Angela Sulfaro-Menconi: Self-advocacy and zero waste living

Mon, 9/20 8:25AM - 50:50

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, people, felt, business, writing, university, class, anthropology, plastic, thinking, learning, autism, cultural anthropologist, teacher, thought, high school, life, diagnosis, find, soap

SPEAKERS

Katy Weber, Angela Sulfaro-Menconi

Katy Weber 00:00
Okay. Hello Angelo. Welcome. And thank you for joining me.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 00:04
Thank you so much for having me today.

Katy Weber 00:06
I'm so excited full disclosure for listeners I do when I'm when I'm inviting somebody to be on the podcast, I send them some questions and I just was really struck. I love some of your answers. And I want to get to talking about them and your fascinating history, your your academic history as a trained cultural anthropologist. But first, I want to find out about your diagnosis, how you sort of first suspected you had ADHD and kind of what led up to you're getting a diagnosis?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 00:38
Sure, well, I'll be upfront that I'm one of those self diagnosed ADHD ears, and how most of us start out that way. Exactly, you have a suspicion and then you go and get verified. So I have a son, who is six years old now. And when he was two and a half, he was diagnosed with autism. And Autism is largely an inherited trait. And so my husband and I both started doing a lot of self reflection, thinking, you know, perhaps we could be autistic. So I did a lot of reading, I joined a lot of asking autistic groups on Facebook, and other social media platforms started following actually autistic hashtag on Twitter. And I realized I was not autistic. The women that were talking about growing up autistic, their stories just really did not resonate with me. However, when I, you know, I'm going through all this research about autism, I'm looking at co occurring conditions, and one of them is ADHD. And when I would read
about ADHD, I mean, just the blinking lights were going off in my head, like, oh, my goodness, this is these are my people. This is what is me. I thought everybody experienced the world in this way. But now I’m finding out that no, this is, you know, something entirely different. So

Katy Weber 02:08

you’re like, and I was just having a deep dive into autism? Yeah,

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 02:13

exactly. And I wasn’t. And you know, of course, we have our deep dives, just like autistic people do. Where, you know, we just get hyper focused on these different subjects. Sometimes, not when we even want to kind of choose us, it feels like, yeah, so it really resonated with me all the things that women who had self diagnosed or had a, you know, an adult diagnosis of ADHD, and many of them had children who had been diagnosed or children who had been diagnosed with autism, which I found fascinating, because of course, we we got Passover, when we were girls, right? We didn’t, we didn’t set off any alarms and teachers or parents brain. So you know, we weren’t we weren’t given our diagnosis back then.

Katy Weber 02:59

Absolutely. Yeah. So So how long ago were you diagnosed?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 03:04

Self diagnosis would have happened probably about two years ago, I would say is when I really kind of accepted that this is probably, well, actually, I wouldn’t even call it accepted that I have an ADHD brain. I embraced having an ADHD brain and realized that I wasn’t lazy, that I wasn’t a morally flawed person that I wasn’t, and I please excuse this pejorative, I was not crazy, which is what I had always thought I had always told people, you know, again, excuse the use of the term crazy, I know that, you know, we’re trying to move away from that term. But at the time when I was 20, you know, 20 years ago, I thought, I’m crazy. No one’s ever gonna love me. I’m an unlovable person. And I’m too erratic. You know, basically, when I, when I said the C word, what I really meant was, I’m erratic, and I’m impulsive. And that’s not always a fun thing to have in a romantic partner or even a friend, right? You don’t want someone who’s gonna take the night of the fun night off that you’re having and get arrested or get in trouble or get kicked out of a bar. And yet, I was acting very impulsively all the time.

Katy Weber 04:19

Right, I think, I think it’s, you know, we tend to use that term, but I think also what it means is sort of feeling like a square peg in a round hole, and feeling so misunderstood not only by the people around you, but also by yourself. And so I think, you know, as I’ve been talking to other women and learning so much more about this feeling of just absolute relief, and overwhelm of feeling like accepted, you know, like, I found my people because we we do we, the one thing we have in common is that we spend our whole lives feeling just other and not really knowing why or what to do with that feeling. Absolutely. Now what are looking back On your life, because that’s another thing I think we tend to do once we realize that this is our neuro divergence, we start to I know for me, it’s like, I just went back and
looked over everything in my life with this new lens, and felt it feeling just like I had all these new this new insight into how I operated, especially when it came to academics and in middle school and high school. So what are some things looking back in your past? where you say, Oh, my God, of course, that was ADHD.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 05:33

Right? So I only know this because I have an older brother. And he tells me that previous to school age, so previous to kindergarten, I basically fit the hyperactivity bill, I would get really really riled up and excited about things. And the adults and him would think, calm down, sit down, sit your body down, stop moving your body. Now, by the time I was in kindergarten, I had kind of gotten a hold of that, right? I’m that part of the of the because I believe I believe ADHD is also ex Spectrum. In the way that autism is handling different situations differently depending on you know, lack of sleep, or if you’ve eaten enough that day, if you are capable of handling situation, you can if you’re incapable in that moment, you’re not going to handle it well. So I had gathered my faculties, by the time I was five or six to learn how to sit in a seat. However, my hyperactivity went up into my brain. So teachers talking at the front of the room, and I’m thinking about 50 different things going on the colors in the room. What that boy said to me at recess, what I wanted to do after school, that funny television show, I saw the night before, what was I going to eat for lunch that day, you know? And then the teacher says, Angie, what was the answer to that? And I think, uh, what are we talking about? Are we in spelling? Are we in math? What’s happening right now? And usually, we know when I was younger, I couldn’t get it together to get it give an answer. So maybe I say something funny to kind of like, ease the tension in the room. But as I got older, I was able to kind of half Listen, enough so that I could say something related to the subject we were talking about. So the teacher would kind of think, alright, maybe she’s not paying attention. But she’s, she’s a daydreamer. But she’s here enough that, you know, I’m not she’s not going to get in trouble. I was not a great student. But I was not a poor student, either. Again, I did just enough to get by all throughout grade school, and I was extremely bored in grade school. B, it felt to me as if we were learning the same thing as year after year, on, we already covered that. Or, you know, a teacher would teach something. And I happen to be paying attention. And I would get it in the first in the first instruction period. And so the next day, the teacher would go over the subject again, and I think what are we doing this for? We just covered this yesterday. Let’s move on to the next thing. So again, you know, at that point, I’m like, wanting to have this novelty in my education. That, you know, in elementary school, you don’t get you have it’s repetitive, right. never really liked homework, from as early as homework started being assigned. I just didn’t do it. I just thought, why do I need to practice this? You taught me this in school? Why do I have to take it home and practice again. And I had parents who were really more interested in me being a good person than in being a stellar student, which, to many people, probably sounds like a dream, right. But at the same time, I had really poor grades because of it. So I didn’t Excel as a student, I also had, again, an older brother, who had tested as gifted. So in my family, he was the smart one. So I didn’t have to perform as the smart one. He was the smart one. Coincidentally, a teacher had also suggested that he be tested for autism to see if he was on the spectrum. And that testing never happened. But I find that fascinating now that ADHD and autism are so highly correlated in families. And there was my brother suspected of perhaps being on the spectrum. That testing never happened, though. So we don’t know. When I went into high school, again, just continuing with doing just enough to get by half listening in class, half doing the reading, you know, I find myself I’m an avid reader, I was a voracious reader as a child and as an adult. But when it came to schoolwork, I’d have to read that paragraph again and again and again and again. Because I realized I wasn’t, I was reading it, but I wasn’t paying attention to it. So I wasn’t learning anything. But I would I would glean just enough from the reading, glean just enough from that day’s lesson to get an A on the test. But then I wouldn’t do any homework. So it would average out to a C. So I was a C student, all through high school. In fact, I barely even graduated high school. I do believe my precalculus teacher bumped up my grade, just enough so that I could graduate. I went from an F to a D. So I could walk. But I have very high LSAT scores. And that enabled me to go directly to university. And when I got to university, the first thing I remember was, I didn’t find it as hard as I had found high school. I was, are you Canadian? I’m not
Sorry to interject. I was just I'm so used to people using the term college. And

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 11:05
so that's all well, maybe because I went to graduate school, and I went to graduate school in Washington State. And there were a few Canadians in my, in my

Katy Weber 11:15
Yeah, we call it University. Again, I'm Canadian, we call it University. And so I always sort of pause and think like, what should I call it when I'm speaking to somebody in the US?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 11:26
No, I referred to as university I think I probably think of Community College Morris college, but yeah, yeah. So um, I, I found University work to be, I would say on the whole easier, but again, I wasn't doing assignments. And I skipped class quite a bit because of, you know, this risk taking that I had, and this doing just enough to get by attitude, because I wasn't smart. Right. I was I had been kind of whether I told myself or others told me your brother's the smart one. you're, you know, average. So I did just enough to get by. And I definitely think that that is somehow related to my ADHD. Although I, you know, I know that there are a lot of women, especially who have an ADHD brain that say, you know, they were they were a student's right type, everything has to be perfect. We're perfectionist, right. And I think I am a perfectionist, but I felt that I couldn't do something perfectly. So I'm not going to try to do it. Yes, yes. So and I remember one story of this, and this would get me in trouble. In elementary school in high school, I could kind of talk my way out of it and explain myself better. But in elementary school, I would get in trouble a lot, because I didn't have the vocabulary to explain myself. And I came across as impertinent. Constantly. I see that now. But at the time, I kept thinking. Why am I always in trouble? I'm in fifth grade, my teacher used to do like a Where in the World is Carmen San Diego type activity. And she would post the outline of a country and put it on the wall and then have a globe next to it and a map of the world next to it. And then we were that week, by Friday, we're supposed to write on a little slip of paper, which country it was. And I could never figure out which one was you know, she wasn't picking like the easy countries, it was like these tiny little countries. And I could never find it. And I probably just didn't have the patience to go through and stand there in front of the map trying to find that shape. And it wasn't that I was bad at geography there. I just, I felt like I'm not ever going to get this. I don't even want to try. So I kept a week after week just writing my name and then writing Portugal, Portugal, Angel, Portugal, and thinking, you know, hey, I'm doing the assignment. You know, it's so and it was it for extra credit to it wasn't really even, like, actual points that I needed. But I did that. And then, you know, one day she pulled me aside before recess, and she said, Why do you keep writing Portugal? You know, this is unfortunate. She's so mad at me. And I and I said, Well, I just I'm not ever going to get it. So I don't want to even try. And she I mean, it looked like her face turned beet red. She was just so upset with me and looking back at probably was because here was a 10 year old girl just not wanting to even try. It's a pretty easy assignment. And I think that that kind of stubbornness can also be an ADHD trait. And it exemplifies a lot of my behavior as a child.

Katy Weber 14:50
does a great story. Yes, because it's sort of viewed by your teacher as this indolence, but also really You know, defiant, right? Like you're gaming the system. And I think, like ADHD is love to game the system? Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. I feel like you and I had a very similar experience with university in that I also spent my first year really doing
the bare minimum and, stopped going to classes because I was partying so much, because for me, I think social acceptance, and just the transition, and, you know, if there was anybody who was willing to party with me, I would find that person and party. Well, you know, like, I just felt like, my focus was on feeling accepted socially. And as a result, I stopped going to classes, and it amazes me that I passed any of them. But I failed enough classes in my first year that I dropped out, because I thought, I, you know, I felt so guilty, I was spending my parents’ tuition; I had no idea what I wanted to do. And I just felt, you know, like, this was not for me. And so I just dropped out after my first year. And when I went back, I took a year off to kind of find myself and travel and, and when I went back, I ended up you know, really deciding that, you know, if I was going to do this, I was going to pull myself up by the bootstraps, and sit in the front row center of every class and attend every lecture, and I ended up on the Dean’s list for every semester after that. And so I think, you know, it’s when we talk about ADHD students who do well in class, I think it’s really just like finding that motivation, and challenging yourself. And if you can’t find that motivation, which is difficult, or if it’s just not your motivation at the moment, then it’s Yeah, it’s an all or nothing.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 16:49

I like how you explain that. And I think I’m gonna steal it because I was more focused on social interaction, because that’s absolutely true for me. I ended my freshman year of university with a 1.5 GPA. So I was on academic probation for the next several years trying to dig my way out of that hole. And at the time, Arizona state university tuition was very inexpensive. I had actually gone to private school, all throughout Elementary in high school, and the tuition for the university was cheaper than my high school had been. So I was able to pay for that. And I worked and had had some help from my family with that. But I stayed in school. It took me five and a half years to get my first ba. Now because of my ADHD and my several interest that I had. I had a double minor, which is odd, right, who has a double minor? Why not just make that into a double major? You’re taking the same amount of classes. I didn’t do that. Yeah, I went ahead and had a double minor. And so that also added some time. Then I took some time off from school and I started working, I fell into a job. What was I doing, oh, I was a barista. I fell into a job I met, I had a friend and I was a barista for a little while. But I knew that I wanted to go back to school. I really did enjoy school, even though I was just doing barely enough to get by. And so one day, I went down to the university and I spoke with an academic advisor, and they said, Well, you know, you can get another ba you have your two minors minor degrees, you can turn one of those into a major, and then just take extra classes. So one of my minors was religious studies, and one of my minors was Women’s Studies. I needed 11 classes to finish a women’s studies degree and I needed 13 classes, to a religious studies. So gaming the system, of course, I chase Women’s Studies, to less classes, got that BA in one year. And as you stated, I was on the Dean’s list that time around, I had chosen to go back. I was going to really, really try hard in these classes. And I had already dug myself out of that hole. You know, it took five years by dug myself out of that hole, that academic hole I had created my freshman year of partying. And I knew how to be a good student by that time. As I was graduating with that second ba one of my one of my professors said to me, you know, Angela, that last presentation you gave was really great. And I want you to know that I think that you have the capacity to go to graduate school. Why are you getting another ba? And I again, I am not smart. This is what my thinking at the time. I’m not smart. I can’t go to graduate schools graduate school for smart people. And it were her telling me that I have the capacity to be a professor. It just blew my mind. And I thought, here’s someone who I find highly educated and intelligent telling me, you can be too, you are intelligent. And that meant a lot to me. So I started, I started the application process for graduate school at that point.

Katy Weber 20:17

then you went on and earned your doctorate.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 20:19
I did.

Katy Weber  20:22
So is that a pretty straight and narrow path from then on?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  20:25
No, really, I, you know, it took another after that earning that second ba it took another couple years, I again, I fell and fell into another job. So then I worked for a city council member at the City of Phoenix for a couple years, I was one of her assistants. And while I was doing that, and kind of putting everything, all everything into that job, you know, just really trying to do well at that job and be a professional person. This is in my late 20s, I again, acquired more skills to go to graduate school. So listening skills and learning how to be in a city council meeting and take notes that were really important to my job, right, it was really important that I paid attention to everything and, and got details, right. So I started this system where I was, I had different colored gel pens, and I would sit there and I and as long as I was taking notes, changing the color of the pen, every time, I realized that I was actually learning what was going on in these meetings. So it took me in my late 20s to realize how to study. I mean, no one had ever taught me how to do that, how to work my brain to actually learn something. So then I applied to several different universities. And I got I got into one, I got into three, and one of them offered me funding. So that’s the one I went to.

Katy Weber  21:58
That’s funny, you just reminded me of the four color pen and how I could not have gotten through. I could not have gotten through university without the four color pen. And yes, and and how taking notes, really, I think I’m just making this connection now. So I’m not sure how formed it is. But I you know, I think the idea of taking notes in class, as a way of helping you focus was sort of, you know, an older version of any kind of like Fidget Cube or, you know, using the writing aspect as a stimulant to help you listen to what is being said. Because I had a really hard time not taking notes, word for word, you know what I mean? Because I always sort of felt like I, you know, I’m going to put, I’m going to write this down now, and then I’m gonna have to go back and really process it later. And so I used to take notes, just, you know, I would try to write down everything the professor was saying. And I would get really frustrated if I fell behind. And so then I stopped taking notes entirely, and would just watch the professor. And I don’t know, for some reason that helped me a lot.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  23:08
That’s interesting. Yeah, I know that when I taught classes. While I was in graduate school, I wasn’t a professor that relied on PowerPoints, and my students didn’t like it at first. I remember every semester, I only taught two semesters. But every both semesters, my students complained that first couple weeks, you know, those first couple of weeks? Can you use more PowerPoints? Can you email it to us, but I knew why they were doing it. It’s because they that way, they wouldn’t have to pay attention during class. They could look at the PowerPoints later, and kind of write their notes after class. And I told them, no, I want you really want you to engage with me, I want you to listen to me. And if something is important, if a term is important, I’ll write it on the board. So I was very old fashioned. Because of course, when I was in university, nobody even had laptops. We’re talking the year 2000. There was no, you didn’t bring a laptop to school, someone had a laptop, it would be as thick as a brick and probably make a lot of whirring noises. So everybody had no books, you know, a couple kids maybe have like a Palm Pilot for some quick notes. But that’s it. That’s it. So I was very old fashioned. They didn’t like that. But then, you know, by the end of the semester, people would say, Oh, no, I really got a lot out of your class, because I felt like we were really engaging in
conversation. I wasn’t just biding my time until it was over waiting for the PowerPoints to, to do my studying. I don’t know, I think that there is something to you know, we all have those learning styles of audio or you know, writing or visual, you know, all of that kind of thing. And I think for me, it’s a amalgam of all of them. I need to have an experiential learning experience, but I also need to be able to see and read and write and I also need to hear so it’s kind of all of the above.

Katy Weber 25:03

So you earned your PhD as a cultural anthropologist. What does that entail besides teaching?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 25:11

Sure. Um, so cultural anthropologists generally continue to do research till either you work as a professor at a university. And anthropology is a four field practice. It encompasses human language, linguistics, human biology, biological anthropology, which encompasses things like primatology, like, you know, Jane Goodall, and also forensic anthropology, like bones like delvin Chabot, and she was a forensic anthropologist. And then there is cultural anthropology, which, which I do, which has to do deal with living human populations, currently different societies and cultures, and the history. So that would be archaeology, archaeology is a subfield of anthropology. So taking all of that for field approach, we’re trying to have a narrative about what it means to be human over time and space. And what that means is you get to talk to really cool people and traveled to really cool places, and get to, you know, have really cool experiences and learn about other cultures and other people and what people used to do and what people do now and what people say they do, but what people actually do. So, you know, I’ve loved it. I was my undergraduate degree was also an anthropology. When I was 17 years old, high school guidance counselor pulled me in and said, Angela, you know, you seem disinterested in school. You know, your grades don’t really reflect we think you’re a pretty creative and intelligent young lady, but like, your grades aren’t showing it what what is your interest? I don’t know. Well, you gotta like something. What do you like? I like to watch the Discovery Channel and talk on the phone to my friends. What What do you watch on the Discovery Channel? And I, at the time, was just watching all these archaeology shows. So he said, Well, why don’t you look into archaeology? And so I did. So I, you know, went to the library and checked out a book and thought, Hey, this is actually really cool. So at first, I wanted to be an archaeologist. But being that I’m from Arizona, and it’s 120 degrees in the shade. In the summertime, I thought, I am not standing in an eight by square in the ground in the middle of summer. It now it didn’t occur to me that I could have gone to university somewhere else where it was cooler. But, you know, at the time, I was like, No, I’m not going to do that. So I switched pretty early on to cultural anthropology at that point. So yeah, wanting to be an anthropologist was something that I had had, since I was 17 years old. That was my idea. And I actually did it. Which is, to me, pretty amazing.

Katy Weber 28:01

That’s great. It does feel very much in line with the ADHD brain as well, I guess, what I you know, looking back at my career as a journalist, now through an ADHD lens, I think, Oh, of course, I can make so much sense. I loved interviewing people and find it, you know, I just love to the whole process of, of how we learn about ourselves through interviewing others or reading other stories and how much I love one on one conversations, as opposed to loud group environments. And and then also the, you know, caffeine and nicotine culture, of, you know, being that hard, rolled up shirtsleeves journalist. And then as soon as you hit deadline, you start drinking, and everything about it just appealed to me so much. And now I look back, and I’m like, Oh, yeah, it all makes sense.
And plus, you know, when you’re a writer, you get to, you get to know a little bit about every topic, right? And the How great is that for an ADHD brain like that. And that’s why I really liked the four fields of anthropology because there was a never ending stream of data and information that I could pull from right. It was all facets of what it means to be human. There’s even like, psychological anthropology. There’s even like business anthropology. So it was just it was such a wide school of thought that I really, really resonated with me. And now

Katy Weber 29:29

one of the answers you gave when I asked the question, what is something that’s changed the most for you since your diagnosis? And I just wanted to talk about this answer you gave what you said. Now, I give myself so much more respect for having overcome difficulties. And I think that that is so important in our ADHD journey. You know, one thing when I went to my doctor and she kind of confirmed for me this diagnosis and I was she was talking about asking me questions about ways in which my hyperactivity present itself. And I was talking about ways in which I’ve come up with hacks over the last, you know, 45 years to live in this world. And she just kept talking about how incredibly hard working I was to be coming up, you know, figuring out how do I work best and what works best and how I kind of have been able to automate my life in a way to make up for these deficiencies. And I just remember being so moved, because I was like, I don’t think I’ve ever been called hardworking by anyone in my life, right? My whole narrative has always been about being lazy. And or feeling lazy and unmotivated. And so I just loved the fact that you’re able to make that connection to and say, like, I have so much respect for how I have been able to intuitively overcome some of my own difficulties throughout life. And I think it’s just so important to recognize what hard workers we are.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 30:55

Yeah, the creative the creativity that we have to get through difficult times. So we’ve grown up thinking that we’re lazy, for me it was I was morally deficient in some way, like it was, I was bad. I was bad. I was a bad person, because I couldn’t keep my room clean. I was bad because I wasn’t paying attention in class, good, good kids paid attention in class, good kids tried hard on their work. And I didn’t, and I couldn’t find the motivation to do it. But again, it took a long time, but I figured out how to be that good student, right? I figured out how to learn for my brain near my getting my brain to actually hold on to information. And I do have a much more gentle with myself than I used to be once I realized, like, No, no, no, no, it’s your neurology that’s doing this. It’s not an excuse. It is not an excuse. It is an explanation. It is a diagnosis. Right? So Oh, gosh, it was like a big sigh of relief when it all kind of hit me. And without outing other people. I found out recently that there’s other people in my family that have an ADHD diagnosis. I have a very good childhood friend who is now a physician, she’s a she’s a doctor, we’re all terribly proud of her. And she and I were speaking the other day on the phone, and I told her, kind of casually about my self diagnosis. And she said, you know, she couldn’t speak about me particularly, she’s, I’m not in your brain, and I’m not doing it in diagnosis on you. But like, you’re very clever, and clever, people can hide it. So you know, the same kind of thing. You are creative, and you’re clever. And you figure out how to get by in the world, and how to make up for your perceived deficiencies.

Katy Weber 32:58

Oh, shoot, I just had a thought. And it escaped me

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 33:00
happens to me constantly.

**Katy Weber 33:04**

I'm like, maybe I should edit that out? Or maybe I should leave that. I'm not sure yet. Is your partner? Do you think your partner has ADHD?

**Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 33:11**

Possibly we were when our son was diagnosed. The the neuropsychologist that did the neuropsychologist, excuse me that did it was you know, giving us the diagnosis in her office. And she said, You know, there's a lot of issues, the term co-morbidities, I don't really like that I like co occurring, but whatever, comorbidity with autism, and one of them is ADHD. And here's a couple like just quick little things about ADHD, you might notice that with your son, too, but he's so young that, you know, it might not pop up yet. And my husband said, Oh, no, that's me. That's me. So maybe he also feels he could possibly be on the autism spectrum. And I, I would if I got a say in that, I would say yes. But you know, it's not up to me. That's just helpful. I think I think it's been great for our relationship, because again, I give him grace and patience now much more than I used to, because now I understand that, you know, to communicate, it just has to be done in a certain way. And, you know, to get things done, the steps have to be made in a certain way. So all the patients that we have for our son were actually given to each other as well.

**Katy Weber 34:26**

Yes, I thought, you know, it's, I think it's this idea that, you know, this is a puzzle, there is a solution, we just have to figure out the best path to that solution, which seems, I think, obvious to perhaps neurotypical people who have lived their life this way. But this is, I think this is something that this awareness of ADHD has brought to me to my attention or, you know, I know sort of approach ideas or topics or tasks. Now with this idea of like, Okay, this is doable. If I feel like it's not doable, I just haven't figured out the way to get there yet. Yes. And so I think that brings in what you were saying about patience and grace. And, you know, really, instead of sort of just emotionally falling on the ground in a heap and thinking there's no way I can do this, really, it's brought a lot more kind of emotional balance, just the awareness alone.

**Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 35:23**

Yeah. And it's something as simple as you know, for my son, you know, I can say to him, okay, you can't do this. Now, you don't have this skill yet. But with practice, you will, right. It's something that parents say all the time to their kids, but I never said it to myself, to myself, it was you can't do this, you're terrible at this. This is just like, it's, you're never gonna do it. You know. But now I can say, Okay, I can't keep my house clean to save my life. I just, I don't have whatever it takes to keep a tidy house. I don't have it. But you know what? I will, I'm gonna figure out a system. I don't know what it's gonna be yet. I'm gonna figure out a system. And if I can't, well, then I'm going to hire a nice person to come and do it for me. Because why go on disliking myself? Right? No, I'm not going to do that anymore.

**Katy Weber 36:14**

Preach. The housekeeping one really hits home. Yeah.
Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  36:19
I mean, anecdotally, my grandmother cleaned houses. That's what she did on the side for, you know, some extra money. And so I always felt guilty thinking about, I couldn't keep my house clean. She kept several people's houses clean and her own. And yet I couldn't even keep my room clean, let alone out entire house. But now I think No, wait, she made money to feed her family by cleaning people's houses that couldn't get it done. So I'm going to do that for somebody else. You know, this is an economy let's keep the economy going. There's no shame in hiring somebody else to do it because they don't feel shame about the work. Well,

Katy Weber  36:55
that's a great segue into talking about this business that you have started, which is relatively new, correct?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  37:01
Yes. It's about three weeks old.

Katy Weber  37:05
Oh, okay. So very, no, it's I love the name, I want you to tell me where the name comes from, and what the significance is of written culture. Tell me a bit about your business. And since this is a new business for you, how are you? Avoiding decision overwhelm?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  37:21
Yeah, so the business is called written culture. And it is a handmade soap company. Very different from teaching anthropology at the university level. But I homeschool my children, and I needed a business that I could do from home. And soap was perfect. It took a long time for me to decide on soap. And I did a lot of research into different types of businesses I could do. I knew that I wanted to work for myself, I didn't want to do any kind of like direct sales. I wanted to, you know, have a job that I could do on nights and weekends. And soaping is perfect for that. I also considered learning coding. But that didn't that didn't work for my schedule. So instead, I'm doing the soap business. And the way I came up with the name was actually I have always had a little side gig kind of like my grandmother, right? I've always had something that I use to get a little bit of spending cash on the side, as a stay at home mom, and I, oh, gosh, why can I think of the word right now is left my brain. Oh, I'm a freelance writer. I'm a freelance web content creator, for a company in Las Vegas. I'm part of their content writing team. And so I've learned a lot about internet marketing from that which has been invaluable for starting a mainly e-commerce site. I get paid through PayPal from that business. They they like to use PayPal. And so when you set up a PayPal business account, they ask if you want to have a name for your company. And so kind of cheekily and like, Just quickly, I said, written culture, right, cuz I'm a cultural anthropologist, I have a PhD. So this is my, this is my business name. And I didn't think about it again for a couple years. And then when I decided to start the soap company, I thought, well, why change the name, it's already it's already on my paypal account. That's going to be the name for my company. And it was also the name doesn't really make you think of soap, which I like because that means it can literally be anything if I get tired of making soap which I am not even close yet to being tired of. But as an ADHD or you have to have a back up plan. I can change what the business focus is, you know, I can become a dropship company or, actually, to be honest, I have already been toying with the idea of Starting to use Zero Waste store like actual physical store, because the
city of Phoenix does not have one and it's the sixth largest city in the United States and it does not have a dedicated Zero Waste low waste store for that community. So, I've already started thinking about the next big business venture, even though this one's only been open for three weeks.

Katy Weber  40:23
Of course, that sounds familiar. Yeah, when I I, you know, I was diagnosed and I think 48 hours later decided I was going to have a podcast and by the women in HD Yeah, everything so fast. I know right? A sense of urgency and fascination and just that's that drive and all of it I love it. Well, the name fits I think it's really great. Yeah, what I started worth it with Katie I was actually a weight watchers leader. And I loved the name worth it with Katie and it stayed with me even though my business has completely transformed to anti diet intuitive eating health coaching.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  41:04
Love it. I'm just that's my new deep dive interest right now is intuitive eating. I just saw that on your website. I love it.

Katy Weber  41:11
Yeah, but you know worth it. I was like, way it worth it to things are things that are worth it to you transform throughout your life. The name has stuck, even though my business has done a 180.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  41:23
Yeah, so actually, I think that could be a tip from both of us to any listeners, if you're thinking of starting a business and you are have an ADHD, ADHD brain, like us pick a name, that can mean many different things. Right? Your business, you just changed what your business is. So I can go back to full time writing, I can start selling, you know, other people's products, I can just be a wholesale business. You know, I love that about the name. It's not, you know, City of Phoenix soap company or something like that.

Katy Weber  41:59
Well, and I think that's another thing too, with my own business. And it's probably common with a lot of ADHD entrepreneurs, which is, I need to pivot often. Because of something that I'm you know, I tend to be passionate about things. And then my business reflects what I'm passionate about. The problem is I tend to also then become incredibly passionate about something else and lose interest in the first thing completely. And so my business needs to pivot over and over and over again. And I used to look at that as a failure and think, Oh, I'm so scatterbrained, and I need to have a brand that people can trust. And I've sort of just realized that that's not capable, you know, that's not possible. But what my strength is, is, is growth and change and evolution on a very rapid scale.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  42:45
And I love that. And I feel like a few years ago, everyone is complaining about the gig economy and how, you know, you have to have all these different income streams. And I remember thinking, that sounds awesome. I'm tired of one thing, you move on to the next thing and focus on that for a while. And then when that gets boring, you go to the
first thing again, you know, like, to me, that sounds great. So I'm trying to do that with this business. So I'm still continued to as a freelance writer, I have a blog connected to my account. So I'm writing about zero and low waist living, which is another fascination of mine and my husband's. So just kind of like, purging our home of plastic, which we are not perfect at. This is an ongoing evolution, we have two children, our house is full of plastic, so I'm just going to throw that out there. But we are trying, that's, that's the game, right? We're trying to reduce our carbon footprint and the amount of plastics that we use.

Katy Weber 43:42
I think that's amazing. They never go away.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 43:47
So. So trying to change our practices. That's, that's the goal of change your behavior. I also love to knit and so and so I've been putting some of my knit work up on the site, I would never open a knitwear company. It takes too long for me to knit. But I can knit a few things that can be used in the company met with soaps. And I'm also trying to think of some other sewing some things I can. So some items that might be helpful to people that I can also put up on the website. So again, I'm just trying to think of all the different ways that I can contribute to this business and continue to make it grow.

Katy Weber 44:30
The holders the hand that soap holders for the dish soap, bar soap, I think is a brilliant marriage. Yeah. Okay, so tell me a little bit more about zero waste living if, how where would somebody even begin to start researching that?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi 44:47
Sure. And there's you know, there's actually a lot of writing about it on my my, my website, my blog, doesn't not even try and reinvent the wheel. There's tons of writing and literature on zero. There's a lot of anti zero waste to people who say, no matter what you do, you still live in a country that creates the most waste in the world. And so nothing you do will help that. And that very well may be true. But that sounds so defeatist to me. And it's just antithetical to how I live my life. I think we all can try to reduce waste in our lives. And what it really means no one is zero waste, okay? It's really a misnomer, as so many things are, you cannot be zero waste. Because we are all part of society, and we all contribute to making waste and filling the landfill. But with zero and low waste, people try to do is to divert as much as we can from the landfill. So that includes recycling, if your municipality even offers it anymore, a lot of places don't. That includes not buying things in plastic single use plastic is like the number one just largest contributor to landfill, landfilling, I guess you'd call it in, in the nation. So that's the plastic fork that you get at lunchtime that you don't really need do you, you can bring a fork people used to do that. A lot of people have switched to like, I like to call them canteens. But people using you know, their take around water bottle that started about 20 years ago, I think that's been great. Yet, there's still people who insist on buying plastic No, I'm not entirely anti plastic, we need plastics for like, the medical field, you know, I don't want to reuse somebody else's syringe and tubing when I go to get a surgery done. I don't want to do that. So plastics can be really wonderful. But I don't need to get a plastic straw. And I don't need to get a cup with a lid at fast food place every day. I just don't, I don't need to purchase things like shampoo and bottle because now a lot of companies and I'm hoping to roll out one next year, produce solid shampoo bars and solid conditioning bars and solid lotion bars. So I don't need to have more plastic bottles that are just going to clutter my counter. And also not necessarily be recycled by my municipality. And recycling actually takes a lot of energy to so it takes a lot of energy to make the plastic takes a lot of energy to reuse
the plastic. And in the end, the plastic never really goes away. So you know, it’s not. It’s not great. We try to reduce our plastic and everyday and I didn’t start off in my relationship with my husband being anti plastic. In fact, when I moved in with him, he was the one that started it. He said, Let’s not ever buy Tupperware so we did it. We switched to all glass. And we’ve kind of in any in any way that we can be low waste we are. It’s been really hard during the pandemic, as it has been for a lot of people because you know, suddenly grocery stores wouldn’t allow us to bring our canvas bags to do grocery shopping, we had to get these plastic bags and they didn’t have paper. Right? So when we’re able to get paper, we get paper when they allow us to use our canvas bags we do. And we we try to choose paper metal, any alternative to plastic that we can I love it.

Katy Weber  48:26
I think it’s great. And I think you brought up such a great point in this I this nation divided this idea that love it. It’s not going to do enough. So why bother? Or there are so many people out there who are doing worse than I am. So why bother and bar shampoo? Like, why haven’t we been doing that all along? It’s so

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  48:44
easy. Well, it’s interesting. I remember. I used to watch a lot of musicals, and a lot of documentaries about everything. But oh, one documentary I saw about musicals, stated that it was South Pacific. I think her name is Cathy Rigby, the actress that from Broadway was in the first production of South Pacific. And everybody use solid shampoos prior to that, but pro had just been developed. And it was the first liquid shampoo. And there’s that song, I’m gonna wash that man right out of my hair. So pro sent her a bottle of pro shampoo so she could get on stage and actually wash her hair in that number. And after that everybody started using liquid detergent on their hair, which is essentially what liquid shampoo is. And I remember that from being eight years old.

Katy Weber  49:35
I love that I had I’ve never heard that story. I love that. And you know, I’m not surprised at all. I feel like so many of so many of our life choices are rooted in capitalism.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  49:48
Right. And we don’t even know it.

Katy Weber  49:51
Right. Yeah, exactly. Thank you so much. It’s been a real pleasure chatting with you. Where can our listeners find you on social media or your website?

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  50:03
Yeah, so I’m on Instagram, as at written culture. And also, I have the website, www written culture calm. And from there, you can find the link to my blog and you’re able to message me there, or through DMS and Instagram. That’s great. It’s
Katy Weber  50:24
a beautiful Instagram feed by the way I know.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  50:27
Oh, thank you. I really appreciate that. I have no training in art whatsoever.

Katy Weber  50:33
We become experts in so many little things. Okay, great. Well, thanks again, Angela.

Angela Sulfaro-Menconi  50:38
I really appreciate being asked to be on a podcast. This is my first one. And also, I wish you luck in this podcast venture. Thank you