

Fordham Footsteps: A Conversation with Maryann Reid, FCLC '97

Sara:

Hey everybody, welcome to Fordham Footsteps, the podcast that features Fordham alumni and discusses their path from their time as a student to their current career.

Matt:

Some will have a direct correlation to their majors and others will describe how they took some unexpected turns. Either way, expect an insider's guide to certain industries and some great stories from our esteemed alumni.

Sara:

I'm Sara Hunt Munoz, Senior Director for Strategic Initiatives.

Matt:

And I'm Matt Burns, Associate Director for Young Alumni and Student Engagement.

Sara:

With us today is Maryann Reid, Fordham College at Lincoln Center, class of 1997. Welcome Maryann.

Maryann:

Thank you, it's great to be here.

Matt:

So great to have you. So Maryanne, what was your undergraduate major?

Maryann:

It was journalism media studies.

Sara:

Okay.

Maryann:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sara:

And what did you think you would do with a journalism major?

Maryann:

I thought that I was going to be a CNN anchor or a writer or reporter for the New York Times.

Matt:

Why?

Sara:

How'd that go?

Maryann:

I went in a completely different direction. I went into the direction of book publishing where I actually became an author with a major publisher at St. Martin's press, writing books. And then from there I thought I was going to be big and famous. And how did that go? It went okay. But let's just say it's been a whirlwind since I graduated.

Sara:

Okay. How so?

Maryann:

In an exciting way, I feel like I had in mind to do one thing and I went completely in this new direction to be an author, not because I chose it, but because as a journalism major I'm constantly interviewing people and getting ideas and doing my own writing, and it just organically morphed into a book, and then another one until I wrote five books.

Sara:

Wow.

Maryann:

But it got to a point where I had to decide if I was going to keep writing or if I was going to start working. And sometimes when you think you're going to be rich and famous, getting a job is not your first priority. You want to get under New York Times' Best Seller List, or at that time on Oprah.

Sara:

Did you get your feet wet in journalism a little bit before you went into the book publishing?

Maryann:

Yeah, I did. I have to say that I had great support from the career department at Fordham, Fordham professors like Elizabeth Stone, I got not only an internship at CNN, I also got a job at CNN right after I graduated and before I got my first book publishing deal. And also I got internships at really high profile magazines. So I had a strong journalism background to basically go in any direction I wanted to, and I think that was the thing. I had so many options at 24, 25, 22, it's hard to choose.

Matt:

So how did you choose?

Maryann:

At that age I felt like it was always about either or. I didn't feel like I can do both. I didn't feel I could be successful at CNN and be a published author. I thought I needed to devote 100% of my time to writing books, going on book tours, publicizing my work in my own way. And I chose to do that because it was a little bit more glamorous as well. And seeing my face in magazines and articles and stuff was really exciting for me and my family. So, being at that point, I just went with what felt good at the time.

Sara:

Talk us through the scenario. So you had all of this content that you wanted to write about, did you get an agent first? Did you write your manuscript first? How has that process?

Maryann:

That's a really good question and I wish I can say that it was a big process for me, but it wasn't. What happened is... well, the story goes that I was actually writing an article for a small business magazine, and at the end of that interview I was actually interviewing a publisher, I told the publisher, still fresh-faced, early twenties, "I have a book I'm working on. I don't know if it's a book, it's journal entries about my dating life. I don't know, I'd like to get it published one day. Do you want to look at it?" And she was, "Yeah, sure." And I don't know what came over me at that time, that I feel so confident at that age, that I could come and just tell this major publisher that, "You may want to see my work." So they did. They loved it, they gave me a deal. Then something said, "Hmm, if you can get one deal, you can get another one." So I did the research at that time and I found a literary agent and he helped me get a major book deal in two weeks with St. Martin's Press.

Sara:

Wonderful.

Matt:

When they say, "You got a book deal," what's the next step for you?

Maryann:

So when I get a book deal, that means that I have a contract to write a book with a major publisher. And whatever the money is, 5,000, 10,000, it may be stretched out over a year or what have you, it's something that I get while I focus on completing and writing the book. So, it helped me support myself while I write. It actually helped me be taken as a serious writer, not just for myself, but for people around me, that a major company was actually paying me to write and will publish my work.

Sara:

Do you have more books in you?

Maryann:

I do have more books in me. I have to say, at this point in my life, I've learned so much in the last many years since I graduated Fordham, that I have books in me, but sometimes it's a matter of what I want to say. And there's so many ideas floating around, but what do I want to say now? I knew what I wanted to say then, 20's and 30's, but at this point in my life I have something new to say and I don't know what that is. So to answer your question, yes, but I don't know what that is yet.

Matt:

At what point did you realize you had to get a master's degree?

Maryann:

So my master's degree was one of the best decisions of my life. I decided that it was time for me to get out of my mom's house, I was about 28 and I said, "The only way she's going to let me leave is if I'm going to school." She can't argue with that because I come from a really strict conservative Caribbean family, and we all live together and we grew up together. And I said, "I'm going to apply to this graduate program. I love Miami, I visited it, beautiful beaches." I only applied to one school, and I said, "Let me just go for it." And I know if I got accepted she would be happy to see me go doing this great, beautiful thing. So I applied and I got accepted, and I also got a full scholarship for my whole master's program because I was a published author. So who can argue with that, right? So now I get to go get my masters fully paid for, mom doesn't have to pay for it-

Matt:

At the university of Miami.

Maryann:

At the University of Miami, and I also get paid to learn because I also get a stipend as a teaching assistant, so it was a win-win. So it was one of the best decisions of my life, so I did it mostly to get out of my house, but at the end of the day, it enhanced my career in so many ways because now I can teach college because of it.

Sara:

So then you graduated and came back up to New York?

Maryann:

Yes.

Sara:

Okay. And then what direction did you go?

Maryann:

Well, at that time in my master's program, when I graduated, I had published two books, and it was time to publish another. So I came back to New York and I started writing again and I started working on my third book, which is called, Marry Your Baby Daddy Day, and, Marry Your Baby Daddy, was about three sisters who had to marry the father of their child in order to inherit \$1 million from their grandmother. Okay, so it's about all of that stuff. So anyway, I came up to New York, I wrote that book. I also threw this big, big live, real life wedding of 10 couples. They got married in Brooklyn at a real service, mass wedding style. So I got into that, and I thought I was going to be doing it over and over for many years. I did it. I kept writing my books. I also started writing for Glamour at that time, who, they were really supportive of me, and I was about to be in for another surprise after that.

Sara:

What was the surprise?

Maryann:

Well, thinking that everything was going straight up into the sky, I got my masters, I got my book, I got my event, I'm being interviewed on 20/20, I'm on CNN with Soledad O'Brien, I'm going to be big and famous. And thinking that I'll get to do this wedding, I'll get to do many other things, and that didn't happen. What happened was that everything stopped after a while and I had to find a job, and when I was interviewing almost every interviewer knew me from T.V.

Sara:

Okay.

Maryann:

And they were, "Are you serious? Do you really want to work here?" I couldn't convince them that I really wanted to work there, that I needed a job.

Sara:

They thought you were overqualified or that you would just go on in a different direction that wasn't suitable or?

Maryann:

They thought that, "Can't you be doing something else? Why do you want to be here?" It didn't seem to them, I wasn't able to convince them. They were more curious about my projects and what they learned about me online or from what they saw on T.V. than they were about my skills.

Sara:

So where'd you end up?

Maryann:

Well, this is all honest stuff here and this was probably one of the darkest points of my life because I was now in my early thirties and I was really at one of those crossroads when I start to think, "Okay, this vision I had of being this bestselling author is not quite working like I thought, and what am I going to do now?" So for me, I went into a really dark period, and that was around 2007, 2008, and you know what happened in 2008, the market bombed, everything.

Matt:

Just a great time to get a job.

Maryann:

Exactly. So at that time I had to, I lost my book deal. So after five books with St. Martin's Press, at that time, all the companies were laying off, cutting off everything, and that really, really was hard for me. So I had to reinvent myself. I had to reinvent myself and I had to do it starting from the very, baby steps. I started to do temp jobs.

Sara:

And what did you find valuable from those experiences? Did it get your foot in the door? Did it give you some administrative skills that you could apply to future jobs?

Maryann:

Absolutely. It was difficult for me as a creative person to hold down a nine to five, so I learned to do that. I learned to make relationships at work with people that I normally don't connect with, and I just learned to slowly but surely get into reality. And this helped slow me down. Slow me down.

Matt:

It was your first time really in an office since your early twenties at CNN, right?

Maryann:

Yeah. Yeah. And CNN wasn't even an office, it was being on live T.V. every single day, so you were never sitting down, you were constantly moving. So between that time and now a lot had happened. And what happened was getting my whole thing together, what I want to do again. So from there I started teaching college, really honing my skills in the classroom. From there I was able to get a contract to teach in Abu Dhabi, teach English, business communications, to oil and steel employees. So I lived in Abu Dhabi for over a year, that was one of the best decisions of my life. I got a chance to breathe, slow down, nourish myself, get back into a spiritual foundation, take care of myself, recreate my life, and that is what I'm still doing now.

Sara:

Did you love teaching?

Maryann:

Yes. Oh my goodness. Teaching for me, I've always been a strict teacher, even in college, and I didn't always get the best reviews because of that, not very flexible and stuff. But after I started teaching in Abu Dhabi, I became more relaxed, meaning that there is some flex room with the due dates, not so much, but I'll listen to your situation, and kind of let the students be more participants in the classroom instead of me being the authoritarian figure all the time. So teaching abroad really helped me do that.

Matt:

So you mentioned Elizabeth Stone, did you pull from any of the professors or instructors you had while you were a student when you yourself became the teacher?

Maryann:

One thing that I remember of one of my most memorable professors, is their ability to talk to me outside of the classroom. Elizabeth Stone, Professor Stone, she was always open to my curiosity, my questions. She even helped me land a really major internship at a major magazine. I remember I was calling... I always remember this, I don't know if she does, but I was calling her one day on the phone, and I couldn't get her because something about a paper, right? And her message says, "Press one for urgent, two for not urgent, three for whatever." So I pressed, one, for urgent.

Sara:

10 times.

Maryann:

I pressed one for urgent and I left my message, "My paper is not going to be in on time." And then she called me back and she said, "I thought that was about my child. You don't have to press one."

Sara:

For a paper.

Maryann:

Right.

Sara:

Okay.

Maryann:

You're going to be okay. So just talking to students in a normal way and understanding the anxieties and stuff that come up with it, and also seeing myself in my students really helped me become a better professor. And also, like I said, examples like Dr. Stone and other professors I've had, also shown that to me.

Sara:

So content strategy appears a lot on your LinkedIn profile, talk to me about content strategy. What is that? How did you find it? And what do you do?

Maryann:

Content strategy found me.

Sara:

Okay.

Maryann:

Okay. Just like my books, they found me. I didn't have this agenda to be a content strategist. What happened is being an editor in the business around 2000, maybe 10, 11 when social media came on, you just became a content strategist. So, a content strategist, quickly, what they do is fill the gap between business needs and user needs. And they fill that gap for online platform for whatever it is, and oftentimes it's really hard to satisfy your business goals for revenue and satisfy users who want see great, amazing, sexy stories all day long, so that's where a content strategist comes in.

Sara:

Do you enjoy what you're doing?

Maryann:

I do. I'm right now... I love it because I get to work on different contracts with great companies. I get to be on different teams. Right now I'm working at a major investment bank as a senior content strategist, I love it because now I'm doing UX writing, which is awesome. And I'm learning more about the user experience. I'm getting now into this technical thing that I didn't ask for, and I'm still being able to do my writing and I'm getting to manage teams and to have a voice and to say things that are meaningful and have some type of impact. And helping people make decisions about how they want to do their business or what have you, and I'm excited about that. So I feel like now is a really good time for me to start focusing back on my creativity side like the writing and the books.

Matt:

Well, any tips you might offer for a student who, you pick, someone who wants to write a book or wants to pursue a similar sort of career path or a creative career path.

Maryann:

Yeah, get a career that pays the bills first. This is reality. Get something that is going to take care of you. That's one of the major steps in self-care. A job is self-care. So get that down and then work on your creativity, and whether that's a movie, a book, a podcast, whatever you want to do. And then eventually they'll come together, but you can't be as creative as you want to if you're worried about bills and finances. So please, I've been there, done that. If you do it the other way, it's going to take you a lot longer to take care of yourself and it's going to slow things down.

Sara:

It sounds like you leaned on the Career Services Office at Fordham, it sounds like you weren't afraid to make big leaps in your career and to reinvent yourself, like you said, so there's a lot of good information that I think current students or people transitioning can really take to heart.

Matt:

Can I ask you what's next?

Maryann:

What's next is I am going to start working on a new book. I'm a novelist, so I write fiction, but I've been having a feeling to do nonfiction and write about a real issue, so I'm still going through what I want to say about this. So, that's what I'm working on next. I also would like to see if I can move out of New York at some point and really start focusing more on my self-care again, as I feel like I'm getting more settled now in my life, as to feeling more comfortable about working, which I never was and being creative. So I think now is the time to sort of keep expanding.

Sara:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matt:

Great Maryann, I think that's all we have for you. Thank you so much for being here today and sharing your story.

Maryann:

It's my pleasure as always.

Sara:

Well, that's another edition of Fordham Footsteps.

Matt:

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