**DYAN:** Hello Mariko.

**MARIKO:** Hi Dyan, how are you?

**DYAN:** Thank you for joining me today. We are doing an interview about bringing our books to you and your processes and skills and what you have done and challenges that you've faced along the way. And then we'll wrap it up at the end with the top three tips and see what happens. So we start with describing your creative process and how you go about that? I'd like to hear your thoughts.

**MARIKO:** I guess before I even before I create a proposal, I project myself to the end point and try to visualise what the finished product would look like. I imagine what I'd like to see and I’ll come up with the craziest of outcomes and possibilities and then I start from there. And working backwards, then I know where I'm going. So it's goal setting. Once I've got the job and I read the manuscript for the project, I will sketch some initial ideas, almost like visual flags along the story line. For example, in this book, I imagined the sneaky Sebastian at the cash register, and that was a really strong image in my mind. I sent that initial sketch to you as an idea what would style I would work in for the rest of the characters.

Also, it was a good idea to understand the characters that I was going to be drawing, to avoid having all the kids, for example, looking exactly the same. So that’s when you sent me the images of your family. It helped me create unique characters for each of the girls, especially their smiles and their eyes. I guess those two things are the key areas that give any face its uniqueness in a drawing. And then I developed their hairstyles and their clothes and their height relative to each other, and it helped me to understand who they were. After I became familiar with the manuscript, I would put myself in their shoes to capture different expressions, for example when they’ve been grossed out or rolling around laughing. I did that for the image of the old couple handling underwear and then the girls would roll around going ewww. It was actually quite helpful to put myself into the shoes of a 10-year-old doing that, because I imagine that’s how they would react. They're the kind of emotions that I try and portray in the pictures.

I think expressions are really important. I would sit with a mirror to help me understand where eyebrows go when you're surprised or shocked or rolling your eyes. Eyebrows are really important expression points as well. To sketch pictures, I use a pencil and then I'll go over with a fine marker pen and clean up the pencil marks. I'll scan the pictures in to the computer and clean it up before I digitally colour and put in the layout and extra images as well. That’s pretty much my creative process.

**DYAN:** Do you find that you're walking down the street and you've had this project bubbling around in your head, and you just all of a sudden go ah, actually, now I just need to . . . and that image, like something that you've been waiting for that’s been sitting around that didn't necessarily work when you'd set the time? Does it pop in your head? Or you find when you sit down at your desk, you know that this is your set time and you would just focus in that time?

**MARIKO:** I do tend to take the book with me and doodle. Yeah, you're right. It's when you're not really expecting it to happen and then you're doing something and it does all fall into place. But it does actually help, rather than think about it, just to put it down and see what it looks like and how it works on the page. But yeah, I think so. It was helpful to really understanding the storyline to the point where it became my story as well.

**DYAN:** Interesting story. With respect to falling into your profession, because sometimes it’s hard when you're at school and kids go what are you going to do when you grow up, and then sometimes when you leave school, you may think oh yeah, I'm going to go that way and then it goes that way. So tell me the story around that.

**MARIKO:** About my background? You know what, I was always interested in the creative, the fine arts. I was planning to go to art school. I'd setup my portfolio, and yet I believe that my mother had a big issue with it. She didn't think it was a good idea to become what she called a ‘struggling artist', because she believed that it was something that you couldn't really make a living from. I was impressionable and I didn't want to be relying on my parents for the rest of my life for handouts or whatever. So I thought she was right and never really believed myself talented enough to run with the best. You know what, I wish I was brave enough to take the challenge head on. The opportunity didn't really exist to pursue such challenges however I don’t think I was quite clued up enough to figure out how to make those opportunities appear, because it is about creating those opportunities as much as finding them. So I did what I thought was best for me under the influence of my parents, and worked office jobs and I made an ok wage. I also moved around the world following my husband’s career. I did take on some really interesting courses and jobs, but I still continued to draw and paint. I attended creative workshops. I did sculpture courses. I did drawing and portfolio development and I studied and I researched and experimented with different mediums, from wax, acrylics, oils, and then I taught myself how to use Adobe’s suite of software. I did it at any chance I could get because I was interested in it and I loved the challenge of learning. You know when babies were napping, or the house was asleep or when my husband was traveling. I guess following a dream is one thing. But in reality my dream was following me around the world all the time. It's always been there. To get involved, it’s a matter of not saying no, putting your hand up and creating those opportunities for yourself. It is really about that.

**DYAN:** Be brave.

**MARIKO:** Yeah. The worst thing that can happen is you do end up on your bum but you have to get back up again. Giving that sense of courage to my kids is important. If they want to follow a creative path or do something a little bit out of mainstream, then I would encourage them to be brave and give it 150%. My dad always used to say you need that piece of paper to fall back on: As long as you've got that college degree, you can do anything. I don’t know that that’s always right. You have to really understand what interests you and it’s not about passion so much passion follows much later… If you enjoy doing something that you like a little bit then go deeper. Otherwise you risk ending up in a job where you hate your boss, and the people you work with are dumbnuts and infuriating. Understanding what interests you on a deep level is really important.

**DYAN:** Finding your strength. It’s funny. As you say, if you walked down the street and say oh, I'm an artist, people say oh yeah, but what do you do. There's that . . .

**MARIKO:** Yeah. I think the concept of being an artist is so broad that you actually . . . I think the vocabulary for what it is to be an artist is not there for a lot of people. I remember looking through the papers when I was young. It was the Saturday paper that had the job sections. There was not one job opening for an artist. I guess it's so much better now that you have the internet to educate kids on careers . But if I'd looked up graphic designer, there would have been jobs listed I’m sure. But I didn't have the vocab or the depth of knowledge to understand that being an artist could mean so much more.

**DYAN:** As you said, like in other professions, if you say doctor or lawyer, they have subsets, and it's clear and defined. But when you say artists, as you say it’s like . . . . . . it is becoming more known because artist now is oh yeah, but do you dance or sing or do graphic design or work in water colour or use Adobe. So all of a sudden people are starting to use that language to know . . . when it’s like saying oh you're a doctor, it's not just that top layer. There are so many subsets. I guess for you and I, knowing that that is clearer, I guess it’s almost a double-edged sword for our children, is that they can go out to the world and say ok, is this diversity now that wasn’t as clear when we were trying to decide what's our future. But that can also be very confusing because all of a sudden it's like oh, there's so many. So try and pull that into a neat . . .

**MARIKO:** . . . understandable and a viable I guess career or . . . When we were growing up, there was a limitation as to only one choice of career. The pressure to choose a stream was really big. I don’t think that it's such an issue now. You don’t have to choose one thing, because it’s understood and encouraged for kids to try out lots of different things.

**DYAN:** It’s almost an expectation you won't stay in a job for more than a certain number of years whereas before you had a job for life and that was just no longer relevant. The other thing was moving onto the aspects of your work that you love and you hate. What is your least favourite and your most favourite? I don’t know what the politically correct term is meant to be there, because you know right or wrong, left or right.

**MARIKO:** I don’t think there's any right or wrong. I guess things that really make me feel alive and buzzy would be the idea, the concept development. Coming up with the new ideas, putting them down on paper, figuring out the best way to present them. The computer is an amazing tool. There are so many aspects to the software that you can get that you try and get the most out of it. I guess for me, all the software skills has been self-taught, and I still feel like I have a long way to go. I've just signed up to do an online graphic design course just to dot those I’s and cross the T’s, and hopefully I will fill in the gaps that will allow me to work more productively and creatively. I think it's the learning and challenge of new things, which is probably the most favourite of mine

**DYAN:** Again, that’s two sides of one coin in the sense that you need to do that learning to be better. But you need the time to fit in that learning to be better.

**MARIKO:** Well exactly. That's my least favourite part. It’s actually finding the time, making the time. It's a precious space. The physical aspect of creativity does take up a lot of space. I'm fortunate enough to have a dedicated office just for me. No one is allowed in my study.

**DYAN:** I can so understand that.

**MARIKO:** Once upon a time, I had to clean up the dining table, with all my work, to get ready for dinner, and that’s a total creativity killer. It really is. To be able to get up, walk away, and then come back to a space that you're in the middle of maybe a day or two later is really important. I've got two spaces: my study and a garage. If I’m working on a bigger project, I will use a big 6-foot worktable in the garage. I can spread out and if I need to, I can just walk away from that. If I'm cutting or stencilling or spraying, that can all stay on the table. That’s a messy side creativeness that I enjoy doing as well..

**DYAN:** Making it relevant. I think that what you've touched on there has started moving into the professional and personal challenges. As you said, now that you've got a dedicated space, it's that ability to say ok, I'm now walking into the office. Before, you walk onto the kitchen bench, you're like is this a kitchen bench for my family to eat food, or is this a kitchen bench which is my creative space, which as you say does change your mindset when you're like ah, I've got to clean all that up. When you have captured a moment, you're like I'm not going to able to get that back. But I've got to get food on the table because my family is going to go mental otherwise, you know. So what you find is the biggest challenge that you've faced professionally?

**MARIKO:** I think knowing when to finish your project and walk away is challenging. The idea that a painting or a project is finished is one thing. If I see my work at a later date it sometimes makes me cringe because with each piece of work I feel I get better, and then going back to an old project with new skills or techniques, I think how I could have done it better if I knew as much as do. The biggest challenge is letting that cringe go.

Another challenge I find is after I have come up with a good idea or a really interesting concept, the client announces they’ve run out of funding and they shelve the project indefinitely. That’s happened a couple of times in the past. You work so hard to get a concept out and not being able to follow through, I guess it's a bit like being constipated, stuck. So I've learned how to keep that pipeline moving and as a result I've learned how to choose my clients a bit better. Those shelved projects are still shelved, and I'm waiting for the right opportunity to use them. So we'll see. There are a couple of big stencils I've got in the garage that I'd love to put out somewhere. I’m just waiting for the right time to sneak down into the city in the middle of the night to do that.

**DYAN:** Kerry Smith says that’s completely acceptable as long as you don’t use spray paint, because it’s toxic. You've got your son.

**MARIKO:** I use spray paint. I've got a mask. Sometimes I've actually put the stencil on paper and I paste it up. So I only need a bucket of glue and a brush and it's safe. I did one paste up in Hosier Lake a couple of years ago when my little one was still in a stroller. We did that on a Friday lunchtime. So there was me - suburban mum in a station wagon, pulling out the paste and glue from under the stroller and putting up a big 6 foot high stencil up in Hosier Lane. I think it lasted a good 10 or 11 months. It was quite an achievement.

**DYAN:** One down.

**MARIKO:** One down.

**DYAN:** What you've talked about there is that journey, as you say, that you go through when you have these experiences of developing these things and then reflecting back. I think it applies across your life anyway. It is hard sometimes accepting that that was the knowledge you had at that time and that was your best, and you know you did your best that you could do at that time. And then you've gathered all this subsequent knowledge and better techniques and whatever else. You go back and you think where was I on that day. But I think you need to learn to forgive yourself and accept that if you hadn't have done that, that you couldn't be here. So that’s ok.

**MARIKO:** Yeah. That’s the challenge. Just letting that stuff ‘be’.

**DYAN:** Yeah, and moving on from that. In your personal life, balancing the challenge of trying to be the mother, the wife, everything else for everyone else at times, as well as what you need to do professionally. How do you find that?

**MARIKO:** In order to get everything done . . . you know I have a list of projects that I want to start and I have a list of projects that I want to finish and I have a bookshelf heaving with books that I want to read and studies that I want to continue and pursue. I want to take the kids camping. I want to go to Tasmania. I want to do more yoga and swim more laps. I wish I was more efficient with my time. I need to find more hours in a day. As a result, I spend many hours at night working when the house is asleep and drawing and thinking out new ideas and working out how to use new software and researching. These are all things that I love to do. But something has got to give and that’s sleep. And my poor neglected husband is very patient. But I think it's what I have to do. When I’m running around during the day after the kids and managing the house and activities and everything in between I can pack quite a lot in. I don’t understand people who are bored. When my kids say that they're bored, it just drives me to destraction, because there's so many things that I would do if I could find the time.

**DYAN:** It's so funny, isn't it? Because it's so hard to reflect upon that. Like I know when I was a kid, I would say that all the time. Now as a parent, I think how can you be bored. It is sad. But I think it is also great for the kids to see mum and you know you as you, me, being able to do all these different things, and say hey, at the moment, you need to find your own space and do your thing. Yes, I know you're telling me you're bored. But it is also important for you to develop some skills here. As you say, give them a suggestion. How about you wash the dishes or read a book? They go oh, I'll read the book. Giving them that opportunity to say yeah, I've got to be a self-starter. That’s what you're showing them every day. You're that self-starter. You're there saying I'm going to have these challenges and these goals and I'm going to move forward. I'm going to keep on stepping forward and keep on driving it, I'm going to do it and I'm going to complete. As much as you get that pushback from your children, it's funny how . . . then you overhear conversations. I don’t know if you've had this happen. But I've overheard conversations that my children have had in amongst themselves and with their friends. The sort of language they use is so . . . the things that I talked about moving forward and stepping forward and keeping an eye on the goals. I think wow, may be they did listen and they’ve seen the example. So there is some hope.

**MARIKO:** I think having a good role model is important. It’s good if your children can see you struggle and juggle lots of different things, and yeah . . . but I think that’s probably the biggest challenge. It's checking all of those boxes that I don’t want to check get checked.

**DYAN:** Did you want to talk more on the balancing parenting and commitments or we've covered . . .?

**MARIKO:** I think finding the time to do the parenting is one thing. It definitely impacts the state of the house. But you learn to make peace with a certain level of mess and disorganisation. But the kids get basic meals; they’re fed, they're not hungry then I’m winning. I think simplifying life is probably the focus now. I’m trying to make sure that life isn't too complicated or too busy with after school activities so we can get that downtime. To me, that's really important.

**DYAN:** Ok. Now the crazy fact that epitomises you.

**MARIKO:** That's a crazy idea. I don’t know. Has anyone answered that?

**DYAN:** I was trying to think about what the crazy fact is about me. It’s almost like I don't dye my hair. Like that's crazy in this day or age. You can't relate to it because you don’t dye your hair.

**MARIKO:** I'm too lazy. That’s just time that’s wasted. That's potentially two hours every six weeks . . .

**DYAN:** No, four weeks . . . [LAUGHTER].

**MARIKO:** [VOICE OVERLAP] jeepers.

**DYAN:** I know. People like go, you don’t dye, what do you mean? I'm like because that would be like time away from me doing another thing.

**MARIKO:** I guess you're not moving forward in what you're doing, if you're not learning, being mindful, working on improving who you are or helping people or improving yourself professionally or personally. I don’t know. I guess I don’t really spend that much time with anybody else like me.

**DYAN:** I'm going with the hair. I think that epitomises you, like on so many levels. Do you see the analogy?

**MARIKO:** Yeah, I think so. The grey hair.

**DYAN:** You make a choice about what your priorities are, and you understand that if you spend two hours every four weeks at a hairdresser, and it’s longer than that, because you've got to get there and you've got to get back.

**MARIKO:** Making an appointment is just as hard.

**DYAN:** It’s a whole day out of your month, which is . . . it is so much of a priority to build all these other dreams and ideas and to learn, you think no, I need to . . . as you say, something has got to give. So the give for you is minimising your time at a hair salon. Now I'm going to wrap up with top three tips. So I'll be interested to see what your feedback is. I took notes this time because as I said my brain, what I can capture here and what I can capture there. So I wasn’t ignoring you when I was looking down.

**MARIKO:** That’s ok. You know what, I've made more than three points. The first is a priority list: getting the things that you need to get done down every day. And prioritising one and getting that done, and you’re already on top of things. Second is routine. It's really important to have routine to be productive, because even though the kids are all over the place during the week, if you can make sure that you do something routinely every day, then that’s important to being productive. Exercise. For me it’s yoga and swimming. It really does help clear your head and helps my productivity as well. Gardening is good. Just the weeding part is great. We've got a nice little garden out back. And eating well. I think that's a really important aspect to just feeling good about sitting down and working, if you've got a good quality food in your stomach and it's healthy and you are nourished, that’s important.

**DYAN:** Ok. My spin on that, because I think we are very much on the same page and I say it in a different language. When you talk about that to-do list, it's that knowing your end goal and keeping this in mind. That’s what you talked about with the routine and the nourishment and the gardening. Those to me is part of that. Knowing what the end goal is knowing where you want to be, and you need to articulate it in such a way that it is you, you start at the top and say this is my priority, and everything else will be . . . when it happens it happens. The other thing you talk about, when you're talking about the weeding there, it also came into something that you mentioned about keeping up the learning and the weeding, what that makes me think about is knowing what to throw out and what to keep. So what do you nourish in your garden, but then what do you take out? What do you know you don’t need anymore? You've just extracted it away. So keeping up that learning and making the time relevant that you're doing that learning and then discarding what you don’t need. So you've got that in there. One thing you didn't talk about, this is may be because as you said you've had this journey of where you are to today. But it's something you mentioned early on, which is be brave and create opportunities and have courage.

**MARIKO:** Yeah, that’s important. But I think also being able to reflect, having that reflection time helps you to be brave. Because then you say well, this is what I *could* do, this is what I *should* do, this is what I *can* do. But I think exercising, gardening – they're all good spaces to reflect. Even if you're driving or standing in checkout lines, reflecting, and being mindful about where you are at any given point. Just having those big breaths when you think yeah, and here I AM. When I was young, I didn't know how to do that. I've been trying to teach my kids mindfulness and reflective thinking ... I think it is really important, because when they need to make decisions and they’re able to make well thought out decisions.

**DYAN:** Yeah. That reset, that let's take a deep breath. You know you have them, they’ll come up to you mum, mum, mum, mum, mum . . . and breath, ok now, gather your thoughts, let's talk. I'm getting that space of time me, me, me, me . . .

**MARIKO:** . . . get a handle and then you say, god, I could have done that better. But at least you know that you're thinking that I could have done that better.

**DYAN:** Yes. So Mariko, thank you so much for your time today.

**MARIKO:** It’s been a pleasure. Thank you for having me.