

# Mistakes and Failures

ISBW S17 Ep20

March 16, 2021

## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

mistakes, realized, draft, teacher, people, podcast, find, might, rejections, shuttle, emails, happened, practicing, happy, failure, writing, learned, year, scene, feel

## **SPEAKER**

Mur Lafferty

---

Mur 0:00

This is I Should Be Writing Season 17 Episode 20. My name is Mur Lafferty and I am your host of this podcast for wannabe fiction writers. I stream live Tuesdays and Thursdays on Twitch, and the RSS feed goes from my web page at murverse.com or wherever fine podcasts are found. It's been a bad brain week and you know in hindsight, I'm thinking it's possible it's simply because of the whole anniversary effect. It's pretty much around a year from lockdown last year. Around this week, next week, last week, that's around the time a lot of the areas around the world were shutting down. And anniversary stress is real, but it's weird because sometimes you don't think about it consciously. And this is one thing I'm realizing in my middle age that I'm getting a little sick of which is, my body can have an emotional response to something that my brain is not even thinking of. So, I don't like it when I feel crappy and I don't know why. I'm trying to do the whole make lemons out of lemonade. No wait, it's the other way around, isn't it? Make lemonade out of lemons and actually talk about it on the show and therefore I have a show title, yay.

Mur 1:53

Yesterday I was getting close to doing my Ask Me Anything stream and then I realized, I won't go into details, but I dropped a ball in another project. And that made me panic because if you miss one thing you don't know what else you missed. You see one mouse, you know there are lots more in your walls. It's not just one mouse or one cockroach or possibly not one mistake so if this mistake was as bad as I feared it was, I needed to take care of it right then. So I missed my stream and I just went searching for information on anything else I might have missed. Then I just started spiraling into a pit of self loathing. Let's just be honest, that's what it was because my records were not organized, and it was hard to find the information I needed. And so in addition to searching for the information, I was also trying to set up new spreadsheets to track the information and set up email filters to track the information. I don't do spreadsheets well. So that's kind of half assed right now. But after that, I realized how little writing I'd gotten done. It just spiraled. It was just bad. Finally, at one point I'm talking to my husband and he's like, I think you need to put your phone down, because I was you know of

course doom scrolling and was also overwhelmed by all the emails I had to answer. Suddenly my to-do list, which I'd been handling okay, seemed insurmountable and scary. And that's when I'm looking through the to-do list and looking through my emails and looking for something I can cross off that wouldn't require too much brain power because clearly I had none left. And he's just like, I think you should put your phone down. I think you're burnt out. I think you need some comfort food for dinner. He's not wrong. He's like, you're in the mood of everything is crap right now and it's not.

Mur 4:19

And it did help reminding myself, one of my mantras this year is "Emotions are not facts". The fact that I felt crappy and I felt like a failure and a loser and the self loathing was building up, doesn't necessarily reflect the reality of my day. The reality of my day was, I made a mistake, which threw off my schedule. That's really all that happened. I fixed the mistake, everything's fine. But the emotions were overwhelming and awful. And only later did I realize, when somebody else mentioned it, it's like oh that's right. We did the whole shutdown thing. This time last year, I still had a relative who was very sick. I need to be a little nicer to myself. And then I remembered that, oh I wish I could find the anecdote. But I remembered an anecdote, I think from a US educator, US teacher. And he was, I think, shadowing or just observing in a classroom in Japan. The teacher put a math problem on the board, and the kids tried to work it out and one kid didn't get it. And the teacher called the kid up to the front of the class to work it out on a board on the board. And the American is like cringing inside, because we've all had that teacher brings you up to the board and embarrasses you or put you on the spot. It was hard enough to do it at your desk but it's even harder doing it in front of all your classmates, several of whom you know are gonna bully you or give you crap or laugh about you behind their hands and all that. And he was kind of dying inside for this kid just in sympathy. And the kid just slowly worked it out on board. The kid didn't seem to be upset. I think the teacher talked him through a couple of the things that were going wrong. And when he got it the class applauded. And the teacher's like, I'd forgotten that we all learn by mistakes. You know that the kid made a mistake and so he worked through the mistake and he came out the other side and he learned it, and the class was thrilled for him.

Mur 6:34

I try to keep that in my head, because I know logically, mistakes are fine. Mistakes are fine. Mistakes you don't learn from, that's where things are very bad. And one thing I did when I made these mistakes is I tried to see where I went wrong. And then, like I said, I set up a spreadsheet that still needs some work because I'm not very good at them, but also I set up email filters to where all the really important emails connected to the project will go into one folder. So it will be easy to search because I know you'll be shocked to hear this, but when part of your job is being a professional writer and another part of your job is being a professional editor, the word contract comes up a lot. So when you're searching for a contract, really, really hard to find. It's like trying to find a piece of hay in a haystack. A very specific piece of hay. And I've been thinking again about how... Of course I'm going to phrase it negatively. I'm really working with that whole inner critic bully idea in my head. Let me figure out a way to phrase it positively. I benefit from many drafts of my stories. I'm often too nice to my characters, and I don't make things... I said on the previous podcast about how I'm too nice, that I need to work

on the conflict and pretty much every draft will amp up the conflict and raise the stakes. And I'm not really good at doing that on first draft.

Mur 8:27

So, I have two people trying to decide which of these two very difficult things, who is going to do what. And it turns out that the person who's more familiar with the harder thing is going to have to do the harder thing. The other person is not familiar with either thing, but she's going to have to do the less complex thing because obviously if you put her in charge of the shuttle, they're going to crash and die. And on the first draft, she was arguing, I'm not qualified to do the thing you want me to do. And he's like, I need to do this professional high level shuttle thing and you need to go outside the ship and do this other thing. And she's like I'm not qualified for that. He's like are you qualified for this? And she says no and he's like okay, so you go do the thing outside. That was fine. But I just realized that the way I've built up the character who's more qualified to run the shuttle is that, even though he is qualified to do the shuttle, the thing outside the ship is the thing that he has studied for and has a lot of experience with, and knows is dangerous and doesn't want to send somebody less experienced than him into that danger. And even though the end result of who does what and the things that happened during that scene, that doesn't change. But I realized that the argument going up, needed to be switched entirely. She needs to be, "Look, I can't handle the shuttle. You have to let me go out there." And he's like, I can't let you do that, it's really dangerous and I'm the one with the experience. And I had to rewrite that whole argument and put in different emotional beats.

Mur 10:33

And on one hand I'm really happy that I came to that conclusion and I changed that scene. On the other hand, I'm very very frustrated, because this is me rewriting a scene that I'd already read rewritten once. So I'm not moving forward in my word count. I'm having to go back to a scene and fix it again. So the book got better, but I can't look at any numbers or metrics or anything to tell you that I am further ahead in the book editing. And I think that might be one thing I hate about editing because when you write, it's, I did 1000 words today. Tomorrow I may do 2000 words and then I'll be 3000 words into my book. Well yesterday it was I'm gonna work for two hours and the word count is not going to change. And I'm really trying to present this to myself as a positive, because I spotted what was wrong with the scene, and I fixed it. I think it was a tighter scene because of it. It made more sense. And it showed the two characters' relationships and their characters a little bit clearer. Also, it helped advance their relationship. So, the whole concept of being perfect the first time out and being upset when you screw something up, logically, we know that's not the way life is. And yet, we still get annoyed when people below us make mistakes. We still get mad at ourselves when we make mistakes. And I don't know how to get past that.

Mur 12:23

And I really feel guilty when I present problems in a podcast and no solutions, but it is on my mind because I've said it many times before that when you have.... Rejection is good because it teaches you. It teaches you that you can take a punch. It teaches you that you can fall down and get up again and you don't need that tub thumping song. And if you succeed and succeed and then you fail, you'll be really confused. How could that have happened to me? What do I

do now? Clearly I'm terrible, because I was good and now I'm not and so I got worse. I mean, rejections and failure make you tougher. They teach you things, and they let you see a wider view of the world. Thomas Edison found 10,000 ways to not make a light bulb. I don't like it in recipes when they make a specific point to say, do not do x, because I always want to know the reason why. But the people don't really don't tell you that unless it's like a food science thing where they'll say well if you use too much baking soda, this will happen. But a lot of times just like, don't do this. I don't know how we get the mindset to be grateful for failures and mistakes. Because there are people we don't want to make mistakes. Mainly, airline pilots, politicians and surgeons, but the rest of us, provided your mistake doesn't hurt anybody, we should just look at it and go, "Alright, that happened. What did I get out of it?" Because I think we'd all be a lot happier, and we'd accept a lot more.

Mur 14:15

I was texting my co editor and at one point is that I feel literally nauseous because of what I think I might have done. And she's like, it was a mistake, big deal. She's like, here's some information you might need to help you track this stuff and move on. And she was right. So that's another reason why I cheer rejections because whether you know it consciously or not, you learned something. If you're at the very beginning of your career, you might not think you learned anything. You might actively rail against me. Yeah, I learned I wrote a crappy book. Not necessarily. Maybe you learned that the person you submitted to was the wrong genre. But I just wish we could be better to ourselves, and more understanding. And I think in society we see people who are showing us the top of the duck. The duck just smoothly skimming across the water and we're not seeing the feet underneath frantically working. You see professional athletes do amazing things and yeah they'll make mistakes. That's why they play games because if they were just always perfect, it would be really boring but they don't make as many mistakes as I would if I picked up a basketball. But what we don't see is them practicing, and making their mistakes off camera, so that they'll be really good on camera. But the training and the practicing is the place where you make mistakes. And maybe we need more training and practicing in other aspects of our life. I don't know. Maybe you should expect errors when you train and practice and write first drafts, because that helps you find your duck. There's my wisdom for the day. Find the duck that's on top of the water. But to do that you have to be the duck that's under the water. A metaphor just fell apart and I'm not happy about it.

Mur 16:31

But I think especially right now, if you're listening to this later on and you don't have to wear a mask and you can go to a restaurant, then I'm very happy for you. For us right now, we're a year into lockdown, a year into the pandemic, whether it's called lockdown or not. A lot of people are still just trying to be responsible and stay home if they're not vaccinated. And I think there's a internal expectation that we should be used to this by now, and we should be functioning better. And even now, I was joking with my husband the other day that like when all this started, we were too in shock, in fear. We didn't know what was happening, we didn't know who to trust. And it was terrifying. And we do know more now. But that doesn't make the virus any less deadly. It just means we're a little bit better at avoiding, I hope. But I'm trying to make the backyard a nicer place. That's one of my goals for the next 12 months is to make the backyard a place I want to hang out in. That's what it's called. It's not like redo or landscaping

or anything, it's just I want to make a place I'm happy to be in. And I thought, if I'd done this last year that would have made last year easier to deal with, but I needed the mental energy and the fortitude to do those plans and make those changes. So now that we're coming out of it is when I have the drive and focus to do it. But still, the point I'm trying to make is that I think we still need to be kind to ourselves. Because even though yeah, daily life is easier to deal with for a lot of people. There's still the weight. I just feel like there's a big backpack on me. And sometimes it feels lighter than other days, and it's felt lighter this year than it did last year but still it's there. And sometimes I forget about it. And then sometimes it's really heavy, but it's still there. And I think we're going to be carrying this stuff for longer than we expect to. So, I think we just need to remember to be kind to ourselves.

Mur 18:51

I had a bad day yesterday. I did not get a lot of what I planned to get done done. But I went to bed early. I got up early. I had insomnia, but working on things a little bit at a time. I went to bed early. Oh, also Daylight Savings Time. That screws with you. Just be kind to yourself. If you find yourself angry with somebody for no reason, or crying over burning dinner, remember, there's other things going on. And it's going on for nearly everybody else in the world. And it's gonna keep coloring our days for a little while. And while that's not great to accept, it's not great to think about, it's still there and it's still gonna happen. So, that's all I have to say about the subject. If you are listening to this later on in the feed. I encourage you to either check out a live stream on Tuesdays or Thursdays on [Twitch.tv/mightymur](https://www.twitch.tv/mightymur), or you can support the patreon at [patreon.com/mightymur](https://www.patreon.com/mightymur) and then you can get the full recording of this. But right now is when I open up to the chat and we start chatting about a variety of topics. Usually on topic, sometimes not for another about half an hour. So I'm going to end the official recording right now and keep chatting with the folks who were hanging out with me. If you want to get in touch with me and you don't catch the live stream, [mightymur@gmail.com](mailto:mightymur@gmail.com) or [@mightymur](https://twitter.com/mightymur) on Twitter, are the best ways to get in touch with me. Blog and show notes at [murverse.com](https://www.murverse.com), and to support the patreon at [patreon.com/mightymur](https://www.patreon.com/mightymur), where you will get access to the archives, early episodes, extended episodes, extra episodes, I need to record some stuff for y'all actually, and all sorts of things. The discord. The discord is very active and fun. So wear your mask. Be kind to yourself when it comes to mistakes and failures. Just learn from it and move on. And you should be writing.

---

Remember you can support the show at [patreon.com/mightymur](https://www.patreon.com/mightymur), [jemi.app/mightymur](https://jemi.app/mightymur), or [ko-fi.com/mightymur](https://ko-fi.com/mightymur). I Should Be Writing's theme music provided by John Anealio. You can find more about him at [johnanealio.com](https://www.johnanealio.com).

Art by [Numbersninja](#) and transcription by FyreRider.

[ISBW S17 Ep20:Mitsakes adn Fialures](#) © 2021 by [Mur Lafferty](#)  
is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

