

EPISODE 93: FROM TEACHER TO WRITER IN ONE YEAR - WITH CECELIA MECCA

Speaker 1: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. 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 Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast, with Mark Dawson and James Blatch. It is a freaky Friday in fun November. If only November began with an F.

Mark Dawson: You ran out of alliterative words for November there, didn't you?

James Blatch: I did. What's the alliterative bumper? There must be a word for the alliterative dead end.

Mark Dawson: We're running up against the limit of our lexicographical skills there.

James Blatch: Good for writers, right?

It's been a good week, and we've got a load of students coming onboard to the course. It's always exciting whenever one introduces themselves into Mastery and the tradition we have in Mastery now, which is two and a half years old.

Mastery is the secret Facebook group you join when you join Ads for Authors. The tradition is you take a picture of your work station. There's a beautiful shot of somebody in Sydney, I think, who works down by the

beach. It was a bit cheating, really. It wasn't actually her workstation, but it was the view she had when she was writing, which is sort of feet up on the table and looking out over the ocean.

Quite a lot of interesting looking workstations. I don't know if they're all as good as my up and down desk. If you're watching on YouTube, you can see my microphone going up and down.

It was controversial, but it was fun that this guy posted a picture of him at work working on the course. He had his laptop open, and you could see our icons. He was at 35,000 feet in the flight deck of an actual commercial airliner.

Quite a few people were alarmed at the prospect of him doing the course rather than flying the plane for the passengers. We had to come in and explain that there are long periods where you don't do anything in modern airline flying and they encourage you to keep your brain occupied, do crosswords, etc., so that you can transition to quick thought. Accuitive thought, is that the right word? I've made that up probably.

Mark Dawson: You made that up. Yeah.

James Blatch: I've made that up. It's good. I'm going to use it from now on. It'll become a word. We haven't had somebody in their fighter pilot or something doing it yet.

Mark Dawson: Not yet. We've had some of these training to fly 747s, so I'm surprised you didn't see that and get excited as you normally do with geeky airplane things like that. We haven't had anything quite like that.

But it is lovely to see people all around the world. We have another thread going on at the moment with people telling us where they're from. Australia, Canada ... I was about to say Canadia there.

James Blatch: Canada.

Mark Dawson: Canada, America, and the UK, and all places in between, Nova Scotia, Denmark we've had. It's gone really well.

Several hundred people have joined since we opened it last Wednesday. We've had the usual ups and downs. We're normally fairly smooth, but we had a problem with our course provider, Teachable, went down on Saturday so all the videos disappeared, which is absolutely not the experience we want students to have. That was Sunday, wasn't it?

Thankfully, you got on the phone to Teachable in New York and they put the money in the electricity meter and, as if by magic, they came back within about half an hour.

It's been great, some lovely testimonials. People are commenting and complementing us on the quality and the presentation and all that kind of stuff that we try hard to make sure is A1. So we're very happy with how that's gone.

James Blatch: Yeah. We do set high standards. Funnily enough, I've just been away for a weekend at a summit in London called the Youpreneur Summit, a lot of whooping and high fiving going on, which is not very me.

Mark Dawson: Or me.

James Blatch: A lot of discussion about what's working in the digital world in terms of marketing and funnels and where we should be focusing, etc.

What was interesting about that is talking to people who would volunteer to say to us, "Your production values are so high," the way we do video, the way we do audio, and so on, particularly the testimonial videos that we do when we go interview people who've been on the course.

This course launches, but in one way we've struggled a bit up some gremlins and we had some ... We're always honest about these things. We don't hide behind some kind of pretending nothing ever goes wrong.

We had a failure on Sunday that has nothing to do with us in New York, but a couple of things before where the revised course versions weren't appearing in the right place. So we moved quickly, because we fret. SPF has a high standard to keep to.

Joanna Penn was at this event and she said to me, "The trouble is you have to stick to that standard now. Everybody expects it from you."

But I'm more than happy in this environment of people working online to be the organization that sets the bar higher than everyone else. More than happy with that, because one of the things that you say to authors all the time is you must look indistinguishable from the multi-billion turnover author houses, publishing houses. I think that echoes in the way that we work.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and for authors it's easy and cheap to do that. It's not difficult to hit those standards and keep them.

For us, it's a bit more involved and a bit more expensive because there's kit to buy and there's a lot of time invested in making sure that everything looks great, but it is important for us to do that. It's not a cheap course. It's not like a \$49 course that you can do on Udemy.

This is an expensive course with a lot of value in it. One of the things we're very keen on is to make sure that people feel that the experience of learning from us is enjoyable and pleasant and it looks nice and it sounds great. All of that kind of stuff is really important to us, and quality is important, isn't it? It's key.

It distinguishes us from other people, and it's something that we definitely want to make sure we maintain.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely. Good values behind the company.

Okay, now we have some live webinar training coming up. That's going to be on Tuesday the 21st of November, so if you're listening to this on launch day it'll be Friday the something. I can't do the maths. 18th, something like that, of November. Tuesday the 21st is going to be a live webinar training, and we are going to learn from Mark Dawson, the guru, the five things that are working right now? Have I got that right?

Mark Dawson: Yes, **the five things that are working in book marketing right now** and the two things that you need to know before you start implementing the five things. A little spoiler. The two things are a little bit of maths, so we're going to look at things like return on investment, how to calculate that, which is very important, look at that too.

Then we'll take both of those things and go into the five things that are working now with some numbers from me in terms of how much I'm spending and stuff like that and return, and also some tips that I'm using to make my Amazon ads more effective, my Facebook ads more effective.

We'll look at messenger bots, do some cool stuff like that. It should be fun. You can hang out with us for an hour or an hour and a half on Tuesday, 10:00 pm UK time.

I think the link is selfpublishingformula.com/5things. Is that right, James?

James Blatch: That is correct. The digit 5, followed by things, 5 digit T-H-I-N-G-S, 5 things. [Selfpublishingformula.com/5things](https://selfpublishingformula.com/5things).

Mark Dawson: If you can't show up live, we will record it and send it out to people who register. It's worth getting on that list. I think there's 1,000 that

we can accommodate on GoToWebinar, so get involved. Go over there as fast as you can and get your name down. I'll bring you as much interesting information as I can on the Tuesday.

James Blatch: Yeah. That's Tuesday the 21st. Again, that URL selfpublishingformula.com/5things. 5 is a digit.

One more thing to mention before our interview today, the second of our two author interviews in a row. That is to mention our exciting new project, BookLab, which we discussed in our Monday morning meeting this morning.

That's a long process, so we're now very close to identifying the person who's going to be the recipient of the BookLab process.

Now, what happens with BookLab, it's a bit like taking your car, which is currently running in the road, into the workshop, not because it's broken, but to have it tuned up, so the mechanic can look at it, get under the hood, find out what's working, what could work a little bit better, whether you need different oil.

I can't go any further with this metaphor, but basically it's a good tune-up from a set of professionals. Who have we got lined up, Mark, to actually do the analysis here?

Mark Dawson: What we'll do is we'll look at people. We'll get people to send us their Amazon product page for a book and we will look at the cover. That'll be handled by Stuart Bache, who does my covers.

He's actually doing covers for Stephen King at the moment, John le Carre, people like that. What Stuart doesn't know about book covers isn't really worth knowing, to be honest.

We'll look at the blurb with Bryan Cohen, who has written hundreds of blurbs, including quite a few for me. Bryan will make some suggested changes to tighten blurbs up.

We are hoping to get Jenny Parrott, who is my development editor, also has done some work with you, James. She's going to look, hopefully, at the look inside sample, so what we can look at the first few pages of the book and make some suggestions on how that could be tightened up and made more attractive.

Then I'll weigh in with anything that may have been missed, or some observations that I have with regards to all of those things and how the actual product page looks and ways that we could make it convert a little bit better.

We're really looking forward to this. I think it's going to be great. We're really looking forward to getting the first one and then starting to break it down in an MC Hammer kind of fashion.

James Blatch: Exactly. What we're probably going to be looking at is that I will get on the blower in terms of ... That's an old-fashioned English expression for telephone, but on this sort of setup, with each one of those.

They'll get probably I would say 10 minutes, probably, to go through their observations of what's working, what's good about it, and what could change. At the end of that, what you've got probably ... I'm going to put this out there ... is a couple of thousand dollars' worth of consultancy.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, probably. Yeah. I don't know. Maybe that's a bit on the high side, but it would be something very, very valuable and worth having. I would've been very keen to get this kind of advice when I put my first book out there however many years it was now.

To get Stuart's time and Bryan's time and my time too plus Jenny, that is a valuable package and we think it'll be fun. We'll be looking to get applications from the Patreon group, so they're the people who support us on Patreon. If you want to do that and support us, it is ... Tell me, James. I forget, as always, Patreon.com/SPFPodcast

James Blatch: SPF Podcast.

Mark Dawson: There you go, yeah. If you want to be considered, support us on Patreon and we will then email out and probably every month, we think we're going to do at the moment, we'll take one writer and we'll tear their page to bits and then put it back together again and hopefully make some improvements in the process.

James Blatch: Of course.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, we're looking forward to getting that started.

James Blatch: We are. Of course, the point is that we take one person, they get this individual bespoke feedback, but the rest of us all listen and we can follow along while looking at their Amazon page and they look inside and then we can take on the points that are being made.

Mark Dawson: It's great for everyone. The writer who's selected every month is going to get a lot of valuable advice, but then all of us can, and I include me in that, all of us can learn from the actual advice that's given every month.

We think it'll be a bonus podcast, maybe like the income reports I did, and then up to this launch, put it out on a Thursday, perhaps, maybe another half hour of content. I think it could be really valuable for the community for us to be doing that.

James Blatch: We're going to go into our interview in just a moment.

One final thing I wanted to say, just from this weekend, I caught up with a few old friends of the podcast who are from the community, the digital online entrepreneurial community, I suppose you could say.

That included Pat Flynn. Pat made a really good point to us, which is shake us up along the way, because we've been doing this for two and a half years now.

Some of the stuff that we do feels a bit routine, and some of the stuff feels exciting. He said, "Never forget the individuals whose lives have changed because they listen to you every week or they've picked things up and you've become their friends and a part of their lives."

He gave some examples of people who had just sent him a photograph of moments in their life where they thanked him. He'd never heard of them, but he saw his name on a banner at a marathon, and somebody came on stage for that, and other examples.

As he was saying that, I checked my emails and we had a couple of emails from people who responded to your early emails, Mark, asking people how they're getting on in their career, saying, "I'm so pleased you've asked me because I don't talk to anybody about this, and I found somebody."

I don't know how often we say this, not enough, but it's a fantastic community that we feel very honored to be a part of, and we don't take anyone for granted in this. We're so excited that you listen to the podcast and that you take part in the SPF community.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. I had a couple emails yesterday from people who've just taken the course.

Someone heard me speak at the Salisbury Literary Festival a couple weeks ago, and he said he'd kind of almost given up on writing, but he can see

the point of the revolution. It's always lovely to see an impact on people's lives like that. It's one of the real benefits of being able to do this.

James Blatch: Well, that does dovetail nicely into our interview, because this is somebody who we did have an impact on, somebody who has gone from being a full-time teacher to a full-time writer in a short period of time.

Now, she attributes a lot of this to SPF, which is great, and you're going to hear that, of course. She is an amazingly talented writer. She must be underneath that, because people are loving her books.

She's writing in a tough genre, which is I think in itself quite an inspiring thing for lots of people. This is not a genre that you would expect books to fly off the shelf very easily. You'd expect to have to work quite hard, but she has made this work and we could not be happier.

Her name is Cecelia Mecca. She's popped up a few times in our testimonial interviews. I knew when we first contacted Cecelia that she was going to be one to watch, and so it has proved.

If you're watching on YouTube, you'll see us sitting in a rather nice environment in Moscow, Pennsylvania. A beautiful part of the world, a couple of hours, I suppose, drive west of New York. We sat and spoke to Cecelia next to her swimming pool, and she is an absorbing and compelling person to listen to. So let's hear from Cecelia.

You live here in Pennsylvania. We're sitting in your back yard, as I believe Americans call their gardens.

Cecelia Mecca: Yes.

James Blatch: It's quite a yard, actually, with a nice pool.

Cecelia Mecca: Thank you.

James Blatch: This is now, tada, your workplace.

Cecelia Mecca: It is. This is my office. Welcome to my office, which is, as I said, it's a dream come true. I mean, this is unbelievable to me. So yeah, it's quite an office. It's very different from a classroom of 30 13-year-olds.

James Blatch: You were teaching.

Cecelia Mecca: I did teach. I was an English teacher for 15 years, and then I was a curriculum consultant for five years, and I taught teachers.

James Blatch: Okay, so that's what we want to talk to you about. We want to talk to you about this transition.

One of the reasons we want to talk to you about it is because it's the dream of a lot of people listening to this podcast, and they're working towards it. Let's try and find out how you did it and see if other people can copy it.

First of all, when did you start writing?

Cecelia Mecca: I started writing seriously in 2015. I actually started that manuscript in college, I guess when I was supposed to be studying to be an English teacher.

James Blatch: Well, it's English and writing.

Cecelia Mecca: You know, it's English.

I was researching. I took a Medieval studies class, and I've always loved everything Medieval England. That particular class really hit home for me. That, being a romance reader as well, those two things started to mesh together. Back then was 20+ years ago, 20-ish. We'll say 20, is when I started to really fall in love with Medieval romance and historical romance. I

hadn't read more than a few of them before I thought, "Wow, this would be really cool to do."

So I started doing some research, and I think I wrote a chapter or two, and that was about 20 years ago. Fast forward to 2015, that's when I picked that manuscript back up and said, "Okay, this is time to do it."

James Blatch: Oh, really? So it sat in the drawer-

Cecelia Mecca: For 20 years.

James Blatch: ... gathering dust for quite a long time.

Cecelia Mecca: It did. I have it in the house. It's actually fun to look at here and there, because that's when there wasn't an internet, so I had to physically do research in the library.

James Blatch: An actual paper manuscript. That makes me feel better as well, because that makes my book relatively on time. Because it's still not published, and that's been nearly 10 years.

Cecelia Mecca: It's never too late.

James Blatch: I've got five years. Yeah, it's never too late. No, I've been working on it. Okay, the Medieval and England. You mentioned Medieval England, so that's the context for the novels.

Cecelia Mecca: Yes.

James Blatch: When you started writing in 2015, did you develop a series idea, or just a single novel at that point?

Cecelia Mecca: It was a single novel. At the time, I didn't realize series, especially romance, is where it was at, so it was a single novel. It's just something I'd always wanted to do, and my family really prodded me.

They said, "We're really sick of hearing about this novel. We've been hearing about it for a long time." But at the time, I was teaching full-time. I have two young children, and I also have a business, a social media marketing business with, we have four employees.

So having a small business and working full-time, I didn't think that there was time to write. But it turns out, I was wrong. You can always find time for something you really love, and I did. I found a few minutes here and there and picked that back up. I wrote what I thought was an amazing book.

James Blatch: Of course.

Cecelia Mecca: It actually wasn't. I just found the time. Because, really, everybody around me was prodding me. They said, "You have been talking about this for so many years. Just do it." So I stayed up a little later and I did it, and I thought I was finished.

It's actually two years, because September 24th is my birthday, that's in two days, so it was a day before that that I finished the manuscript. That was 2015. Yeah, here we are, two years almost to the day, when I wrote the end. Little did I know that was really just the beginning, of course.

James Blatch: Of your self-publishing journey.

I guess at that point, you probably were thinking you were going to get it published.

Cecelia Mecca: Yes, of course. I thought Avon, who is a traditional publisher, especially of romance, historical romance. I thought, "This shouldn't be too bad. I'll send it to them ..." I really, obviously, was quite

ignorant about publishing. "I'll send it to them, and this is such an amazing ... I read hundreds and hundreds of romances. This is a good one." It didn't work out that way.

James Blatch: No.

Cecelia Mecca: It didn't work out that way at all.

James Blatch: You'd worked out what you were going to spend your advance on, what cars you were going to buy.

Cecelia Mecca: Oh, yeah. I mean, honestly, no. I didn't think it would be easy, but I didn't know much about indie publishing.

I actually knew nothing about indie publishing at the time, so I didn't know there was any other path. So I thought, "Okay, let's do some research. This path here is, what I know now, is the traditional one," writing a query letter, finding an agent.

One of the very first things I did as I was writing is join RWA, which is Romance Writers of America. I went to the conference before I even had my manuscript finished. That was interesting.

There were 3,000 people that I didn't know, and that's a very unusual circumstance for me. It was weird. I didn't know one person, I didn't know anything about this industry, but it was amazing. That's what really showed me there are other people doing this, and that it was possible.

So when I finished the manuscript, I thought, "Okay, I know what to do now. I'm going to look for an agent, write a query letter, and go from there." Because it's all I knew.

James Blatch: Had self-publishing raised itself at all at that point?

Cecelia Mecca: I had seen, obviously, some sessions on self-publishing, but, as I said, I was ignorant and I thought self-publishing was something that you did if you couldn't get traditionally published.

I probably thought what some people out there think now, that self publishing is just that other option. But really, it is the option. I just didn't know it at the time.

James Blatch: Which you know now.

You went ahead and you tried to get a literary agent.

Cecelia Mecca: Yeah. I tried to get an agent, I started to query, and that's when I learned that this wasn't the book of the century. There was crickets.

Being an English teacher, I thought, "Well, I'm sure I can write," but it turns out I really didn't. There was a lot I didn't know about story structure, how to write a novel. Writing is one thing. Writing a novel is another.

As I did more research, I realize, okay, this might need some tweaks. So I started to read, I started to dig in a little bit more, and learned the craft, which is what I would tell anyone to do.

Start with the craft. Even if you think you know the craft, I thought so too. I taught reading and writing to people, but I didn't know how to write a novel.

Once I did that, I revised and I started to get partial requests and full requests, so I thought I was on a really good path. I had actually, right before I went to RWA in 2016, I had I think in one week four full manuscript requests. So that was a good week, and I felt really good.

But everything changed at that conference when I met another indie author who writes Scottish historical, so it's in my genre. We went to dinner one

night, and she said, "Can I ask you why you're on this traditional path, or why you haven't considered indie publishing?"

I said, "Well, this is the way it is, right? This is what you do."

She said, "Well, you know I'm indie published." I had seen her books. We met the previous year.

I didn't realize that she was indie published or self-published, and I said, "No, I didn't know that." She said, "Well, I am. This is how much I make, and this is what I do full-time," and that was it.

That was the conversation that really changed everything. The next day, I went to a session that was given by Data Guy. That was when I started to really dig into indie versus traditional, and it's what set me on this path.

James Blatch: Yeah. Eye-opening moment for you.

Cecelia Mecca: Yes, it was very much.

James Blatch: You say set you on this path. What were your next steps after that, then?

Cecelia Mecca: My next steps were to make sure that this was the right decision. When I came home from that conference, I decided to sign up for another conference closer to my home in Connecticut because I could get a 15-minute sit-down with an Avon editor.

Because that was always the dream, I wanted to make sure this was what I wanted to do. I started researching indie publishing, but I wanted to make sure this was the right decision.

I set that meeting, it was supposed to be to take a look at the manuscript. Really, it was I had one question: Will this ever get picked up? Because I

had started to ask questions, the right questions, and realized that, while historical romance is still very much alive and well, Medieval wasn't. It wasn't on the bookshelves.

That's one of the things this author said to me, is, "Look at the bookshelves and see if the books exactly like you write are there. You'll see Regency, but you won't see Medieval." I started to realize that it was more of a niche than I had originally thought.

I did that and I went to that session, and she's like, "Okay, this is what I think about your manuscript." But what I really wanted to know is, "I have a question for you. If this was the best manuscript you had ever read in your entire life, would you buy it? Would this work out?"

She said, "Do you want me to be honest?" I said, "Yes. That's why I'm here." She said, "Medieval hasn't been popular in 20 years, so probably not. Digitally, maybe." That was it. If I was going to publish digitally, I certainly was not going to give it up to anybody else.

James Blatch: A combination on those two things. Then you started getting serious.

Cecelia Mecca: Then I started to get serious. I came home that weekend, it was in October of 2016, and said, "Okay, I've just started to learn about indie publishing, but now it's time to really put this in high gear." I still just had that one manuscript. It was a lot better because it had been revised now probably 15, 20 ... I probably should've given up on it, but I couldn't. It was something I'd started 20 years earlier, but it was a lot better than it was because I had learned the craft by this point.

I started doing my research. That's what I did on the way to work. I'd listen to podcasts. On the way home from work, I'd listen to podcasts. That was my professional development time. The more I learned, the deeper involved I got.

Luckily, I was introduced to Mark Dawson, I think probably in November or December of 2015, and then I obviously took the course. I don't know when he opened it up, but it was probably early 2016.

James Blatch: Yeah, June, I think.

Cecelia Mecca: Was it?

James Blatch: Or maybe in early of May, yeah.

Cecelia Mecca: So maybe before that I might have been looking at the videos and really-

James Blatch: That's the 101 Self Publishing course.

Cecelia Mecca: The 101 Self Publishing, yeah. That's really what showed me how to publish. Because now I knew I wanted to be indie published, and that this was actually a viable career. Because at this point, I was thinking, "This would just be really fun."

I have always wanted to write a romance novel, publish a romance novel. I wasn't thinking career. I was thinking, "That would be so cool," just to do something I've always wanted to do.

But after I met this other author, and she did this full-time, in my genre, I thought, "Wow, can you even imagine this as your life?" That kind of inkling in the very back of my head, if someone else did it, I know I can do it, and let's see how to make this happen.

James Blatch: I'm acutely aware that for some people who think, "Oh, self publishing sounds great," and then they start to look into it and become very quickly overwhelmed.

Did that happen to you?

Cecelia Mecca: Never, no. I love being online. I've been online for many years. I have that small business I mentioned. It was kind of an influencer marketing business.

I don't have a background in marketing, but I was a blogger. I started blogging back in 2007, 2008, just as a hobby because I like to write, I like being online.

Met another blogger and we partnered up and ended up working with brands to partner brands and influencers. This accidental business, we always call it, has been since 2009.

I love starting businesses. I love working with people. I think when you get together with other people, great things can happen, and so we partnered up. This was just one more thing that I had to learn about.

Yes, there are a lot of pieces and I absolutely think without Mark's course maybe I would have been overwhelmed. But he put it together, it was very compact and easy to learn. I'm sure there are days that I feel overwhelmed, but no, it was more just this is the goal and let's get it done.

James Blatch: Then, at what point did you start thinking that you might need more than one book?

Cecelia Mecca: I think it was at some point January, February, I was starting to read and listen to videos and dig in a little bit deeper. Joined Facebook groups, which I highly recommend.

I'm a part of multiple author Facebook groups and I think it's really helpful to read what other people are doing. Yeah, and I think there was one that they talked about one book just not being enough to make a career. But I do believe it was Mark's course that gave me the idea to go backwards,

actually, and write a novella. I wrote a prequel novella then so that I could use that as lead gen.

James Blatch: To give that away free.

Cecelia Mecca: And to give that away free, yeah. Actually, the author that I had met that we had the dinner, she said, "If you're working full-time, one of the things you might consider ..." Now, this is very difficult for someone who's impatient ... "you might want to consider stockpiling a little bit and maybe have two or three."

But I wasn't listening to her because I thought, "I just really want to publish this one." But then it turns out, her advice I started to see in other places. I said, "Okay, maybe I should put the brakes on it."

That book was ready to be published at the end of 2016, but it didn't actually go out until March of 2017. No, I'm sorry, April. I wrote the novella and had that edited, and then I put both out basically within a month apart.

Then, the third one was already in the works. So I stockpiled two, but I had three already started because I realized at that point, like you said, one book isn't a career author going to make.

James Blatch: When you did publish them at mid 2017, you did do it as a free giveaway, building a list and selling the first full novel.

Cecelia Mecca: I did. I did the very, exactly as Mark had laid out. I since have pulled that from free for various reasons, but right now it's for sale on Amazon for 99 cents.

I initially used that prequel for lots of different things. I put it into Instafreebie and gave it away free, I did use that to build my newsletter. I had my mother and my sister and my husband, at this point, on my newsletter.

So when I realized I needed a newsletter, I went into blogging mode and started to partner with other people. Because, really, it's the power of numbers and just working with others.

I started networking very early on, and I think that's been huge, working with others, doing group giveaways, and things like that.

James Blatch: I know people are interested in the details and the free versus 99 cents. Bit of a debate going on about that, and I've seen some people describe 99 cents as a more effective free, and so on. There's different theories on it. Specifically, you say there were various reasons.

Why did you move from free?

Cecelia Mecca: The reason I moved from free is one of the things I noticed with my subscribers is the free, because I segmented the list and I knew where they were coming from, I knew my Instafreebie subscribers versus my website versus the back matter at this point. I knew they behaved differently and I knew they reviewed differently.

I decided at some point to play the long game, which was to train readers, I guess you can say, to buy full price books. I don't discount the books. I did that first one.

Like I said, I took Mark's course and did it to a T, but since then I've decided that I want the readers to expect \$2.99 for the first two weeks, goes up to \$3.99 after two weeks, and it pretty much stays there. I'm sure I'll do sales at some point in the future. I would love to get a BookBub. If I get a BookBub, I would do a sale.

But aside from that, I don't want them to think, "If I buy it now, in a month it will be for sale." I guess that's kind of the same theory with the prequel novella. I just noticed the behaviors were a bit different.

I personally think that there are different markets. There's readers that are looking for KU, I am in KU, readers looking for free. I don't discount that it would be a strong, powerful lead magnet, but since it's come out I've developed other options, so extended previews. I do character interviews. I have a whole package put together that has since been able to replace that novella.

James Blatch: You think your list is better quality when they're paying 99 cents for the book?

Cecelia Mecca: I do. I think I'm moving it toward that. There is some debate there too, and sometimes I wonder, should I put it for free, and what would that do? Even I don't know the answers.

A lot of times it seems like in indie publishing the answers are very nebulous and nobody can really touch them. I think they probably would both work, to be honest with you, in different ways. It's just the path I've chosen for now.

I'm in this for the long haul, and I want readers to know that this is a book that it's not going to be on sale for very often and that kind of thing.

James Blatch: How's it gone? Have you sold some books?

Cecelia Mecca: I have sold some books. The first two that went out, it was very cool. It was nice to have a few hundred dollars while it sold. Then, the second book, after I had followed the course and really done it to a T, it really did I guess take off. I don't know exactly what that means, but enough that I was able to leave my job. I guess we did okay.

James Blatch: Well, congratulations.

Cecelia Mecca: Thank you.

James Blatch: What a fantastic achievement. You've obviously just put your nose down and learnt the stuff and implemented it. I think that's the right thing.

You referenced Mark's course several times. Obviously that's been your guide. Then you've correctly then moved away where it works for you. You're probably now a guru in some areas going forward. I've noticed you're very active in the groups as well, which is one of the great benefits of the community, to have people like you.

Cecelia Mecca: I would say one thing that, if I were to give advice, if anybody were to ask it, I'm not sure where they would because I'm really just starting out. It's been six months, seven months, since I published my first book.

But if they were to ask, I would say just be involved, even if you're not usually the person who raises your hand all the time. I raise my virtual hand all of the time. I'm not shy in the groups, I'm not shy at a conference to talk to people, because that's how you learn. You learn from other people, get advice and tips from other people.

If you have a question that you're sitting on but you're kind of like, "Oh, but if no one answers it and that post goes completely unnoticed," so what? It's no big deal. Ask the question.

I did that, and I've always done that. I would say that those groups have been very helpful. The SPF community groups have been very helpful because there's people out there that have been doing this for a lot longer and there's something to learn from all of them.

James Blatch: When you did start selling books, did you go into this thinking, "I want to quit my job and do this full time," or did the money start to make you think ...

Cecelia Mecca: Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay.

Cecelia Mecca: I didn't think I could quit. Even though I had met other authors that were doing this full time, I thought this was still kind of a retirement thing for me. Some day, in I don't know however many years, 15 years, I'll be able to leave education.

I actually never thought I would quit because there's a pension, to be perfectly honest, in education. So the longer I'm in it, I get paid when I'm retired. I can't give that up.

So no, I actually never really imagined that until the second book came out and the money started to come. I thought, "Wow, I just made this month more than I have with all of my degrees in education that are now sitting in my basement. This is kind of cool."

I would say just this summer that idea took hold, and then it was hard to get rid of. Imagining this being my office, it was hard to just think about putting my heels back on and going into the classroom or going into education. Yeah, it was exciting and it is exciting.

James Blatch: And here you are, sitting by your pool, if you're watching on YouTube, on a beautiful autumnal day here in Pennsylvania. Again, congratulations on that.

What I love about this also is you're not writing very mainstream romance. People often say, "Well, my book's far too niche to be successful." Here is the proof that niche, the digital world is really set up for that, much more than ... That's why the traditional publishing world don't do it. They can't find the audience using the techniques that you use now.

Cecelia Mecca: Yeah. When she said Medieval was dead, I thought, "That's not possible," because I buy Medieval romances. I buy different ones all the time, so I knew that it was there.

I do think I'm lucky in a way, though, because my genre does lend itself, it's big enough that I can make this a career, but it's small enough ... If I were in contemporary romance, I think I really would've had a harder time clawing my way to the top, getting a bestseller tag on a book.

Not that that's easy to do, necessarily, but there's certainly less readers in Scottish romance or Medieval romance than there are just in historical, or even Regency, which is a little bit bigger.

I did find a sweet spot, and I'm happy to have done it. I feel lucky because what I love, some people have to decide. I've heard this debate, for love or money. For me, it just worked out that those two things cross paths.

James Blatch: With a little bit of adaptation with the series and the novella and so on.

You're driving sales now how? Facebook ads, I'm guessing?

Cecelia Mecca: I'm using some Facebook ads, but more for lead gen, to be honest with you.

I'm driving sales by putting the best possible book out there. I haven't done any promo on the last two books. I just launched a book last week. I haven't paid for any promotions. In the past I have, and I've tracked all of those promotions. There's various services. I've tried most of them at this point.

But what I found is that I can sell the books on their own merit almost just as well as with the promotions. So I really think it does go back to that book. I know this sounds very trite, but those three pillars, the book, the cover, the blurb, having those things in place. Having a great editor, I can't discount

the fact that my editor is amazing. I think she's part of the success of the books.

James Blatch: Where did you get your editor from?

Cecelia Mecca: Going back to networking, from another author, from another romance author. I was telling her, I actually hired an editor, spent I think \$400 or \$500, and I said, "I think I feel good about her."

She said, "Well, if you're hesitating, that's a problem." I said, "Well, I don't know. I've never had a professional editor edit my book. I mean, she did some sample edits." She said, "Did you talk to other people?" I said, "Well, no, but there were testimonials on her site and I did a sample edit."

She said, "Well, why don't you take a look at mine? I'll ask her if she has any space. She was a big five editor, and compare the edits." I had to pay for that. I thought, "Well, I already paid for an editor. I don't know if I want to pay for another one."

But there was that feeling of, "Ugh, I don't know. I don't feel great about this. I'm just going to go ahead and bite the bullet." Then, when I hired her for that first ... Actually, I think she did the novella first. That was a way to test it out.

There was no comparison. You get what you pay for. I thought I had done my research, but really talking to other authors, there's no other comparison. It goes back to that networking for me almost always.

James Blatch: The future for you, you've quit your job.

How was your husband about this, by the way? You should say you're married with children.

Cecelia Mecca: Yes. He's amazing. He has never read my books, to be honest with you. He knows all about them. We plot them and things like that. He helps me.

But he's not a reader, and so this is a whole new world for him. To his credit, when I came back that first conference and said, "I think this is what I'm going to do," and this whole indie publishing thing, he said, "Okay, let's do it," and he learned about ads.

He runs all of my AMS, and neither of us knew what AMS meant or stand for, but he runs all of those ads now. He comes home every day, he tells me about my sales. It's actually really cool.

We've forged a new area in our life that is around the book sales and the books. It's exciting, and it's a lot of fun. He loves it and he's very involved, and I think that's great too. It's fun.

James Blatch: Good, yeah. The future. You've got a supportive husband, always useful, and it's working out for you so far.

The sales have stayed.

Cecelia Mecca: Yeah, so I launched a book last week. It's doing exactly what the last book did. I think right now it's a matter of building a back list.

The future, so less than a year ago I wasn't even imagining making money off of books, so it's hard to imagine what will happen. But yes, that bar just keeps moving up.

First, it was a few sales would be great, and then it was quitting my job would be great, and now, of course, it's hitting a bestseller list or taking it to that next level would be great.

I spent a few years as a consultant, so I definitely see myself moving into, at some point, nonfiction. I love to speak to groups. I love to design workshops and things like that. I've done it for years with teachers, so I could see moving into that part of the book publishing and marketing area as well. I have some ideas, but I need to make sure that I have my solid foundation first.

James Blatch: Yeah. Well, you certainly have built a solid foundation. It's a brilliant story, Cecelia. Thank you for coming onto the podcast and sharing it with us, and thank you for hosting us in this lovely, beautiful wooded area of Pennsylvania.

We should say, if you're just listening on audio, you can hear the trees rustling and occasionally John Dyer stamping on leaves. There you go, as he moves around. Can you clear some leaves up while you're ... Make yourself useful. Go and do the pool. He could be the pool boy, couldn't he?

Speaker 5: Let's not go there. I've seen that.

James Blatch: We're going to keep in touch with you, Cecelia. We're going to follow your progress in the groups, and I know that everyone wishes you success as a happy story for self publishing, and hopefully inspirational for people like me and others who are just starting out on that journey.

Cecelia Mecca: Well, thank you for being here. I appreciate it. If anyone ever has any questions, I love to teach, and so once I know something I'm happy to pass it along. Thank you.

James Blatch: I actually sat next to quite a few swimming pools on that trip.

Mark Dawson: I noticed.

James Blatch: Yeah, Mr. Dawson emailed me and said, "Perhaps don't sit next to a swimming pool in the next interview."

Mark Dawson: It was starting to look a bit samey. All these swimming pools, and I started to get quite swimming pool envy.

James Blatch: One of them we haven't actually released yet because it was an interview really about the 101 course so we'll save that one for next year. That was David in LA, and he had the nicest swimming pool, but then he lived in one of those lovely apartment blocks where they have the shared pool facility, so it wasn't all his pool. It was nice, though.

Let's talk about Cecelia, who is ... I love Cecelia for many reasons. She's an Anglophile, for a start, so she loves everything about the UK and you can tell that from her books, obviously.

She prepared a basket for John and I at the beginning of a long journey through the States. This basket was full of Pennsylvania goodies, Hershey ... I didn't realize Hershey comes from Pennsylvania. Gosh, it was so many other things. Little peanut butter bites, and beer.

Mark Dawson: Where's mine?

James Blatch: Pennsylvania beer. Well, see, that's the thing, Mark. Our luggage was pretty full and we were quite hungry. Once you've combined those two facts, you didn't get anything back.

But we did get signed books, so that was absolutely lovely of Cecelia.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: But also, just to hear somebody who is organized and listens to it and understands how to apply it and applies herself and then has success, that in itself is just a great thing to hear.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. I met Cecelia at RWA in Florida before you met her, and I think she was just thinking about leaving her job and then, in the interim between me meeting her and you meeting her, she did leave her job and I know what that feels like.

It's three years since I did that, and it's a wonderful thing to be able to do to support yourself and your family with your writing. She is a smart cookie. I immediately knew that when I saw some stuff that she had put together and shared with the community, very high quality, which is always a good indication that someone is taking this seriously. I'm not at all surprised that she's doing so well.

James Blatch: We have an amazingly talented family growing in SPF and we couldn't be happier about that. Great.

Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you on this Friday. Don't forget, the live webinar training is on Tuesday night. We didn't give the time out. We're always a bit wary of giving a time out, so let me say Tuesday night.

What we mean is Tuesday night in the UK, which is probably going to be something like 4:00 pm in the afternoon in New York and a bit earlier in the afternoon, depending on how far west you're going to go. If you're in Australia, who knows? Probably breakfast time, I'm thinking.

Mark Dawson: Who knows?

James Blatch: Something like that? It's always a bit unfair, isn't it, for the Australians, but breakfast-

Mark Dawson: I feel very bad for the Australians.

James Blatch: Well, they get all that beautiful sunshine and sea and coast in Sydney, so I don't feel too sorry.

Mark Dawson: And they'll probably beat us at cricket this year as well, so there you go.

James Blatch: Well, yeah. Americans are wondering what on earth we're talking about now, but that's a big thing.

Mark Dawson: Genteel baseball.

James Blatch: Yeah. Proper baseball. Where was I? What was I saying?

Mark Dawson: Webinar. Australia. Times.

James Blatch: Webinar.

Mark Dawson: 10:00 pm UK.

James Blatch: Whenever we talk about times, everything goes to haywire. It's going to be on Tuesday evening UK time, a little bit earlier in the afternoon if you're further west in the States.

To sign up for the webinar, as Mark says, even if you're not sure you can actually make it on Tuesday night, the only way you can get a replay is if you've registered in the first place. The replay will be sent to you automatically the next day. You need to go to selfpublishingformula.com/5things. 5 is a digit, things is a word, and you will be on the list.

We look forward to talking to you then. If you can't join us on Tuesday, we'll see you next Friday. In the meantime, have a great week writing and a great week selling. Goodbye.

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