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MBS ([00:00](#)):

So, let me tell you about Jen Louden. Her new book is called, Why Bother and I've been on the path with her as she has been writing this book and then abandoning it and then writing it again and then abandoning it, then coming back to it for a 98th time and then abandoning it. Then finally, and brilliantly, getting this book out into the world. Jen and I have known each other for a long time. We started off because we both had similar practices, we both had coaching practices and therefore Jen and I and a few others banded together in this mastermind group, which has been a source of friendship and nourishment and growth. It's really been a wonderful thing over the years. I'll introduce you formally, this is what she sent me as her succinct introduction.



MBS ([00:46](#)):

Jen is the author of *Why Bother*, which is true and has helped people get their bother on for nearly 30 years. I've known her for maybe 20 of those 30 years and I know you're thinking, how is that even possible when you're both so young and vibrant looking, what were you, were you twins together back in... But no, no, we've just known each other as adults all that time. So Jen welcome.

Jennifer ([01:15](#)):

Thank you friend.

MBS ([01:17](#)):

So tell me this. I know some of this story, but others won't. How did you come to write *Why Bother*, because I don't think that was the original book that you were planning on writing.

Jennifer ([01:28](#)):

No, not at all. I didn't want to write another self-help book. This is my eighth book, I think, seventh, eighth, I don't know. There's some gift books in there, so I lose track and I was really tired of being in the self-help field for some good reasons and some not so good reasons. So I tried writing fiction, which was my original background, I tried writing a memoir for four years and 500 pages that completely failed as a work of literature. I tried to scrape a book out of that memoir that my agent turned down. I think we all make these stories up when we look back at our lives, right? We make this neat little narrative. So I think my narrative that I'm sticking to for today is, that I struggled for so long because I was trying to own my voice and I was trying to make peace with what my calling is. Part of my calling really is to help people make more of what they want and I didn't want that calling. We don't always want our calling. I wanted a cool different calling, so that's the story behind the book.



MBS ([02:34](#)):

What's the moment like? It's a little bit like the heroes journey or the heroines journey, which is like, I want to cross the threshold, but I resist crossing the threshold, but finally you go, dammit, okay. I'm crossing the threshold and it feels like that moment of coming to recognize, this is my calling and even though I may have been resisting it, I need to accept it. What's it like, what's that? What did it take to flip from resistance to acceptance? Was there a moment or was it just period of time? How did it work?

Jennifer ([03:09](#)):

I don't think there was one moment and it was writing that memoir that failed. So I had to actually tell those stories over and over again to myself and you know from the books that you've written, it's one thing to write a story to yourself, say in your journal, or you and I having a conversation, it's very different to try to make it a piece of literature, a story that brings people in. There's some kind of alchemy that happens when we do that. When we take our life and try to find something that it really means and I think in doing that and working on that memoir that I say, the memoir that shall not be named, for four years, it really just made me see over and over again, how I was doing this rejecting and this judging and no, that's not what I want to do. So I think that it was a gradual process, as you know, I'm not the fastest learner.

MBS ([04:00](#)):

Oh, but isn't that true for all of us, none of us are the fastest learner and part of what I love you sharing and is important for people to hear, which is how much work and rework goes into finding a path. You're not just a successful self-help author, you're a super successful self-help author. You wrote The Woman's Comfort Book, which is an absolute classic of its time. It got you appearing on Oprah, so if you wanted a stamp of approval, that's it and that time being blessed at the church of Oprah was the thing. But for you to come and go look, it's been all this time, all this struggle, all this books that got turned down by



agents and turned down by you to get to this point, is really powerful for people to hear. How did you land on this idea of Why Bother?

Jennifer ([04:55](#)):

So I was in conversation with Jenny Nash, who's a great book coach and she's the one who had the unfortunate news of telling me, your memoir doesn't work. When I decided to work with her, she was like oh my God, I love you Jen Loud and I love your work. Oh my God, I'm so excited. I'm going to get to coach this really cool author. Then I sent her the memoir and she was like oh, holy shit, this doesn't work, I'm going to have to tell her. It took her three days. It was horrible to write that email, but I'm like, that's okay, great, onward and so we coached for some while in that book that didn't work, that my agent didn't like, and then she was like okay, well, what is it that you really want to say?

Jennifer ([05:30](#)):

I thought about someone in my life who I've known for a long time, who had always lived her life for everyone else and woke up in her late fifties and went, I don't want to be married to that man, I don't know what I want, I have no idea what I want my life to be. We had been in correspondence and I had said to her, before this conversation with Jenny Nash, sometimes you just have to fight for your life and it just kept resonating with me. Like, what do we do? We all get to this place, we get to it in big ways and little ways, we get to it for an afternoon, we get to it during our pandemic. We get to it, these big moments when we go, oh, holy shit, something I loved has died or been taken from me or ended, or it's lost its juice, or it's not working or I've had a failure or a series of failures. What am I going to do? What am I going to bother about? Am I going to give up on life?

Jennifer ([06:22](#)):

Or am I going to find a new way to bother and that to me just seems like such an essential question, especially as we age. You've been through the why bother



times with me, not all of them that I talk about in the book, but the biggest and the longest one, you were there for it. There was a lot of times when I wanted to give up, so that's how it came together. I feel like probably this is the book I've been meant to write my whole life. It's a question that I've had my whole life. What do we do when life beats us down? What do we do when we reach that place in life and we're like, what else is there, and do I care?

MBS ([06:57](#)):

And do I care? And am I willing to get up and fight for my life? It's such a powerful phrase, a powerful existential moment.

Jennifer ([07:07](#)):

It is.

MBS ([07:07](#)):

I'm here. Do I just give up and resign myself to a fight that I don't want and be diminished or do I step up and go, this is actually worth the fight.

Jennifer ([07:20](#)):

When I was a kid, I would look around me at people who gave up and I'd be like, how could they ever do that? Now that I have been through loss and heartbreak and divorce and losing both my parents and professional embarrassments and setbacks. I'm like, oh, oh, now I get it. Now I get it. Now I get why they give up. Wow. This is a heck of a lot, a million times harder than I ever thought it would be.

MBS ([07:47](#)):

Well, let's actually hear what you've written. Would you read a couple of pages from *Why Bother?*



Jennifer ([07:51](#)):

Yes. You're in this story.

MBS ([07:53](#)):

Oh, that's terrifying.

Jennifer ([07:57](#)):

So this was in the midst of that long why bother time I just mentioned, and I used to live in the Pacific Northwest. I'm sitting on my porch and you call, my daughter brings me the phone and you say, you don't sound great. I say, I'm just in a midlife funk and the twins from down the street rode their bikes past me. They'd stuck playing cards into their bike spokes and the whacking sound reminded me of being a kid when summer was forever and that made me even more sad. I would never feel that spaciousness again. "Well, what part of midlife's got you down?" Michael asked. "Well, the part about it being too late and me being too old. A few weeks ago, my high school posted a reunion, some mid decade thing where they invited all different years to come back together and my cousin went and she emailed me about it.

Jennifer ([08:47](#)):

Somebody had the bright idea to print out what people wrote in the yearbook that they'd accomplish in the next 10 years. You know, that 10 years right after high school and they tied what we said to balloons. This balloon, this card, this balloon kept knocking my cousin in the head and she grabbed it and she read the card. It was mine and she was so embarrassed by the cocky tone of what I wrote. She hid the balloon under the table for the rest of the night." So Michael says, "well, what did you say that was so bad, that you wanted to rule the world?" "I don't even want to tell you." You know you do." I recite it in a monotone, as if these weren't once my deepest dreams. "Write one and a half novels, write and direct three movies, win an Oscar, have one and a half children



and split my time between Switzerland and New York." I pretended to laugh at myself. Remember I was going to do all that in 10 years.

Jennifer ([09:39](#)):

Michael laughed "that half child might be difficult to find clothes for." I laughed for real and a little of my mortification eased and Michael added, "it's a good thing your cousin hid that balloon." Well, she must have picked up that I was all about wanting to be special. I remember writing that blurb thinking, I would show everyone. I studied my toes. I needed a pedicure. But part of me thought I could, that I would. "I know what you mean," Michael said. "I was a road scholar and some of the people I was at Oxford with, one guy's a big city mayor and no doubt will end up running for president and people, they won genius grants and somebody's a billionaire, bloody hell. I regularly go WTF."

Jennifer ([10:23](#)):

I took the phone away from my ear and stared at it. Michael, he was the most confident person I knew. Securing his abilities and his intellect founder of a multimillion dollar training company, he was my gold standard for confidence and success. I said, "but you can't feel that way, you're the man" and Michael snorted, "I reckon we all do." That summer day, my friend pricked a hole in my story of, I'm too old and it's too late. He reminded me it's not unique to feel disappointment about our lives. It's inevitable. When we're young, we don't understand what life will throw at us, both beautiful and terrible. It's impossible to live the story you imagine at 20 or 40. Deciding you can't bother because your story didn't unfold the way you thought it would, or should, is self cruelty of the highest degree. It's declaring because my life doesn't look the way I thought it should, I give up or because I can't do or have this particular thing, my life has no meaning. Doesn't that strike you as mercilessly, narrow and harsh?



MBS ([11:36](#)):

That is a great story and I have to say, that Michael guy sounds amazing. I really like him.

Jennifer ([11:45](#)):

Oh. I went to look for my two pages. I'm like ah, this is just too perfect.

MBS ([11:48](#)):

That is too perfect. Hey Jen, I know part of the work you do in this world is, actually help people, particularly women, write. You hold gatherings and retreats virtual and not virtual and in the days when that happens, you are a great encourager of people writing. At that broader level, which is helping people write and rewrite their lives, who are they and what do they do? How do you help people start again? Think about, I need to start again and write a new story, one that fits with the now of what reality is and the now of who I am, which means the sadness of letting go of an old story.

Jennifer ([12:39](#)):

I think it's a constant practice that story that I read brings to mind, which is this, how do we keep leaving behind? How do we keep even getting just a little bit of elbow room from what we're holding onto. You know that I've had to do that with a launch of this book. I had a whole book tour planned, we had all kinds of fancy-schmancy stuff and it all got canceled or didn't happen and for about two weeks, I just moaned and cried and ate toast and got depressed and took naps. Then I woke up one day and went oh, I have to leave behind what I planned. It's hard, right? It's over and it's a constant practice of going, that's what I wanted. What's good here now, that I can take action on and build on?

MBS ([13:29](#)):

Yeah. I don't do a great job of this myself, but I do feel there is something about the ritual of departure or the ritual of mourning, like own the failed dream and



set it alight and push it into the lake and fire arrows at it, or whatever the Viking thing is that you do. But there's a way that... It's the dreams that aren't actually properly transformed into ash and get to float out into the world, that stick around and keep us stuck. You've got to do that kind of full release going, we're done. Just like you tell the story of the book launch, where you're like, okay, I've just got to go. I'm just going to set that book launch plan on fire because it turns out book launches and pandemics are tricky things, and I've got to rethink that. You did such a brilliant job with that. You're like okay, plan B, here we go. When you got it, you really got it.

Jennifer ([14:33](#)):

Yeah and I think there's actually a poem in the book that I want to read to you that speaks to this. It's by a Korean poet, and I'm not sure how to say his name. Ko Un. "It is said that nothing can become new, unless it first turns to ashes. For a whole decade, my misfortune was not having turned to ashes. Burning a mound of dead leaves in late autumn, I want to weep." And when a friend sent me that poem in the middle of my why bother time, I did cry because I knew that's one of the ways and reasons I stayed stuck. Crap happens, disappointment happens, pandemic happens. It's going to take us a while. It's not going to be pretty, but how do we actually walk towards that mound of dead leaves and set it on fire? How do we have the bravery to do that? How are we courageous enough to do that? That is a constant practice for me.

MBS ([15:33](#)):

Yeah. I hear you.

Jennifer ([15:36](#)):

It's hard and it's tiring.



MBS ([15:40](#)):

I know you're like, come on, [inaudible 00:15:42] can't I just relax in my penthouse with my two and a half Oscars and my one and a half children and just have somebody fan me or something? I don't know, what's going on? Why am I working so hard? You're like no, the work is the life, that is the life.

Jennifer ([15:57](#)):

That's exactly right, Michael. That's beautiful.

MBS ([16:00](#)):

Yeah. Earlier on, we had Seth [inaudible 00:16:03] on and his piece was mostly around, you win by focusing on the process and letting go of the outcome and when you can do that, it's hard, but if you can do that, it's such a freeing experience. This is a little bit of an experiment. I am totally enjoying the process of this festival, I'm not sure what the win is and if I did know, I'd probably not get it, but I'm enjoying just going, this is an experiment and it's just the latest iteration of something. Let's see where this now takes me.

Jennifer ([16:37](#)):

Right. I think, another way to think about our work is, it's an offering. For me, the process was to show up and write the most honest and best book I could and I completely know that I did that and I love this book and I trust it and I believe in it but, launch in a pandemic. Wow. So it may end up that this book doesn't do anything that I thought it would do in the world and that really hurts. It's hard to let go of that outcome. But I think the tricky thing is, or the edge to keep working is, letting go of outcome does not mean giving into resignation.

MBS ([17:15](#)):

That's right, because you can go, I am committed to do all I can to get this book out in the world for the next two years or one year or whenever it feels the right time for you and it'll either do something or it won't do something or more



likely to do something in the middle of all of that. All you can do is commit to the process of going look, I'm going to bang a drum and wave flag as best I can and we'll see what happens from that.

Jennifer ([17:43](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([17:44](#)):

So you get to bang a drum and wave flag by telling people where they can find out about you. We know that your book is available in bookstores, online and offline, all around the world. But if they want to find out more about Jen Loudon and the work you do, where do they find you?

Jennifer ([18:00](#)):

They go to Jenniferloudon.com.

MBS ([18:05](#)):

How do you summarize what you do and who you serve and how you help the world?

Jennifer ([18:12](#)):

I think if I summarize it the most simply, it's that I help people make more of what they want, especially creative women and especially a subset of that is writers. So what is it that gets in your way about owning your desires and taking action on them without getting attached and snared by fear and hiding and wanting a certain outcome and perfectionism? I feel like that's the, not so great elevator speech that I use, but I think that the real thing I do is I companion people. I say, so here's my experience, let's talk about yours and let's see how can being with you through my writing or my retreats or my virtual retreats or my programs, my oasis, how can I companion you so you can listen to yourself and keep making more of what you want?



MBS ([18:59](#)):

Jen, thank you for being part of this. I loved having you as a guest, it was wonderful. Just as a reminder, for all of you, this festival, the Two Pages Festival, brought to you by, The Year of Living Brilliantly, 52 amazing teachers. Every week you get a new video from a new teacher, two to six minutes designed to provoke, encourage, and help you move forward to design and own your own year of living brilliantly. Absolutely free, it's at mbs.works. So I hope you'll join me and the wonderful community of people there, doing great stuff.

MBS ([19:33](#)):

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