

The Interview

Laura Griffin

The Interview

“Good morning, Chicago! Welcome back to Waking Up in the Windy City. I’m Angie Glass, and today we have such a treat for you. Beloved author, Morgan Harlow, is joining us, and she’s going to be giving us an exclusive one-on-one interview about her rise to success as one of today’s most famous children’s writers. Let’s go ahead and bring her out.”

Morgan strode on to the set, her smile twisting awkwardly as her eyes tried to focus through the unnaturally piercing set lighting. This was only her second interview since the start of her career.

Less than a two years ago, Morgan Harlow had been sitting at her laptop, wearing pajama pants with cat paw prints all over them, and inventing creative, inviting worlds that she thought children would love to dive into. Now, here she was on Chicago’s highest rated morning show. She wasn’t sure if she felt successful or out of place. She missed the furry flannel of her kitty pants.

Morgan sat across from Angie, crossing her legs and placing her hands limply in her lap. “Hello, Angie. Thank you for having me.”

“We are delighted you’re here! Now, let’s dive right in,” Angie said.

Morgan nodded as she forced as polite chortle in agreement.

“First, let me congratulate you on the success of your most recent book *Many Monsters of Mooresville House*. This is such a fun collection of poetry for children – and adults– of all ages,” she added and winked at the camera, then reimaged her face into a rehearsed entertainment journalist manner. “What was your inspiration?”

Morgan hesitated, distracted by Angie’s blindingly white teeth.

“Um, I think writers finds inspiration from everywhere and in everything.”

“I’m not sure what you mean by that. Could you be more specific?”

“Sure. I just mean that artists of all genres pull inspiration from their lives, others’ lives, secret desires, fears, love, even politics.” She paused. She could have gone on for days about her own inspirations but her media manager, Rebecca, insisted on concise and generalized responses.

Make sure it’s a good sound-bite clip, Morgan. They’ll play it everywhere online. Your book is on the Best Sellers list. Choose your words wisely.

“Interesting. Politics, you say? Even for a children’s poetry book?” Angie casually tucked her hand and under her chin. She had years of training in feigning well-crafted expressions of deep investment.

“Why not? Politics is the very foundation of human existence. It decides how we live, eat, work, and perceive ourselves and others.”

Flipping through her powder-blue index cards, Angie looked down for a brief moment before responding. “Maybe the poem, *Monster Madness*, exemplifies a political theme?”

Morgan raised her eyebrows. She was impressed that Angie had read her book. Or maybe she hadn’t and this was a result of Angie’s manager feeding her pertinent information she needed before the interview.

“That’s a fair assessment. It’s about one monster not liking the other monster because the color of his fur. Prejudice.” She looked past the stage lights to see Rebecca frantically waving at her and pointing to the exaggerated smile she was making. *Ugh, she wants me to be more light-hearted. I’m messing up already.* “Of course, at the end, they become fast friends,” Morgan added with a beaming grin and more breezy tone.

“Is that the message you want to spread children? Be less judgmental of someone’s appearance? A sort of ‘don’t judge a book by its cover’ theme?”

“It’s definitely one of them. But...” Morgan let the beginning of her next sentence fade.

“But, what? You were about to add something?” Angie would not let this slide.

“I just was going to say that sometimes the best way to send a message to children isn’t to teach at them, but to show them through creativity. If they feel like they are being taught a lesson, it won’t have the same enjoyment or effect.”

“That’s certainly an astute observation,” Angie said, leaning forward and shuffling the cards in her hand.

“Let’s get more into the nitty-gritty of Morgan Harlow, shall we?”

Morgan shifted in her seat. She thought she saw a sinister grimace curling the edges of Angie’s mouth. Like an accidental warning of some devious, secret plan. Suddenly, Morgan wanted to claw at her itchy, sandpaper-like throat.

Angie’s tone deepened. “What made you want to write children’s literature?”

“I think when everything is washed away from it, the desire really came from happiness. I feel happy when writing children’s literature.”

“Was that because you had a particularly pleasant childhood?”

Here we go. Rebecca warned me...Angie would try to get personal. I can handle this. I can do this. Calm down. Smile and respond with likability...Or lie...whichever. Just smile.

Morgan giggled gently. “I would say that never letting my imagination cease to flourish fueled that happiness. Children are inherently imaginative.”

Deflected. Nice try, she thought pressing her shoulders back. She felt proud of her answer.

From the minute her agent called about doing the morning show, she had been a bundle of nerves. She just wanted children to enjoy her poetry, create worlds of their own.

“So, you didn’t have a pleasant childhood?” Angie paused, waiting for Morgan to show discomfort or fear. The air thickened with silence. “Of course, you don’t have to answer. I just think your readership, and viewers, would love to know what ignites that in you. So that they can foster that desire in their children.”

“Well in that case, I can certainly tell you that being an only child allowed my imagination to run wild. I spent many hours entertaining myself, and I loved it. But parents should be reading more to their children regardless. Find what their children love and expose that kind of literature to them.”

Rebecca was more than pleased that Morgan avoided that childhood-bullet. She knew Morgan hated discussing her parents. Not from lack of love, but it was *private*. Her personal life was guarded like a fortress.

Yes! Good job, Rebecca mouthed to Morgan, giving her the thumbs up as she stood next to the cameraman.

Annoyed by the dodged question, Angie tried to grab the audience back with a little personal, tv-journalist magic. “You couldn’t be more right. My little girl loves animals. We read a lot of tales about all sorts of creatures at home,” she said, again tilting a smile at the camera. Mentioning her own daughter would serve to make her more relatable to viewers at home. “What about your husband? Does he read your works as well?”

“Most of them. He loves his thriller novels though,” Morgan laughed. The cameraman panned out, noticing that her body language had loosened considerably. It was no doubt that capturing this relaxed, fleeting moment would increase Morgan Harlow’s likability to viewers.

Also noticing, Angie promptly targeted this moment by continuing to engage Morgan about her husband.

“He must secretly want to be a detective.”

“I wouldn’t argue with that.” Their girlish laughter ricocheted with a mutual understanding of men.

“So, your husband –”

“Matthew,” Morgan assisted.

“Yes, Matthew, thank you. I imagine that Matthew is supportive of your writing career? After all, you are on the New York Time’s Best Seller’s list this year.”

“Absolutely, he is. We are supportive of each other’s careers.”

“So he’s not jealous of your sudden rise to fame,” Angie prodded.

“Fame is probably a strong word,” Morgan replied. “Nah, I just think he’d rather be a rock star than a children’s author. It’s a bit flashier. You know, the loud music, the money, and the screaming girls.”

Rebecca was glowing with pride. She couldn’t imagine a better response. Endearing, a little true, probably, and witty. Surely, this interview would increase book sales. Rebecca was riding an agent’s high. *Make us some money, Morgan.*

“Matthew Harlow, filling in for Alice Cooper,” Angie guffawed, dropping her an index card.

Man, she’s good. Pandering to the viewers. Morgan reluctantly joined the laughter.

As Angie’s boisterous laughter settled, she dropped her voice to a more dramatic tenor.

“You two do not have children of your own, is that correct?”

It was as if a sudden, sweltering heat permeated the room, the oxygen vacuumed into thin air. Angie’s producer was in the wing, emphatically signaling her to stop this line of questions.

Ignoring the producer, Angie just smiled as her silent missile was launched into the interview. It was torpedoing through the conversational waters, waiting for impact.

Morgan swallowed the small rock in her throat. It thumped into her stomach. She tapered her line of vision at Angie, grasping her journalistic intentions.

They both knew rumors had been circulating the Internet for weeks that she and her husband struggled to have a child. How interesting. The children's author has no children of her own. What could she possibly know about the subject, then?

Rebecca was shredding the show's producer, quietly but vehemently, arguing for Angie to move on with the interview to a new topic.

Stymied with shock, Morgan hesitated.

Dead air.

No one was speaking or moving. This was bad for radio, but great for television. Viewers at home could clearly *see* the question was penetrating. Morgan could have sworn she saw horns growing from the top of Angie's platinum blond hair.

"Um, no. We do not." *Short and sweet*, she thought hoping to move the conversation along.

"That's...ironic- a beloved children's author would not, herself, have children." Angie allowed her statement to linger with silence long enough for everyone on set, and perhaps the viewers, to collectively hold their breath. "Is it not?" Clearly, Angie had rifled through the Internet comments and came to the interview silos stocked.

"Ironic, maybe. But, we don't." A puddle of sweat filled Morgan's shoes.

"Why is that?"

Rebecca was now having a full meltdown in the wings. Jumping up and down trying to get Morgan's attention to smile and be happy. *Stay calm. Be happy. Stay focused*, she tried to telepathically communicate to Morgan.

Angie continued burrowing. "It's rumored that you and Matthew struggled with infertility. Is this true?"

This was going to be Angie's breakthrough moment into prime time journalism, probing a cherished children's author about the dirty details of a personal tragedy.

Morgan looked around. Rebecca was on the phone. No doubt it was Matthew. Warning him that this was going to be discussed on live television, and virally, soon after.

With a deep breath in, eyes closed briefly, and forcing a generic smile, Morgan said, "Yes. That's true."

"That's so awful. I'm so sorry to hear that." Angie was being just sympathetic enough not to be hated.

"Can you tell us when you stopped trying to have children? Or have you stopped at all? Could you be pregnant right now?"

"Oh, Angie. You *are* nosy, aren't you?" Morgan rebounded, her words more shearing than joking. "We have stopped."

"Well, we know that you love children. That's quite clear from your work. You have several well-published children's books, are known in most households in America, and many schools now teach your poems to children. So, why give up on having children?"

BOOM!

The missile hit its target.

Rebecca slumped into an empty director's chair. There it was. Now Morgan would have to answer. Would she politely tell her it wasn't her business? *That would be doable, but incredibly defensive – something readers do not want in their children's author.* Rebecca panicked. She winced and closed her eyes, bracing herself for Morgan's reaction.

"Give up?" *Humph.* Annoyance and injury radiated from Morgan in her body-language, her tone, everywhere. There was not one part of her left untouched in the wake of the detonation. "You know, Angie, that's a great question."

What is she doing? Is that sarcasm or the start of a polite response? Rebecca reluctantly opened one eye.

"Yes..." Morgan paused and continued sardonically. "A great question."

Yep. Sarcastic. Oh, no. Rebecca closed her eye again.

Angie tilted her head, refusing to respond until she got THE moment. This was for her future. She could stand-off with Morgan, if she needed.

"We did not *give up.*" The words *give up* came off like a three-star Michelin chef being served peanut butter and jelly on Wonder bread. "In fact, that's an ignorant question. Especially for a journalist. Honestly, I expected more from you." In that moment, Morgan launched her own career-affecting missile. "There are so many women in this world who suffer as a result of infertility. Some are open about their struggles. Others, like myself and my husband, are more private. But let me be clear about one thing: women of every socio-economic background, race, creed, and color experience infertility. Some fall apart. Rightfully so. Others become obsessive and relentless in trying to achieve motherhood, and some actually do become mothers. Then, there are the rest of us who never have children of their own." Morgan uncrossed her legs, sitting up straight now. She held composure. Her eyes glistened, becoming more reflective as tears

filled them. “I will probably never have children of my own at this point. But, that’s okay, Angie. I did not *give up*. I simply added another path to my happiness.”

Rebecca jumped out of the chair, clapping silently with pride and throwing as many thumbs up in the air as possible.

Morgan was overcome with unexpected relief. Her lack of children had been taboo for so long in media that she was beginning to feel like a liar. Omitting part of her truth.

Angie felt her focus slip, crushed by the weight of Morgan’s stern, yet poetic, and nakedly honest response. She hunched over, and the adrenaline she had from asking the question to begin with had all but vanished. *She’s taken the interview! What do I do? She made ME look bad? Answer quickly! Be likable!* She screamed at herself.

With an almost inaudible exhale and a slightly flushed complexion, a scheming smile coiled on her face. Angie finally spoke. “Another path to happiness.” *THAT is my sound-bite. That is my moment. I did it!* “I love that. ‘Another path to happiness,’” Angie repeated. “You have just given women everywhere a reason to hold their heads up high and find a way to make peace with any past or present struggles they’ve had with infertility.” Angie’s eyes twinkled as she rotated to camera. “Writers may find inspiration from everywhere, and in everything, but now Morgan Harlow is an inspiration to women everywhere.”

Like playing a game of chess, Morgan and Angie recognized each other’s clandestine moves. Was it wrong that Morgan respected Angie?

Maybe, this will help other women, Morgan wished.

She had felt love and support during her struggles, but had also dealt with mountains of ignorance and pain. Angie managed to use that, and Morgan had not cared for that one bit. Morgan glanced to see Rebecca biting her nails, before looking back at the camera.

“Thank you, Angie. But to all the women out there, just remember that you’re not alone. You too can find your own path to happiness.” Her smile stretched ear-to-ear.

She had the last word. And it was amazing.

Checkmate.