

The Art of Asking Everything

Erika Moen: Candy and Broken Glass

Amanda 00:33

This is the Art of Asking Everything, I'm Amanda Palmer.

Uh, hi everyone. This is a very unusual, new, different, patron-only podcast release, which sort of goes against the initial concept of the podcast, which was to use the Patreon to fuel a big, badass, free, worldwide, giant, fancy podcast. But, shit happens, and shit changes, and if you know anything about me, you know that I never follow any rules, even my own rules that I set for myself.

So let me explain to you why this is happening, and also what I think it means, and why it's really important that we're putting this out as a patron-only podcast. And it's kind of a long story, so hang in there, but we will get to the podcast itself.

And also, can I just say, it is really nice, I'm sitting in a closet in New Zealand, in my new AirBNB, and it's really nice to just be recording an intro for the podcast that's just for patrons, because I feel more like myself, and like I don't have to be so fancy, which is actually kind of a horrible thing to realise, because it makes me feel like all the other intros that I've been recording for the podcast have been totally inauthentic, because why would I feel like I have to be someone else, or pretend I'm Terry Gross from NPR?! Whatever. But yeah, it's just nice to feel like I'm just talking to you.

And also, since I'm talking to you, and since I know that you're a patron listening to this, thank you for supporting me, and for making this possible, and we can get back to that lovefest a little later, but yes, thank you, and thank you.

So back in June of 2019, while I was on tour with There Will Be No Intermission in Portland, Oregon, I recorded this conversation with the comic artist and sex educator Erika Moen. And Portland, on the aside, was actually a really fruitful podcasting trip, because within a few days, I did my conversation with Storm Large, which came out towards the beginning of the podcast, and the one that I did with Madison Young that just came out, and it was a very podcast-y city.

And I had known about Erika for a lot longer than Storm and Madison, we were old Twitter pals, we were Kickstarter friends, and we had been cheerleaders of each other's work. And not just the art and the music, but here was an artist after my own heart, who was self-publishing her non-commercially-viable comic books about sex and sexuality, to thousands of people; she wasn't just selling ten copies of these comics, Erika was really successful, and she had built her

own business. So we had, like a lot of my other guests, we had all of this stuff in common, and I was really excited to pick her brain.

So we're sitting in this lovely recording studio in Portland, Oregon, and we're chatting and buzzing along, talking about our work, and internet hate, and cancellation. And things start to turn very dark. And because I didn't quite understand at the time, and actually, now that I'm saying it, that's not really true, because I had gotten together with Erika socially in the few days before the podcast, and I think she'd tried to communicate to me the gravity of just how dark things were in her life, and in her head, but suffice it to say, at the time this was recorded, Erika was in the middle of a very, very dark period. And me being me, I just kept encouraging her to talk, and go deeper, and go darker, because hey, this was also me in between two nights of a four-hour stage show at the Crystal Ballroom, where I'm poundy-piano-ing, and hey everyone, listen to my abortion and miscarriage stories, hoorah. And I'm watching what Erika is saying, and I'm like, yes, let's go there! Let's talk about it! So we go there, and you'll hear. And it's hard to listen to. And it's great, and it's cathartic.

Here is where the story starts to turn into a story. So a few weeks, or maybe months later, I don't remember, Erika emails, and says, I wanna talk. And she gets in touch with me and Fannie, who's the producer of this podcast, and she says basically, hey, I don't feel great about this podcast going into the world. I don't even really remember what I said. I'm worried.

To which I responded, listen, the reason I love having total control over my podcast is nothing has to go out without your total approval, it doesn't even need to go out at all, if you wanna listen back to it and edit anything out, no problem, work with Fannie, she'll send you the recording. And so, Erika listens to it, and she gets back to us, and she's like, ooh... yeah, maybe just take that part out, and that part. And Fannie and I say, cool, easy.

And then, you all know what happened to the podcast. History happened, and instead of putting the podcast out, tour got really heavy, and then my fall European kerfuffles happened, and the bushfires happened, and COVID happened, and my life collapsing happened, and becoming a single mother happened, and all in all the podcast was delayed for an entire fucking year.

And I know this is a long story, but stick with me. We're about to get to the actual podcast. It's just gonna take a second.

So a few weeks ago, we emailed Erika, my whole podcast team, and we said, we're finally ready to put out this motherfucking episode! After almost two years! Get us your book links, get us your photos, we're gonna start putting the socials together. And I get a message from Erika, and she says, I wanna talk. And I know what's coming. So three days ago, I call her. I'm at a coffee shop in New Zealand, she's at home in Portland. And she says, 'Amanda, I've finally got my new book coming out in a month, and I'm so scared to put this episode out.' And she doesn't need to tell me why, but if you're wondering why, you'll hear about it in the podcast, but Erika has full-time trolls who exist to make her life hell, and I have the same sorts of people. There are

accounts on Twitter that exist only to call Amanda Palmer a trans-exclusionary feminist, and a racist, and Erika has the same sorts of people, who just wanna get her cancelled, and don't want her to be able to publish, and will stop at nothing to make her life hard. And she just did not want to stir the mud in her currently-sort-of-clearish internet pond. And if anyone gets that, oh my God, do I get it. Because there are times when you just don't have the bandwidth, even if something is only 2% risky. And putting out a podcast with me is risky, because there are people out there who hate me and wanna cancel me, just like there are people out there who hate and wanna cancel Erika.

So I say to Erika, 'listen, on a scale from 1 to 10, how many people are trolling you right now?' And she says, 'It's not that bad right now, and that's why I just wanna be careful.' And I say, listen, if anybody understands that, it's me. So we could do a couple things. We could just not put this podcast out. We could never put it out, we could put it in the can and put it out in two years after your book has come out, and people have cooled down on you. Or, and I'm thinking aloud as I'm talking in the coffee shop, we could just put this podcast out only to our patrons. I have 14,000 patrons. Erika has 1,500 patrons. That's a big audience. That would not be nothing. And also, these are the human beings who need to hear this conversation, and who we want to listen to this conversation. So we can still put it out, and I don't have to say anything about it on social media. And Erika says, 'Oh my God, I hadn't even thought of that.' And Erika says, 'My body literally just relaxed, realising that that's an option', and I was like, of course that's an option! We can do anything we fucking want!

And so, that's what we're doing. This episode, at least with this intro, for the vast foreseeable future, is just for our patrons. Not because we're trying to be exclusive, but because we don't have the bandwidth to put it out into the shark arena of the wider internet right now. And I would hope that you guys understand that.

And I also wanna take a second and tell you how fucking powerful this is, and how Patreon itself, and you being patrons, makes this moment, and a moment like this, possible. Because in the old days, we didn't have these options. We could sell content, through iTunes, or through whatever, through a publisher, sell it, and charge for it. But that's still a very public act, and you're out there flogging your wares for the general public. Or, you put shit out for free, and you're just totally naked and vulnerable on social media, where a single person, or a handful, a teeny handful of bad actors, can just undermine your work, and your moment, and your book coming out, and your album coming out. I've been there, she's been there.

So for the 16,000-plus of you who are currently supporting both of us: thank you. This exists, and our ability to put this out, and reach our people through a portal, is important, and exists because you're here, and we're so grateful. And I will speak for Erika, I know she is grateful, we are so grateful to have the kinds of communities that stick with us, and fund our work, and our lives, as we make stuff, and as we learn, and as we grow, and as we figure out what we want to create. Thank you. This is fucking awesome. And this is why our communities are so precious, because we can release this into our republic of kindness, knowing that many of you have

experienced these dark moments, and these traumas, too, and you have been there, and you will share them back with us, and we will converse.

And I also wanna tell you that Erika wanted me to share something with you. And that shortly after this conversation was recorded, she went into treatment, and she enrolled in an intensive outpatient program, and she spent a month doing that, and then she went into a six-month dialectical behaviour therapy program, where she learned how to cope with distress, and to regulate her moods. And she wants you to know that she is doing a lot better now.

And this is important, because yesterday I had a call with my whole podcast team, and someone suggested that we maybe rip it up and start again, and do a new, fresh episode with Erika, that we put out after her book, now that she's in a totally new and different place, and I was like, no! No, no! This shit that we went through in this episode is gold! Because to listen to us sitting in that moment, when she was in such agony, the same kind of agony that I have been in again and again, and to know that she made it out the other side, is honestly, I think, way more powerful.

So now, let's get to the podcast. For fuck's sake, this has been the longest intro I think I have ever recorded. Before we do it, I wanna give you a quick Erika bio. If you don't know her work, and by God, I hope all of you [sign up to support her Patreon](#) after listening to this, and I hope all of you [go and pre-order her new book](#), because that is the best thing you can do for her right now.

Erika Moen is a freelance cartoonist who has been publishing online for 20 years. She holds an illustrated storytelling self-designed degree from Pitzer College. She is the creator of the autobiographical comic series [Dar: A Super Girly Top Secret Comic Diary](#). Her sex ed comic projects include [Drawn To Sex: The Basics](#), and [Oh Joy Sex Toy](#). And I would like to add there, she's a Kickstarter genius, and she's used Kickstarter to fund her work beautifully. And the soon-to-be-released book that I've been talking about throughout this intro is called [Let's Talk About It](#). That's the name of the book! You'll hear us talk about it in this episode! And it's almost here, yay, and there's gonna be links in the Patreon post, and you can Google. Please get the book.

And again, since everyone listening to this is on Patreon, don't forget what a powerful tool this is. [Please support Erika on Patreon](#). And if you're one of Erika's patrons, [please support me](#), so that we can support each other.

And now, fucking finally, without further ado, ladies and genderpants, and genderfluid earthing beings of all sizes and shapes and orientations and everythings. Me and Erika Moen, fucking talking about it.

MUSIC BREAK - Scarlet and Gold

Amanda 14:17

Erika, thank you so much for talking with me.

Erika 14:21

Thank you for talking to me too, I've really, really been looking forward to this.

Amanda 14:26

Let's start with the big questions.

Erika 14:26

Alright.

Amanda 14:27

Why have you been looking forward to this?

Erika 14:29

Because I see what you do, I see the art that you make, and I relate very much to what appears to be your process, where you take your personal experiences, and you project it outwards, and you make it consumable for an audience, and you have an audience who is consuming it, and you... I relate to that a lot. And I look at you, and I see, it appears, from the outside, that you are thriving. And I am at a place, and I have been for several years now, where I... what is the opposite of thriving? Like, if you're going outwards, I'm going inwards.

Amanda 15:11

You're wilting.

Erika 15:13

Yeah. Well, except, it feels... I'm calcifying. It's not just like, oh, bloop. It's like, I feel like I'm turning into a rock.

Amanda 15:22

Like a defensive, hard thing.

Erika 15:24

Yeah. Like a shell. And I'm shutting down.

Amanda 15:28

Oh God.

Erika 15:28

And I feel really numb inside.

Amanda 15:32

Let's talk about it. For anyone listening who doesn't know very much about you, I've been following you on the internet for a long time, and I know your books, and I think what you do is amazing. How do you explain what you do to people?

Erika 15:47

I do comics about myself, and about the things that most people are uncomfortable to talk about, specifically sex and sexuality and gender stuff, and I turn them into really digestible, consumable, friendly comics, and I put them on the internet, and I've been doing that since I was 15 years old, and I am 35 now, turning 36, actually, in a couple weeks. So for the last 20 years of my life, I've been performing on the internet, and performing my personality, and performing, it's like I'm your internet friend, Erika.

So I got my start doing autobio comics. Throughout my 20s I did [a comic called Dar](#). It wound up being the autobiographical story about how I went from being a lesbian, who then fell in love with a man, that process, and a whole bunch of dick and fart jokes.

Amanda 16:33

Why was it called Dar?

Erika 16:34

Oh, because in my early 20s, in college, that used to be a noise I made. Instead of saying duh, I would say dar. So like, if I tripped, I would be like, 'Dar, I tripped again!'

Amanda 16:46

Was it d'oh?

Erika 16:47

Yeah, it was d'oh, but dar.

Amanda 16:48

They all start with D.

Erika 16:48

It's a good, guttural sound. And the comic was supposed to be, it wasn't a heavy exploration of my soul; some comics were, but for the most part it was supposed to be just a ridiculous snapshot of my ridiculous life, and my life is dar. Actually, the full title was Dar: A Super Girly Top Secret Autobiographical Comic Diary. Dar for short.

Amanda 17:12

If I bring your name up, most people know you for [Oh Joy Sex Toy](#).

Erika 17:14

Yeah.

Amanda 17:15

So somehow that evolved into this more educational comic series, or internet series, about very, very frank talk about sex, what it is, how we do it, the tools used.

Eric 17:28

Yep.

Amanda 17:29

How did one lead to the other?

Erika 17:30

To me, it's a really integrated, natural progression. Because in the autobio series, I did talk about the sexual misadventures I was going on, and I did talk a little bit about, hey, here's how to buy a sex toy. And before I'd done this comic, when I was still in college, I did a comic called [Girl Fuck](#). I was at the height of my lesbianity, and it was a comic that explained how, and why, women have sex with each other.

Amanda 17:59

Why would they do that, first of all?

Erika 18:01

Yeah, why would they do that?! And the whole thing like, well, if you guys are using dildos, why don't you just be with a man, what's the difference?! And so it was with my girlfriend, we would be out and about, and strangers would come up, or even friends, would come up with these really invasive, rude questions.

Amanda 18:15

Like what?

Erika 18:16

Just like, which one of you is the boy? How do you have sex? How does that work? And you're like, I have never met you before! There's the one reaction you can take, which is totally valid and totally legit, which is, how dare you ask me that?! That's so invasive, you ignorant bigot, blah blah blah blah blah. Whatever. And that's valid, and people can do that response. And I also realised people were asking these questions cos they genuinely had no clue. They really didn't know.

Amanda 18:45

I didn't know! I mean, I remember the first time I was with a woman, and I was like... I mean, I can improvise, I'm really good at improvising, but I actually... Are there things I'm supposed to know, that I'm supposed to do, if I am having sex with a woman? And am I gonna be bad with

this? And I had never had performance anxiety with sex, but all of a sudden I was like, uhh, and I was a teenager, and I was clueless, so that's legit.

Erika 19:10

No, it's totally legit!

Amanda 19:12

The cluelessness is legit.

Erika 19:13

And so I wanted to make a comic that people could read, and come with their really basic questions that are coming from a place of ignorance, and the comic would feel like it was having a conversation with the person. It's like, I am so glad you asked that! Let's go into it! I wanted to make the reader feel included in a conversation, not shamed or scolded for not having already known this.

So anyway, so I did that back in like, oh God, 2003 or something, way back then. I met a guy, which is why I had to stop calling myself a lesbian, and he told me that he'd read that comic way back in the day, and he was like, 'You should do more sex ed stuff. You have a natural ability to talk to people about these complicated subjects, and you should do more of this.' And I was like, 'Yeah, that's a great idea.'

And then ten years go by, and he keeps bringing it up, and I'm like yeah, yeah, I'll do that some day.

Amanda 20:02

So what were you doing in those intervening 10 years?

Erika 20:04

I was doing Dar, the autobio comic, and then I did [Bucko](#) with the writer Jeff Parker, and I was kind of flailing around. And after Bucko, I was like, okay. I'm ready. I'm gonna do a sex ed book. Sex ed is something that I care very passionately about, and I have for a really, really long time. I spent about a year keeping to a really strict schedule, and making a sex ed book. And then I kind of hit a wall, and I was like, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm self taught, everything I know is from [scarleteen.com](#) and Wikipedia and Planned Parenthood.

Amanda 20:37

And your own experience.

Erika 20:38

And my own experience, which, that's just, I only have my own experience, I don't have anybody else's experience, so it's very limited. I kind of reached a point where I was like, I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what I'm doing with my career. And as a comic artist, I was

not earning much money, and my husband was the breadwinner. I was contributing, but he was carrying the load, and he was really supportive, and he believed in my work, and said, do this, do this. But there's a lot of, I don't know if this will ever pay off, blah blah blah.

So then I went on a reality TV show, as you do, called [Strip Search](#). It was a reality show about cartoonists, and we were all competing with each other, living in a mansion, doing little...

Amanda 21:17

I didn't know this dark chapter of your history.

Erika 21:21

Well, it was actually a really light chapter! Because we all went in expecting, okay, it's a reality TV show, so it's probably gonna be high drama, and negative. And so all of us twelve cartoonists were like, okay, well I know how this goes, so I'm gonna be the nice one. So you had this house of twelve people being really nice and friendly, and just excited to talk to other people, and it wound up being this big friendly fest.

But at the end of it, there's a man named Robert Khoo, who was the manager business guy behind [Penny Arcade](#), which is the most successful webcomic that's ever existed, the guys are millionaires, and it's because Robert Khoo took their creativity, and monetised it. And I got to go have a sit-down talk with Robert Khoo, and I was like, I don't know what to do, I don't know how to support myself in this career, I don't know what I'm doing, blah blah blah blah, what should I do? And he said, 'Well what does your audience want from you?' and I said 'They want dick and vagina comics.' And he said, 'Then you should give that to them.'

And so I came out of that conversation, and I came back to my husband, and I was like, 'Baby! Guess what!'

Amanda 22:25

He said what you've been saying for ten years!

Erika 22:27

Exactly, and he was like, 'Oh my God, are you fucking kidding me?' He was so frustrated. But sometimes you have to hear it from somebody you're not married to!

Amanda 22:34

Yeah, totally.

Erika 22:35

And so, from there, I shifted focus from doing this sex ed book, to, I'm gonna do it as a webcomic, and it's gonna be short little vignettes, and it's not just sex ed. It's sex toy reviews, and it's, we went to a kink club, and it's just anything basically that has to do with the world of

sex, sexuality, gender, feelings. And it's not just me. It is also, we hire so many guest artists to come in, and talk about their experiences, and get these other perspectives.

Amanda 23:08

Hold on, so just to clarify, so when you have guest artists come in, they are guest artists who draw in your platform space, or they're guest artists who share their story with you, and you then draw their story? Or both?

Erika 23:23

Oh, for the most part, we have done a little bit where I drew other people's stories, but right now, the last several years, we're focusing just on other people who come into our space, and they write and draw their own story.

Amanda 23:36

And you publish it.

Erika 23:37

And we publish it. And we pay for it. Matt and I, Matt's my husband, and we work full time on this, and we've both been freelancers for many, many years, and so we really understand the importance of paying people for their work, and paying them promptly.

Amanda 23:58

Well, and sharing your platform with other voices.

Erika 24:02

Yeah.

Amanda 24:03

Which is really cool that you can do that.

Erika 24:06

It's a real honour actually, cos we've been able to publish, there's some cartoonists who have an established career, and they can't touch sexy stuff, and they will come on and use our platform under a pseudonym, and they still get to do the sexy stuff, talk about some personal deep shit, and they've got their pen name, and the work still gets out there, they still get to share it, and it's not gonna show up in their Google results.

Amanda 24:32

Yeah, wow. And so, let's finish with this story, and then I'm gonna come back and ask you some questions, cos I have some burning curiosities about how some of this works. So you were working on a book.

Erika 24:47

Right! And it was like a textbook, basically. It was gonna be a heavily illustrated, with some comics in there, textbook of sex ed. And put that on pause, did a reality TV show, had this talk with Robert Khoo where he told me what my husband had been telling me for ten years, and I came back, and it's like, okay. We're gonna do this. And it wasn't just me. This was very much my husband, Matt, and me, together, sat down, and at first it was just my name on it in the beginning, cos Matt still had his other job, and it's like, keep the focus on you, Erika, nobody wants a white cis man in this realm. So it was presented as just my project, but behind the scenes, he co-writes the strips, he edits them, and he now, for the last several years, has been colouring them. So we launched with sex toy reviews, and little adventure comics, and then the sex ed as well.

Amanda 25:47

And when you say launched, where? How? What?

Erika 25:50

On the internet.

Amanda 25:51

Okay.

Erika 25:52

2013, we launched ohjoysexttoy.com and just started putting comics up once a week. And they're multi-page comics. So they're formatted to go into a book, cos the plan was always these will be collected in books. I'm a huge book fan, I just love books, and they won't crash. So they're formatted for books, which meant that on the internet, we would put these three to five page comics stitched together as one long scroll, so you just scroll and scroll and scroll through this long-ass comic. And it took off immediately. We were not expecting that.

Amanda 26:37

And so if I can ask you a dorky internet question...

Erika 26:38

Yeah yeah yeah.

Amanda 26:38

This is 2013, right?

Erika 26:40

Yeah.

Amanda 26:41

So, how did people find your comic? Were you cross-posting to all sorts of social media? Did people subscribe? Did you have a newsletter? Did people get emails? How did people, human being people, wind up on that website?

Erika 26:59

Well, it started out with just me going onto social media and saying, 'Guess what! Launched a new comic, go check it out, here's a link!'

Amanda 27:07

Yeah.

Erika 27:08

And from there, there's my already inbuilt audience, the people who had been around since the Dar days, and who had followed my work that whole time. And they then would share it on their social media, and that's where it spread like wildfire.

Amanda 27:23

Yeah. Cos this is now in the day of Twitter and Facebook.

Erika 27:26

Yep, yep. And back when it was still fun. Back when it was still a conversation. Cos you just go on Twitter and you're like, let's make jokes! Let's talk to each other! Oh, I'm so excited to meet you! So it was a really friendly environment.

Amanda 27:37

I remember those days!

Erika 27:38

I know, wasn't that nice?!

Amanda 27:40

Ye Olde Twitter.

Erika 27:43

And nobody else was doing a comic like this. As far as I know, we made the first sex ed, definitely the first sex toy review comic. And it was so novel and new, and such a different approach, that people shared the link, and it just spread.

MUSIC BREAK - Look At All The Women In The Street

Amanda 28:15

And so at that point, you were doing this, or starting to do this, basically full time?

Erika 28:20

Yeah, so I was definitely doing this full time. And because my husband was willing to take on the financial load, because he believed in what I could do, I had been an artist full time for many years at that point. And like I said, I was contributing! Just, you know...

Amanda 28:37

So, was any of that, you say it spread like wildfire, did you make any money?

Erika 28:43

Yes. Oh, here's the unique thing about doing sex toy reviews, or any product review, actually. There's this thing called affiliate plans, where you affiliate yourself with certain online stores, they give you this code, and when you say, 'Hey guys, I reviewed this product...'

Amanda 29:00

You get a cut.

Erika 29:01

You get a cut, if somebody clicks that link, and they make a purchase, and not even if it's just that toy, if they go to that website, and they've clicked your link, and they're like, 'That toy's not for me, but, ooh, what else?'

Amanda 29:12

I'm here and I'm shopping.

Erika 29:13

I'm here and I'm shopping.

Amanda 29:14

I'm spending my clams.

Erika 29:15

Yep. And whatever I buy here, I would get a cut of that. And man, okay, back in the day when Amazon was trying to get people to get used to affiliate plans, they paid so well back in the day. It was amazing. And then once they had enough people doing it, they were like, 'okay guys, now it's peanuts!' And you're like... You can't even be mad, cos it's Amazon, you knew they were gonna fuck you at some point.

Amanda 29:38

Yeah, I remember this era.

Erika 29:40

Oh yeah?

Amanda 29:40

Cos I had friends who did it, and it was like... the affiliate link still worked if someone goes onto Amazon and decides...

Erika 29:48

I'm gonna buy a computer.

Amanda 29:49

Spontaneously to buy a computer or a refrigerator.

Erika 29:52

Oh yep. Yeah, we had people do that. Thank you!

Amanda 29:56

So that's how it was bringing in money?

Erika 29:58

It was a lot of different things. Because I had been doing web comics for probably a decade or something at that point, so I'd been self-publishing my books up until that point, so I knew how to merchandise, we had ads on the site, just all the standard, typical ways that you monetise.

Amanda 30:19

And again, self-publishing, I remember one of the first things that I knew about you is that you had [Kickstarted a book](#). What year was that?

Erika 30:27

Uh, Kickstarting the book, that probably would have been maybe 2014, I think? But I had been self-publishing before Kickstarter existed.

Amanda 30:34

And just selling the books straight off your website to your crowd?

Erika 30:36

Yep. And at comic conventions. So yeah, I remember the days where you had to save that money first. Not even taking pre-orders, you just had to...

Amanda 30:44

Right, you just had to have enough money to make the books, so you could sell them.

Erika 30:48

And then hope that people would buy them afterwards.

Amanda 30:49

And guess vaguely how many you might sell, and not wind up with 5,000 of them in your garage. I went through the same thing with record albums, it's a real pain in the ass.

Erika 30:59

It was fun at the time though, it was such an adventure. Like everything, it was hard, but it was such an adventure back then.

Amanda 31:09

Back then?

Erika 31:10

Back then, back in the old days.

Amanda 31:11

You make it sound so sad!

Erika 31:13

Oh now, now I'm 35, and I'm tired, and I'm burned out.

Amanda 31:19

So maybe we should talk about that. So that brings us to the present day, Oh Joy Sex Toy, you've now done more than one Oh Joy Sex Toy book?

Erika 31:29

Yes, we have done lots.

Amanda 31:32

Have they also broken the barrier and gone on to sell in brick and mortar bookstores?

Erika 31:39

Oh yeah, yeah.

Amanda 31:40

So you can walk into, I mean certainly I would assume that the cool sexuality stores and boutiques carry these books, but can you walk into an average indie bookstore and get one of your books?

Erika 31:53

Yeah.

Amanda 31:54

So you've got distributors, and it's the real deal.

Erika 31:55

Yeah, no, we're profesh now. It's weird, because I still have the mindset that Matt and I are these little teeny tiny scrappers, and we're just scrapping by, and it's like, no, sweetheart, you are internationally distributed. France, Glénat, the French comic publisher, they bought the translation rights. My book is translated into French, and it is in France! I'm not the little tiny scrapper any more.

Amanda 32:27

But inside you are!

Erika 32:29

Inside I am, though!

Amanda 32:30

And me too!

Erika 32:31

Right?!

Amanda 32:32

So listen, just so I can throw him into the mix here, because I feel like he's sort of sitting here as a ghost, because Neil Gaiman, my husband, is an obvious venn diagram of my world, your world, comics... He still feels like that. I watch it all the time.

Erika 32:48

I believe it.

Amanda 32:49

I watch it all the time, he still feels like a scared 23 year old.

Erika 32:52

Yup.

Amanda 32:53

Are they actually gonna like this? And are they gonna take it all away? And am I really gonna get paid?

Erika 32:59

Oh yeah.

Amanda 33:00

It's very hard to get rid of scarcity mentality, especially if you've been DIY for a long time.

Erika 33:04

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Amanda 33:07

And you're doing something weird.

Erika 33:08

Doing something weird, and you've been doing it yourself for so long, and I very much completely see myself as the teeny tiny scrapper. And it's been very jarring to realise that other people view me as 'The Man'. I am the establishment from which you rebel now, to get your voice, establish who you are, 'I am NOT Oh Joy Sex Toy, I am NOT Erika Moen!' it's like, woah, woah!

Amanda 33:39

Yeah, when did this happen to me?

Erika 33:40

What?!

Amanda 33:41

So let me ask you...

Erika 33:42

There's room for all of us!

Amanda 33:43

Something in you was inspired to, and got the idea to, take pen to paper, and not just do, like, Garfield, Far Side. Something inspired you to have the idea to take your own experiences, and put them on the page. When you look back at your influences, which I'm sure you've done 8 million times, because any time you're interviewed... This isn't even so much about influences in the comic world. But who did you see, any gender, but maybe particularly female, discussing the sorts of things that you're discussing. Who did you see in the landscape when you were a kid and a teenager, who even planted the idea in you that it was a possibility to take your own fucked up feelings, and your own weird experiences and questions and stumblings, Dar is literally, you were like, let's look at this, let's take this stumbling nature of humanity and put it on the page. Who had you seen do that in any way, that sort of opened the door for you to peek in and say, 'I'm gonna do this in my way, I'm gonna do this the Erika way'?

Erika 34:56

My dad had been really into underground comics in the 70s, and he had some big collected books of comics from that time. And there was a book called Titters. And it was an anthology of female humourists, I think is what it was called. Cos it wasn't just comics, but there were some comics in there. And there were some women in there talking about like, her dad had a boil on

the back of his neck, and another woman was talking about having sex on her period, and I was disgusted, but I kept coming back to it. Oh, and somebody else had done a story about, you know the kids book Eloise?

Amanda 35:34

Oh yeah. I'm currently reading it to my child.

Erika 35:36

Aw! Well, when your child is older, and not reading with mom, somebody did a follow-up to Eloise...

Amanda 35:43

Oh no...

Erika 35:44

Eloise in her 20s or 30s, and she's still living in the hotel, and she is just a disaster.

Amanda 35:51

Of course. Now there's needles and condoms everywhere.

Erika 35:52

Actually, yes! And it was these women being disgusting. And I was repulsed, and I was compelled, and as I started to get older, and my body was changing, I found a lot of humour in this stuff. And my dad also had a really offbeat sense of humour. Lot of fart jokes growing up. People ask, 'Why did you decide to do comics? Why did you decide to do this?' And it's like, there was no decision. Something would happen, I'd be like huh, that was funny, and I would just turn it into a comic. It was a natural process. And I think it's probably like tweeting today. People are like, 'Oh, I thought something. Tip-tap-tip-tap. Send!' That was my thought process back then.

Amanda 36:38

The first comic I ever saw like that, that kind of pried my brain open into, oh, comics can be something else, other than the boring shit that is in the Boston Globe in the back pages, and nothing against Garfield, but just like... what's up, Garfield?... was Julie Doucet. I had a boyfriend when I was like, 15 to 17, who had a crazy underground comic friend, who had a basement full of comics. He actually lived in his parents' basement, surrounded by comics.

Erika 37:14

The dream!

Amanda 37:15

And his pet snakes.

Erika 37:15

Oh God!

Amanda 37:16

And we would go over to Eugene's house, and Eugene was just like a comic nerd. And he looked at me, and things were very awkward, and I was a girl, but he was like, 'I think you'll like this.' And he handed me [Dirty Plotte by Julie Doucet](#), and I just remember thinking, eh, I don't really like comics, I don't really do comics. But I remember opening those comics up and going, oh my God, you're allowed to do *this?! You're allowed to say...* Julie Doucet just drawing her life, surrounded by tampons and cigarettes and confusion and anger, and her weird battle with her own sexuality, whatever it was, and I was just like, oh! You can do that! I didn't know you could do that! I just thought there was Garfield, and The Far Side.

In popular culture, do you see any books you were reading, music you were listening to, TV that you saw, movies that you saw, can you think of anything else that was sort of in the environment, that might have given you permission to tell it like it was?

Erika 38:22

I do have an influence, and I feel really nervous about saying it out loud, cos then people will be like, 'Oh, Erika made Dar because of this influence, how dare she!'

Amanda 38:33

How dar she.

Erika 38:34

How dar she. I read The Diary of Anne Frank when I was about 10 years old, and I was like, oh shit. This is a girl who lived, and wrote down her thoughts and feelings...

Amanda 38:45

So honestly.

Erika 38:47

So honestly. Her life was worth documenting, and people are reading it decades and decades later, and I was like, hey, I'm a 10 year old girl!

Amanda 38:57

Wow.

Erika 38:58

I can write my diary! It feels very disrespectful...

Amanda 39:02

No, I don't think you should even say that it's disrespectful, because that's just really powerful. That's a little girl, seeing another girl sharing her truth.

Erika 39:14

And it being worth reading.

Amanda 39:16

Right.

Erika 39:17

Which is not to say that I think everything I write is worth reading, and obviously I don't have any equivalence to Anne Frank and what she went through, so...

Amanda 39:27

You don't need to get all apologetic. I mean, I know where you're going in your head, but that's totally fair, and legit. That's why a book like Anne Frank is so powerful, is it's not only a book about the Holocaust.

Erika 39:42

It's not just a tragedy.

Amanda 39:44

The reason that that book endures is because 10-year-old you saw her voice, her truth. And her ability to just speak really frankly about her feelings, and the world around her. To say we're not allowed to use that book as an influence because of its associations with tragedy actually does the book a disservice, and her a disservice, and her life a disservice.

Erika 40:07

That's the earliest one I remember, and then throughout the rest of my life, I have always been so drawn to memoir. And all kinds of memoir, and people just being really raw, and honest, and being fallible and vulnerable, and fucking up. And I just, I love messy humans! And I love reading about messy humans!

Amanda 40:29

Congratulations, because guess what? You wound up on a planet full of seven billion of them. When you were doing these Kickstarters, and gathering capital to be able to print these books and send them out, how many people were backing your Kickstarters?

Erika 40:46

The first one, I think we had 1,000-and-change, maybe like 1,500? Which just absolutely, completely blew us away. And so then we did four books of just collecting Oh Joy Sex Toy as an anthology, so one year's worth of comics would be one book. So we did four books that way. Kickstarted all of them. And each subsequent one, the number would go down. Because the

very first one, we were like, oh yeah, let's join together! It's a brand new thing! Gotta show support! And then the second one, they're like, well, I got the first one... I already backed her, it's fine! And then the third one, fourth one, blah blah blah. Which is fine, it wasn't like, ahh, popularity dropping! It was just like, well yeah, you guys already got a couple books already.

Amanda 41:27

Well, also, novelty dropping.

Erika 41:29

Novelty dropping. And we were doing one a year.

Amanda 41:31

That's a lot.

Erika 41:32

Which is a lot. And these are like, 200, 300 page books? It was like, oh, I'll catch it next time. Or, I already got the first two. Which is, I totally understand that.

And then our last one that we just did, instead of doing another anthology collection, we collected just the sex ed comics, and did one book of just, this is how body parts fit together. This is how you have a threesome. This is how you do this and that. And we did that. And we got more backers than the first Kickstarter, which shocked us. It was much closer to 2,000 than any of the other ones.

Amanda 42:13

That's great.

Erika 42:14

It was really overwhelming.

MUSIC BREAK - I Don't Have This Shit Figured Out

Amanda 42:22

You're currently working on a book that is not a crowdfunded book.

Erika 42:25

We're working on two books simultaneously. One is a crowdfunded book, and the other is a traditional publisher. I have to stop myself from saying a real publisher.

Amanda 42:34

Yeah, it's all real. So tell me about both of them.

Erika 42:37

Okay. Well, starting with the next Kickstarter one, so we are now doing a series of three books, called Drawn To Sex. That was the sex ed one that we Kickstarted last year, that was volume one of it, and that was called [The Basics](#), and it's just the basics of sex ed. The second book is gonna be [Drawn To Sex: Health](#). And that's gonna talk about all the ways your body can explode. All the STIs you can pick up, and a lot of it's like, don't freak out. Everybody gets STIs. It's not a death sentence, it's not the end of your sex life, and here's how you deal with it. So talking about a lot of the health aspects of being sexually active.

And then the third book is gonna be the weird shit. So we have all these guest comics about kinks and crazy stuff, and so it'll be a collection of all that good stuff.

Amanda 43:23

Masters level.

Erika 43:24

Yeah, there we go. The basics, health, the masters level. Those are being crowdfunded, while we have a really interesting affiliation with the publisher Oni Press, and specifically their adult imprint, called Limerence Press, and they are the ones doing our distribution. So we crowdfund, and we pay for the print run, and they...

Amanda 43:49

And then you can kind of give it off to the distributor, and into the real world.

Erika 43:52

Yeah, and then we give those files to Oni, and they produce the book, and we do our own shipment to the people who backed on the Kickstarter, but they get it into bookstores, and they get it into libraries.

Amanda 44:03

So this is not unlike how I have been putting out my own music, which is I've got my core crowd, but I also want someone... Yeah! And I also want someone in a record store to be able to find, and maybe discover, a new Amanda record. So I do both. But I don't wanna fully get in bed with the distributor label and not have control over my work.

Erika 44:30

This isn't a secret, there's no money in comics, in the comics industry. The money that you get for an advance in the comics industry, unless you're working with Marvel or DC, and doing a superhero comic for them, which you will not own, that is work for hire, the advances that most comic publishers can pay is nothing. I think at this point you wouldn't even be able to pay your rent in Portland on an advance for a book that takes a year to produce. Which is not like, oh, the evil publishers are screwing us over!

Amanda 45:00

No, it's just the...

Erika 45:01

They don't have that money.

Amanda 45:02

It's just a supply and demand, and where the money comes from.

Erika 45:05

But Kickstarting, we make our advance. It's more of a retroactive, I guess. We do all the work, and then we get paid for it through Kickstarter, and then we release the book. And so, rather than a publisher paying in advance, we pay ourselves the advance.

Amanda 45:20

What's the other book that you're working on with the "real" publisher?

Erika 45:25

That would be Random House Graphic. So Random House Graphic is a brand new imprint from Random House, and it is their graphic novel line. And we are doing a book that is specifically geared for teenagers, for how to talk and think about sex. So it's sort of like, the second book you would get in your sex education education. So the first book would be, here's how you roll on a condom, banana on condom, and here's an STI, so you get that lesson. And then this book is like, okay, so you know that. How do you get to the point at which you need to use a condom? How do you go from, 'I am attracted to this person,' to how do you talk to that person about consent? If you consent to something and then you're like, oh, actually I'm not enjoying this, how do you tell that person, hey, this isn't working for me? And as that person getting that message, how do you be cool about that? How do you not take that as a rejection?

Amanda 46:20

How do you deal with penises not getting hard?

Erika 46:22

Actually, yes, yep, we're just working on a chapter about that.

Amanda 46:27

Hooray!

Erika 46:28

So it's basically like, how to talk about sex, to yourself, and to your potential partners. And it's also, it's not just like, now go fuck, teenagers! It's like, it's totally okay to not do anything you're not ready to do, or you're not comfortable to do, and if you never feel comfortable with this stuff, that is okay, and there are other people like you, and if you don't wanna bump your genitals

against somebody, you will find other people like you as well, and you can have a loving, fulfilling relationship with them, if you want. Sex is not required for love, and companionship.

Amanda 47:02

Ahhh, you're making me cry!

Erika 47:05

And also, sex is not just a penis going in a vagina. Sex is sexual intimacy, and you can have that from phone sex, where you're not even touching each other, you can have that from mutual masturbation, where you're on opposite sides of the room, and you're jerking it, and flicking it, and I count that as being sexually intimate with somebody. So just letting teens know, they have a lot of options!

Amanda 47:27

Yeah. One of the things that I had been thinking about a lot on this tour, and with this record, is, I was in Lexington, Massachusetts, where we had "the best school system in the country."

Erika 47:38

Ooh!

Amanda 47:39

And it was also this thing that was held over our head all the time, like, we're in the best schools in America! And I just think about the way I was and wasn't educated about sex, and I'm just really appalled at what I didn't know.

Erika 47:54

Oh, yeah.

Amanda 47:55

Oh my God. It was so lacking in reality, and nuance, and there was no emotion involved, it was just like, a bunch of worksheets about, you can get pregnant. You're gonna have a period. You have to use a condom. Lists of things, with a bored gym teacher just going through these multiple choice tests of like, name four forms of birth control. It was just really, first of all, very boring, and also, really, just really anemic. Lacking in the real information that...

Erika 48:32

Human connection.

Amanda 48:33

That I needed. Because at 15, I was having sex! And these felt like two totally different worlds, the kind of sex that I was having, with the people I was having it with, and then the stuff that I was learning in Life Skills, just seemed unrelated.

Erika 48:47

Exactly.

Amanda 48:48

It was crazy.

Erika 48:49

Yeah. So Oh Joy Sex Toy, my husband and I are the narrators of that comic, we're literally...

Amanda 48:54

In it.

Erika 48:54

In the comic. And we really play up being goofy, and making bad dad jokes, on purpose, because we feel like if we can make the audience be disarmed by our goofiness, it makes it easier to learn about challenging topics.

The book that we're doing for Random House Graphic, this book that's for teens, we are not in it, and there are not goofy dad jokes in it. What we do is we've created a cast of teens in the book, from a bunch of different backgrounds, different scenarios, and they find themselves in a situation, and they'll be like, 'I don't know what to do about this! I'm real confused!' And then we'll have another teen, or trusted older sister or something, come along and be like, in a really sincere way, 'Hey, I have some experience with that, let me tell you what worked for me.' And so we've tried to make a book that's very...

Amanda 49:45

Conversational.

Erika 49:46

Conversational. It's super conversational.

Amanda 49:49

That's the way information is usually better passed, from one human being to another, not on a worksheet.

Erika 49:57

Yeah, with a diagram. You look at a diagram of a uterus... That's not actually what it... I mean, I know that is what it looks like, but if you were to...

Amanda 50:07

We never vivisect ourselves!

Erika 50:08

Right?! And it's like, we're all squishy and wet, we're not this clean outline that's perfectly symmetrical.

Amanda 50:16

Does that book have a title?

Erika 50:17

Yes, it's called [Let's Talk About It](#). It'll probably be coming out either real late 2021, probably more like 2022-ish.

Amanda 50:26

So a big, long, huge project that you're working on?

Erika 50:28

Yes.

Amanda 50:29

Wow.

Erika 50:29

Matt and I are gunning to wrap up our work on it by December this year. It's been a really intense experience, working on two books at the same time, and also this book, because it's such a different flavour than what we've been doing for the last six years.

Amanda 50:46

Is that sort of helpful, to bounce back and forth between these two worlds, and sometimes work on one, and sometimes work on another, because one can get boring?

Erika 50:57

Yes and no. What we have been doing is we do one week on Oh Joy Sex Toy, we do the next week on Let's Talk About It, and we keep alternating like that. And I was actually feeling, recently I said, 'Matt, we need to switch this up, because I'm feeling a bit of whiplash.' So now we're trying to do a thing of two weeks on Oh Joy, and two weeks on Let's Talk About It, and we've just barely started that, and it's working better for me. Cos it lets me get into my groove, and then I can stay in my groove for another week.

Amanda 51:31

So I'm really curious about this, because I just don't know, and I wanna know, and I have my own process, I'm a songwriter, I have a weird relationship with space, I can't write songs at home, I have to borrow or rent other people's studios, cos I really need to get away from the domestic world that I've built with Neil, and he has his own weird process, where he likes to edit in a certain environment, and write in a certain environment. Where do you literally work?

Erika 52:01

Okay. Well, because there's two of us, it's a two-pronged thing. So, Matt, for the most part, he's really taken the lead on doing a lot of the writing, because, like I said, the last few years, I've really burnt out, and writing the initial scripts has become really, really hard for me. So Matt has an office in our house. He taps out the first draft of the script, whether it's for Let's Talk About It or it's for Oh Joy Sex Toy.

And then I have an office downtown, at Helioscope, which is my comic book studio, it's the oldest and largest comics studio in the English-speaking world, I believe is our tagline. And I've been renting space there for about a decade or more, at this point. And I go there, and Matt texts me over the script that he's written, and then from my studio space there, where I've got lots of people who are in the studio with me, they are also working on comics. We have a couple writers, but mostly it's people doing the visual stuff, mostly it's people doing the drawing stuff, we have some flatters, people who put down the initial flat layer of colour before it goes to the colourist, who does the fancy colouring. And we have people working across the entire spectrum of comics. We've got superhero stuff, we've got sex education stuff, we've got young adult fiction stuff. Everything.

So I'm there, with these people, who I love and care about, and they are my second family. And I will read Matt's script, and either I'll edit it, or I'll just completely rewrite it. And then from there, I work all digitally at this point, and I take the text from the script, and I plonk it into a page template I have for our comic pages. From there, I start laying out the whole comic, and I do little stick figures, and I turn those into more refined drawings, and then I...

Amanda 53:49

What utensil are you using, onto what surface?

Erika 53:53

Right. I am working on a Cintiq, it's like a computer monitor that you can draw on.

Amanda 53:58

It's like a big iPad, kind of?

Erika 53:59

Yeah, yeah.

Amanda 54:00

What software do you use?

Erika 54:01

Okay, so for all the layout and text placement, I use Photoshop. And then for the actual final line work, I use Clip Studio Pro, cos it just has better line quality than Photoshop does for drawing.

Amanda 54:16

Cool, we're going deep nerd here for the people who are into comics and making them.

One thing I'd love to mention to people, because we just had dinner last night, and I now know this, but Matt is a Brit.

Erika 54:30

Yeah.

Amanda 54:31

We have this in common.

Erika 54:34

Yes. He's a silver Brit!

Amanda 54:36

How is that going for you?

Erika 54:37

Oh, I love it.

Amanda 54:38

Aww! Where exactly is he from?

Erika 54:39

Oh my God, he's from all over, actually. He was not born in London, but I think it was close to London, and then he grew up in the south of England, in Kent area, and then he went to university up in the north, in Teesside!

Amanda 54:54

Oh, it sounds so British, darling. Teesside. Of course. Is it in North Teesside or South Teesside?

Erika 55:00

Matt told me- okay, so when we very first met, and mind you, we met young, and we met because of my comics, cos he was a reader of my comics.

Amanda 55:06

Aww!

Erika 55:07

I know, right?!

Amanda 55:08

You fucked a fan!

Erika 55:09

The one time! The one time I fucked a fan, I married him!

Amanda 455:14

That's really sweet, though!

Erika 55:15

I did it wrong! You're supposed to...

Amanda 55:17

No, you did it right. You won.

Erika 55:19

Okay. I mean, I guess I've married my best friend, we've spent a lifetime together, ugh.

Amanda 55:24

That's pretty great, though.

Erika 55:25

No, he's my favourite person. And I stopped being a lesbian for him, so you know...

Amanda 55:29

Have you guys had to deal with the cultural collision of American person meets British person, and oh, you speak the same language, so of course you're the same, and oh my God, the horror?

Erika 55:41

Yeah.

Amanda 55:43

Cos Neil and I have been really struggling with that, for the ten years we've been together. I have had to learn how to speak British, in a way that I was not expecting to. Even just phrases that would be completely misunderstood, and massive miscommunications, and fallout from this is the way British people say it and do it, and this is the way American people say it and do it, has been rough for us at certain moments. You're looking at me like I'm crazy, like this has never happened to you.

Erika 56:12

No, we will have things where he'll say something like, 'Oh, that really threw a spanner in the works,' and I'm like...

Amanda 56:18

What does that even mean?!

Erika 56:19

What does that even mean?! There's some cultural differences that pop up. But for the most part, we're a really good team. We've just always really been on the same page about a lot of stuff.

Amanda 56:32

Weh-weh...

Erika 56:34

Hey, I'm the comic, bitch! And partly I think that's also because Matt, his mom is 100% French, and his dad is 100% Australian, and they met in England

Amanda 56:46

Oh, so he's not pure Brit.

Erika 56:48

Exactly. Like, his entire life, he didn't identify as being British.

Amanda 56:51

As a Brit.

Erika 56:52

He actually only officially became a British citizen two years ago, living in America.

Amanda 56:58

Wow. Weird.

Erika 57:00

That was because Trump got elected, and he was like, oh, fuck.

Amanda 57:02

I'm gonna get that passport.

Erika 57:05

Yep. But his whole life, he had a French and Australian passport.

Amanda 57:07

Wow.

Erika 57:08

And in his little British schools that he'd go to, they would make fun of his accent, and so he never felt like a British guy. He never really felt like he really had...

Amanda 57:18

Belonged to the empire?

Erika 57:19

Never really had a country base, where he really, truly belonged. And so I wonder if that's part of why we've been able to adapt to each other so well.

MUSIC BREAK - You'd Think I'd Shot Their Children

Amanda 57:30

Hey there, Amanda. Just a note, at this point in the conversation, Erika and I talked about some personal back-story history stuff that creates a better context for what she talks about next, but she's asked us to omit it, just FYI. What's important to know as you listen is that the hate she was receiving online was triggering a very deep, old trauma. And that's all you need to know.

MUSIC BREAK - You'd Think I'd Shot Their Children

Amanda 58:05

I wanna get back to what you seemed to be hinting at at the beginning, which is that things sound like they might be kind of hard right now.

Erika 58:16

Yup.

Amanda 58:17

Why are they hard?

Erika 58:19

I have literally been performing and putting comics about my life on the internet since I was 15 years old. I'm turning 36 this month. And... I have given a lot of myself publicly, without realising that there would be consequences for that. And I feel real tapped out, and real drained, and real shut down.

Amanda 58:50

What kinds of consequences?

Erika 58:52

Uh... Just, when you present yourself to the world, not everybody's gonna like you.

Amanda 59:04

I don't know anything about that.

Erika 59:06

I don't think you would know anything about this. Yeah. And also, the more attention you get, the more... my friend told me a saying, the tallest poppy gets cut down.

Amanda 59:21

Oh yeah. That's an Australian-ism, they all talk about it. Tall poppy syndrome.

Erika 59:27

Yep.

Amanda 59:28

Especially when you achieve success.

Erika 59:31

Yep. And especially if you don't realise you're the tall poppy! You think you're in the poppy field! You're like, oh look at all us poppies together, all growing together! And then the poppies are like, oho, bitch.

Amanda 59:41

You know, I have another great word for this, or term for this that just came into my life, thankfully, two days ago, because of Storm Large, I'm staying at Storm's house right now. She's this great Portland musician, and she said, it's the bucket of crabs.

Erika 59:56

Yeah!

Amanda 59:57

I said, what's that? She said, 'You're from New England! Bucket of crabs!' I was like, nope.

So apparently, if you put a bunch of crabs in a bucket on the beach, none of them will escape, because the ones at the bottom will just cling to the ones above them, and so on and so forth, so they'll all just keep each other trapped in the fucking bucket, and I'm like, that sounds just like the Boston music scene!

Erika 60:18

Yeah, apply that to any niche interest scene.

Amanda 60:24

First of all, as an artist who makes art out of yourself, I can really relate. And you and I had different experiences, because you're about a decade younger than I am, and when I made my songs as a teenager, that were just as direct... I mean, it's funny. My music got more direct as I

got older. When I was a teenager, I was more of a goth, and everything was just soaked in metaphor. But I didn't really, there was no access point, there was no way, there was no internet, so there was no way to throw my music up on the internet and see what people thought. And maybe that was a good thing, because I incubated and gestated in private, very scared, I was very, very, very, very scared to share my songs with people. Scared in a way it would be hard to imagine, because now I'm Amanda Palmer and I love to share. I was terrified, because the music was so personal, and so just about me, my fears, my insecurities, my sexual abuse story, this, this, this, this. And even if it had a couple layers of metaphor, it was pretty obvious what I was going through. And the idea of playing that song for someone, playing a song like [Girl Anachronism](#), or [Half Jack](#), or [Slide](#), or all of that material that's on [the first Dresden Dolls record](#), if someone judged that material, and deemed that song not a good song, it was just an absolute value judgement about my personhood. If they didn't like Half Jack, they just didn't like me.

Erika 62:13

Yeah.

Amanda 62:15

And I didn't have a lot of fortitude in my early-mid-20s. And I talked about this in my stage show, but a big part of what made all of that possible was getting in a band with a guy, especially he was a guy who had been a punk rock drummer, and was like, no! We can do this! You can do this! You can share your songs with people! I'll make really loud drumming sounds that are really overpowering, while you sing these words to people, and we'll do it together! And Brian, the drummer of the Dresden Dolls, really lifted me out of the cloud of insecurity that I was in.

But then I had to deal with people not liking my band. People not liking my songs. And to me, the immediate translation, people not liking me. As I'm sure you have experienced, there was a cost benefit analysis that I was constantly rotating in my head, going, well, all these people seem to hate me, and hate my band, and are telling me that I'm a narcissistic, gross, evil, talentless, fat, hairy, unattractive, unfuckable, disgusting human being, whose microphone should be taken away because we don't wanna hear what she has to say. And on the other hand, we had fans, just like you did, and people who were like, oh, I really relate! I really relate to that song by the Dresden Dolls, you helped me through my rape, you helped me deal with my friend's suicide, you helped me from committing suicide, thank you! And I was constantly looking at these two realms of people really hating me and hating what I did for whatever reason, and then people over here saying no, I really wanna hear what you have to say! You're helping me. Your art, your work, keep going, you're helping me, the thing that you're doing is helping me. Thank you. Will you do more? Can I give you more money so you can do more things, so you can help more people?

And a lot of my life, especially in my 20s and 30s, was just about going in between those two universes, because I couldn't go on the fucking internet without hearing both of those people really loudly. The people who hated me and didn't want me to do my thing, and the people who

really liked me, and seemed to wanna do my thing. And sometimes, in a single day, it would just be deafeningly loud for both sides. My Kickstarter exploded, and I was like, look at all these people who wanna support me! Who wanna hear what I have to say, who want my art to be in the world! And simultaneously, I couldn't enjoy that without lots of other people being like, she doesn't deserve that, you don't deserve that! Why is Amanda Palmer doing that? Fuck her, this is ridiculous. She's giving musicians a bad name, why is she even crowdfunding? That's greedy, that's selfish, that's narcissistic, she's stealing money from her fans.

When I take the long view, it's almost always been in balance. For as many people appreciate what I'm doing, and relate, and wanna hear it, and have an actual, real, emotional response to my work or whatever, there are just as many people on the other side of the fence, hocking stones. And sometimes, the balance is way off, and it feels like everyone today just hates me, and doesn't wanna hear what I have to say, and is trying to cancel me, and shut me down. And then there are some days where, oh, there's no trolls today. What a fine day outside!

This work, and having to go back and forth between those two universes, and defend yourself, and explain yourself, and deal with it, and read the evil tweets, and the days where it just feels like everyone who's a feminist just wants to cancel Amanda Palmer, whatever, that's part of the job. And I was like, I didn't know that was gonna be my job! I didn't want that to be my job! I just wanted to be a musician!

Erika 66:25

Yep. I had a different experience sharing my work on the internet originally, as a 15-year-old. And that was, I would put up these comics that were like, hey, here's my life, doo-do-doo-do-doo. I'm of the first generation of teenagers that were on the internet. Cos this is the late 90s, early 2000s. I would post my things on the internet, onto forums that I was a member of, and people that liked that kind of thing would follow along. I had positive feedback for the first however, until my mid-20s. And I felt like I was connecting with people. And I would put up these weird little things, and people were like, oh my God, I feel the same.

From 15 to maybe 25-ish, it was just, hey world! I'm here! And the world was like, guess what, Erika! We're here too! And we're so glad you said you're here!

From 25 onwards, that's when it turned into your thing, and I was not mentally or emotionally prepared... traumatised. And I'm not saying traumatised like, throwing the word around like Tumblr does, but I mean genuinely, just in a dead place. For the last 10 years, this has been my experience on the internet. I've been in a real bad place.

Amanda 67:52

How is that affecting the work? Because you're clearly, you're an amazing artist, and you and Matt have created this thing that's clearly wanted, and clearly helping people, and clearly you're putting this good thing out into the world. But meanwhile, you, the human being artist, who has

to be the human being making the art, is out there, trying to deal with this balance, and this other conversation that's really distracting, and can feel really abusive, and...

Erika 68:33

Slams down on my personal trauma in such a perfect alignment.

Amanda 68:39

Yeah. So how do you get out of there?

Erika 68:42

Uh, that is... I don't know. I've been real trapped there. Every single one of my close friends has, I told you this last night, has had an intervention with me. And they tell me, I'm worried about you. And they tell me, you need to quit your job, because it's killing you. And the thing is... I know that they're right on a certain level. But... One, I believe in what I'm doing. I think it is important. And two, I don't have any job skills!

Amanda 69:38

You do! You do!

Erika 69:40

I'm unemployable! This is the only job I can do!

No, but I feel like...

Amanda 69:47

Are you allowed to make work about this?

Erika 69:53

Not yet. Not yet.

Amanda 69:57

Do you feel like that's something that you're gonna wanna do, or need to do?

Erika 70:02

I think it's something I have to do at some point.

Amanda 70:04

I think you're gonna have to do that.

Erika 70:05

Because, I mean, I've had 10 years of being silent, and never presenting a counter-narrative to the things that are said about me, so it's just taken as truth. And at some point... Like I said in

the beginning, I'm turning into this rock. And the last couple years, I felt dead inside, and now I realise this year, I just feel numb inside, which is a big improvement.

Amanda 70:34

Oh, God.

Erika 70:36

And I feel like at some point, I will have to turn this into a story, just to get it out of my soul. But I don't know when I'll... I don't know when I can do it. I don't know when I'll have enough nourishment inside of me in order to be able to do that.

Amanda 70:58

My guess is that it will provide the nourishment. Your superpower is the ability that you have, and you have had, to take the truth of your experience, and lay it out. And others relate. I relate! I'm excited about all of these projects that you've told me about, that's the book I wanna read. That's the one that I'm gonna pre-order, and buy ten copies of before I even read it, because I know how important that message is gonna be. Because you cannot stay dead inside, and numb inside, and you cannot just... When you deal with that kind of trauma, and abuse, and people coming at you, and trolls, and bullying, and trying to explain, and all of that, it kills you.

Erika 71:53

Yeah. Yeah.

Amanda 71:55

And it disorients you, because it can feel, at the darkest ebb, like the best thing to do is just nothing.

Erika 72:05

Yeah.

Amanda 72:06

Because you go to try and fix it, and it flares, and it can feel like peeling a scab. But there is really only one exit out of the dark, and you have to shine the light on it. And you're almost luckier than some other people, in a way, because you have the platform, you have the tools, and you have the superpower. You have the kitchen to take these ingredients of shit and lemons, and actually transmute them into a consumable cake that tastes good for the people out there who need this message. Because there are so many people out there who feel disoriented, especially in the world of sex, especially the disenfranchised, especially on the left. And there are a lot of loud, outraged, angry voices out there, and a lot of that anger is righteous. But, I would be crushed if it did its work on you, and diminished your voice, because your voice is too good.

Erika 73:26

Thanks. I mean, that's one of my feelings of shame, is that I don't feel like I use my voice any more. I repeat sex ed facts. And I post photos of my plants on social media.

Amanda 73:41

Your plants are beautiful.

Erika 73:43

Thank you. And I do write some personal essays on [my Patreon](#), and on [Instagram](#), but Instagram, I set it so that only people I follow can comment on my pictures, just because I just... I'm so scared of the audience, of the people who all want to weigh in.

Amanda 74:12

But this is interesting. So we haven't mentioned this yet, or talked about it yet, but you have a Patreon.

Erika 74:18

Yeah.

Amanda 74:19

And the fact that you have a Patreon means that you do have, I would think, a safe haven. How many patrons do you have, ish?

Erika 74:30

Uh, 1,200ish?

Amanda 74:33

A fuckton. So, do you not feel, with those people, at least a level of safety and comfort, that you don't feel on regular social media, where it's just the arena of the wild internet?

Erika 74:48

Uh, I feel like people support an image of me, and it's an image that they have projected their own messages onto, and I'm just this avatar for it. And as soon as I say something they disagree with, or I follow somebody on Twitter that they don't like, or I like somebody's post who you're not allowed to like that person's post, you haven't just disappointed them, you have betrayed them. You have deceived them into thinking, you've tricked them into making them think that you were somebody else, and now you've disappointed them, and they're mad at you. And they're not just mad at you, it's like, they go from loving you to hating you.

Amanda 75:38

Your audience in general, do you think that that is true of every single one of them? Do you think that every single one of them is out there just waiting for you to fuck up and follow the wrong person on Twitter, or say the wrong thing, or do you think that there is this subset of them that are like oh, we get Erika?

Erika 75:56

The thing is, I know there is that subset, and I do hear from them, and I do meet them at conventions, and they'll come up and be like, hey, I just want you to know, I'm backing you on Patreon. I just like that you exist, and I want you to take care of yourself, and I want you to be healthy. And I appreciate that. But the thing is, when you have a paper bag, right? And in the paper bag, there's a couple pieces of your favourite candy, and oh, I fucking love that candy, it's so good. Mixed in there though, is some broken glass. Are you gonna keep reaching your hand into that bag? You get that glass a couple times, and you're like, okay, my favourite candy is in there, I've got enough glass in my hand.

MUSIC BREAK - Congratulations**Amanda 78:58**

I feel like there is this path to focus on, and strengthen, the ties with the people who really do not just support you, but they get you, and they have compassion for you, and they are not just super trigger-happy, 'the minute she does something wrong we're out, and we're after her.' Those aren't your people. They're out there, and maybe they'll buy your books, and maybe they'll have a different opinion today, and a different opinion tomorrow, but if you've got a thousand-plus people on your Patreon, I think you might be happily surprised that the vast majority of them are candy, and that a couple dozen of them are glass. And I would encourage those glass people to not support you on Patreon. And even if they wanna come at you with criticism, that's okay. They can come at you with criticism. If they wanna call you out, if they think you've done something wrong, drawn something wrong, said something wrong, thought something wrong, that's fine. But it's also Darwinian.

I've got 15,000 patrons at this point, but I've also lost more than 15,000 patrons. I have fewer patrons currently on my Patreon than... They go away. They go away for financial reasons, but also, I read my exit surveys, they don't like my abortion politics, they don't like this, they don't want that, they don't want me to podcast. And I'm just like, that's okay! You don't have to love every facet of me, and guess what? I'm not gonna get it right. I'm just not gonna be. And, if you have an image of me, and I'm an avatar, great. It's not me. And I would rather watch my Patreon shrink, and just get to be myself, than try to live up to their expectations. It will never happen. I'm never gonna be the right Amanda Palmer for any given person who has any idea of what I should be.

And those people, I just feel like, especially because Patreon is a thing now and exists, those people, the ones who come up to you at the convention, who are like, Erika, we just support you, we love your work, whatever, if you fuck up, you fuck up, we've got your back, those are your people. That's your tribe. That's who you should be able to talk to, openly and honestly, even just about what you're going through right now, the way you're talking to me. You can't be afraid of that. And also, your vulnerability, which is your superpower, that's what drew all these people to you in the first place!

Erika 79:55

Separate but parallel to what I said before about fear, is also, I feel a shame, and I feel like there's all these people that send me their genuine care and affection and support, and I am so empty right now, I don't have anything in me to give back. So it's so one-sided, and I feel so guilty about that.

Amanda 80:25

Don't feel guilty. Just don't feel guilty.

Erika 80:30

Well then I'm just taking!

Amanda 80:32

No, you're not. And I will remind you that a lot of those people, 100% of them I could assume, have that care and concern to offer you because your work has meant something to them. You've already done your part, you've helped them, you've delighted them, you've informed them, you've given them something. It's allowed to work that way. They're allowed to take that from you and then to wanna give back with their care and concern. You do not need to feel guilty about that.

Erika 81:10

But then they reach out, they have their hand open to me, and they get nothing back.

Amanda 81:16

That's okay.

Erika 81:17

Is it?

Amanda 81:18

Yes.

Erika 81:18

How? Why? That's neglect!

Amanda 81:21

Because... No, it's not neglect. And anyone who understands grief, and the grieving process, and depression, knows that it's not your responsibility to go and be delightful and take care of everybody who's trying to take care of you. It just does not fucking work that way. You are allowed to collapse and feel fucking dead inside. You're allowed to collapse, and feel numb, and go, everyone's calling, everyone's knocking at the door, I just can't deal.

Erika 81:51

Yeah. That's where I'm at.

Amanda 81:53

That's okay. Please. For me. Just do it for me. Stop. Stop feeling guilty about it. What's happening to you, and what's happened, is really real. You're allowed to collapse. You're allowed to not get back, you're allowed to not answer the texts, you're allowed to go dark. It will all be forgiven. It's fine.

And when you come out of the dark, when this part is over, which it will be, eventually...

Erika 82:32

It's been ten years.

Amanda 82:33

You will have galvanised, in a way where I assume that whatever art is coming next is going to be very amazing. I mean, I just know that sitting here and talking to you, I'm, again, I'm excited about both of these books. But it does feel like you're on autopilot.

Erika 82:54

Yeah.

Amanda 82:55

And the guy who told you to cater to the people who want dicks and vaginas, you've done that. You've done your job. You gave people a lot of really good...

Erika 83:07

Dicks and vaginas.

Amanda 83:08

Dicks and vaginas. And maybe now it's time to hang up the dicks and vaginas, and get back to your superpower, which is taking all of this, taking the dark, taking this story, and working through it the way that you know that you can, that you have an incredible talent. And maybe it takes five years, or maybe you choose a different format, who knows? I do know that if I were listening to this podcast, and I had never heard of you, I would want that. I would want it, not just because I would want the book, and I would want the artifact, and it would be an amazing read. I would want it because I would want it for you. Because I don't want to hear you cry. And I don't want you to stay in the dark.

For anyone who's listening to this, they're gonna find you, they're gonna follow your work, but hopefully they will all be part of your care-taking audience.

Erika 84:15

They won't feel neglected.

Amanda 84:18

No, and this is the thing about being an artist. It's a service job, in a weird way.

Erika 84:24

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Amanda 84:25

You're there to serve, and you're there to help, and you're there to educate, and you're there to sing your feelings, and you're there to...

Erika 84:31

I call it dancing on the internet.

Amanda 84:33

Yeah. We're allowed to take care of ourselves. We're allowed to step out of the spotlight. We're allowed to turn off the dance, and to stop tap-dancing our pain, because we're just empty, and tired, and we need a second. We need a second.

Erika 84:51

What if that second takes years and years though?

Amanda 84:55

That's okay. I mean, maybe it's not just a day or a week or a month, maybe you need a year fucking off being Public Erika Moen, dancing on the internet, and performing your pain, and trying to make sense of it all like spinning plates in public. Maybe you just need a year to think about it, and take care of yourself, and go on walks, and take baths, and have sex totally in private, without thinking about how you're gonna harvest your experience for the next comic strip.

Erika 85:27

You know, there's times when Matt and I will start to fool around, and we'll be like, oh wait! Should I go grab that...

Amanda 85:32

We could use this!

Erika 85:33

Yeah, should I go grab that thing that we just got sent?! And I'm like, no baby, I just wanna have sex! I don't wanna review a toy!

Amanda 85:39

How does Matt deal with all of this?

Erika 85:41

Much better.

Amanda 85:42

Yeah.

Erika 85:43

He's much less affected by it. When it's really bad, when there's really a storm going on, it's hard. But right now, in this moment, we're not in the middle of a shitstorm. And this is where I am, sobbing in a podcast for thousands of people to listen to, this is my baseline, is breaking into tears.

He handles this a lot better. He doesn't think it's as bad as I feel it. Which is not to say, he knows that I feel it harder, but he thinks, objectively, the scope of what's going on, it's not that bad. Whereas for me, this is where I'm at every day. So we just have two very different outlooks on it, and reactions to it.

Amanda 86:32

And meanwhile, you're full-time partners, and you're full-time business partners, and full-time artistic partners. That's a lot.

Erika 86:39

Yeah. Well, and that's the other thing. Everybody, everybody tells me, you need to take time off, you need to take a break, you need to not work for a while. And I so agree with everyone. And me not working shuts down our business. So it's not just a matter of doing something that's right for me. This affects two people. And Matt loves our job. And I do too! For as much pain as I'm in, I do love what we do.

Amanda 87:12

Both of the projects that you're doing sound great, but I can also tell that there's gonna be a lot of relief getting these two out the door, and then getting to at least make a choice about what project is coming down the line.

What is your Patreon? What are the tiers, what do people get, how does it work?

Erika 87:30

Okay, it's real basic. I was an early adopter, I think I was within the first six months. So my Patreon is [ErikaMoen](#), I am marked as adult, so if you search for me on the site, you will not find me, cos you have to protect the children from me.

Amanda 87:51

Oh, wow.

Erika 87:52

Yeah.

Amanda 87:53

Cos God forbid they should be educated about sex and sex toys.

Erika 87:58

Yeah. I mean, and that's not Patreon's fault, that's the credit card processor's fault. I don't hold that against Patreon.

Amanda 88:05

Right, but we can actually take this link and put it everywhere, so that's fine

Erika 88:09

I have two reward tiers for you. Not only two, but there are two. And the first one is for a dollar per Oh Joy Sex Toy update you get access to my blog posts, and I have been making some bitching gardening videos in iMovie, and I found this site bensound.com where you have copyright-free music that you can use on your YouTube movie things, so I have been using that, and I have been making really amazing videos, that my friends think are really bizarre, but they make me really happy.

Amanda 88:47

That is your healing area now, is your garden.

Erika 88:51

Yeah. And I've been making these really dramatic videos that detail the battles of my garden, and I've got this Queen Beth beet, and she's gone on a journey, and you can watch the journey of Queen Beth on my Patreon.

And then for \$5 per Oh Joy Sex Toy update, you get access to my two original self-published e-book Dar collections. And if you read Dar online, there's a whole bunch of brand new comics that I did just for these books, so there is new additional content in them. And so you get a download of the PDFs for those books, at \$5. And that's it.

Amanda 89:32

If you are listening right now, and you're thinking about joining Erika's Patreon, you're also going to be quietly, bravely funding her ability to do whatever the next project is.

I'm so proud of you.

Erika 89:46

Oh God, thank you.

Amanda 89:48

I mean, I'm proud of what you've created, cos what you've made is really important, and really good, and the universe, especially with what is going on politically right now, really needs good sex education about consent, about everything. But in a world of misinformation and craziness, what you are adding to the universe is incredible.

And also, you've been very brave to stick with it, especially in the face of the horror, and the things that people are trying to do to you, and have tried to do to you. It is very, very brave of you to stay in the arena, especially given what you were having to go through. You're incredibly brave and strong, even if you don't really feel like it right now.

Erika 90:48

I feel like it's self-harm. I feel like it's Stockholm Syndrome self-harm, to keep doing this.

Amanda 90:54

No, I don't think it is. I don't think it is, and the reason I don't think it is, is because I think you've run the cost benefit, and you know what the benefit is, to what you do. You know. You know because you've seen it. So I wouldn't call it self-harm. But you are tied to the mast right now, going through the storm, just going, God, when is this going to be over? When is it going to get better? And I know I will help you.

Erika 91:28

Thank you.

Amanda 91:29

I will help you. I think there are a lot of people out there who will stand by you and help you while you weather this storm.

This has been The Art of Asking Everything podcast, patron-only edition, holy shit.

Thank you, obviously, to my guest, Erika. Thank you to all of my patrons, thank you to all of her patrons.

For everything Erika, you can go to erikamoen.com

You should definitely [pre-order her book, Let's Talk About It](#), this is the one that she was working on way back when we spoke. It's out March 9th, please get it, get it for all the kids and teenagers you know, get 9 million copies of it for Christmas, and share the love. Absolutely [please support Erika on Patreon](#), I would love for a flood of new supporters to come into her life.

The engineer for this interview was Ryan Mauk.

For all of the music you heard in this episode, you can go to amandapalmer.net/podcast

The podcast was produced by the amazing FannieCo.

Many, many, many, many, many, many, many thanks to my incredible team. Hayley Rosenblum, who makes so many things possible, especially supporting patrons, and the community, she is the ghost in the machine who makes many, many things possible. Thank you Hayley, I couldn't do this without you. My assistant Michael McComiskey - both Hayley and Michael, by the way, are locked down in New York for going on a year, and these guys are just fucking heroes, and Michael has been making sure, as my assistant, that the emails get answered, and the trains run on time, and that shit does not get lost. Huge thanks to Alex Knight, who is our Merch Queen in the UK, but also has been helping to transcribe these podcast episodes so they are accessible to everyone, thank you Alex, we love you. Our new team member is Kelly Welles, who's been helping on social media, and with some of the editorial and the researching and the writing for the podcast, she's amazing, thank you Kelly, she's locked down near London. And my manager Jordan Verzar, who makes sure everyone gets paid, and also helps with a billion other things, he's in Sydney, not so locked down, but helping all the time, thank you Jordan.

Last but not least, I've said it before, I'll say it again, this whole fucking podcast wouldn't be possible, not this way, with no ads, and no sponsorship, and no bullshit, without patronage. So to all of you who are listening, who are supporting me on Patreon, I hope you see what's possible, and what will continue to be possible with patronage and total freedom. And with that, special thanks to my high level patrons, Simon Oliver, St. Alexander, Birdie Black, Ruth Ann Harnisch, Leela Cosgrove, and Robert W. Perkins. And to everyone who's supporting, from a dollar all the way up to the high-rollers, you guys are fucking making my life happen.

Everyone else, please keep supporting Erika, and please keep supporting as many artists as you can directly, and know, even if that artist is too busy to thank you, it means the fucking world.

Signing off, this is Amanda Fucking Palmer. I love all of you. I love you, Erika. Keep on asking everything.