

Interview with a Barefoot Writer: Annette Annechild

By Mindy McHorse

"You have to take yourself seriously as a writer. It's not just the fantasy and the freedom. It's that writers write. Everything that stops your writing is in your head. It's not in your heart. When you connect with the heart, that's when you're really writing. That's when it's easy."

— Annette Annechild, Ph.D. and Bestselling Author



Annette Annechild

When you cross someone who relates to life as a writer (because she's a bestselling author), with someone who knows how to access the deepest powers of the mind to overcome obstacles, the result is tremendous. And that's exactly what I found when I connected with Dr. Annette Annechild from her home in Delray Beach, Florida.

Annette has authored 10 books in the wellness field, backed by respected publishers like Simon & Schuster, MacMillan, and Random House. She also holds a Master's Degree and a Ph.D. in counseling psychology and runs a successful family and marriage counseling service, where she uses yoga and hypnotherapy in her practice along with a trademarked method she calls HMT, for Hypnotic Meditative Technique.

Along with being a psychotherapist and bestselling author, Annette's accolades include time as a media dynamo with multiple TV appearances on shows like Oprah and Regis Philbin. But today, her life is focused on creating and living with joy by helping others heal their struggles.

Enjoy this glimpse into Annette's perceptive approach to calming the fears and hang-ups that come with life as a writer, so you can get the most out of each day. Pay particular attention to her soothing tactic for curing procrastination, what new writers should actually focus on (hint: it's not outcome or goal-based), and how Eastern philosophy completely transformed her world.



Did you always want to be a writer?

I started out actually as an actress and was a singer and a dancer in New York City. That had always been my dream. But the problem was, I wasn't beautiful enough to be the star and I was too pretty to be the sidekick.

So as a struggling actress, I ended up writing a book called *Getting Into Your Wok with Annette Annechild*. Because I was poor, I only had a wok. And I'm Italian — I was a good cook and I could get everything in a wok.

What happened with the book?

I eventually sold the book to Simon and Schuster who then put me on tour because back in the day there were all those morning shows — like *Good Morning Philadelphia*, *Baltimore*, etc. So with my acting background, of course I was a natural as a cook on TV. This was before the Food Network. I was like the Rachael Ray of my time.

Tell us more about the book tours.

I wrote seven books in a row and went on seven tours. I did everything — Oprah, Regis Philbin — everything. Some of what I wrote was on natural foods, which was a little ahead of its time because back then — this is like 1980 — people really didn't understand that nutrition and disease went together and all of that. It was really like the dark ages. So I was one of the few people saying that kind of stuff back then. In fact, one time a TV producer told me, "You sound like a witch doctor. You cannot say food and disease are connected." Now, of course, everybody knows that's true!

How did writing about food lead to becoming a therapist?

At 35, I sort of woke up one day and realized I didn't want to write about food anymore. I had gotten really bored with just talking about food.

I'd written everything I knew about it, and this voice within basically said, "You're going to be a therapist," and I said, "I can't be a therapist, I don't have the education." And that voice within said, "You will."

And long story short, one thing fell into place after another and I ended up going back to school and eventually went all the way — got my Ph.D. and got licensed and everything.

How did yoga and meditation come to be part of your therapy practice?

An equally fascinating part of the journey for me was that in my early 20s, I got into yoga. This was back when yoga wasn't about exercise but was more focused on the meditative aspects. I really fell in love with the principles of yoga — of loving and serving the world, and believing the world would take care of me, and peace, and all the other things it taught me. So I became a yoga teacher back in my twenties and taught yoga and meditation for years. But when I went back to school to become a

therapist, I always thought of those things as separate. Because we're talking about 1990. I was thinking I'd worked too hard to be thought of as a "woo-woo" therapist.

But the minute I got into the room with my first therapy client, I realized that everything that I knew thanks to yoga was the best thing I could be talking about with the people who came to me for help. So it became clear that my practice was going to be more spiritually-oriented and metaphysical, and it got very popular. I was living in Malibu then and it was just the right place at the right time.

What kinds of clients did you have in Malibu?

My first clients were all movie stars, actors, TV people, theater people, Olympians, and other people from the area.

Must have been interesting! So where does hypnotherapy fall in your practice?

About the time my private practice was becoming successful, I took a hypnotherapy course from the American Association of Hypnotherapists. And the minute I got into the room and started to learn about hypnotherapy, I realized I'd been using very similar techniques as a yoga teacher.

What do you say to people who don't think hypnotherapy works?

I just repeat what the Buddhists say: "Don't believe me, just try it."

Good advice! So you'd published seven books before becoming a therapist. What gave you the confidence to put yourself out there like that?

Well, you know the truth is because I started so young — basically at 21-years-old — I believed I could do anything. But what also helped was getting introduced to yoga and to the Buddhist teachings of Swami Satchidananda. He's renowned — one of the greatest masters from India, and he was in New York City when I first got introduced to yoga. I became one of his students and he was just a wonderful influence in my life. I was at the feet of the master.



What was it like being taught by such a spiritual master?

I don't know if it was just a lucky thing or if it was my karma, but I was really very close to him. I even stayed in the ashram for brief periods of time. So I was really in the presence of such love.

There are two things he said over and over. One was, "If, every day, you get on your knees and you just say to yourself—" (I always add 'on your knees' because I'm an old Catholic, but he didn't say the knees thing.) He said, "Say to yourself that you dedicate your life every day to love and serve. If there's a dog that needs walking, walk it. If there's a plant that needs watering, water it. If there's a child that needs comforting, comfort him. Just become an instrument of service. And at night, just be grateful that you had another day of living to love and serve."

So I was only 21 when he said all this to me. And he said, "If you do this every day, everything you ever need will come to you." All I had to do was serve and everything and more would come to me. I was 21, I didn't know about any philosophies on living. So I thought, "Well, I'll try it." And I started doing it, and exactly what they said has come true.

Did this spiritual yoga training affect you as a writer?

By 30 I had been focused on serving for a long time. It didn't come together in therapy until five years later. But back when I was writing books, I wrote in a very meditative state. I used to get up in the morning and go, "Okay, I'm ready if you are," and I would sit and write for several hours and then at the end of the day, I would read it and I'd be like, "Damn, that's good. It really works." It was an out-of-body experience. The writing just flowed.

Do you have any pre-writing rituals?

Well, I start and end my day on my knees. Like I said, I'm an old Catholic. I'm sure the knee part isn't required, but I do it. I have an altar in my bedroom. It's a very nondenominational altar — it's got everybody on there. In yoga, they say "truth is one path to many" so you don't have to pick and be Catholic or Jewish or whatever. Just be present.

In the morning, I do my meditation and I always begin it and end it by saying, "I just want to love and serve. Just let me love and serve." And then at night, I say, "Thank you," and I do my little meditations for letting me love and serve. Another thing I'm just so grateful to be able to do is take my big dog out most mornings and go either to the beach or to a big garden. I love being in nature.

One other thing comes from this wonderful meditation I once read where you look at the sun and you say, "May the sun that illuminates the earth illuminate my heart so that I may illuminate the hearts of others." And the moment I say that, I feel my energy go, "Oh yeah, that's who I want to be." So it puts me in the groove because really I still work with patients day in and day out, so whether I'm writing or whether I'm with patients, I have to be connected to the muse.

Do you have any secrets for ramping up creativity?

I think all creativity is bigger than us. You know, we're tapping into something when we really feel that creative surge. And then I'm a big believer in that you have to sleep enough and you have to eat enough and you have to practice self-care, so I get massages occasionally. I do things that really take care of Annette. I do my yoga, I do my stretches, I work out, I do my Pilates. I listen to music.

What about tools for writing — any favorites?

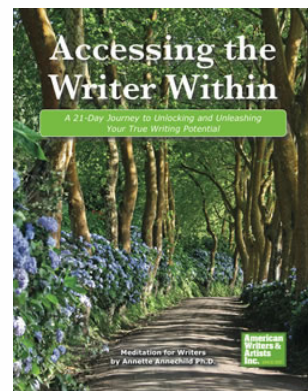
When I write, I like writing on my bed. I've always been a bed-writer. I like just lying on my bed and that's where I do most of my work. I used to always have a pen in hand with a yellow pad, but then I got into the iPad, and I also do a lot of writing by voice using Dragon [editor's note: Dragon Naturally Speaking software].

Tell me about the program you authored with meditations for writers.

It's a program I put together for AWAI, and it's about tapping into that zone. It's about how to quiet your mind, how to comfort all the parts of your being and go forward as a writer. It shows you how to meditate and self-hypnotize, and then you go on to learn things like how to silence your inner critic, end procrastination, overcome challenges, and so forth. Then the second half of the program helps you figure out your personal definition of freedom and renew yourself as a writer and nurture yourself as a writer and other things like that.

You've talked about writing as a revered profession that attracts people because they're seduced by the romance and glamour of it. But then they get stuck. How can they get over the hump?

That's where it's important to nurture yourself as a writer, which is similar to a yoga mindset. Meaning, love and serve, starting with yourself. Because unless you love and serve the instrument, which is you, then you can't be much good to other people. So I think writers have a particularly difficult task because there's nothing else but them, right? If you're a singer, you're given a song. If you're an actor, you're given a script. See but writing, it's you and that's it. But the difference between writers and non-writers is that



writers write. Right?

When we nurture ourselves, we're being very kind to ourselves as opposed to what happens to an uncontrolled mind which is constantly usually criticizing us. "Nobody's going to buy it, why would I bother writing it, who do you think you are?" etc. There are so many people dreaming of this life, the writer's life, and meditation can help that dream come true.

Why do you think it's so hard for some people to just get words on the page?

It's hard for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that we judge ourselves before we even get going. We write a sentence and think, "That wasn't any good." So the biggest thing is to be freed up enough to write your head off and then go back and edit.

When I would write books, I would literally start with the title, the dedication, the content, the chapter outline, and so forth. I focused on just getting words on the page because even though maybe none of it would be the final, it helped get me over the hump, right? So you have to get yourself in that place where maybe you're not judging and you're tuned in, but we all know about the zone, the flow. All blocks are in our minds. That's why meditation helps so much.

So you need to ask yourself these questions: When do you write? What room? What do you use when you write — an iPad? A pen or pencil? What do you do? How many hours a day would you like to write in the writer's life? So it's getting this wall more concrete because really the reason most people talk about writing and don't write is that they don't have a schedule to write. Right?



Sure — no schedule and little self-discipline.

If you have another job, you get up and you go to the job. But if writing is your job, you don't get up and have it scheduled. When I was writing books, I wrote from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and I would sublet my apartment in New York and I would go to an island and write and everybody I met on the island was writing a book. But I was the only one who ever actually wrote the book, because everyone else planned to write all day and ended up never writing. But for me, I wrote from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. And

whether I had an idea in my head or not, I was working as a writer.

So you have to take yourself seriously as a writer. It's not just the fantasy and the freedom. It's that writers write. Everything that stops your writing is in your head. It's not in your heart. When you connect with the heart, that's when you're really writing. That's when it's easy.

That makes so much sense.

One of the things I find interesting is that when people say they want to be writers, it's because they want to have freedom, they want to work from home. They also say, "I want financial freedom," but the truth is, financial freedom only seems like the definition of freedom to people who don't have money. Yet people who do have money don't think that they're free. So it's important to think about freedom beyond money. Because it's also peace of mind. That's a part of freedom. Contentment. Gratitude. Those are parts of freedom. Feeling that the work is abundant, not scarce. That's a part of freedom. I think it's important to take these generalized ideas that everybody loves, like working with your feet in the sand on the beach, and saying "Okay, you really can maybe have this, but just like anything else, you're going to have to do a little work."



Right. It won't just come to you if you sit on the beach and twiddle your thumbs and procrastinate.

I joke that the minute you know you have to write, you want to mow the lawn, do the dishes, scrub the floor, whatever. Your mind is saying, "I'll do anything! Please just don't make me have to write." So I believe in being very gentle with yourself. Imagine that in your unconscious mind, there's a car, and in the car are all the parts of you. The little kid, the baby, the rebel ... all different parts of you. And the procrastinator is one of those parts, and usually procrastination has a lot to do with fear on some level. So you comfort the procrastinator. You say, "Look, I'll make a deal with you. We can mow the lawn, we can take a nice bath, we can even take a walk. But we are going to write. We are going to write today."

Does that work for you?

I'm not a procrastinator. It really is not my devil, though I have certainly done it, like everyone has. But that was so long ago. I'm so gentle with myself that if I have to write something, it's like I give myself a lot of treats. I'll say to myself, "Okay, we'll just do the first part this morning, and then we'll have breakfast." Or "We'll just write this or we'll just get some ideas down. We're not in the mood and we don't really feel creative right this moment so we'll just do the stuff that's really easy to do. Just get some ideas out. Make an outline." So I talk to myself in a soothing way like a good mother would. Not, "You're going to do it now."

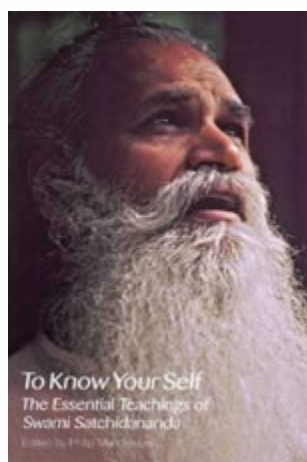
Addressing all these parts of yourself through meditation is what empowers you to gain control of the mind so that when your mind says, "I don't want to write this," you're not going to listen to it. The mind isn't where you want to live. I think you want to live in your intuition or your heart. Your deeper self, or whatever you want to call it.

Makes total sense. Tell me, who are the biggest influences in your life?

I think that I've certainly been influenced by a lot of writers and a lot of other therapists. But I would say Swami Satchidananda has been the absolute biggest influence on everything. He was such an overriding teacher for me. There have certainly been other teachers along the way, but no one else who has fundamentally changed me. I feel like this whole Eastern philosophy just took the best in me and brought it forward. It so radically changed me from somebody who was sort of a wild Sicilian big-mouth to this mellow, joyful, productive person. My life has become incredibly blessed. I started out with nothing, really nothing, and now I'm really successful. Who would have thought it? It wasn't my goal.

You know one of the things that I think it's important for new writers to address is that it's a focus on the effort, not the outcome. People tend to focus on the writer's life as "Yeah, I'm going to be free, I'm going to have my own time." But it's really about what you create. So when you start to focus on the creation, the effort, then beautiful things come to you.

I never did anything except really to try to love and serve and then all of a sudden I have this gorgeous house, this big practice, and just a very happy life.



Do you have any books you recommend for new writers?

There are several books I really love. One is called *The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself*, and it's by a man named Michael Singer. And the book that's been my bible is a book by Swami Satchidananda. I really live by it. It's called *To Know Yourself: The Essential Teachings of Swami Satchidananda*. And he wrote another one called *The Golden Present: Daily Inspirational Readings*, and that has a reading for each day and really lays out the principles of yoga in a beautiful way.

And then one of the earliest books I ever read that was life-changing was the book called *The Prophet*. I don't know if you've ever read it — it's by Kahlil Gibran. It's just this tiny little book.

They still sell millions of copies. It's just very inspiring. And Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, is very inspirational, especially the beginning of it when he talks about just staying in the moment.

If you had to pick just one step that a new writer could take when getting started on the road to long-term writing satisfaction, what would you recommend?

I would quote Joni Mitchell who said, "Write what you know." It really needs to come not from the outside — not from what you think people want — but from something that's personal to you. Because there's always something special about everybody, the way they think about things, what interests them, the way they coin a phrase. So trying to go in and write what you know is the key to good writing, beginner or not. Sometimes we advanced writers need to remember that!

Can you share any final advice on cultivating a career as a writer?

Most people just walk down a hallway where they just do what everybody tells them. They have a house, the picket fence, and the kids and the job. What you've got to do is put a hole in the hallway and you've got to believe you can get out. So when it comes to nurturing, you're nurturing your dream. You're nurturing your essence. You're being on your own side and believing that there's beauty in you and that's what you want to express in whatever shape it is. The reason my job as a therapist is so great is that people really are beautiful. We struggle, we fall down, we get up. But it's the getting up that matters. You know people do have beautiful things inside of them when they find their niche. That's when the floodgates open.

This interview was previously published in the August, 2014 issue of *Barefoot Writer*. To read more interviews from fellow Barefoot Writers be sure to check out [The Barefoot Writer's Club](#).

Published: February 13, 2018

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1 Response to "Interview with a Barefoot Writer: Annette Annechild"

What an inspirational story, thank you Mindy (I love your work!) and to Annette. I've been struggling with trying to find a 'niche' for my writing. I've been in marketing for over 25 years, and am now realizing I'm done with managing others and

want to concentrate on what I love to do... write. I have had so many experiences in writing though, it all seems the same to me and I've been having a hard time finding just one or two areas to focus on. Your words of 'do what feels good in your heart and follow that' rung true like a clear and pure singing bowl. Thank you for your calming and clear message!

C Bailey – over a year ago

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American Writers & Artists Institute

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924