

EPISODE 05: BECOMING A PUBLISHED AUTHOR

Davia Roberts 0:03

Welcome to More Than a Therapist, a podcast for ambitious and creative clinicians who want to build careers beyond the couch. I'm your host Davia Roberts and I hope you're ready for today's session.

On today's episode, I'm chatting with one of my beloved colleagues, Jor-El Caraballo. Jor-El is the co founder of Viva a private practice based in New York City and he also co-hosts the podcast by the same namesake. So be sure to check out the Viva podcast when you get a chance. But in addition to creating mental health content for the Viva podcast, Jor-El is also a writer and he's been doing so for several years. As of last year, he's become a published author with the release of the Shadow Work workbook. His publishing journey was not the typical process but it is a reminder that people are always paying attention to our work. But that'll make a little more sense once you hear his full story. But nonetheless, I am beyond thankful that he agreed to join the show and give us a peek behind the curtain. So I just want to start by saying, thank you and welcome to the show.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 1:03

Thank you so much. I appreciate it. My pleasure.

Davia Roberts 1:05

I actually remember us talking about the book several months before a published date. It's just so exciting to actually see it from this is something I'm working on to now literally holding it in my hand. Yeah. And once again, thank you for joining, because I know that there are a lot of other clinicians who also have ideas and want to publish. I also recall you just mentioning that as you're stepping into to Viva and wanting to share mental health and psychology in a different way. I'm wondering how writing became a part of that avenue for you.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 1:45

Yeah, so this is interesting, a little bit convoluted. But so one of the ways as we started Viva, obviously, like everyone and their momma, were like, we have to have a blog. And so we're like, okay, we have to write for the blog. Interestingly enough, this is a fun fact that I have not shared on my Instagram I don't think. That prior to that, I had started a natural hair blog for men in 2009, when I was in grad school, when I grew out my hair for the first time.

Davia Roberts 2:23

I never knew that.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 2:25

Yeah, I was like, I don't think I've ever mentioned that on my Instagram. It was a whole thing. Like, it was a whole thing for years. Part time, but it was a thing.

Davia Roberts 2:35

But it makes sense looking at your hair.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 2:37

Doesn't it? It makes sense. So I had always kind of dabbled, and I always love writing... I used to, I can still picture this, or there was a little notebook that I used to have, before I started school, that I used to write poetry in. Right, just digest that sentence. Because that's who I was.

Davia Roberts 2:58

I love it. I love it.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 2:59

Right? That's who I was. And so I always wanted to write and on my bucket list was like, I would like to write a book one day, I would like to be an author one day, I had forgotten about it for, I don't know, 20 years, I'm like, blogging is cool. This is what writing is now. I do it for fun, mostly, I have a good time with it. And so it was like the hair blog thing, which was fun, got to do some cool things. And then Viva and I was like, Okay, this is how we're marketing and this sort of stuff. And then, you know, the book, and writing just evolved from there in terms of expanding the scope and reach of having these kinds of conversations about feelings, about thoughts, about internalized scripts, about pain, and grace and compassion for yourself. And, yeah...

Davia Roberts 3:50

It sounds like you were literally writing the book already. For for lack of a better word, like you are already getting those consistent skills and tapping into just this writer mode nonstop. Because I often hear a lot of people say, blogging is not the same as writing. I'm like, there are a lot of writers who are bloggers. Yeah. I'm like, I do believe there are bloggers who are not writers and that's not a diss.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 4:15

I mean, it is what it is .

Davia Roberts 4:16

It is what it is. That listicle is not the same as an article. However, you were already preparing that. So when did the Shadow Work workbook become this idea that you wanted to put into the world?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 4:34

Yeah, also very sort of like synchronous moment. I had, I had written about maybe blogged about somewhere about shadow work. And essentially what happened was, I did not have a book agent. I was not querying, I was not this was... it was not in the plan. I was like, meh. That thing I wanted to do, probably not going to happen. Getting, quote unquote, 'getting older now,' so stupid. And like, yeah, I just need to focus on Viva and what we're doing and like continuing that. And essentially, like, an editor had reached out to me saying, "hey, we saw that you've written on this before and would you be interested in exploring the idea of like writing something long form about it?"

Davia Roberts 5:27

Nope... So you're already telling yourself that the book isn't going to happen. I'm getting older. We can let that die. I'll just write. And now someone is opening another door to say, "Hey, that thing that you've been writing about... let's create a book."

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 5:45

Well, and also, this was like, the, the sort of, like, weird thing was a few months, maybe like a month or two before, I sort of discovered, I was sort of reintegrating myself into like, more of my spiritual side, which also had kind of fallen by the wayside. And I got these oracle cards. And do you want to know what the title of those oracle cards were? It was the shadow edition.

Davia Roberts 6:15

* laughs* Sorry.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 6:17

Yeah. And this was this was before the editor reached out to me. And again, it was an invitation. And I was like, oh, some something somewhere it's communicating to me, like, I don't know, randomly bought this deck, that was fine. This person reaches out and they definitely want to talk about this sort of thing. And I was just like, oh, okay. What would happen if I entertained this? Could I do it? And that's how the book process started.

Davia Roberts 6:48

Wow. So walk me back. Because I know this is not the most ideal situation for most people. Most people are like, wait a minute now Jor-El. Okay.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 6:59

Right. I'm like, I don't know what to tell you to do. Because like, things just sort of happened that way for me.

Davia Roberts 7:06

That's awesome. And I know a lot of writers talk about pitching to editors and literary agents and it is a matter of, is this the type of content that they're looking for. Naturally, you had someone seeking certain content based on what you were already putting out

there. So very aligned. However, looking back, what do you wish you knew about just the journey to publishing?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 7:37

I wish I would have known how emotional process it was going to be for me. And so it was, like the, I mean, there's so much to learn about the publishing industry, which is also frankly, a mess right now. If anyone's been, like, if you read things, the strikes, there's like, the mergers, but not the mergers, which, yeah, it's a lot going on. I didn't realize it was gonna be a very emotional process for me. And it was interesting, because it was a very meta thing that was happening, because because I had not really been in this lane in this sort of higher stakes way, writing in this higher stakes way.

Part of my own stuff, sort of like came back up, that hadn't come back... hadn't been really salient for a long time, in terms of like, you know, am I the person to be having this conversation? Should I be the one writing this? Like, do I have the voice? Do I have the things to contribute meaningfully to people, all these sorts of doubts and questions and insecurities, which I generally don't struggle with most days. And so in this process, it was just incredibly vulnerable for me. And, you know, I found that I was like, really fighting with myself sometimes to write things, because I was working through something at the same time. And I think that that's something that people don't often talk about when it comes to writing. I think just on the publishing side, I would just say, it's so complicated. And there's so many steps. So even though my journey started the way that it did, I still had to put a proposal together, I still had to do all these things. And I was like, and I told, I told the editor I was working with, I was like, "Look, I don't know what I'm doing."

Davia Roberts 9:40

It's my first time at the rodeo.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 9:42

This is a first time at the rodeo. I never thought this was gonna happen. I don't know what to do." And she was like, "Don't worry. We work with a lot of first time authors, like I'm gonna guide you through it." And I got really clear sort of direction say okay, this is what we need. Now, this is how we're gonna do it. And that was really helpful for me.

Davia Roberts 10:05

Yeah, it sounds like you have someone that was hands on, and also emotionally intelligent to say, Okay, I'm gonna guide you through this, I don't want you to be overwhelmed. This is... this can be an intimidating process but here's what to expect, here are the expectations. When you don't know what to expect, when it is your first time... Yeah, it's intimidating and stressful. And let's not pretend that you don't still have a full time business that you have to run. That part.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 10:34

Also that.

Davia Roberts 10:36

What were some of the steps that people can expect as part of this journey that you had to go through?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 10:43

Yeah, so I think, you know, a big part of it is the sort of initial query or proposal. And that that was also something I kind of knew, but didn't really know because I'd never done it before was, you know, that proposal means you should have a clear idea. So you, you really do have to come with a clear idea of like, what's what this is gonna look like? Theoretically, sometimes things change, obviously, but like, what do you want it to look like? And you should have some sample chapters ready to go as a part of that proposal so that the team that you're querying, or the agent that you're trying to, like, have picture book for you has a really clear understanding of this is where this person is trying to go with this, this is what we think this is going to mean.

Because for, especially if you're going to traditional publishing route is, they also have to market it, they have to start to think about where it fits in their schedule, which they are already like, a year, probably a year ahead, if not longer, in some instances, about like how things are coming out, and they're skipping their publication schedule. So they really need to have an idea of, okay, where does this, how could this fit in our whole schema? Who will we reach with this? And what can people... what can we expect? And so having that clear idea, having a solid outline, a few sample chapters most people ask, and really trusting yourself in your voice and tone. It needs to read and sound like you and your unique perspective. And so if you don't know what that is, you are going to be in trouble.

Davia Roberts 12:39

Okay, so it sounds like be the first main step is the proposal, and already having an outline and expectation for what this book is going to be and backing it up with actual content, like, you know, just an outline. Yeah, here are some chapters, as you mentioned, things may change, but you're essentially presenting a sample of what the book is, and will be. And so once they receive that, what happens next?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 13:09

So then you basically get like a yay or nay. Okay. And if you get the yay, then it's about refining, whatever, you know, sample content that you got. And also, in my instance, it worked that then I got the plan of like, okay, so here's what we're looking at, in terms of when we want this done. We, I was fortunate enough to sort of have this broken, I don't know if they sustain it or not, they're like, alright, so give us 50% by this date, give us the full by this date. Then it was just like... after that it's like, okay, I guess that's what we're doing now. And then it was just I had to write a lot, like a lot. And so then it was just like the finding my groove in my process and figuring out how do I get this done, and get it done in a way that honors who I am and sort of feels right for me. And so yeah, and that's and then from there, that's kind of how it goes.

Davia Roberts 14:13

Okay, so it does really seem like once the proposal is either accepted, and there may be caveats to that acceptance, we want to shift this change this and then we're good to go. There may be a no, I've heard writers receive flat out rejection. This isn't for us. We're not publishing things like this, or I've heard, we're interested however, we want to see more of XYZ. I've even heard a writer say they made the changes and the person was like, "Yeah, I mean, it is better, but we've switched lanes since then."

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 14:44

Oh no. Gosh, that's heartbreaking.

Davia Roberts 14:46

Heartbreaking. Interestingly enough, she said, another agent picked it up. So the feedback actually helped. It just sucked, you know, through that experience but it does seem like there is a structure when you're working with the right team. What would you say to someone looking for the right team, the right literary agent or editor? What are the what are the things that they should look for in them?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 15:13

I think for me, I was just, it just was very, I was very fortunate and how it worked out for me, I got lucky, perhaps. But I think you really want is actually kind of the process of thinking about mental health support and therapy is that like, you really want to have someone that you can be comfortable enough with to start, like, if the vibes off from the initial email, uh, you're probably gonna go through hell. To be frank, and, you know, because it is writing is such a, especially if you're not a professional writer, right? I think if you're someone who has been writing professionally, maybe you self published your own book before or had a vast amount of experience, maybe you got an MFA degree or something like that, then maybe it's a different process for you. But you know, I've been long gone from the experience of getting feedback for writing, which I, you know, studied a bit in undergrad, but you know, it's a very vulnerable process, it's hard, generally, to put yourself out there. And so to have someone who's going to respond with, and engage with you, with like that emotional intelligence, that sort of patience, the humanity is crucial. And so I would tell people to really trust that, like, it needs to be a good fit for you, whether it's an agent or an acquisitions editor, or whomever you're going to primarily be working with. It needs to feel comfortable enough. For sure.

Davia Roberts 16:55

No, that makes total sense. Because writing and publishing a book is not a quick process.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 17:01

No.

Davia Roberts 17:01

And so you're going to be in this relationship for a substantial amount of time and so you want to make sure that you're not suffering.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 17:09

Right? But like, don't come at me sideways with feedback because then we're gonna have a problem. Like, you can tell me your truth. But let's not be you know, ridiculous about it. Because like, who was it? I forgot who said it? Was it was it Diddy one time? I'm not gonna say the whole thing. But he's like, as an artist, I'm sensitive about my shhhh...

Davia Roberts 17:32

Erykah?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 17:33

Was it?? Okay.

Davia Roberts 17:34

Keep in mind that I'm an artist, and I'm sensitive about my...

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 17:38

Yes. So that is definitely me. Like, I'm generally sensitive. So that to think about like, writing, I was like, oh, no, like, handle with care. Be honest because I love an honest vibe. I love an honest situation, give it to me real, but also, like, don't be rude about it.

Davia Roberts 17:59

Because you can be constructive without being cruel.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 18:02

100%

Davia Roberts 18:04

That's really helpful, just something to for somebody to consider when they're seeking an agent. Because I know there, there are multiple routes to creating a book, you can go self publishing, put something out on Amazon, or you can seek an agent and want a big publishing house behind you. Typically, what are the steps to securing a literary agent?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 18:27

I, it's funny, this was not my experience and so I can't really speak to it. But what I do know, based on being a little bit more in the writing community, is like that initial query that you send out to an agent is really important. And it's really hard. So my really my only advice would be is to really tap into especially the online communities you might have access to, right and community is big on Twitter, to really read and establish contact with other authors, other writers, people in the community, and navigate, and like use their experience gain knowledge from them about like, what this process was, like, sort of

things they put into an initial query or experiences that they've had. People are generally really willing to share about those experiences, because everyone who decides if they want to write a book, and they have a book in them, wants that same dream to be achieved for the next person. You know, and so there's a lot of good people out there who share a lot of good information about you know, how to go about the process.

Davia Roberts 19:44

That's definitely something that I have heard about the writing community is that it is large, but it's also very tight knit and supportive... and people want to see other folks get published.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 19:55

But yeah, it's there's so much about it, that even the whole process is really really subjective, which is why it's so important that the able to start from a place of like self knowing of like what you want this to be, what's the ideal. So then you give people the ability to react to something, right and then you get more information, you get more data, you get more clarity of like, oh, this, this agent is saying this, maybe that's because they're affiliated or they've published most with this sort of house, maybe I need to go to this different publishing house or this lane would be better. You learn so much.

Davia Roberts 20:30

I know that seeking a literary agent can be a challenge. You know, as you said, like, there's just information that you have to gain to be able to put your best foot forward. However, I do know there's a another lingering thing for a lot of people that talk about writing books, and it's around social media. I have heard multiple people say, "I couldn't possibly launch a book with a publishing house unless I have a million followers. It cannot happen unless I have this huge following. I can't do anything." What are your thoughts?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 21:07

I was one of those people too, who thought that. And so whoever, if you're listening to this podcast right now, what I want you to do is on another device, don't stop listening, on another device, I want you to pull up Instagram. And I want you to go look at my follower account. And there you have it. Because I'm sitting at a cool, like, 2K right now.

Davia Roberts 21:34

And a published author!

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 21:36

Yes. And it's just like, I don't know, I obviously consider myself incredibly fortunate. That's been a part of just like, my personal story of like, things sort of happened for me. And I realized that the privilege in that. What I also know is that when I get an invitation, I take it seriously. And I also know that I work hard. So, you know, I have no qualms about being the published author with 2000 Instagram followers. Because I know what I do and I know how I do it. I know the value of the things that I can contribute. And so I think that is at the

core of... Yes, you're much more likely to get a book deal with a major publishing house or any publishing house, if you have a social media following that's sizable. It is not necessary. As long as you have a clear idea, a good voice, a topic that people are interested in, like, and that's not just like, oh, what are your friends and you know, people say, but like, what does the market say? What are people looking for on Google? Like, what are people struggling with? What do they want to know? And if you can merge those ideas about what you're able to share and what you know, people are really looking for, you can publish and certainly in the non-fiction world. Fiction is just like a whole 'nother beast to me that I do not understand.

Davia Roberts 23:18

My favorite genre!

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 23:20

I mean, listen, my favorite genre to read 100%!

Davia Roberts 23:23

But you're like writing? No. no, no, no, no.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 23:24

But no, I have thought about it. And who knows? You never know, in the future. But yeah, it's just like, so much, I think, I don't know if it's more saturated or not. I have to believe it is with, you know, fiction authors. But there's just so much to process about the whole field.

Davia Roberts 23:45

No. But I mean, even listening to you, it's that frequent reminder, we need to hear. It may be challenging, but it's not impossible. Yeah. And even as you were talking, you said something, you know, I was just lucky. And I'm like, to an extent. In my mind, I'm like, I mean, you weren't lucky, you were working. You were writing hence why they found you. Because you were already in the practice of writing consistently. It may not be the book that you were writing at that moment, but you were already in the practice of writing around mental health and shadow. And that's what opened the door. And so I think, even for other folks who are saying, well, I have to focus on my social media platform to get the eyes. What is that thing that you want to write about? Like start writing about that now. It may not be the book right now but you don't have to wait for someone to come banging down your door.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 23:48

Yeah. 100% and I take this approach also with my own social media is it like, I love content. I have a love hate relationship with content.

Davia Roberts 24:58

Same.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 24:58

But yeah, like it's my relationship with it is... What do I want... this how I wrote the book too... is like, what do I want to give to someone? What is the message I want to give to someone? If this was a literal gift, they opened it, what would they pull out? And that's how I approach social media. That's how I approach writing is that I want that to be clear, that like this, this is what I'm giving you. I'm giving you permission, I'm giving you kindness, I'm giving you insight I'm giving you space, but like, you're gonna know when you engage with that, when I'm giving you.

Davia Roberts 25:40

There's going to be intention behind this gift.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 25:44

Yes.

Davia Roberts 25:46

I appreciate that. So one of my last questions I have for you, you have already demystified the fact that you don't have to have a million followers, you don't have to write every single day. But as long as you are intentional and are showing up and are clear on what you want to offer the world, publishing a book is definitely a possibility. Yeah. What would you say is the first step to getting started on publishing a book?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 26:12

I think the first step is deciding to do it. And deciding, even roughly like what you want it to be about, because I think that that will inform all the subsequent steps. You know, once you make a commitment to yourself, at least this was my experience, once I made a commitment to myself that I was going to take this invitation, then the natural next step was to figure out okay, now, how am I going to take the invitation? How am I going to show up? And that came relatively natural for me from there. But that first part, deciding, that was the one of the hardest parts. But I think it's important, important first part, to have under your belt.

Davia Roberts 27:14

And do I have permission to share it the word that you gave me last year? Audacity? If not, I'll edit it out.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 27:24

Yeah, that's fine. I was like, wait, what did I say?

Davia Roberts 27:27

Wait, don't get me out here embarrassed. I'd never do you like that. But even listening to you talk about that. I remember, and I didn't know the name of the book, I don't even think we got into what that content was, but I remember you sharing that you were writing a book. And we were, it was probably we were talking in January and I remember you saying

your word for the year was audacity. And I think that is just such a spirit that so many clinicians need to have, because we've been told our careers only look one way, there are only certain avenues you can be in academia, you can practice, you know, in social services, or you can have your own private practice, pick one of those and your that's it, but having the audacity to say, I'm going to show up and show up in my expertise in this non traditional role that few clinicians have been able to break into. And especially when we're talking about something that isn't just theory. There are a lot of clinicians that have published but it's theory theory, theory theory. Yeah, that for you to say, I'm gonna work, I'm gonna write about shadow, audacity. So just having the audacity to say, I'm going to own this, and I'm going to lean into it. And having that audacity informs how you move and the confidence and just commitment, like I need to have, am I committing to writing 10 minutes, 20 minutes each morning, whatever that looks like for the person. But there is a level of audacity to say, this is happening even if I don't have the agent today. Have the audacity to do believe it for yourself and start working on it.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 29:05

Yeah, absolutely. And I'll just add one bit to that and say that, that is something that I often talk to clients about, is really just having the commitment to themselves to try even while scared even while anxious, even whatever the situation is. And so yeah, like having that audacity, being willing to take those risks and show up. Yeah, I think is now sort of like a more of a core part of who I am and I'm pretty happy about that.

Davia Roberts 29:44

And I'm thankful I get to witness it.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 29:45

Thank you.

Davia Roberts 29:46

So thank you for sharing all of this wisdom. I know that this is going to be extremely helpful to folks that are, they've been writing the book already. But before I let you go, I want you to join me for the Hot Seat. Okay. The Hot Seat is our final segment where I asked you 10 rapid fire questions and you reply with the first thing that comes to mind. So my first question is, are you ready?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:12

No, but okay. This is how I know that's my natural speed. So you're like, oh, no, but here we go.

Davia Roberts 30:21

All right, but here we go. And the first, the first official question, coffee or tea?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:26

Coffee.

Davia Roberts 30:27

Favorite author?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:29

Right now Fredrick Bachman, Backman? Backman.

Davia Roberts 30:33

Worst writing advice you've ever received?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:36

Oooh worst writing advice? I don't have any. I don't think I've ever had bad writing advice.

Davia Roberts 30:47

Okay, what's the best writing advice you've ever received?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:49

Writing is a practice. Make it a practice. Yeah.

Davia Roberts 30:54

Do you prefer an outline or to freestyle?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 30:57

Freestyle.

Davia Roberts 30:58

Favorite way to get through writer's block?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:01

Take a break. Music. Get back to it.

Davia Roberts 31:06

Would you prefer to self-publish or literary agent?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:10

Traditional publishing, agent.

Davia Roberts 31:12

Favorite form of self-care?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:15

All things food. Eating it, making it, learning about it, watching other people make it. Yeah, that's very joyous for me.

Davia Roberts 31:24

I love that. One thing every writer should know?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:29

Ain't nothing to it, but to do it.

Davia Roberts 31:30

And the last one... Have you finished your notes this week?

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:34

No.

Davia Roberts 31:36

Bless your heart. Well, it's time to go because Jor-El has some notes to do.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:40

I'm usually very, you just caught me in an off time. I know what I sound like right now but I promise... I always find those conversations on Twitter very funny. Because I'm like, Why is no one writing their notes?

Davia Roberts 31:52

As we're all talking about the notes.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 31:54

Everyone's always talking about the notes. I'm like, write your notes. Write your notes. Yeah, I Yeah.

Davia Roberts 32:00

But it has been a pleasure. Thank you so much for just sharing your experience and can you let the people know where they can find you online.

Jor-El Caraballo, LMHC 32:08

Sure. You can connect with me on Instagram at JorelCaraballo. You can visit my website at JorelCaraballo.com and you can contact and reach out to Viva, which is my practice, and we are at Viva Mental Health or at www.vivamentalhealth.com.

Davia Roberts 32:33

Thank you so much Jor-El. In honor of today's episode, we're giving away a copy of Jor'El's book, The Shadow Work workbook, and a \$50 gift card. To enter the giveaway, be sure to follow our Instagram page at [morethanatherapist](https://www.instagram.com/morethanatherapist) for more details. That's going to tell you everything you need to know about winning a copy of his amazing book and the gift card. For those of you interested in learning more information about Jor-El, Viva, and the Shadow Work workbook, and where to buy it, be sure to check out today's episode notes at morethanatherapist.co.