



[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts witty writing information and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content and establish you as a leader in your field.]

[I'm your host, Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that and have some fun with Monica McCarthy today. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat on my website at elisadoucette.com/episode8.]

Elisa: Monica McCarthy is a content creator who thrives in words and language in many various forms—whether it's manifestos and engaging conversations over dinner with brilliant people through her brand Cheshire Parlour, scripting and filming video stories for her Show and Tell Stories, or teaching and encouraging others to explore their curiosity and passions as the Experience Impresario at Holstee's headquarters in New York City. A former professional actress in Los Angeles, and later the Broadway stage, Monica positively exudes presence and personality while also having an insanely philosophic and strategic mind to guide the creative process for herself and her clients.

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today, Monica. Is there anything I missed there?

Monica: Oh my gosh, that was like, the best intro ever. Thank you so much. I need to take some notes on what you said.

Elisa: Well, one of the things that I really love about being able to have you on the show is you write in so many different ways and create like these creative strategies in so many different ways that are kind of—to buzzword it up—“outside the box” of what people think of when they think of writing. You create scripts and manifestos and stories, and most of us are thinking like, “I wanna write blog posts and books, because that’s how you become a writer.”

Monica: It is really interesting to... I've gotten certainly through this myself, of the sort of “Who am I?” question and wanting to put this label on it—and “writer” is not one that I would have said before. Like, for so much of my life, it was “actor—you mentioned that. But really, when I think about what I spend so much of my time doing every day, you are right: it is writing. And for me, it's more about the truth than the medium, so like you said, that’s why whether it's the script for a client or sort of curating conversations and then putting my own perspective on it—and that becomes a manifesto for the contemporary philosophies on Cheshire Parlour, whatever. And so I hope that anyone listening will be like, “Oh, you know what I do? I write copy. I write emails.” And if you want to write in a different medium, you can at least look at what you are already doing, and gain momentum from that.

Elisa: And I think it's so important as well because I very much believe in and adhere to the philosophy that all of us are very different learners. We consume information in different ways—there’s the auditory people, the visual people, and the kinesthetic people. And so I think kind of, in that same way as creators, it's almost like the reverse of that. All of us have different stories to tell, but we just have to really find what the medium is that we wanna tell those stories in. And at the end of the day, it all comes down to how you create those thoughts and how you put them into words.



Monica: Definitely. Writing is so cathartic, right? So sometimes what I wanna write is a blog post. It needs to be something that I need out there in the world that I need somebody to see, versus if you are writing something that is going to be a longer form project like a book, which nobody sees for quite some time. So some of it is. As for the artist, even to be able to take care of your own muse or, you know—that sounds a little bit hippie dippie, but whatever it is that the process that you go through to recognize, “Oh, maybe I'm writing this for one purpose or reason or outcome. And that might not be how I write or create for another purpose or outcome.”

Elisa: Speaking of those processes and kind of finding that muse and figuring that stuff out, I'm going to guess you probably didn't start as the Experience Impresario—amazing title, by the way—at Holstee, creating these manifestos and video stories for people. How did you start out writing this stuff and creating this content way back when? What was your daily life like?

Monica: I feel like I am the reluctant writer. Like, writing is something that has kept coming out for me since I was a kid. For example, in elementary school, I would enter these poetry contests and I would win the poetry contest, and National History Day, and I create something for that. And it was more like, “Oh, that's nice,” or, “Oh, that would make my dad happy.” Because my dad was always like, “You should write.” And I was like, “No, I am an actor.”

And same thing, you know, when I went to college. I was at the university at Pepperdine—they have what they call “Great Books Colloquium,” which is basically a philosophy degree. And you don't do much writing; it's very much more conversation based. They are small classes. And I think you write like two papers a semester and that takes care of few different requirements, but one of them is English. So one of the reasons why I feel like much of my writing is filled with so many typos and grammatical errors is because I haven't actually taken an English class since like English AP in high school.

So then I really didn't do much writing again until I got certified as a holistic health coach several years ago, and thought... that was sort of how I first got into entrepreneurship and that whole world, something outside of acting. And wanted to do (which is—now, of course, I like, laugh at). I was doing five-day-a-week posts at the site and it was all about... it was a different kind of help-y tip or help post every day. I mean, it's like exactly not my style of writing at all, but I didn't know it at the time.

And by doing that, that helped me quickly see: you know what, I'm not a how-to kind of person. I'm not an informational writer as much. So then that transitioned into: I was doing some freelance travel writing and then I was doing, when I started Show and Tell Stories, the video production company, then I was helping them write the scripts for everything from commercials to people's “about” videos, and then that led to Cheshire Parlour. It's such a long and winding road, I feel like I wanna say. But around that time when I started really traveling and going through some of my own, like, “life” stuff, I actually started blogging, and that, I think, is when it started to change, and people started to message me and write me and use the word “writer” next to my name much more so than I had really ever heard before.

Elisa: Can you tell me a little bit more? Because I think that so many of us follow that path of one thing kind of lead to another, lead to another, lead to another, and like boom, somehow I got here and I'm what some people call “successful.” I'm not even sure exactly how that all worked, but somehow, that was the path I came down.



When you were going down that path and you really started having to create these videos stories and Show and Tell, and began writing, you write such beautiful—“thoughts in papers,” I guess you would call them, or “periodicals,” I think you call them on Cheshire Parlour. How did you make the transition from someone who kind of liked writing before, and was involved in it, but was obviously very much more involved in the acting and the traveling and the other stuff? What kind of things did you have to do to all of a sudden flip flop into creating this content?

Monica: For me, it was a feeling. For me, it was the feeling of going from, “I need to write this. I have to write this. I owe this to a deadline or for money or whatever” into: “I need to write this for me,” or, “I have to get these thoughts onto paper.” So that’s when I started to realize that what I enjoyed writing about more is sort of this style. And it took me a while to figure it out. It was more of other people saying, commenting, and letting me know it resonated with them, which is the sense of sort of taking these bigger picture ideas—things like freedom or truth or what not—and then sharing like a personal story or anecdote about it.

I’ve taken like a skills testing or whatever, and it’s like, one of the skills is being able to like connect the dots, basically; to make those connections and then to write and share about that is something that I started to really enjoy—again, much more than like, giving any informational posts or even traditional blog posts. I think that’s another thing, too—is when a lot of people first get started (and I’ve also been guilty of this), you really start to emulate some of the writers you’re reading at the time. And they might not be what is true to you, and how you wanna share.

So for example, I’ve got very uncomfortable saying, “You should do this,” or, “Here’s how to live a big, epic life.” That’s not me, but that was always very popular at the time—and probably still is. So I think it is moving now a little bit more towards people wanting some more transparency and honesty and more questions, more people admitting that we’re all in a journey and really if people have the answers, then it would all be over. So yeah, I think it really came down to when I felt like I need to get something out there, because that’s I think what muse does is you are just like, “I have to say this,” versus, “I shouldn’t say this.”

Elisa: I think that’s something that a lot of people really struggle with. It sounds like you, in talking about the travel and the journey and everything else, kind of took a long path to get to this kind of security in yourself to be able to say the things that you wanna say. But when you were starting to really put your vulnerable self out there, how did that feel? I think so many people who are in that place—that they are just starting to do that—are terrified of the judgment and the rejection and things like that. How did you get past it?

Monica: Well, I think I’ve got a pretty strong backbone for rejection from all these years of pounding the pavement as an actor. Not that it doesn’t still totally sting, but to me everything worth doing comes at a risk. I can remember, for example—I think one of the posts that really started changing the way I was pursuing or thought about my writing was I wrote about—basically—when I called off my wedding six weeks before. And I didn’t write it in like, “Here’s what happened, and blah, blah, blah.” I just wrote about how the power of words and how certain words like, “love,” “forever,” and “marriage--” how my perception of those words had changed.



And the feedback that I've got from people from that was so encouraging, and so unexpected. So that post changed things. When I wrote about when I went to go spend three months by myself in South East Asia in traveling, and my first sense of like disillusionment when I got to Bangkok. Because I was expecting this—a really exotic, I don't know, other worldly kind of place. And you show up at the airport and it's like, "Everybody looks just like me."

And then I started writing about expectations and these things that like... and I think what happens is when you share those things—because nobody is reinventing the wheel, right? Nobody is actually saying something that hasn't been said before; it's just that you're saying it with your own perspective. That is the only unique thing about it, and then that somebody else is hearing it at a time when they need to be hearing it—that's when that resonance happens. And so I think letting go of this idea that you have to write something so profound. And yeah, if you're looking at it from that perspective—just as versus what is true for you—then you kind of say, "Screw it."

But I mean, I don't know anyone, whether they're a famous actor or famous writer or director or whatever, who doesn't still feel vulnerable. In fact, sometimes more so because then obviously the more people are seeing you, the more possibility there is of people "judging" you. But what people really want is to find people they connect with and resonate with. That's human nature. So whether you are worried about you are going to give a talk, and you are worried that everybody in the audience is judging you, no—they really want is for you to be awesome. When you go to an audition, they are not like, "Oh, I hope you suck." They are like, "I hope you are the person, so we can stop looking for other people." So I think it's that shift that helps—at least it helps for me.

Elisa: I love the example you just gave at the end there. It's such a fascinating analogy between worlds that I think a lot of us as creators don't think of, is the interment is not—or even any sort of type of audience or medium—isn't really a place where the majority of people aren't looking for you to fail or to suck. They want you to be the one that changes things for them.

Monica: Definitely. And we're hardwired to connect, you know? We want to have our tribe. We want to have that. So I think that sort of attitude—of not looking at the whole world as judging you. I think another big thing, too, is—this drove me nuts about acting (and then when I got into business, and then I see this with writers)—is a lot of times, writers just look to other writers for their inspiration. And that's where they compare themselves to as well. And instead of looking at other mediums, whether it's... I love going to museum and then I'll see something and that will make me wanna write. I have this like, journal of postcards from paintings that resonated with me at that time, at the museum where I was at. Those helped to be honest Going to a movie, going to travel, going to whatever your kids, whatever it is, but looking to other things besides writers and writing for your inspiration. And for how you fill yourself up and for how you compare yourself because we all do that. So I think: "cross-disciplinary" setting. Is that a word?

Elisa: We're making it one now.

Monica: We're making it one. I like to make up words. That's another thing. So yeah, it would definitely be something else that I would say helps me sort of get out of that tunnel vision of what will people say about me, and what do I say about me and all that.



Elisa: And that's one of the things I love about having you on the show, Monica, is you are such a multi-faceted creator, writer, and thinker. What is your day look like now? I mean, you are kind of creating (as we said in the introduction) content and writing and words and ideas and stories in so many different mediums—what is a day in the life of Monica McCarthy?

Monica: Oh my gosh, it changes all the time. That's what I love about it. So you mentioned that I have the job title of "Experience Impresario" for a company called Holstee, which most people are familiar with Holstee from a manifesto.

Elisa: Such a good manifesto.

Monica: That I did not write. But it's so great. It starts with, "This is your life. Do what you love and do it often," and then it goes from there. And the reason why I have basically the dream job is because we made it up. It did not exist before. And so, short version is, they created products to help you remember what mattered to you. So mostly posters and cards with some other things. People are so intrigued by, "So, how do I live that Holstee lifestyle?" and the founders and that the people that work there do really live. So I was brought on because of that other thing that I was doing at Cheshire Parlour that we've mentioned—to create experiences that help people do exactly that.

My daily life now is so different because it depends on—I feel like now, every night, we're doing this potluck global dinner series where we're asking everybody all around the world to host a potluck; bring together four more people and we will donate \$25 to support food corps, because potlucks and dinners has been such a part of Holstee from the beginning in building community. And then also, with me, as I just said, I'm a huge believer in that, and gathering around that dinner table and the solace that I would do, were always over dinner.

So it's so different every day. Every night, we're doing something to help the learning lab that starts this week, and that's bringing in experts from everything from bourbon tasting, to how to start your blog, to dating in New York City. So my daily life is—I wish it started with writing. Again, I think that that's going to be the next thing that I go back to, because before being at Holstee, I was working by myself and for myself at home and in coffee shops. And I know that's the dream for most people, and probably most people listening to this because most writers tend to err on the side of introversion.

I'm not an introvert, so I like to have that time to create, but then I do like to spend a lot of the rest of my time in brainstorming meetings and sessions and the dinners and the events and things like that. So yeah, that was a long-winded answer, but just because it really is different every day. I know the days that I'm not happiest are the ones where if I'm just like, emailing all day long—those are the days that I don't like.

Elisa: I think that's actually something that's really important for a lot of us. As someone that does very much err on the side of what you are talking about, I do like being around friends and going out to things, but if given the choice, I probably am going to err on the side of staying home with a notebook or a book or something, because that is my personal preference. But I also recognize that I do have much richer writing, and much richer thoughts, and I'm able to give more that really great (I keep using the word, but it's just because it's such a great thing for people to have as creators) is that multi-faceted, multi-dimension experience to be able to bring into what you're creating. I think that's something that a



lot of listeners can really take away from how you do things, is that you do live such a varied life that that just kind of pours into the things that you're creating and writing.

Monica: And I think what's helped a lot, is being very tuned to how actually my brain works. So for example, like I mentioned writing in the morning, if I'm going to need to write anything, whether it's like a script, a blog post, working on my book proposal, anything like that that really takes like such intense focus for me—that's definitely morning. Afternoon, I know I'm brain dead at that point to try and connect those up, so that's when I like having the brainstorm meetings or working on a filming project or whatever. And then the evenings again, of having this sort of, like, camaraderie. And again, I thrive a lot on getting energy and ideas from other people. And then a lot of times, though, I get this sort of like rush again to write and put everything down right before bed. So if I can, when I do have that freedom to follow that rhythm, that works best for me.

And fortunately, Holstee, it's not like clock in at nine, clock out at five—it can be whatever I want it to be as long as the stuff gets done. So it is the sort of best of both worlds for me, because I still very much have that freedom and flexibility. If I wanted to go somewhere, I can do that. If I have a doctor appointment, I can do that. If I need to write something, I can do that. But also for me, having the full day available to me when I was working by myself was the worse. That was actually not good for me. So, yeah.

Elisa: And I think that really touches on how this has all helped your business and your pursuits and everything. We talked about it at the beginning, but it just seems to be... and I think that a lot of people would believe that someone might kind of fall into this experience or this life or this ability to able to create. But you freely kind of architected your life for the past few years to continue just doing things that you really love and creating things that really love, and that's how you kind of gotten to this point where you have, as you said, what probably most people would view as kind of an ideal life?

Monica: Well, I will say that it is much improving very quickly. And I've only been at Holstee a few months and it feels like it's been years. But I do want people out there to know, like—I went through really shitty, like rough few years of finding—I don't even wanna say, "finding myself," because you never really do—but of figuring out what worked for me, and how I'm at best able to create and the kind of people that I wanna surround myself by, and who I don't wanna surround myself by and what I don't wanna do. I think that those are all part of the process.

And some people are much more self-aware. They know, like, getting out of the womb, they are like, "Yes! I wanna write. This is how I would like structure my time." That is not me. So I'm a big proponent of like, it's okay. Put it out there. Try it. You will learn so much faster how to iterate. If you do that, then you do really feel like, "I think I might do it. I think I might like that." And then you can come back to certain things. I've had to put Cheshire Parlour on hold the past few months since I started at Holstee. And I know what was going to happen to it, but it was clear with—I've been doing more speaking engagements about how to create your manifesto, and the more people I meet and the more I'm involved in this that I'm like, "No, it still has a life. I just need time, probably over the holidays to really regroup and bring it back in another way, in another form." So yeah, nothing is permanent, right?

Elisa: Absolutely. With the fast and the kind of iterating things and just trying to figure them out, we're going to move on to the next section. This is a fun little game I like to play with folks. Super easy—over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions, and I want you to answer with



the first thing that pops into your mind. This is one of the only places where you can absolutely say whatever you want—first thing that pops into your mind. And we're going to try and get through as many as we can and get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of a writer and creator's mind. Are you feeling ready?

Monica: I'm born ready.

Elisa: All right, let's go. Pen or pencil?

Monica: Pen.

Elisa: Mac or PC?

Monica: Mac.

Elisa: Coffee or tea?

Monica: Coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoons.

Elisa: Night or morning?

Monica: Both, at the right time.

Elisa: Good writing, or correct writing?

Monica: Good writing.

Elisa: Noise or silence?

Monica: Joyful noise.

Elisa: Righty or lefty?

Monica: Righty.

Elisa: Weird or typical?

Monica: Weird.

Elisa: School or no school?

Monica: School, mostly.

Elisa: Outside or inside?

Monica: Both, equally.

Elisa: Clean or messy?

Monica: Wish I was clean, always messy.

Elisa: Teacher or student?

Monica: Both, always.

Elisa: Town or city?



Monica: City, with a country home.

Elisa: Trains or planes?

Monica: And automobiles.

Elisa: Skiing or surfing?

Monica: Neither.

Elisa: Fantasy or reality?

Monica: Both have their own perks.

Elisa: Love or money?

Monica: Love, always.

Elisa: Introvert or extrovert?

Monica: Can't we all just get along?

Elisa: Good content, or good marketing?

Monica: Good content.

Elisa: Smile or game face?

Monica: Smile.

Elisa: Call or text?

Monica: Call when it matters.

Elisa: Money or fame?

Monica: Don't they come hand in hand? I've never had much money. We'll go with fame.

Elisa: Older than you are now, or younger than you are now?

Monica: Right now.

Elisa: Think before you talk, or talk before you think?

Monica: I hope I think before I talk.

Elisa: Have a dragon, or be a dragon?

Monica: Have a dragon.

Elisa: Bestselling book, or million dollar business?

Monica: Book. [Time's up] Those were so hard, because I'm like, "Well, let's talk about that. What do you mean by that?"



Elisa: That is so true. That is exactly your style. I haven't thought of that. So maybe for you, it was not quite as easy as some other people have been.

Monica: I'm like, "Hmm, I don't know. I like pencils for this. Like, oh my gosh, pick something."

Elisa: I like it because I tend to go down those rabbit holes as well. I'm like, if someone asks me an either/or questions, I want to expound and then I wanna know what they think, and I wanna let that kind of influence what my ideas and perception could be, so that I can like drink in the whole thing. Where when people are like, "No, seriously. Do you wanna go to this restaurant or this restaurant?"

Monica: Oh, I'm the worst. I mean, one of the first things you talk about when you study philosophy is like, "What does 'good' mean?" So whenever I hear like, "Oh, that's good." I'm like, "So what do you mean by that?" And people are like, "Stop."

Elisa: "Stop it. Stop it right now." I live and die by thesaurus.com.

Monica: Oh yeah.

Elisa: Merely for the fact that any one word is never enough for me. I need to understand the entire gambit of what the experience is.

Monica: I wish more people did that, because I think if people really understood what "epic" meant, and "awesome" meant, and "radical" meant, and "unconventional" meant, and all these things, then maybe we could have some real conversations around stuff, but that's just my little soap box.

Elisa: That's like fellow one word nerd to another. I heart it. I heart it very much. So thank you again for taking the time to join me today. Where can folks find your writing and creations and business and everything?

Monica: My blog is in, like, sort of central hub at MonicaMcCarthy.net. Somebody else owns monicamccarthy.com, sadly. I am [Twittering](#) away, and on [Facebook](#) and on [Instagram](#). I love actually conversing with people on there at [@MissMMcCarthy](#). Cheshire Parlour, which like I mentioned, is on pause, but the site is still there if you wanna know a little bit more about it. You can see some manifestos. It's at CheshireParlour.com.

And the Learning Lab and the Holstee Potluck Series and all of the things that we're doing there are at Holstee.com. And the video stuff is ShowAndTellStories.com. But again, if you go to MonicaMcCarthy.net, you could probably find your way to anywhere.

Elisa: Do you have any parting thoughts, as we talked about talking about one thing kind of sometimes opens up and entire "looking glass" things of other things to explore? Do you have any parting thoughts or things that you really feel like listeners should know or think about before they kind of delve into their writing stuff?

Monica: Well, first, I like your Alice in Wonderland analogy. That whole "looking glass." I'm like, "Yes. This is my girl." I guess the main thing is, like I said, I've been doing some talks about how to create manifesto and people admirably asks some of the questions. And I think the main thing is if you want people to believe you, you have to give them something to believe in. And if you want people to read what you write, if you want people to share what you have to say, and more importantly, if you just



want people to resonate with you, having that clear perspective and putting that safe in the ground and staying—not being scared or be scared, but do it anyway. Just saying, “This is who I am and this is what I believe in,” I think is one of the most important things—more so than any sort of word count or anything like that, is to actually have a point of view. Have something to say and share the world. And then once you do, don’t let anyone try and silence that.

Elisa: I love it. Thank you so much for being on the show today, Monica. I really appreciate it.

Monica: Thank you. It’s such a pleasure!

[You can find this episode’s notes and resources at elisadoucette.com/episode8, and the Writer’s Rough Drafts full archive at elisadoucette.com/podcast. If you wanna talk more writing with me, or just say hi, you can always catch me on Twitter at [@elisadoucette](https://twitter.com/elisadoucette). This show was produced and published by my outstanding content management team over at WritingBusinessWell.com.

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Reviews and sharing your favorite episodes help me get the word out, and get more people on the show. So, thanks, Eric, for doing that, and thanks to all of you for listening to me geek out today about writing with Monica McCarthy. ‘Till I’m in your earbuds next Tuesday—go create your own compelling content and make some words sexy.]

[Outtake]

Elisa: It is creepy how you like legitimately exist inside my brain.

Monica: [Laughs]