

Transcript

Sarah

Hello, everyone and welcome back to Season Eight, Episode Six of the Rough Draft podcast, your favorite student-run literary art and culture podcast here at York College, Pennsylvania. It's Sarah again, and I'm joined by Ben.

Ben

Hello!

Sarah

Today, Ben and I were able to sit down with Louise Snyder and discuss her latest book and her writing. Her latest book is *No Visible Bruise: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us*. Just a little bit of a warning, before you get into this episode: we will be talking about some difficult topics surrounding domestic violence and other issues. But we do think this is a very important episode to tune in to. Rachel is joining us today. She's, as I said, a journalist and author. She's joining York College on...today is 11-10-2020, to talk about her latest book with students. Rachel, thank you so much for being here.

Rachel Louise Snyder

Thank you for having me.

Sarah

Just a little bit of a softball to get us started here. What first got you interested in journalism and writing?

Rachel Louise Snyder

Well, those are sort of two very different questions for me, strangely enough. I--I've wanted to be a writer since I was a child. My grandfather was a writer. He was a poet and a journalist. And his twin brother was the creator of *The Addams Family* TV show. And he also wrote that my great uncle also wrote science fiction novels. So to some extent, writing was sort of the family business, or one of the family businesses. I just knew I always wanted to do that I was not so interested in journalism, I was interested as a teenager, I was interested in poetry and then in college and graduate school, I studied fiction. So I never took a journalism class. And it wasn't, it really wasn't until, right after college, I started to travel like, I would save all of my money from waitressing or, you know, as a janitor I was that did all kinds. I never said no to a job. And I saved money to just travel. And, and so I wanted to combine those things, somehow traveling and writing, but I didn't want to write like, here are the 10 best beaches, you know? So I started to look for stories in those places. And, you know, look, I guess I was I naturally gravitated

toward stories where people were fighting in some sense for their own survival. And so that's how that's kind of how I started. I learned everything, everything on the job when it came to journalism. I mean, I just knew nothing. And luckily, I had a lot of patient editors.

Ben

What would you say is maybe the most important lesson that you learned in your, your traveling and reporting?

Rachel Louise Snyder

You know, most of my lessons have involved some sort of huge, humiliating moment for me. So you know, I remember standing I, I lived in Cambodia for a long time. I lived there for about six years. And I...this was sort of after I'd established myself as a journalist of sorts. And I went to Vietnam to cover a story about our...the military's ongoing search for MIA soldiers. And I was there with a New Yorker, a woman who was writing for The New Yorker named Caroline Alexander. She was so amazing, one of the smartest people I've ever met, and I was so intimidated by her. I mean, you know, she spoke like Ancient Greek, and you know, she just was incredible. And I remember her telling me, after the first day that we were on site, she sort of pulled me aside and said, "Can I give you a little piece of advice?" I was like, "Sure, yes. Okay. Yeah. New Yorker writer. Yeah." And she said, "You need to talk less." So embarrassed, like, I've been going around kind of making friends with everybody and just being like my chatty, friendly self. And it was really an important moment, because it wasn't just that it was like kind of embarrassing for me, it was also that I learned that I wasn't letting people talk enough and tell their own stories. And so that was, that was really important. And I would say, the other part of that which is sort of connected is having to remind yourself that everybody has a story that is worth telling. They may not be able to write it themselves. They may not have that particular skill set, but even the worst criminals--and I've interviewed a lot of criminals in my life--even the worst criminals have a story. And sure they'll make excuses and stuff like that, of course they do. They every...we all try to put our best foot forward, but, but they have real legitimate stories, and most of them have real legitimate pain. And so I guess I would say that that is a corollary lesson, to the shut up and take notes, one that I got from her.

Sarah

You've covered a lot of different topics. And I know you said you'd like to tell stories, what led you to picking some of the stories you've told, I know, I read an article on that you wrote on the gun violence and the Supreme Court decision, what makes you pick with domestic abuse? What makes you pick, kind of, the stories that you're covering?

Rachel Louise Snyder

That's so funny that you put--you picked out that one, that was in the New Yorker, right? Yeah. Because that was, that's such a minor story. That it's that's like, that's like the one and only newsdesk piece have ever done for them, where it's like, oh, there's a Supreme Court decision coming down, I'm just gonna write about it. Like, there's no narrative and that one or anything, it

took like a day to do. I mean, I was always attracted to stories where I felt like where I felt like there was a mission involved, it wasn't just about people's survival, but like, where I felt like, I...it felt more important than my life or anything that was going on in my life. I mean, those, those have always been the stories that I'm...that I'm drawn to. Stories that, I guess, make me feel small, and some 'cosmos' kind of way. You know, the things that people are up against are really unpredictable in the world. And I just I was drawn to it. And then I later kind of became drawn to more specifically to domestic violence and to the ways in which domestic violence kind of has this kind of tangential spread into all these social issues that we face as a country. And yet, we don't talk about it, we still consider it private, we still even consider it a woman's problem, which is crazy, because we don't rape and beat ourselves, right? It's not a woman's problem. And so I don't know, in some sense, my work has grown more and more narrow in terms of like, I started out with this, I started out with this big lens on human rights, really, I think all my stories were about human rights to some extent. And then now in the last 10 years, it's really kind of gotten narrower, because it's, it's domestic violence and human rights. But it's also broadened in terms of my, my knowledge and the ways in which I see connections between that and other things that we are facing. You know, it's the number one, domestic violence is the number one cause of homelessness for women in this country. And it has huge implications for lifetime earnings for women, it costs taxpayers in the trillions of dollars in hospital, you know, medical bills, lost wages, law enforcement, the judiciary court cases, like it's just--as it costs our society so much. That's kind of a long answer, I guess, to your...to your totally reasonable question.

Ben

That actually segues right into our next question, which is about your most recent book, which is *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us*. What is something that you that you would want somebody to know, before they start reading that?

Sarah

First, that it's not all totally bleak? You know, the last third of the book is really like, well, and so what can we do? But beyond that, I think, really the number one takeaway that I would like people to, to walk away with is understanding the ways it intersects, you know, all these, as I say, all these other social issues, homelessness, mass incarceration, certainly gender discrimination, dating violence, is something that we don't talk about enough. I'm a professor on a campus as well. And, you know, I just even I don't think it gets talked about enough. And I think people, men, women and non-binary students alike all have questions about boundaries, and how to how to navigate situations, that might be a little bit sticky. So I think, I think there are there are really big, important ways like mass incarceration, and then there are sort of more personal ways, like what do I do in this situation? You know, what can you do to intervene, if anything? What do the police get right and wrong? What does the law get right and wrong? How are the ways that mass shootings which we all are--ought to be concerned about in this country? How are the ways in which mass shootings are tied to domestic violence? It's, it's not as simple as like, well, if you're an abuser, you might be more, you'd be more likely to commit a mass shooting with someone who is an abuser. Like that's not necessarily true. And that's not even the connection necessarily. So I think, I think walking away...understanding that, and then

there's also the the sort of basic fundamental fact of when 50% of your population is suffering from gender discrimination, the whole society loses, because those are contributions that are--that are not being made, then.

Ben

Going off of that, other than reading your book, what's something that we can do as maybe college community or society in general, to better educate ourselves and this important topic of domestic violence?

Rachel Louise Snyder

I mean, one of the things that I feel like the Me Too movement did for us as a country, was give us some sort of roadmap for talking about really difficult subjects and things that were--or felt--shaming to the people involved, particularly the victims, but even even like perpetrators, right, people aren't raising their hand saying, "Yeah, that was me," or at least not very often. So I think one of the things we can do is look to the Me Too movement as a way to try to take away the the stigma and shame of talking about domestic violence. I think the other thing we can do...yeah, I would recommend reading my book. I mean, I wrote it to read like a novel. So it shouldn't be arduous reading. It's not a textbook, right. But I want to eliminate those questions that are so dogged around domestic violence, like, if things were that bad, why didn't that victim just leave? Right? And, and I want to re-frame that conversation to be if things were that bad, why did the abuser stay too? That was a person who was obviously unhappy in that relationship? So? Or why did the abuser abuse in the first place? I think those are much more important questions to ask, then, you know, why didn't she leave? Or why didn't he leave? Because there's some pretty, pretty good questions that we need to ask ourselves.

Ben

So on your website, you have some resources for victims of abuse, assault and violence. What are some of those resources? Can you tell us a little bit about some of them?

Rachel Louise Snyder

Now, let's see. That was years ago, when someone put that together for me. I mean, you know, there's the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which is a good resource for anybody to call. Every state--you're in Pennsylvania, so that the--you have a Pennsylvania State Coalition of Domestic Violence, which can link anybody to resources in your area. And when I say resources, I don't just mean shelters. Of course, we have shelters all all over the place. But I mean, also things like, you know, maybe there's a group, a group that meets to talk about domestic violence, right, for someone who is a current or previous victim of domestic violence, maybe there's a community group of support for abusers who are trying to stop their abuse. So there's all kinds of different supports that exist. And I would say, getting hold of those State Coalitions is going to be the best thing. I also think that on on your campus, you know, there certainly if you don't have a group already, you could certainly start one. And I would go to, if you remember, this is...you're a little bit, you were a little bit younger, but there was a young

woman at the University of Virginia named Yardley Love who was killed by her boyfriend who was lacrosse player. Do you remember this story? It was maybe 8 years ago, 10 years ago, I think she was a sophomore in college? And her mother has since begun the One Love Foundation, which is, to me the single best resource that I've seen on dating violence, teen violence, you know, dating violence, and on a college campus. There's all kinds of apps that college students can download. If you're, for example, in a situation and you want to get out of it, and you can't call 911 for whatever reason, there's actually an app that you can download that is linked from One Love that will call the police for you, or it will call, you can set it up to call a friend who can come help you or a friend who can call the police, you can sort of set it up any way you want. And then it automatically that app automatically, once you click it, changes to like Pandora or Spotify or something. So if you are in a situation where your phone gets taken from you or you're being abused, that person won't necessarily know that you have contacted somebody for help. So I think there's a lot of things that we could be doing. But it all starts with acknowledging the problem, and that that means talking about it.

Sarah

And then for anyone who is thinking about reading your book, or has read the book, if they could only take one message away from your book, what would you want them to know? There are a multitude of messages.

Rachel Louise Snyder

There's always a multitude of...you know, um, it's like, you know, what's more important climate change or racism? You know?

Sarah

Yeah.

Rachel Louise Snyder

Um, I guess I would say that we need to understand what leaving looks like that leaving is not like a suitcase packed at the door, like you're, you know, off to Vegas for the weekend or whatever--up to New York for the weekend. That leaving, in fact is often a years-long process of careful background maneuvering. And that most of the time, it's us who don't know what leaving looks like, as opposed to the responsibility or the impetus being on the victim or survivor, I would also say that a lot of really small tweaks can make a big difference. And that's the thing I tried to do in my book, I didn't want to just write a book that was like, here's this terrible problem, and I'm going to explore this terrible problem. And we should all just be aware. Like, one of the things I sort of really rail against is the whole idea of raising awareness--of anything of anything, right? We're all aware of homelessness, we're all aware of breast cancer, we're all aware of poverty, right? Like, we don't need to be made aware that it exists, we need to be made aware of what we can do to fundamentally transform society, right? And so that's, that's really what the whole last third of my book is devoted to. So I would say, believing that we can change, actually

believing that it is not an entrenched problem over which we have no control. We actually have a lot of control.

Ben

So we usually try and end on like one powerful note, but there's just so much that you said during the interview that is important. Thank you for coming on and talking to us. Where can people find your work? Where would be the best resource to find it?

Rachel Louise Snyder

Um, I mean, they could follow me on twitter at rlswrites, or my website is just rachellouissnyder.com.

Sarah

Thank you again for speaking with us.

Rachel Louise Snyder

Thank you so much for having me!

Ben

That was a very interesting interview with Rachel Louis Snyder.

Sarah

Yeah, definitely. She has a wealth of information.

Ben

Yeah. And she, she knows it. Like she didn't have notes or anything, she was just talking. And she knows everything that she talked about off the top of her head, which is, I think, really impressive.

Sarah

It definitely is. I would definitely recommend checking out some of the stuff she's writing. Her website is in the link below, in the description below. So there's a link, check that out or follow her on, on Twitter, that's also down below. Or look like if you want, then you have the time, and you have the resources to go check out her book, her latest book, or any of her books, but her journalistic work is on our website, real easy to access, real easy to read. Really informative.

Ben

Yeah, I, I wanted to talk about a couple of things that she mentioned. That's really the big one is, you know, when we talk about domestic violence, we always ask the victim, you know, why did you stay? But we never asked the abuser, you know, if you were so unhappy that you were abusive, why did you stay? Or like, why did you start in the first place? I think that's a really interesting, you know, point of view to look at it through is, you know, no normal person wants to abuse their partner. So there's some, you know, problem that needs to be addressed, whether it's a mental health problem, or, you know, past trauma that needs to be addressed, otherwise, that person is not going to change, and they're just going to continue to abuse people. And I think, you know, it's important to keep that in mind that, you know, it's not necessarily always a choice. It's just people have something that they need to work through.

Sarah

Yeah, I like, um, it comes up several times if you read her book, but the the concept of "hurt people hurt other people." And I thought that was a pretty, like, just a simple way to look at that. That whole idea. It's just a few lines, like few words, but it really, I think, is a good summary of a lens to view things through. Something that stood out to me that she said was how some people still view it as a woman's problem and not like a problem of like, that's still the woman's fault. And it was how she put it was like, you know, women aren't out here, like, we're not out here raping and beating ourselves. Like, I thought that was such a pretty strong phrase because we can talk about, like domestic violence and like...you know, abuse, but like to actually like, you know, just saying like, somebody was like abused, that's still strong, but like, it's not as strong as like really putting that, you know, that powerful punch that she put on those words.

Ben

Yeah, it was just a very, very eye opening episode. I hope our listeners get the same out of it that we did.

Sarah

Definitely.

Ben

I definitely learned a lot more than I even knew there was to know.

Sarah

Yeah, yeah. So I guess that wraps up Season Eight, Episode Six of the Rough Draft podcast. Go check out any of the previous episodes we've done. We've had a whole season, Episode One through Five, the last episode, we talked about some pretty important things with protesting and the Black Lives Matter movement. If you're a York College student, don't forget that you can still submit in print work for our print issue. Check that out on our website. If you like this episode, you're listening on a platform that you can give a like or a comment, feel free to do that. Go follow us on social media at the York Review on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, anywhere

that you can find us. Go check out Rachel's stuff, it's all in the description. As I said earlier, down below, give her love and support because she gave love and support to our podcast and was willing to come on, which was fantastic.

Ben

And yeah, I just wanted to jump in. Before we close things off and say the New York review is having an open mic night where you can come and hang out, share some of your own work out loud, listen to other people share their work. And that will be held on a day at a time that is escaping me at the moment.

Sarah

It's November 20, at 6:30, from 6:30 to 8:30. It will also be streamed over all of our social media. So if you want to, if you're not a student at your college and you still want to watch, you can follow our social media and look to that.

Ben

Yeah, we hope to see you there. So reminder, masks will be required if you're there in person because we're on campus. And that's the rule. And we are still in a pandemic, as you'll find out in Episode Seven. So yeah, just remember to wear a mask while you're there. Practice social distancing, and have fun, you know, it's still important to remember to have fun in our lives, even though everything seems bleak and depressing. It's still important to have fun.

Sarah

Yes.