painful stuff.

Margaret: Yeah. Yeah.

Dani: As well as the fun, good stuff.

Margaret: Yeah. You faced a lot of what I would call shadows and it takes so much courage to do that. So kudos to you 100%.

And you know, it is a lifelong process. It never ends. We're always able to hone and change and come closer to our, who, who we. Are the core of us. But I, I

would want somebody Who has, who knows that process and it's, it's so beautiful that, you know it.

Dani: I mean, you know, I know a version of it and I keep finding new things about myself, especially the shadow things.

I'm like, Oh, why is that there?

Margaret: I know, I know, because we're human.

Dani: I know, right? Um, But it's so interesting, you know, in the process of writing and kind of walking with writers through exploring their own connection to their novels, because I work with writers who are typically pretty personally connected to their stories.

And, you know, it's so amazing to watch them realize, like, why this story is so important to them. And, like, what questions of their own they're trying to answer through their story and to see them, you know, not be afraid of those things anymore.

I mean, so, well, sometimes you are still afraid of them, but, but when you, when you recognize them and you can be aware that that's part of why you're writing, um, it allows you to just write with so much more honesty and power and intentionality than when you. write... I feel like when you don't have this aspect of self-discovery or self-reflection in your writing, then you just end up writing what everyone else is writing, you know. Or you write on the surface of what you actually want to say, because what you actually want to say is so effing scary. Like...

Margaret: Yeah, yeah, 100%.

I had an MFA mentor who used to ask all the time, like, is it true yet? Is it true yet? Have you gone deep enough yet? I love that question so much because it's like, it, it, it just undercut everything. And it was like, well, no, no, it's, I haven't, I haven't gone to the bottom of this barrel yet. There's more to do.

Dani: Cause it's so scary.

Margaret: It is.

Dani: It's so scary.

Margaret: Yeah.

And, and to write something that is true, that is really true, it involves just like cutting open your heart and laying it on a platter for people to be like, here it is, here's everything I am.

Dani: Right, right. And I write, I like, I primarily coach speculative fiction writers who are writing fantasy and sci fi, but the story is still true.

You know, like the, the honesty, I think you can only be as honest with your reader as you are with yourself. And so if you really want to impact people, like on an emotional level, you have to take so much bravery.

Margaret: It does.

It takes vulnerability and that. That is courage. 100%. And it's, it's that same courage that you have to bring to the process of discovering yourself.

And I think that it's so beautiful that you're coaching in this way. 100%. Um, so my other question for you is, how does it feel as a book coach to work with a writer through this self-discovery? Like, how does that feel to you as a coach?

Dani: Oh, Margaret. Okay.

So I'm laughing because, um, just in therapy, like last time, she was like, we were talking about, you know, um, how I use, I can use my own experiences and my own sort of authenticity as a way to like draw people in and connect with them and as a type four, as an Enneagram type four, that's one of my sort of ways I've learned to be in the world.

Um, and so it's a, it's a good and a bad thing. And so anyway, I'm just, I'm very aware of like what I'm getting out of everything, all my coaching right now, uh, in a new way. I mean, we always get something out of our coaching, right? But just exploring how, how I'm sort of my shadow is coming into it. Anyway, back to your question.

What's it like to, as a coach? It's so interesting. You know, I, I've learned to trust the process a lot more in the past couple of years because, um, the resistance that comes up is almost always grounded in a fear, you know, or a wound. And so as a coach, sometimes, it can feel like, why isn't this person doing their work?

Like, why aren't they, you know, why aren't they doing the next step? Why aren't they turning in their pages or whatever? But, always, it's, well, either something's happened in their life and they just don't have the capacity or, you know, they're scared, they're scared of failure or they're scared of what the story is asking of them or they're, something's misaligned, like they're not, the story isn't as true as they want it to be.

And so for myself, I've really had to, um, stop thinking that my success means them checking the boxes off and like moving forward at the pace I expect and recognize that my job is just to hold space for them, to help them show up for their story and to allow them the opportunity to reflect and to have the time and the safety to do that.

Margaret: Yeah, that's so important. And that's really, that's, that's a lot of what coaching is, right, is creating that space for people where they can come to their work in a, in a, in a safe environment where they can access those deeper parts of themselves. That's...

Dani: Yeah.

Margaret: That's beautiful.

So my final question for you, Dani, is, If you had any bit of advice for a writer who is just about to start the self-discovery process or this writing process, what would that advice be?

Dani: Okay, so the first thing that comes to mind, which is totally like self promotional, is, um, I offer a free workshop every so often called Find Your Writing Roots, and it's, it's actually the foundation of my, I have a year long, um, writing mentorship and it's the foundation of that and it's free and it helps you connect with these pieces of yourself that you may not have considered.

So I do the workshop. That's the thing. But, um, I think my advice is just to be curious and be kind to yourself. You know, if you approach your self-discovery and your writing with curiosity instead of judgment it's going to be easier. And then when you do find things that are painful or that you don't like, just be kind, like, you know, we're, we're all doing our best and we all are complicated and there's so many layers happening and we're never going to be perfect, fully healed. Like we can't be Barbie dolls, you know, we're not plastic people. We're living creatures and we have things and so just allowing yourself the time and the space to, to heal and to grieve and to change and to grow and almost like

loving, you loving the shadow in yourself, you know, instead of judging it and trying to like eradicate it.

Margaret: Wonderful. That's excellent advice. Thank you so much.

Dani: Yeah, you're welcome.

Margaret: Thank you for joining me and for your openness and bringing your true self.

Dani: Yeah, I'm always happy to talk about this. So...

Margaret: Well, great. Thank you so much, Dani.