

PODCAST 1: HOW TO BE A PART OF THE SELF PUBLISHING REVOLUTION – WITH JOANNA PENN

James: After the success of the advanced Facebook ads
Transcription of Interview with Joanna Penn

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Announcer: Hello, and welcome to Podcast Number Two, from the Self-Publishing Formula.

James: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, hello. I'm James Blatch, and with me, as ever, is our resident author-

Mark: Mark Dawson. Hello, James.

James: Hello. I should really count myself as an author as well, shouldn't I? I've got to be positive about this, but you are the tried and tested and successful part of the duo here. Here we are, Number Two of our Podcast, and this will be the first podcast with a full interview in it, and I'm delighted to tell you that our guest today is none other than the Creative Penn herself, Joanna Penn, who's a bit of an old friend of yours, Mark, isn't she?

Mark: She is, yeah. As I told you and when I spoke to her, it was great to have her on because she's one of the first podcasters I listened to when I

started learning how to do this stuff three or four years ago. She's got something like two hundred fifty or three hundred episodes, which, so you know, that's the thing to aim for, James.

James: Yeah.

Mark: No pressure.

James: We're at the bottom of that mountain at the moment, but we are climbing assiduously. One of the things I think we want to do in each podcast is have a glimpse into the working lives of us as authors, as how we're progressing and the things we've learnt this week and so on. Obviously, we weren't podcasting for most of this year, so we might do a bit of catching up for both of us.

Mark, I know you were taking a quite systematic approach to your work this year, aren't you?

Mark: I am. I've slightly in the past been guilty of, I'm very productive, but I think I could be more productive. One of the things I am doing now is trying to introduce a bit more, bit of a systemized system, so to speak, to try and get things moving a little bit more efficiently.

I'm staring right now at a big year planner that I've stuck on the wall of my study and one of the things that I'm doing, and this is helping loads and loads at the moment, is at the end of every day, just noting down the number of words that I've done. If I start working on any book on the first of the month, and I figure I can do 3 or 4,000 words every day, it's quite easy to extrapolate forwards and see roughly when I think I should finish that book.

If I put way markers or way points along each week, so on Friday, I might say, "I need to hit ten thousand words, twenty thousand for the next Friday," it enables me to make sure that I'm keeping in track with where I need to be and hopefully motivate myself by gamifying it a bit and demonstrating

that I've actually got more words than I thought I would have at that time. That's working really, really well. It's keeping me really focused. It's making sure I get my bum in the chair, do the words every day. There it looks like I'm going to be about 10 or 15,000 words ahead of schedule tomorrow, which makes me very happy.

James: A good feeling. Everyone finds their own ways of these little tricks of the trade to motivate yourself. Some people just don't need it. They'll sit down and write and write and write. I think Joanna takes a quite, also a systematic approach. I've emailed her in the past about doing some things, and she said, "Well, I'm writing in the morning." She always says that, so she blocks off every morning, I think, and does her writing. In fact, it's quite interesting. In talking to her from the psychological point of view of emerging from the rather dark thriller writer to the bubbly, bright and optimistic Joanna Penn in the afternoon. There's two sides to her as will come out in the interview.

I don't have a systematic approach. I'm probably like a lot of authors who are getting going and haven't really worked out how that's going to work for me. I think your approach is very good, targets and knowing you're ahead of it or behind it, that's quite motivating.

I'm interested to know what sort of state your house is in when you write, because I often end up writing at teatime-ish for some reason because I just have a lot of work on a lot of things to do. I prefer to get them all done. Then I can feel I can write. At four o'clock, actually, my house is quite busy. Children are emerging back from school. The door gets opened quite a lot. Because it's writing, perhaps in my mind, I don't take it as seriously as work, as a lot of the other things that I do. How do you approach that, Mark? Do you write in a quiet, empty house, or you take yourself off to a café? What would you do?

Mark: I need a quiet house, so I suppose the starting position is, that is my work. If I had to, I'd do lots of different things. Podcasting is a new thing I've

added to the slate. There's the course that we do. If you had to make me pick one, it would be writing. That is my work.

I tend to start working, I'm a morning person like Joanna. I'll start writing 8 or 8:30 most days. If the house is empty, because my wife's gone to work and the kids are at nursery, then I'll write in the study, which is where I am now, or if Lucy is here, or especially if the kids are here, then I will go somewhere else. I'll go into a café.

I'm quite well known around the cafes in Salisbury now. I'll put some noise-cancelling headphones on. I'll listen to some white noise. Something I'm listening to a lot at the moment is a new website, it's called "Brain.FM" which we might talk about later, which is very interesting. All about brainwaves and productivity and that kind of stuff.

James: Really, what does it do?

Mark: Then I'll just sit down.

James: Does it play whale songs at you?

Mark: Kind of. Not whale songs. It is musical. It has beats. It's quite hypnotic. A lot of this is marketing BS, obviously, I suspect. I think there is something in just the kind of non-lyrical music. It puts you into a fuge state, if you're that way, just very, very productive. I tried it for a couple of days and I've managed to add twenty-five, thirty percent to my word count.

James: Really?

Mark: It could be a placebo effect, but at the end of the day, who cares?

James: Doesn't matter, as long as it works, yeah. I'm fascinated by this, though. I want to hear some of this. We need to perhaps look at a couple of these on our future podcast.

Mark: We will. I'm going to actually approach them and see if they'd like to come on and have a chat with us, because I think it's potentially really interesting for people who need that intense concentration, like writers do.

James: Are you going to describe their approach as marketing BS when we have them on as a guest?

Mark: Hey, I don't pull any punches, James.

James: No, you don't. That's the lawyer in you. One thing I wanted to mention quickly before we get into it with Joanna.

A bit of the state of the nation in terms of where we are with indie authors and the industry that we are in.

In February 2016, we had the latest report, the Author Earnings Report, and it was the one that caught a lot of eyes actually in the mainstream press as well, because it showed this really dramatic switch reversal of traditional publishing versus independent publishing, and indie had overtaken them, knocking on forty-five percent of all earnings now, and traditional publishing dipping below indie for the first time ever. That was such an important moment, wasn't it?

Mark: Massively important. The thing is, author earnings has been going now for two years, I think. I'd like to get Hugh Howey and Data Guy on the podcast a bit later on because I think, Hugh is amazing and Data Guy has got this fantastic grasp of the data.

What they're doing is casting light on something that indie authors have known to be true for a long time. We will talk about this ad nauseam, I should think, as we go forwards, but it would take an amazing deal now for me to consider selling the digital rights to any of my books to a traditional publisher, simply because, and I'm certainly not alone in this. I think I can sell them better than they can.

Then when you start adding to the end and things like, "Add seventy percent royalties as opposed to fifteen percent max, then another ten percent for your agent taken off," there are so many reasons now why the sensible authors are starting to make a preference towards self-publishing rather than getting someone else involved.

We've spoken about this before, and I think we mentioned it with Joanna. Vanity publishing these days is getting something on the bookshelves rather than what it used to be, which was having the arrogance if you'd like to think that you can go and print a book and sell it yourself without the seal of approval of a traditional publisher. It's just not like that these days. Things are changing so fast. It's one of the reasons why we wanted to do this because it's just so exciting to be an author right now.

James: One of the interviews we've got coming up was Maria Force, who said that more has changed in the past two years than in the previous twenty in publishing, and that is an accelerating experience of the moment. The good news is, you know what? There's money to be made. There are livings to be made out of them. Just look at those lines on the author earnings report. Just make sure that you are determined to grab a piece of that action for yourself.

Okay, let's get into this interview then. Jo Penn, delighted that she is our very first guest. It won't be the last time she appears on this podcast, but we're always going to be very happy to have her on.

Joanna Penn is a woman who probably doesn't need a lot of introduction to most of you, but I'm going to introduce her anyway because it's very impressive. A New York Times and USA Today best-selling thriller author under the pen name J.F. Penn with over half a million books sold in seventy-two countries and five languages. She's one of the leading lights in the self-publishing movement. Her podcast and blog, The Creative Penn, has served as the starting point for many authors as they embark on a self-

publishing career. She's got an amazing rapport with a large and engaged audience, very active audience, The Creative Penn followers, and she's seen as one of the most trusted voices available to authors today. Joanna, welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula Podcast.

Joanna: Thanks for having me! It's great to be on the show and thanks for the lovely introduction.

James: It's all true and I guess we've really just touched on what is a multi-faceted life.

Can you give us a snapshot of what Joanna Penn does during the day?

Joanna: I like to describe it as I have two heads, as you mentioned. I am a thriller writer; this morning I was J.F. Penn and I was in the latest novel, and I basically don't talk to anyone. I'm plugged into rain and thunderstorms. J.F. Penn is very dark and stormy, basically.

Then Joanna Penn, the Creative Penn, is very much outwardly focused, trying to help people. I always wanted to be the British Tony Robbins. I like to inspire people with what's possible and I'm definitely a Pollyanna figure in self-publishing. I'm always glass overly full, but I did spend 13 years as an IT consultant in my previous life, implementing accounts payable into large corporates, which I think people will realize was a super boring job. I left my day job in September 2011 to make a full time living with my writing. It's certainly been a journey.

James: I bet a psychologist would have good fun with the dark and stormy Jo Penn being locked away and then the bubbly one coming out later. There's something going on there, but let's just push that to one side for the moment. Mark's with us, of course. Mark, I know when we've talked about Jo, we talk about somebody who's got a great barometer and an overview of the industry. You were asking a lot about the changes that we've seen.

Mark: I thought that would be an interesting thing to talk to Joanna about because just as a kind of supplementary introduction, when I started self-publishing four years ago, I suppose it was now, Joanna was one of the first podcaster I listened to, and I've probably listened to every episode since. It's a really fascinating and interesting podcast and a really great way to get information on things that are happening and also things that might happen. Jo's really forward thinking and has one eye on the future, which I find very interesting. I've got loads and loads of use out of all of her interviews. I've been on the show once and we've since become friends. Seems really weird since starting out all that time ago, now that she's on our podcast, which is really cool. I think it's going full circle.

James: Jo, why don't you give us an overview of the changes that you've seen since you began your blogging and your podcasting, when you were really getting under the skin of the industry. What are the major differences you've seen?

Joanna: Firstly, thank you, Mark. You are so sweet. I think what's great about the indie industry is it's very generous and everyone's sharing everything. I've learned a lot from you guys as well. That's one thing that hasn't changed. When I started self-publishing back in 2008, I was living in Australia. There was no international Kindle at the time. The word e-book just wasn't really used for a fiction novel. It was a two-hundred-page PDF that the internet marketing crowd was selling on website for ninety seven dollars and whatever. That was the extent of what e-books were at that point.

2008, I did what the old-school self-publishers did back then, which was print thousands of books and try and sell them through live events, through bookstores, that type of thing. Self-publishing at the time, I've always been very independent, so I actually looked at the publishing industry at that point and decide to self-publish because I couldn't stand how long everything would take.

I made so many mistakes because back then. This was before Twitter or Twitter had literally just come out. Facebook was in its early days. The Kindle, then, came out later that year. The international Kindle, which I was able to buy in Australia, I was one of the first people to buy the Kindle, and to see the potential of this future. It really was amazing.

Back then, the stigma of self-publishing was still huge. It was massive. You only self-published if you were someone who couldn't get a publishing deal or you were a professional speaker who sold books at the back of the room, which I actually was at the time. That was fine.

In terms of what's changed, actually, even when I moved back to Britain in 2011, I remember meeting some people in the publishing industry here, and being treated in a bad way because the stigma of self-publishing in Britain has stayed a lot longer. I think, again, it has changed here pretty much in the last couple of years. We've definitely seen the opinion about self-publishing change. Even this week, Mark's been in Forbes magazine and all that, and we've seen this week, Meredith Wild, who is a self-publishing success story, creating an imprint, being in the New York Times. The respect that is now given to successful self-published authors is completely different. I think that's probably the biggest thing that's changed.

Of course, technology. There was no Kobo. There was no KDP Select. I think what people forget nowadays is how good we have it. People moan, fair enough. Everybody has a bit of a moan, but seriously. Back in 2008, you could not have made an income doing this. A lot has changed since I first did this.

Mark: I think that's a really good point. It has changed massively, and I don't really notice that stigma so much anymore, and I'm serving ads to thousands of people every day now and get lots of comments on those ads, as you'd expect. I don't know whether it's just that people can't tell that the books are self-published or they just don't care anymore.

I haven't had any comments that I can think of in the last couple of weeks where someone has said, "Is this a traditionally published book or is it independently published?" I think it's getting into the stage now where it's about the story and the actual backstory behind that book was published is not so relevant as it was, maybe certainly 3 years ago, there was a lot of stigma, but I think that is going now, which is great.

Joanna: I don't know if readers have ever cared. Who goes onto Amazon or goes into a bookstore and says, "Oh, I'd like the latest Harper Collins." I don't know if anyone's ever done that. Maybe Virago, Prast, or a few of these very literary imprints, perhaps, but the vast majority of readers, I don't think have ever done that.

The author as brand name is one of those things I don't think big name indies have realized. If you can get your name into people's heads, then they will look for the next book.

You and I both like Lee Child. How many of his books, actual book titles, can people name? They can't. I probably, I think "Make Me" is his recent one or whatever, but basically people know Lee Child and they know Jack Reacher. These are the things, certainly, for fiction. And then for non-fiction, it's about, "Are you being useful?" If people type in, "I need to diet" into Amazon, do they get back the things that answer their problem? I think it's probably authors are so sensitive about publishers because we care. Most of the stigma and nasty comments you get are from people in the industry, other authors, agents, etc.

Mark: That's right. I think the phrase that I come back to quite often is "vanity press," and that's not necessarily something the readers apply to the books. It's something that the industry applied to people who couldn't get traditional deal. It's pejorative. It's suggesting that you're publishing something because you want to puff up your ego and all that kind of stuff. That is dying out and I don't hear that very much anymore. When I started

writing, again, after I had my hiatus, that was something that I heard much more often. That's great if we can get rid of that. That's fantastic.

Joanna: I just want to come back on the vanity thing because when people talk about vanity press now, I'm like, "Well, the biggest vanity press now is traditional publishing because why else?" It's really vanity and ego that makes us want Harper Collins or Penguin on the spine.

Let me just say, there is nothing wrong with ego. We all have it. We have to in order to actually publish books. I think that the vanity idea very much now is, "Why do you want the things that you want? Do you want to make a living? Do you want to be in a bookstore? Why do you want those things?" That should be the reason that people choose a certain publishing path.

James: It's really interesting how quickly that's happened as well. A couple of years ago, I would see a colleague of mine who got a book deal and they're showing on Facebook their front cover, and I would think, "Well done you, fantastic!"

Now I look at them and I think, "Why have you done that? Why'd you sign that contract?"

Joanna: That is true. I would say, though, that it's almost like a shift that is changing by country. The US was certainly first, and I think I was very lucky that I was living in Australia in 2008. I was influenced by the American and very strong Australian blogging movement, internet business movement in Australia at the time. People like ProBlogger, Darren Rouse, Yaro Starak, Entrepreneur's Journey, and the Americans, because I had lost my English. I went to Oxford University. My mum was an English literature teacher. I lost the care about that type of thing. I stopped caring because Australians don't care. Americans don't care. Now England has shifted, but what we're seeing next is Germany, which is an incredibly literary culture. Germany is starting to shift. We're seeing some other countries slowly.

I was talking to a Nigerian author the other day. Nigeria is starting to shift. This is the wave that I see that will sweep across the world. India, the first self-publishing podcast in India, for Indians, has just started. This is the beginning in all of these other countries, and that's super exciting to me. James: Jo, you painted a great picture at the moment. I know that you and Mark are very focused on making hay while the sun shines and teaching others how to do that.

Here's a question, then, from somebody who's yet to publish their first book, i.e. me. How long will this last?

Joanna: It's crazy because I think this is only getting better all the time. Like I said, I've sold books in seventy-two countries. Some of those, I've sold two books. I've sold two books in Nigeria, for example, but I'm now emailing with one of my readers in Nigeria and learning about how people are reading in Nigeria. It's fascinating, and Kenya, and some of these Asian countries, some of the South American countries.

What I would say for anyone entering the market now is don't think it's all over. We've hardly even started.

There was a podcast that Amazon India did. They said - this was January 2016 - We are in minute one, day one, of e-commerce in India. There are two hundred million English educated English speakers in India who have money, who have smart things, who work in IT.

I think people's idea of what the rest of the world is, people get so obsessed with their local book store, but that's not the point. The point is that you and I, all of us listening, can sell books to this global market. As the streaming internet is rolled out, people shifting to reading on mobile, indies are so well positioned to sell in these markets because we can actually price specifically for those markets and still make a profit. I see it as only the beginning of the most exciting time that authors have ever had. That's how I feel.

Mark: I agree. I always say when people ask, I think it's a golden age for writers, and readers too, because it's so easy to get stories out now and find new stories, new voices you wouldn't otherwise have heard. You hit the nail on the head with the global thing. That's pretty exciting for the book. China as well, big market just waiting for books to come along. It's a fantastic time to be doing this.

Joanna: I think it's even more important than that, like you said about new voices, talking to these Nigerian authors who basically said that they tried getting a traditional - These are British Nigerians, and we're all in England and we know we have a multi-cultural society - so these are British Nigerians, trying to get a publishing deal and being told that they already have an ethnic author on their books. I was just like, "Oh, that's so offensive."

Some of these authors, and in India as well, are starting to self-publish because their voices cannot be heard in the traditional sense. I heard about Wattpad, they're really good for YA books. They have a sub-genre of romances featuring Muslim women in hijab who just don't have stories told about the way that romance happens in those cultures. This is what I'm excited about too.

The publishers, for so long, have said, "This is what you're allowed to read. This is what you're allowed to enjoy, and we will only publish books that we think you should read." If the audience has shown that they love *50 Shades of Grey*, they love all these different books, and that's why I'm excited. Also, you can find your target market anywhere in the world. Again, people listening, the human condition is the same. It pretty much is. Everyone loves people and has a family and all that type of thing. Stories cross these borders. I do think it's super exciting, and the tools that we're getting just get better every day.

James: We hear quite a lot of negativity about the internet and if you watch the news, it's often the dark side of it comes to the fore, but it can be an incredibly empowering and liberating force. It is an empowering and

liberating force in the world, and it's changing the way cultures interact and the way we live our lives, which is great.

Joanna: I talk about social karma as well, which I think is something that's been massive for me. The energy you put out in the world is the energy you get back.

If you're reading terrible news, and it doesn't change anything, and if you're trying to be generous and you're helping people and you're being positive, the internet is a wonderful place. Sure, I get a couple of nasty emails occasionally and tweets and whatever, but generally, my internet, the place I live, is amazing. My readers are amazing, and you guys are amazing, and that's, I think, just because when I'm feeling negative, I don't share it. I try and keep the energy positive out there, and this doesn't mean it's all happy days, but we also have to work hard. I think trying to make the best of things is better than moaning all the time.

Mark: Yeah, definitely. I agree with that completely.

James: In terms of how have things changed for you, when you were, 7, 8 years you've been publishing now, must be, something like that?

Joanna: Yeah. 2008, yeah, so pretty much 7 years. As I said, when I started, I wrote a non-fiction book first and my intention really was to become a non-fiction author, professional speaker, which I did, but I also started a blog, The Creative Penn, about what I was learning along the way, because I fell for some of the biggest ripoff merchants around back then in terms of print thousands and thousands of books and have them all end up in the landfill and a number of other things like paid compilation books. A lot of the things that are still around today, and which is why I'm so passionate about teaching this stuff.

Another thing, and you'll like this. I spent about six months learning how to do press releases. I got really good at press releases. I got onto national TV. I got in the national press. I got on national radio, and I ended up selling about a hundred books. That's when I started learning about internet marketing.

What's changed is as I've blogged, and this is something, if people want to write fiction and they don't feel that creative, by blogging, I was able to release my voice. I was able to get used to putting things out there in the world, and if I hadn't had a blog and a podcast, I don't think I would have written my first novel, which is the thing that's really different. Of my book income, sixty percent is fiction, forty percent is non-fiction. I'm just writing the twelfth novel and I still have seven non-fiction books, but I want to write more and more fiction and I think the non-fiction, I won't do so much of that going forward.

That's what's really changed. I guess also excitingly, I was able to hire my husband out of his day job.

James: Yay.

Joanna: Yay, last year. Now we've got a family business and that's really exciting because when I left my job in 2011, he was still doing the corporate grind. It was great to be able to do that, and that is a result of all of these things. I do say to people when they ask about that. That's not with one book. That's with seventeen books and a blog that's been running for seven years and a podcast and all the income streams that I've been building up for years have made a mature business. Most businesses at seven years should be making a decent income. That's the way I look at it.

Mark: Just the same for me. It took me quite a long time to get to a position where I was able to leave my job, too. In case you get authors asking you how many books would it take for me to be able to do that, it's unlikely to be one or two books. Some people manage that. People like Andy Weir, although he had been writing on his blog. He was reasonably quick out of the blocks. Other people look at people like Hugh Howey. Hugh had ten books behind him before he wrote 'Wool' and that was the one that broke out.

I think it is really good advice is to be prepared to be patient, and write the next book. That's the best advice that I am able to give new authors when

they ask what they should be doing once they've written the first book, is just keep writing.

Joanna: You can't build a business based on a lightning strike. Andy Weir is a great example. You can't attempt to do an Andy Weir. You just can't. Also, sometimes it's a zeitgeist. Look at *Gone Girl*, was a zeitgeist. Hugh Howey, love the guy, but he didn't build a business like say Bella Andre or Bob Rafisi or Liliana Hart have crafted at building a business. One of those books took off massively and things happen.

When that happens, what's so brilliant if you have lots of books as Hugh did, as you say, is if you have other books, you will sell a lot more. If you only have that one book and you haven't even done something like put a sign-up to your email list at the back, you can get very upset. You hit number one on Amazon and you only had one book. That spike is going to be pretty short-lived, basically.

Also, the other thing I say to people is how valuable is anyone in the first year of a new job? Whether you're a teacher, whatever you are, a lawyer? How valuable are you? You're just not. In year three, still not really. Year five, you start becoming more valuable, and by year ten, you should be one of the top in your industry if you've stuck it out, because many, as you and I know, in the writing industry, most people don't even make it to one book, let alone make it to ten years honing their craft and writing more and more books. That's what I think.

I also love to learn from people like Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, who have been 40 years in this business, now are hybrid authors, obviously, that have been writing as a living for that long and have seen all the ups and downs and I just read everything that they put out because I want to learn it from people who have that kind of longevity.

James: Can I just take you back a fraction, Jo, talk about the non-fiction books?

It is a fairly frequently asked question when I talk to other self-publishers, is somebody who writes non-fiction, they look enviously at people turning out

thrillers and romance novels, and they ask the question, "Can I do this? Can you make money? Can you make a business out of it?"

Joanna: It is much easier to make a business with non-fiction. Fiction is super hard. The thing is with non-fiction, most non-fiction authors have other products, so someone will put out a book and they will have a course off the back-end that is much more pricey, or they're a public speaker. You're going to find that most of the best-selling business books, best-selling non-fiction books on Amazon, those people don't have many books. They will have a consulting business, a speaking business. Some of those guys getting twenty grand, a hundred grand for speaking or running a consulting thing with a company. I would say with non-fiction, most business models around non-fiction rest on having higher priced products around them.

If you want to make money from non-fiction alone, you have to follow the same model as someone like Steve Scott, S.J. Scott, who made, I think he put out publicly that he made half a million dollars last year with purely non-fiction, but Steve has 45 books. If you actually do the sums on that, he's still making about the same as I am per book. He's just got a lot more. That's the thing, and Steve focuses on volume and co-writing and that type of thing.

Yes, you can, and that's the same model as most fiction authors are doing. It's volume and putting out a series and that type of thing. With non-fiction, and then, I span both. I would say to people, "If you can avoid doing both, then do, because you do end up splitting your time and your personality into these two things." I'm really happy with my non-fiction income.

What's amazing is every December, I make a massive stack of money on print books of non-fiction. Print sells in non-fiction so much more than fiction for indie authors. That's interesting. It also has got me every single speaking gig I've ever had. I've never pitched for speaking. This year I'm speaking at the Digital Commerce Summit in Colorado, which is for CopyBlogger, which is one of the goals of my life. It's so amazing, and that has purely come from the blog, the podcast, the non-fiction side of things. Yeah. Absolutely, much easier to make money with non-fiction.

Mark: What would you choose, if someone said to you, "You can only do one?" What would you go for?

Joanna: I really couldn't choose, Mark, because I've been through this. Especially when I met you and I saw what you were doing, before you did the course, how well you were doing with your fiction. I knew, and you basically said, "I just focused." If I could just focus, if I canceled my podcast, if I canceled The Creative Penn, if I put all of this energy, if I stopped speaking, if I put all this energy into fiction, I would do so much better with my fiction. That's got to be true because you get what you focus on. By splitting my time, I split my focus, but I wrote a blog post about it. It's "Plato's Chariot," which visually was a Roman chariot or a Greek chariot with a black horse and a white horse. The dark horse is that darker side and the white horse being the light. You have to have the two of them running in parallel in order to be happy. That's kind of how I feel. I need to teach people and help people, and I feel that when I write fiction, I almost feel it's selfish. Fiction is so what I want to do, whereas non-fiction to me is helping other people.

You're now, you're not writing non-fiction, but you're producing non-fiction content, so you're starting to split yourself. You've made this choice too, haven't you?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. I think the motivation is similar. It's very nice to be able to show people things that work that I've been able to develop to work very well. It is nice to be able to do that. Honestly speaking, it's pretty good in terms of the income as well and it is something that you can charge a little bit more for than a book, obviously.

If I had to choose, I would certainly choose the fiction. I think it is a bit selfish. It's something that I love doing. I think I'd do it even if someone said to me, "There's no prospect of ever being able to publish a word again," I would still write just for myself because I enjoy creating those worlds and creating characters and conversations and that kind of stuff. We're very fortunate that it's something that can run in parallel.

James: From an outsider's point of view, let me just say that I think both of your worlds, the reason your non-fiction is valuable to people and works so well is because of your fiction, because you have that proven ability to do

that. That then gives you something to talk about that's a value on the other side. They do work in synergy. You both have this idealistic dream of being on the beach, just knocking out novels, but from my point of view, please don't do that. Just keep putting out the non-fiction because that's where the rest of us learn.

Joanna: Thank you, and I hate beaches.

James: Oh, okay.

Joanna: I'm a workaholic, actually.

James: And you lived in Australia?

Joanna: Yes, I know, it's crazy. I lived in Brisbane, Australia with Queensland Beaches, but no. You spend a lot of time inside in Australia, or you just die from skin cancer.

The next non-fiction book I'm working on is going to be around the author mindset. It's funny because I also do write my non-fiction books based on what I need to learn myself. When I wrote the first edition of "How to Market a Book," it was because I had just spent eighteen months, two years, learning about what marketing was, because my degree is in theology and I have a second degree in psychology. I needed to learn marketing, so often the easiest way to learn something is to teach it. That's how I write my books.

When I wrote "Business for Authors," it was because I needed to structure my own business in such a way that it was running well, so I thought I would just write a book about it. I think that's a good, and I think a lot of people could do that, and non-fiction can be a palate cleanser in between novels, especially if you're finishing a series or finishing one book in a series, and you want to do something a bit different.

James: Before we lose you, Joanna, can we just drill down and get a little bit of detail from you? The world changes a little bit and the marketing and you've been a trailblazer over the years.

I wonder, what do you think is hot at the moment? What techniques are working? Where should we be focusing?

Joanna: For non-fiction, because I presume there's non-fiction people listening, I still find content marketing to be amazing. When people say, "Is blogging worth it?" Blogging, podcasting, is still speaking, etc. Putting out

free information in exchange for people, either to come to your website or to click something and give them your email, is amazing.

The number one traffic source for me is Google SEO, which I don't pay for, and I don't mean I pay for SEO. It's Google organic search. That's huge. For non-fiction for me, I continue to do everything I do and the income just goes up all the time because I keep putting out content. It's free in terms of money, but it's not free in terms of time.

I would say right now, podcasting is just massive. You guys obviously believe that too because you've started a podcast. In terms of me as a consumer, I read barely any blogs now, and I listen to about seven different podcasts as well as audiobooks. I've noticed my own preference shift to audio, which I think we're seeing the same shift in books as well. I think audiobooks are only going to continue growing, and which we've seen with Amazon announcing its expansion in that area, too.

I just wanted to give a hat tip to content marketing for fiction as well because, of course, Facebook ads are brilliant, but if people are just getting started and they want to give it a go, your own content is content marketing for fiction. If you put a book out there for Permafrees, which I have my first in series "Stone of Fire," I still get downloads on that every day. I'm not in KDP Select. It's also really good on the other platforms, so iBooks and Kobo and Nook, which do have special promotions on first in series for Permafrees. If you have an email signup there, you can get traffic. You can do email marketing, all based on having a Permafrees book. It doesn't cost you anything except time, so I would always say to people that yes, if you have three books in a series, it's great to try a Permafrees first in series, and then you can do paid traffic to that. You can do Bookbub, you can do other things, but that will actually start people through your series.

We need to keep learning from each other, and nobody has the premium on all the information. I think this is a real importance around being an indie is things change all the time, and you have to be learning from all different sources, and don't just dismiss what some people might say because it sounds crazy. Start paying attention, and I think that it's so important to pay

attention to these different things. I listen to the Sell More Book Show with Jim Kukral and Bryan Cohen, and I quite often get ideas from authors that you might never have heard of who've tried something new. It's so brilliant to keep learning and finding out about this stuff, so thanks for trying that, Mark, and I'm glad it was good for you.

Mark: It's good so far.

James: Good. Jo, Mark has a load of questions, most of which we haven't got to because the conversation has flown all the way through as I knew it would, but there was one question I thought would be really useful for a lot of people to hear your answer to, which is:

What single piece of advice would you give yourself if you could go back and talk to yourself as you were starting out?

Joanna: I think it's going to depend what type of person you are. We mentioned ego earlier. I want the subtitle of this author mindset book to be "Massive Ego and Chronic Self-Doubt," because that chronic self-doubt, I think we still all have it. I think whatever writers say, they still feel that every time, but we become more used to how that feels. I think at the beginning, it took me years to write a novel. I probably wanted to write a novel when I was about five years old, and I didn't write one until I was 35. I still care very much what people think, and that holds me back sometimes. It holds me back from doing crazier stuff.

It was my fifth novel, "Desecration," where I finally stopped self-censoring my writing. Telling myself back then, it would be, "Stop caring so much what people think. Write this scene or write this book and don't worry about how it's going to be perceived in the world." That is very difficult. In fact, the book I'm writing right now, "Destroyer of Worlds," there is a scene in it I'm actually quite worried about in terms of some religious extremists, but then in terms of marketing, possibly if you get banned, it's a good idea. This kind of self-doubt and there's too much that stops you from writing, can be crippling. That's the advice I would give myself is really, "Look, just don't self-censor. Get that first draft down and edit it later, but stop caring so much what people think."

James: Great. That sounds like a really good note to conclude on. I've no doubt that we will talk again in the future, Jo, because you're a good friend of the Self-Publishing Formula.

Mark, is there anything that we've missed from your astute mind that we need to talk to Jo about before we finally let her go?

Mark: I think we should certainly ask to tell listeners where they can find both of the horses that are pulling her chariot.

Joanna: Yes, you can find Joanna Penn at thecreativepenn.com and you'll find the Author 2.0 Blueprint now, which is a free e-book and video series and everything on how to do everything, and then J.F. Penn at jfpenn.com, F for Francis and my books are everywhere in all formats, and I'm on Twitter @thecreativepenn.

James: What a delight talking to Joanna. She's one of the brightest voices in the industry, totally engaging. By the way, she is also a professional standard broadcaster putting us to shame. I think she's so engaging and brilliant to talk to. An important influencer, has influenced you, has influenced quite a lot of the people who will be following and listening to our podcast, and so somebody who we always want to tap into and hear her view of what's changing and what's next.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. She's always inspirational and her podcast is one of the first ones I listen to as soon as it comes up on Mondays. I'll always be listening to her.

James: Yeah, great. Okay, well that's about it for Podcast Number Two. You can email us at any point, support@selfpublishingformula.com. You want to suggest a guest? You want to ask a question? You want us to talk about a topic? Do let us know. I'd love to hear from you. Follow us on Twitter @selfpubform and we will see you in Podcast Three when we are going to be talking to one of the biggest names in indie publishing, the magnificent Marie Force.

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