



Meet the Author: DJ Lynn Author of *Road Noise*

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Do you go by DJ?

My name is Debbi but I wanted to shorten it for writing. One reason was that I didn't want to be judged as either male or female, but it was also just a shorter website URL.

Have you done any literary pilgrimages?

I have done several pilgrimages over the years, but I finished *Road Noise* during the early days of the pandemic when I wasn't going anywhere.

I reinvented my life from public relations writer (owned a PR firm at one time) to creative writer in 2013 when I started an online magazine called Liveloughroll. I interviewed and reviewed digital nomads and various products and small RVs. My goal was to travel the US myself and write. In 2014 I bought a small trailer and lived in it at a trailer park for four months while I figured out how to use it (I didn't have a clue!). I called it the 'Writer's Retreat' and traveled for 18 months around the US alone. I spent my days either behind the wheel, volunteering where I parked for a day or a week, and writing.

It changed my life. It gave me time to think without interference from my daily routine. In 2016 I got tired of traveling all the time. Later that year I went to Costa Rica for two months with my son and a few friends. I'm still writing about that experience. In 2017 I wrote *Running with Chickens*, a book I co-authored with my son. I'm working on the second book in that series right now. In 2018 I went to Spain. In late 2019 I was starting to get restless and made plans to go to Europe for several months to write. Then the pandemic happened so I finished and published *Road Noise* and several others including a couple of romance novels I published under a pen name.

You wrote some books under a pen name? Can you tell us why?

I think the same reason anyone writes under a pen name. It gives the author some freedom. I had never written a romance novel and I wanted to be open about it. And yes, it's definitely for mature audiences! I'm now writing a literary fiction book in that same genre, but I will be publishing it under DJ Lynn.

Tell us a little bit about *Road Noise* and why you wrote it.

I used to think *Road Noise* was about the road trip. I knew all along it was never going to be a travel log but when I wrote in the journals during the trip all those years ago that's what was in my head at the time. I was focusing on the actual travel as a way to distance myself from all my past trauma over the previous ten-plus years. I've since spoken to an editor who urged me to rethink what the book was about. That's when I realized that the book was really about me running from my past and trying to understand what I could do to change things going forward.

Is this the typical navel-gazing self-discovery book we think of with memoirs?

I've heard that said about memoirs and to some extent that's always true with a memoir, but I am told my book goes beyond that because it wasn't me taking a journey alone. I had my nearly 12-year-old son with me and so there are a lot of layers to the stories. I think almost any solo parent will see themselves and identify with the daily struggles of being a single parent and trying to have a life of your own. It's a struggle to separate your motherhood or parenthood life from your personhood and there's always this realization that you can't fully do that. And everyone has something to say about that. Mothers get a terrible rap for wanting to be people and I think part of what I was going through at the time was trying to find a balance between raising a very challenging child alone and my own life as a woman—a person.

Do you think you were successful at changing things going forward after the journey?

That's a great question because many people asked me, *After the end of three months what did you learn?* The thing is I challenge anyone to have an epiphany at the end of just three months. That's only a beginning and the most you can expect from that short time is to clarify some things in your life; at best what went wrong and accepting that, in most things, you had a hand in it. I think the most important thing is to be alone with yourself in your head and find that place where you can admit to yourself that what you did brought you to this point in time. I don't think anyone can move forward until they have identified the past. You can't change whatever happened obviously, but you can move past it once you've pulled it into your conscious thought and dealt with it—admitted your own faults. I think most people just don't want to think that long about themselves. They prefer to hide the past and pretend things didn't happen or that they had no hand in the outcome.

So, was I successful at changing things? I'll leave the details to the end of the book, but the short version is, yes. During that last couple of weeks many things happened in my head and between my son and I that changed my path going forward. And in the case of my career, everything changed for the better almost immediately upon getting home. That was a big take-away for me and I will say this, I believe a lot of that change had to do with one thing that sounds so simple. Confidence. I had just driven more than 12,000 miles and although that seems like a tame journey when there are people out there trekking the Outback or summiting eight-thousanders, spending three months in a car with an 11-year-old was a big deal to me. My attitude about myself and my abilities changed radically during those three months, but I didn't recognize it until the last couple of weeks and even more so after I got home.

What are common traps for aspiring writers?

I don't know about everybody else, but for me the hardest part is narrowing down all the things I have to say. I know that a key element for all writers is to edit themselves. That is, to remove paragraphs, maybe whole pages that don't work and I think for all writers this is extremely hard to do. I'm also an artist and the same issue applies. There's a point at which you're over-stating, over-working the art and it becomes very hard to find that place to stop.

Does a big ego help or hurt writers?

That may depend on the type of book you're trying to write. If it's a business book then maybe a big ego is helpful, at least in terms of promotion, but I don't like reading books where I sense an ego is more important than the content. The first book I wrote many years ago was about my divorce and what a traumatic time that was in my life and how much ego played a part. Some of that past trauma comes out in *Road Noise*. Generally, I think a big ego is damaging to a writing career because it limits the author's ability to be honest.

Do you try more to be original or to deliver to readers what they want?

I don't think I TRY to be original. I have to be. I can't write something that I don't want to write about. For instance, I like to read some romance books, but I could not spend my entire writing career writing romance even though I know it's a big seller. The same is true for young adult fiction. Although my interest-genres may vary, I have to stick with what I feel.

Do you think someone could be a writer if they don't feel emotions strongly?

There's a difference between feeling emotions and expressing them. I believe that some writers may find it easier to express strong emotions in writing versus expressing them physically or verbally. I am very much an introvert and often keep my emotions to myself (to the detriment of a few relationships). I still have very strong emotions and feel like I am an overly sensitive person. I find writing is a way to let a lot of that out.

What was an early experience where you learned that language had power?

I remember the day—the actual moment. I was a young PR manager for a technology start-up. All my confidence skills to that point had been learned from Glamour Magazine (as sad as that is), but I was trying to fit in. Every morning before work I would skim-read the Wall Street Journal in an attempt to keep up with the “smart” guys in the room. I walked into the office one morning to find our top 3 managers (all men) standing in the lobby chatting. I said hello and joined the group. They were talking about something I had just read that morning in the WSJ. To join in the conversation, I found myself saying, “Oh, yes. I read in the Wall Street Journal this morning about that merger.” The men acknowledged my comment and continued their conversation, but I quickly realized something critical. The way they spoke and used words was as if they had first-hand knowledge—as if they knew these people—had been there at the merger board meeting. I, however, found the need to qualify my statement with, “I read it in the WSJ...”. It was a big *ah-ha* moment because I realized the way they used words and phrased a sentence exhibited confidence and authority. It changed my view of them and how I would speak going forward.

If your book was to be made into a movie, who are the celebrities that would star in it?

I've thought about writing a premise for a movie for this book. However, I can see it in a very different way. I think it would make a good comedy series. I think the main characters and the people they meet along the way—throughout their travels could be developed in a very quirky, funny way. I would love to see the director as someone like Dan Levy. I admire his comedic sensibility. I would love to see myself played by someone like Kristen Wiig. As for someone to play my son, I have no idea.

Are your characters based on real people?

I don't know how many authors are going to admit to that but yes, although there's not a direct relationship with their lives specifically it's more of an idea that may come to me after seeing them or hearing their stories and I adapt it from there.

Can you give us any examples?

The sci-fi that I'm writing has a lot of components from my past life in technology and much of it is very real in terms of the people, places, events, and activities. In the romance novels I pulled from a personal experience I had when I was 16. I also took inspiration from *Schitt's Creek* and a movie called *Shelter*.

How much time do you spend researching before beginning a book?

I spend a lot of time researching even small details in my books. And I do it before and during the writing. Even in the romance novels.

What's the most difficult thing about writing characters from the opposite sex?

That's funny because I think I write male characters well although they may be more verbally expressive because it's a book and they have to be!

How do you select the names of your characters?

Sometimes I name them after an actor that I like but that depends on the personality of the character, and I may do some research on that. I had an editor tell me that I was using almost all "J" names in one book, and I didn't realize it until it was pointed out to me.

Describe your writing space.

I have an HP Spectre laptop running Windows 11 and two additional large monitors. That's overkill but I usually have 10 windows open at the same time. I use the Adobe and Microsoft products. I'm also good on Photoshop (Adobe) and Canva and have a couple of video-creating products. I have found that Microsoft Word works best for me just because I'm used to it but even after all these years it still makes me mad sometimes. I've heard of authors that write in bed or on the couch. I find that too distracting. I write formally at my desk every morning. I'm up early so that tends to be 6:00 AM but I may burn out at 2 or 3PM in the afternoon.

What do you do to relax and have fun?

I travel when I can. I walk daily—usually 3-4 miles. I used to run—did 10ks at one time but my knees don't like that anymore. I used to paint (oil and acrylic) and was a gallery represented artist at one time. I read—a wide variety of genres.

Can you give us an idea of what you are reading right now?

We are doing this interview in mid 2022 so I don't want to be too out of date. I just finished *Swimming In The Dark* by Tomasz Jedrowski—excellent book; *My Policeman* by Bethan Roberts, book was okay but I expect the movie will be better; *Black Hole Blues And Other Songs From Outer Space* by Janna Levin; *20 Minutes On The Tube* by Daniel Hurst, great writer, and I am about to start *AI 2041* by Kai-Fu Lee and Chen Qiufan, and *Wool* by Hugh Howey, a dystopian drama that might scare me and I don't typically read scary books but I heard it's going to be a movie. I'm a very eclectic reader.

Are you on social media and can your readers interact with you?

I spend a lot of time on Twitter - @DJLynn28 and I love to connect that way. I only recently rejoined after many years off social media, but I find I really like Twitter because it's an informal conversation with a specific person.