

Author Q&A

Eleanor Vincent

How many books have you written, and which is your favorite?

Two published memoirs, an unpublished novel, and a work in progress. I'm partial to my work in progress, *Swiss Coffee*, about my time living in Basel Switzerland with a host family I loved so much I've returned six times.

How long have you been writing and/or when did you start?

I wrote my first short story at age 12. So if my math is correct, I've been writing for more than 60 years. I wrote articles for my high school and college newspapers, became a journalist in my early 20s, and began my first novel shortly after that. Starting in my 30s, I worked as an editor in large companies to make a living and support my children as a single mother. I got an MFA in mid 40s and published my first book at age 55.

What is your writing process like?

I like to putter before I write but once I sit down and focus I work rapidly. My journalism background means I can turn out copy quickly. I'll edit as I go - but only a little. I let the work cool for a week or so and then get feedback from my writing partner or my writing group. I revise obsessively once I've gotten feedback - I often will do ten or more drafts of important chapters, not a total rewrite, but moving sections around and smoothing out the prose.

What risks have you taken with your writing that have paid off?

Being authentic and self-revealing to an extreme degree. I don't hold back on revealing my own flaws, my trauma, my limitations. But I also don't shy away from showing my strengths. That makes my work more relatable, and gives it greater emotional impact.

What is the most valuable piece of advice you've been given about writing?

Writing IS rewriting. If you don't want to revise, your writing career will be short.

What books helped you the most when you were writing your book?

Crisis memoirs by authors like Lucy Grealy, Nancy Mairs, and Natalie Kusz when I wrote my first book about the death of my daughter. For the new book, I read everything I could about autism and neurodiverse relationships plus all the great divorce memoirs out now by writers like Maggie Smith, Glennon Doyle, Gina Frangello, Leslie Jamison, and the novel *Liars* by Sarah Manguso.

If you had to describe yourself in just three words, what would those be?

Brave, Creative, Funny

Book Q&A

Disconnected

What part of the book did you have the hardest time writing?

The sex scenes.

What part of the book did you enjoy writing the most?

The sex scenes

What is a significant way your book has changed since the first draft?

Less starry eyed, more realistic, more focus on the clues the narrator overlooks as she is falling in love.

What perspectives or beliefs have you challenged with this work?

The belief that love conquers all. Love is not enough in the case of a high conflict marriage between people with opposite neurotypes. You must be educated about how our brains and emotions function when you have a neurotypical paired with a neurodivergent partner. Both partners have to be willing to learn new tools and techniques to communicate and find ways to offset their profound differences.

How long did it take to write this book?

Two years.

What inspired the idea for your book?

The painful experience of falling in love with a man who masked his autism during courtship and then dropped the mask early in the marriage, resulting in miscommunication and conflicts I had no idea how to handle. The profound shock and loneliness I experienced.

How would you describe your book's ideal reader?

A feminist leaning man or woman who is mature enough to appreciate the ambiguities of relationships, and curious enough to want to understand a neurodiverse marriage.

How did you come up with the title of your book?

Endless brainstorming. Writing down and rejecting titles. Then, one day, as I was working on revisions at my co-working space, Left Margin Lit, the idea of Disconnected came to me. Later, over lunch, a small group of writers brainstormed the subtitle.

If you were given the chance to say something to the individuals in your memoir what would it be?

I am so sorry. You both deserved so much better.

Next Level Q&A

Disconnected

What was your objective in writing this book?

To raise awareness of the special challenges faced by couples when one is neurotypical and the other is neurodivergent. To show that it is possible to reclaim your own identity and your life after a marriage becomes emotionally and physically untenable.

Before writing this book, were you knowledgeable on the subject?

I thought I understood Asperger's syndrome (ASD-1) but discovered my knowledge was partial and ill-informed because it was based on pop psychology articles and TV portrayals. I thought of it as social awkwardness, difficulty with eye contact, and challenges with expressing emotions. It is so much more than that. The experience of discovering the array of associated conditions my husband manifested from Pervasive Demand Avoidance to Alexithymia (no words for emotions) to context blindness, emotional dysregulation, hoarding, depression, and anxiety was a deeply humbling experience. I literally had no idea what I was signing up for.

What are some surprising facts you discovered while writing this book?

Some estimates are that up to 85 percent of neurodiverse marriages end in divorce.

What are the 3 most important takeaways from this book?

- Look for signs of neurodivergence early in your relationship and heed them.
- Find appropriate resources for supporting your neurodiverse relationship. Traditional couples therapy is not helpful, and can actually be harmful.
- If you are a woman, understand the signs of Cassandra Syndrome, a form of affective disorder, that can cause extreme distress and depression. Get help immediately!

What advice can you give your readers?

Educate yourself on neurodivergence. It takes many forms. Do not take a relationship at face value in the early months and years. Be sure you know how your partner will respond under 24/7 togetherness and the inevitable stress of an intimate relationship.

What do you hope the readers take from this book?

A sense of compassion for couples who do not know they are neurodiverse at the time they marry, and a sense of hope that it is possible to reverse course if the marriage or the relationship becomes destructive to the emotional health of the couple.