

Transcript for Dust Jackets Interview with Joan Ramirez

Maggie Lynch: Hello, and welcome to Dust Jackets: Conversations with Authors. And my special guest today is Joan Ramirez. I'd like to just take a moment and read her bio, so that you can get an idea of what an accomplished person she really is.

So first, Joan lives in New Jersey in the New York metropolitan area. She has 25 years of global corporate communications, teaching, journalism and publishing experience. Her educational background includes an MS in journalism, with an emphasis on financial, technical engineering, business, and medical writing. She also has an MS in English as a second language, and an MS in elementary and special education. I tell you, that's a lot of degrees.

Joan really knows her stuff. Her nonfiction books for children have been a primary focus of her early career. She's written a wonderful book on autism, and that's available in Chinese, Spanish, and English. *Jamie is Autistic* is the name of that book. Also, she has two leadership books for students *Go for It Leadership Handbook*, and *Let It Go Let It Flow Leadership*.

And for adults, Joan has recently published a writing handbook for ESL adults looking to improve their writing, presentation and communication skills. And that is called *The Write Rules*. I've actually had a chance to read that handbook and it's quite good. And we'll be talking about that more in depth today.

In fiction, Joan has written short stories that have appeared in online mystery and suspense publications. Her first novel *Secret Desires* is now available.

So again, welcome, Joan. Let's go ahead and get into the interview. So, you write both nonfiction and fiction. And that's unusual. Many of the authors that I interview only do one, it's not that many that do both. So, I wonder, do you actually like one better than the other? And how do you divide your time between the two?

Joan Ramirez: Well, I've been working in the business world since I was ten. I've always loved business. My uncle had his own pharmacy, and he was my role model. And I wrote *The Write Rules*, because I felt it was important for people to have a handy quick guide. And it satisfies the business aspects of my earlier career. I mean, I was one writer for a staff of 1,000 engineers and I, they were just fantastic people to work with. And I just can't give up the business side. But I love being creative. And I've taught creative writing in many countries, to a lot of darling children and wonderful adults. And I like bouncing back and forth between the two. You know, it's like I have two children, and one is now grown. I wish!

But I have so much that I like to do. And if I give one up, and I turn to the other, I feel like I'm ignoring the other. So, I have decided to satisfy both sides of my life.

Maggie Lynch: Well, that makes perfect sense. And trying to keep that balance, I'm sure it's quite hard. So, let's start off talking about your handbook *The Write Rules*. This really intrigues me because it's a compact and easy to use for quick reference. One of the things I noticed, as a person who uses like Strunk and White for grammar, you know, it's really easy to look up things. It has a nice little index and so you can go ahead and find exactly the area that you want. And so, why this particular book and why a handbook instead of, like, a full text like you might find at a college course?

Joan Ramirez: I taught engineers, I worked for engineers for 20 years, and ironic you should mention Strunk and White because every month I conducted a writing course. It was writing and presentation skills. And it was it was one of the best parts of my job. And, when I was working with a lot of these men whose native language wasn't English, they were very frustrated because they didn't know how to communicate their thoughts properly in English—even though they know English very well to do their job.

I wanted something that people weren't tortured. I looked at 100 writing handbooks. Some of them were more volumes. And I thought, oh my god, I don't want anyone to ever walk out of the bookstore, buy my book and say: God, that woman is driving me crazy! I can't find this. I can't find that. I don't want to go back to my college days.

And one of the most rewarding parts of publishing that book, which was an outgrowth of the things I'd done in my writing career, is a lot of people have different needs. The book satisfies someone who wants to do a presentation, someone who wants to write correspondence, someone who just wants well, I just want the rudiments of starting my own business. So, the book satisfies all that. Is it a compendium? Will it cover everything? No. But it gives you a soupcon, a taste of everything, so that if you want more, you can go to it. And I do have resources in the back. But I wanted something that wouldn't frustrate people. Because these big volumes, when you go into college, when you're going to get your MBA, that's essential. But when you're at middle management, and you've decided you want to go out on your own, you want something fast, and something easy, you don't want to be frustrated.

Maggie Lynch: That really shows a lot of insight into business people for sure. I know when I was in business, I didn't want anything that was more than 20 or 30 pages, because I just didn't have time. So that's really great. I understand that you have a business now, would you be willing to kind of talk a little bit about what that is. And in terms of helping other people who may need something beyond your book.

Joan Ramirez: I'm so excited about that. Earlier this week, I was part of a webinar for a Chamber of Commerce business organization on the island. And we were talking; and a lot of people said to me, "Well, what do you do?" I take people who want to start their own business, maybe they'll just want to know how to write a press release. Maybe they'll want to know how to speak in front of an audience. Maybe they'll want to know how to put content together on their website. So, it's a myriad of services.

But I noticed that a lot of the people who were presenting were a little bit nervous. Were they saying too much? Were they saying too little? And a few of them, afterwards, spoke to me on the webinar; and they joined my mailing list. It was really very rewarding because you never say anything to anyone. Everyone is entitled to give their presentation. You never criticize. You never talk down to people, you don't talk up to people. But afterward, a lot of people said to me, "You seem very composed. You knew what you were doing." Because I've been doing this forever. I've been doing this forever.

I was telling my husband tonight, when I was nine years old I had an after school tutoring workshop in the basement of my home. And I think it all started then. So, it's just, I enjoy it. And I especially like helping people whose native language isn't English, because they have it all up here (points to head). But it's a matter of getting it out. So, the company is open to people who are open to learning how to present themselves. People who have knowledge—engineers, doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, basically anyone who wants to take the fulcrum of their knowledge and they want to help people on their own.

And in this economy, it's unfortunate that a lot of people really don't have a choice, because of the downsizing. So, I'm giving them options. I'm also giving them courage; and I'm giving them my enthusiasm because I like what I'm doing. I really do.

Maggie Lynch: That's really wonderful. And I think it's very much a needed service. So, I wish you the very best with that. Let's move on to your writing in terms of your novel *Secret Desires*. I know that a lot of my fans who love romance and suspense, and things like that, would really be interested in this novel. This, of course, is very different from your nonfiction work. So, can you tell us a little about the premise and what inspired you to write that particular story?

Joan Ramirez: Honestly, truthfully, I was dating someone; and he was not going to be my prince charming. And, when I started to do my romance novel, I thought of him. I wish him well, we just weren't meant to be together, forever. And then I met my husband. And I thought of the person I had dated before I met my husband and my husband. And when I started writing the novel, I thought, gee, what about writing a novel about someone who is a widower. And he had a happy marriage, because a lot of the men that I had dated were widowers, or they were divorced and they had problems.

I thought (the character would be) a widower who just can't let go. And he loves this woman. And there is a bit of an age difference. And he just can't separate himself. And the book, I've left open for sequel, because I don't want to give away the ending. But this man wants to take a second chance on love. And also, I did a little bit, believe it or not, on retirement homes where people are a little leery of meeting. You know, they've been very happily married for many, many decades. And they just want companionship.

So, I hope that people get different things out of the book. In my case, it was taking a first chance on love, because the first time it wasn't right for me. Not being bitter, and not being soured, and not saying: "Oh, you know, the heck. Well, that didn't work out. That's it. I don't want to do anything." Or for people who are older and they want to just have companionship. Because there's all different kinds of love. So, the book started out with one aspect, and it ended with another book. I really enjoyed it.

Also, because I had looked at a lot of romances, I'd read a lot of romances, I wanted it to be a little spicy. But I wanted it to be respectable. And I also wanted to be tender. And I wanted people to walk away with their own feelings of Edward, the hero, and Margot the heroine. And I think everyone has their own take on it. But it was a big departure.

Maggie Lynch: Well, I love that you actually think about older people falling in love as well. Just simply because there's not a lot of books like that. A lot of romance is really for about 25 to 35-year-olds. Forty is like considered old for most of them. And, and I know there's a lot of people, myself included, you know, who had perhaps a previous marriage. I know people, older people who were never married before and are looking for love. And so, I just think it's great that you can reach out to that demographic as well. And it happens.

I'm talking to all my fans out there now because I know most of you are around my age. So, this sounds like a good book for you to pick up. And that is called *Secret Desires*.

So, you said that you had left it open for a sequel. Is that something that's in your plans in the near future? Or is it just kind of down the road sometime?

Joan Ramirez: Oh, no, it's in the near future. I just think that it will be a lovely thing to do. And then I think I'll probably close the door on romance. And if I do have any romance in the future, it will be in between the chapters of my suspense novels. That's really what I want to do. Because I'm a history lover, a history reader. So, I really want to focus on my historical suspenses.

But I think I've just met so many really lovely women, all ages, doing all these webinars and COVID. It's just we're all captivess, whether we like it or not, and they're just really strong. In the webinar that I had with this business group, this woman is newly widowed, and she's in a 60s. Lovely lady, and she's not sure whether she wants to meet somewhere or not. But I just I would like to do the sequel just for these ladies, just to give them hope.

Maggie Lynch: That sounds wonderful. So, you mentioned that your love now has to do with more suspense novels. Can you share a little bit about the historical suspense that you're working on?

Joan Ramirez: Oh, absolutely. My darling, wonderful beloved uncle. He was a medic in World War II when he was a pharmacist; and he left me 75 years of his war memorabilia. And shame on me (for leaving it so long). Because it's been years of building a career and then switching and going into my own business. About a year and a half ago, I retrieved all of his material. And I have crafted a historical novel set in World War II. And it's a family saga. And it's based on a lot of his memoirs, because he was in North Africa.

The book starts when he's in the Italian campaign. And I'm thinking very seriously of maybe having a sequel and just doing his correspondence. This was a man for all seasons. He spoke fluent Italian, he spoke fluent Spanish. He was a semi-pro tennis player. But his memoir and his notes, and all the things that he jotted down, it's just been so helpful. It's my tribute to him. It's my love note to him. So it's very important.

I finished it. I'm editing it. And then I'm also going to be doing a few more historical suspenses. And that's really where my interest lies.

Maggie Lynch: And is your interest in history simply because you love that? Or is it because of how much happens. Like World War II, obviously, was a huge change for our country. A time that, you know, we haven't seen in 60 years. I guess it's been now 70 years. So, is it that a particular era that you're interested in? Or is it just history in general?

Joan Ramirez: With being Jewish, and reading a lot of books on the Holocaust...I mean, I'm reading a lot, a lot of books on the Holocaust. And my book that I'm going to be writing will be a historical suspense novel with the Holocaust. But it's going to be a totally different take. It will be a series. It will be a tribute to many wonderful, talented Jewish people who, through no fault of their own, were victims of torture and murder, by a very evil demon. But it's going to be a different take on the Holocaust.

It's going to be set in the world of fragrance. So, then in there, it's going to have a whole different premise. But it's something that I've been thinking about for a long time. I've been to Paris many times. I have created my own perfume formula. And, also, some of it has to do with my uncle. And just the way he felt.

My father, when I was little, he was away a lot. Unfortunately, he wasn't around a lot when I needed a lot of things in school. But my uncle was there, and there were a lot of the things that my uncle and I

discussed. I mean, he'll always be with me. But this is I think, psychologically, it's also my way of keeping my uncle with me and bringing him more to life. It's just the way I felt about him. But it is a very, very important topic to me. And it's something near and dear to my heart. And as I said, it's my way of paying tribute. And also I enjoy this type of writing.

Maggie Lynch: Well, you're very fortunate that you had your uncle around to share some of those stories. That's really wonderful. And then to have all his writings as well. And I'm sure you know, I am not Jewish, but certainly the Holocaust has rung through our history. And still, there are people today that, that just don't even believe it—which blows my mind. So, I think it's great that you're writing a book that does have a different take. And isn't, I assume that it's not all in the camps, for example.

Joan Ramirez: Well, I tell you, honestly, and truly, I belong to a lot of Jewish organizations. And a couple of years ago, I was at a synagogue sponsored event. And there were some Holocaust survivors and I've been to Yad Vashem (Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust) and I visited Dachau (Nazi concentration camp). But these women were so strong and so loving and so giving. They were just so overflowing with joy. They just inspired me.

And this, the first book, is my way of paying tribute to my uncle. This book is my way of recognizing that we should never forget what happened.

Maggie Lynch: Well, that's really excellent, very excellent. So, you have the sequel to *Secret Desires*. Then it sounds like you have two or three novels in this kind of World War II suspense genre. What, you know, between running your business and being a writer, it just sounds like an awful lot to do. So, are you feeling that you kind of have that balance in your mind already worked out?

Joan Ramirez: I do. Because, up until last year, I was teaching the most magnificent, darling little elementary school children. And I had to balance teaching during the day, and lesson plans, and my novels. And now I'm moving forward with the company. And honestly, that's the way I've always been. I find when I have more on my plate, as long as I don't neglect my responsibilities to each project, I function better. Because it's more diversified for me, as opposed to just doing one thing.

I mean, when I was in the corporate world, I had a very active photography career. It saddens me that I've had to put it on the back burner. But, as you probably know, there are very few photographers now who are making a lucrative living. I love it. It's a passion. It will always be a passion, but it's going to have to wait for now.

It's been a while that I've been cultivating these literary projects, and I didn't know how to put them together. Now I do. I have my voices. I want to put them on paper, and I want to send them out into the world.

Maggie Lynch: Well, I think that's wonderful. And I think every author and even readers will appreciate that. Because, once you have those voices in your mind that makes the stories for sure. So, we're actually doing quite well on time. So, I'd like to ask you if there's a question that I didn't ask you that maybe you wish that I did? Something else you want to share in general.

Joan Ramirez: The only thing I can think of is right now I really want to travel to promote my book. And that's my biggest frustration. I'm constantly on book sites and webinars. And we're all just feeling... I mean, the other day, someone said, we're all in our little squares. And it's not just about making money.

We all want to make money. I mean, everyone wants to be remunerated for their books, for their writing, for their time. But it's just getting out and speaking to people and getting their face-to-face feelings on what's going on. As opposed to, well, you know, this is going to be another webinar.

And the biggest thing of all is just the human contact. I was in synagogue, on Hanukkah. And you know, we were all separated, and we're all wearing masks. And we have one female rabbi. And I love her to pieces. And we're like this. And she said to me, "I just want to reach out and hug you." And I said, "I want to hug you too." But I said, "We can't do it right now."

So with that, being that barrier to human communications, that's what I'm feeling very, very bad about right now. I mean, I think it would really bother me if I was in the classroom right now. And I couldn't reach out and hug my kids. Because that's one of the best parts in the morning. I mean, it's a very respectable hug. But it's just the lack of communication.

I mean, I see my husband in the morning, he goes to do his work in his office. I'm in my office. It's like everyone's in their own little cubicle. And there's no communication where you can reach out if someone's upset.

The other day I was with a friend, and she really looked upset. I mean, we were both upset. And it's like, if you're with someone, you're sitting next to them, you can pat their hand and say, it's okay. It's going to be okay. But it's kind of hard to do that. And also getting the reaction, a lot of times, people are afraid to frown, to tear up, to feel a little down. They feel they always have to be up. Otherwise, people will not have a good impression of them.

And I really want to get people's reactions to my books; and not just you know, because they're being recorded. And that's another thing about being in a bookstore, as opposed to being on a webinar where I'm being recorded. I mean, I can't show anything but a happy face. Believe me, when I'm reading these Holocaust books, I'm not having a happy face. Matter of fact, the other day, I skipped my lunch because I was so overwrought reading this stuff. So, it's just not being able to communicate as we all are, and be ourselves.

Maggie Lynch: I certainly hear you on that and agree 100%. I think everyone has been struggling with that for sure. But in some ways, authors more so because authors already have a very lonely life, you know, it's you and your writing, and your books. And, you know, it's not like when you're in an office and you can knock on the cubicle next to you, or the door across the hall from you and get together. You know, as an author, it's pretty hard to kind of run out of your house and find another author who actually knows you and knows your works that you can brainstorm with. And then, once it's published, not being able to get out there and get feedback that it's certainly very, very difficult.

Well, I really appreciate you sharing all of this part of your life with me. And I want to remind everyone that you can reach Joan on her business website at: jregenenterprises.com and on her author website at: joansbookshelf.com. Again, I'll have links to both of those in the show notes. So please do check her out. She's a wonderful writer. And I think that you'll like both sets of her books, both her fiction and her nonfiction. So, thank you very much, Joan. I really appreciate it.

Joan Ramirez: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate your efforts on my behalf.