

Episode 70: YA Author Sierra Elmore

Emily 00:21

Welcome to the Hybrid Pub Scout podcast with me, Emily Einolander. And me, Corinne Kalasky. We're mapping the frontier between traditional and indie publishing and today we're talking with Sierra Elmore

Corinne

Sierra Elmore writes YA contemporary and thriller novels about girls wreaking havoc while fighting trauma. Her work has won the YoungArts merit award and was selected for the author mentor match program. Elmore earned a BA in sociology from Arcadia University. She has conducted research on the representation of mentally ill women in media, as well as relational aggression amongst adolescent girls. Elmore lives in New York City, where she explores independent bookstores, volunteers for the Crisis Text Line, and goes to as many concerts as possible.

Emily 01:08

Welcome, Sierra.

Sierra

Hello, hello. Hi.

Emily 01:12

It just finished reading *Death by Society* a couple of days ago. And, you know, did it all in one sitting and that was pretty fun.

Sierra 01:25

Oh, wow. Thank you.

Emily 01:26

I mean, I'd just be rewatching a TV show. So it seemed like a better use of time.

Sierra 01:33

The real question is Which TV show?

Emily 01:37

I've been rewatching *Succession*.

Sierra 01:43

I heard that's good.

Emily Einolander 01:45

It's kind of weird to have it as a rewatch comfort show. But I, you know, I know I just like, I like shows that have big ensemble pieces. And there's all of these scenes where people are like, at a party and

kind of going back and forth across the room and that kind of stuff. And I'm always very excited and my little writer brain, because I just love ensemble stuff. So, and Sierra, you got your copies of your book this week I saw on Twitter.

Sierra 02:15

Yes, I did. And they look very good. You must be really excited. I am so like, I got them from Ingram Spark, which is a distributor for pretty much indies, their elite their. Their other division is for traditional publishing. And so they came right on time. I want to make sure they weren't ugly, you know?

Corinne

Yes. Very important.

Sierra

But yeah, they came, they came. They're beautiful. And so now I just have to get the hardcovers going, which I will. Once my blurbs are all in.

Emily 03:02

Oh, that's exciting. You're doing hardcover?

Sierra

Yes.

Emily

That's very cool. Yeah. Um, and it's all print on demand, right? Yes, yes. Oh, my God. Cool. I'm glad everybody's doing hardcovers. Now. That's so exciting.

Corinne 03:17

So what was the last concert you went to?

Sierra

Yep. So I know that I put it I tried to go to as many concerts as possible in my bio. I haven't been to a concert since before COVID.

Emily 03:30

Oh, yeah.

Corinne 03:33

Yeah, that's, that's fair.

Emily 03:36

But do you remember what the last one was?

Sierra 03:38

Yes, I do. Absolutely. Because it was my favorite. Well, my favorite artists are Hozier and Taylor Swift. So I went to a Hozier concert? Obviously incredible. 10 out of 10. Yeah, I'm jealous of my past self. He said his voice was off, which it didn't feel off, but like he would know better than I do, obviously. So he played slower songs, which was like, I don't want to say it was a benefit, because his voice was like, struggling, apparently. Um, but it was a benefit because he played like, Wasteland Baby. So that was really nice. The slow down version up From Eden. And I almost got to meet him after the show. But because of his vocal issues, he did not meet fans that day. We were all waiting outside. That he tweeted Hey, guys, and that's going to be bad after the show though.

Emily 04:47

It was like too cold outside for his voice or something like that.

Sierra

Possibly. Yeah.

Emily

Yeah, I saw that you put Hozier in in your book. I was there. I was like oh, yes, yes, this is correct.

Emily 05:04

This is accurate. Yeah. Corinne and I are Spotify buddies. And so, Corinne, you've probably seen me re-listening and re-listening to him over and over again. And last couple weeks.

Corinne

Yeah.

Emily

Thank you for not judging me.

Corinne 05:19

Oh, there's no judgment. This is a judgment free zone. You know? So yeah, our friendship in this podcast. All right, Sara. So tell us about your upcoming book, Death by Society? What is it about and what inspired you to write it?

Sierra 05:36

So Death by Society is a Mean Girls remix, that happens when two girls worlds collide, after one attempt suicide to avoid toxic popularity. So there's a real focus on mental health, on bullying, sexual assault, and just really this host of things that teenagers go through what my friends that I went through as teenagers, and what I know teens are still dealing with today. And so my inspiration for it. In middle school, we had a presentation on bullying, which they were talking about a young man who had died by suicide, and they were talking with his parents. And they were like, what if he had had a hero, somebody who had intervened? So that kind of converges with my question, what would happen if I tried to die because I was dealing with some very personal issues, I was in a really bad place in eighth grade. And so I took those two questions and made a short story called Hero, where a girl that Lily was a very different character from Abby, as is in the book, save Carter's life, who was the main character.

And then I decided to expand it from a novel from there. And there's been many iterations of the novel. There's some ones where there were four point of view characters. Yeah, it was like 100,000 words, which I don't have that me anymore.

Emily Einolander 07:19

I don't think teenagers really do either.

Sierra 07:22

They don't like my favorite novel, my current novel, the artists, congressional love, which is coming out in March. That is like, right now. It's like 40,000 words. I'm hoping to get it to 50000.

Emily 07:39

That's a reasonable number. I mean, I kind of want to walk back, the teenagers not reading 100,000 words, because I don't know I see those books in the YA sections, and they're thick. Those are some Yeah. So you made a really powerful statement about the truly dangerous and harmful effects of bullying in your book. But you also managed to create nuance and sympathy for the main character Carter's bully, Abby, and her voice is a big part of the book. So can you tell us a little about why you made that choice and what the experience was writing sort of from that? More bully viewpoint?

Sierra 08:20

Yep. So I made that choice. Early on in the process. I was interested exploring the other side of bullying, what might lead a bully to bully. I was being bullied at the time. So I was kind of interested in diving into that psyche. So in Abby's case as she developed, she became like this naturally caustic person, but her meanness is kind of ramped up by trauma that's explored throughout the novel. And I took that from my real life because I knew that when I was being traumatized, like, I wasn't exactly the same person. I was, like, I could be terrible. I could be mean, I could be selfish. And so I really just taking my own trauma, traumatic experiences because Abby had been sexually assaulted. That's the trauma that she goes through. Like, I don't consider that a spoiler or anything because like, trauma was never a sport. And so that's explored throughout the novel. And so her side was also difficult. So right, because I had to step into that mean girl headspace, which like, isn't necessarily me. I can be like, a bit sometimes. Because I don't know if I'm lying to you.

Emily Einolander 09:54

You definitely are.

Sierra 09:57

But like, Abby takes it to a whole nother level.

Emily Einolander 10:01

She definitely has Don't fuck with me energy.

Sierra 10:03

She does like, her energy is like wild.

Emily Einolander 10:09

It seems a little bit, maybe fun to write her though.

Sierra 10:12

She can be fun to write. She can. Yeah, like, it's very different from Carter who's like, you know, very sad, very somber, like kind of a reflect more of a reflection of myself. And I'm just like, this is just bumming me out.

Emily 10:31

Something a little more high energy to break up the pace, probably. I do think it's notable to say that you didn't include like the scene of sexual assault in your book. And you're also very cognizant of giving content warnings at the beginning of your book. So if people have concerns about what they're about to start reading, for their own mental health, I think that was very thoughtful of you to do. So. Thank you for that.

Sierra 11:02

Thank you. And that was very important to me, because I'm a survivor myself, and I dealt with a lot of the things in this novel. Um, so I would have appreciated those warnings sometimes. And so I know that readers are getting more and more savvy, they want content warnings. And so of course, I'm going to put those content warnings like, even if somebody didn't ask for it, I would put those content warnings. And just being very cognizant of that, including the scenes, and be very mindful of how I discussed Abby's trauma, and Carter's trauma as well.

Emily Einolander 11:46

But you definitely didn't shy away from the emotional effects. And yes, very powerful.

Sierra 11:54

So I'll answer did the subject matter influence the decision to Self Publish? So I never received confirmation. But I was always scared that the deep intersectionality was a reason why it wasn't accepted in traditional publishing. Because it always feels like there's that quota, you know. And if your book is too much, I say that very hesitantly. But, yeah, that you gotta have the quotes, because it's never too much. But if your book is too much for publishing, traditional publishing, anyway, self publishing is definitely different. And I'm grateful for that. But yeah, so it did influence my decision to self publish, because once my agent and I separated, I decided, okay, why not self publish? I'm not seeing like, I haven't seen traction for three years decide when I was working on traditional publishing. This seems like a great option for me. Why? Why the hell not?

Emily 13:07

Yeah, if you have the opportunity there.

Sierra 13:10

I'm someone who likes...I'm a control person. And I'm a great. Well, I'm taking a project management certificate from Google right now.

Emily Einolander 13:21

I'm sorry. Corinne, Sierra is a Virgo.

Corinne 13:27

I salute you.

Sierra 13:30

So I'm going to be a great project manager. I'm sorry, my cat just screamed in the background.

Emily Einolander 13:37

That's a requirement for the show.

Corinne 13:41

The more cats the better.

Sierra 13:45

But, um, so I put everything um, so I've put everything into a plan. Which I can actually, I'm happy to share with your audience. The notion template.

Emily 14:00

Okay, yeah. Did you create that or you got it from a website, or...

Sierra

I created it?

Emily

Oh, my God. I might that sell that if I were you.

Sierra 14:16

No, I just wanted to do it. Like,

Emily 14:18

Oh, okay. Sure. Yeah, love it. I might need it for my own stuff, too. So I do a lot of book project management stuff, and I've been trying to create those process documents. So seeing someone else's process is always really helpful.

Sierra 14:37

Yeah, it's so helpful. So I just use that natural project management tendency to kind of just control freak my way into everything. And so working with individual vendors, like my cover designer has been amazing. And then I have my I use a different cover designer from I just wanted 23 covers, but those are one is done. The other one is revision. So that has been really fun. How did you find your cover designer? She actually DM'd me. So she DM me and shot her shot, which I really appreciated. Because I didn't know who I was going to pick, like for a cover designer. I didn't know where to go. Like now I know different places to go. But yeah, so she and her name is Sophia Chen. She is amazing. She

designed the cover for Death by Society. And she was like, Hey, I don't know if you already have a cover designer, but I would love to work on this. And then I took one look at her portfolio. I was like your hired.

Emily 15:49

as a very burn book sort of look to it. Yeah, yeah.

Corinne 15:56

Do you feel like your experience with traditional publishing publishing helps on sort of on your journey with self publishing?

Sierra 16:03

Oh, absolutely. Querying definitely helps, because now I know how to pitch a book like that. Pitch contests help, because now I know how to pitch a book accordingly. Like now I have a pitch. I use my comps. And then I and then I will like, do well, I'll just please stop by sight is simple. I'll just do being girls, we just kind of a funny story. And then XYZ happens. And that works. And now I know the publishing process the basics. I met a ton of people, a lot of friends, including people who are self published, hybrid published, who have helped me along the way. Yeah, I've just learned so much about the process. And I've taken that, and marketing. Because I've seen how authors market. I've been seeing this for years, I've seen what works, what doesn't work. So I've been taking that away from my own things. Like for example, I'm doing a pre order campaign with pocketbooks, a bookshop in Lancaster. And so I wouldn't have been able to, like know how to do that without see how people do their pre order contains.

Emily 17:27

So it sounds like your own experience as a reader and just someone who's very absorbed and kind of that book. Culture really helped you with your own process?

Sierra

Definitely.

Emily 17:41

Do you read a lot of YA books?

Sierra 17:44

Oh, yeah. I have this app called I think it's called Libib, where it like scans, you can scan all of your books. And yeah, it's called Libib. You could scan all of your books, and I just looked at it and I have 243 young adult books. Wow. That doesn't even include like the seer my series. So yeah, I read the adult

Emily 18:13

labor and it shows. God, I can't imagine how bad it would be if I tried to write a young adult book and be like, how to succeed in business as a teenager? Actually, that's kind of I mean, Carter in the book has a

very successful mental health app. So that's pretty cool. I guess that is a business book for a teenager. Do you code by the way? I was wondering.

Sierra 18:43

I don't. I always like try to and I've given up. So like I am so not Carter?

Emily Einolander 18:53

Yeah, I used to think that I could do sort of the web developer thing. And as soon as I started learning JavaScript, I was just like, Why isn't this working? This isn't working. Why this isn't working. Back to the words. So it sounded like you did have various guides along the process. But you're it sounds like your experience was also pretty self guided. I'm going to sort of double down on this question and say, what were the sort of sticking points along the way? And how did you overcome them? You mentioned that your cover designer, you kind of just put it out there and then someone reached out to you. But otherwise, you wouldn't have known? Like how to deal with it. Were there other steps in the publishing process? Like, you know, figuring out where to sell it or like how to print it or how to find an editor where you maybe experienced a little bit of friction.

Sierra 19:54

Yeah, so I was um, so as far as finding an editor, that was actually pretty easy because I had, well, first the first editor I was going to pick because my agent and I had like, edited the hell out of this book. before. Before we had separated, so I had to do it just needed that like a line and copy, edit. And proofread. Of course, at first, I had just found an editor in one of my books that I had read, because they were named. Um, and then my friend was like, No, edit it for free. I'm like, I love you. But like, I'm gonna pay you.

Emily Einolander 20:41

Yeah. Yeah, that's, yeah. Looking out for each other.

Sierra 20:50

Yeah. Um, but yeah, so I was like, Yeah, I love you. But like, no. And then, like, another sticking point was like, I was doing a Kickstarter to raise money for the editing costs for the cover design costs for a couple of other costs. And then, like, the middle of it, which I hear everybody deals with the middle slump, which where you get like, maybe one donation, um, was so difficult to deal with, like, you're just promoting and promoting and promoting. But like, it's not moving the needle. Yeah. So I'm doing another Kickstarter for my for my second book. Probably. Yeah. So there's that. So I'll, I'm going to make it shorter. So we have less of a middle slump

Emily Einolander 21:51

Oh, smart.

Sierra 21:54

And then I'm probably going to run Facebook ads during the middle slump. I heard that helps a little bit. Okay. Then other sticking points. Honestly, it's not been too difficult of a process. I think just like figuring out the best ways to market. Yeah, I think figuring out the best ways to really market the book.

Emily Einolander 22:14

Well, that kind of leads us into our next question, Corinne.

Corinne 22:17

So what have you been doing to promote the book? And how do you manage all the work that goes into that? And I will also say that I know about all the work that goes into that, because I have had like marketing and publicity positions at several publishing companies. So I am, my heart goes out to you, because I know it's hard work. So yeah, yeah.

Sierra 22:40

Yep. So I have been doing all just have us all. So the big thing was the Kickstarter, which got a lot of pre orders in, and then I'm doing a launch with a new bookstore that's opened up in New York City, P and T, knitwear. And then I have been preorder campaign with pocket book, and I might be doing something else with them stick to I had a giveaway in early June. I've been pitching press outlets, which is not fun.

Corinne 23:20

I'm in PR now. And yeah, it's, as I said, my heart goes out to you because it is a lot of work. And it's thankless. Truly.

Emily 23:30

Yeah. And every once in a while, Corinne I'll get like, a "Never talk to me again."

Corinne 23:35

Oh, I get those all the time. I was just like, this is I am not interested. Why are you such an idiot? Why would you think I would be interested in this or what?

Sierra

Oh, no.

Corinne

Yeah, I mean, I got I think it was a couple of weeks ago, I got a response. It was like, I am repulsed by this pitch. And I was like, okay, like, you know, I know I know. But the thing is, like, the more you do it, the more used to it you get and you're just like whatever this guy's having a bad day or he's an asshole either way. I'm taking them off my list and I never ever talked to him again since cares, but anyway, yeah.

Emily 24:09

Hopefully they're nicer nicer to you because author.

Sierra 24:13

I hope so. Yeah, I haven't gotten any of those um, yeah, so I've been emailing bloggers. I've stopped doing that now because it is thankless. Um, I had a cover reveal with my friend Fadwa I'm actually going to be a BookBub do releases for less, which is a congrats.

Emily 24:38

Oh, yeah, that's a really great, and that's mostly just you reaching out to like lots and lots of people to do all this stuff. Yeah. So What recommendations would you have for authors, either with marginalized identities or who struggle with mental illness as they try to write their books and then market and promote them.

Sierra 25:04

So my biggest piece of advice is not to give up. Because there are people in this world who want to see your stories they want to see you succeed. Like cats? Um, no, not my cats. I mean, they do want to see you succeed. Yeah.

Emily 25:28

Yours cats want you to succeed. Don't disappoint the cats.

Sierra 25:34

Yeah. Nobody else will leave you behave like cats.

Emily 25:41

That's gonna keep me going in the dark times.

Sierra 25:47

But yeah, just believe in yourself, um, know that the haters are just, they're always going to be there. Like, it's okay to be upset about it. It's okay to be upset about people who are just assholes. But, and I don't want to tell people to step away from social media, because unfortunately, it's how we promote ourselves that our books and marginalized people do already have a disadvantage when it comes to that. So it said, consider your approach to social media and how it can be healthier. So does that mean being an updates account? Does that mean logging on for only 10 minutes a day? Does that mean hiring your posts out to a company if you can afford it?

Corinne 26:37

So where can people find you and find your book?

Sierra 26:41

So you can find me on Twitter sort of

Emily 26:45

There's a lot of information out there. There's enough information up there to find the book

Sierra 26:52

Twitter's tick tock Instagram under SierrawritesYA, Death by Society can be found pretty much everywhere. And the links are at CRL more.com. Okay.

Emily 27:04

Fantastic. And is there anything else you'd like to plug?

Sierra 27:08

I'm not right now, although I do have a second book coming out in March. That is the Art of Congressional Love. And it is Scandal meets Red, White and Royal Blue. And that is all I will say right now.

Emily Einolander 27:20

That's such a good.

Corinne 27:21

That's an amazing, like elevator pitch that really

Emily Einolander 27:25

like Corinne and I both did the head tilt. All right, well, you can find us online hybridpubscout.com on Twitter at [hybridpubscout](https://twitter.com/hybridpubscout) and Facebook even though I don't really go on there anymore. Instagram at [hybridpubscoutpod](https://www.instagram.com/hybridpubscoutpod), and please give us a five star rating and a nice review on your favorite podcast app. Sierra, thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you. And thanks for giving a rip about blood