

PODCAST 39: THE ONE STOP SHOP FOR FORMATTING & DISTRIBUTING BOOKS WITH KEVIN TUMLINSON

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 39 from a Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: 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: Hello, Mark Dawson. How are you?

Mark: Hi, James Blatch. I'm fine. How are you?

James: I caught your cold last week. Obviously, the link we use is a really powerful digital link. I've had a real proper man flu cold. I'm on the back end of it now. That type of cold that women don't really understand how much men suffer from when we get it, that kind of cold.

Mark: I'm not getting involved in that conversation, James. My life's worth more than that.

James: I can hear things being thrown at the, I can say the radio, or whatever people are listening or watching on. We finally got our video sorted out as well. Here we are in a nice glorious split screen for video so if you're enjoying that. Increasingly when we do the interviews, as long as our interviewees are happy with that, we're going to use video as well. I've interviewed a guy called Chris Tucker this morning who lives in the Philippines. Actually, is a UK citizen coming back to the UK soon. He's a big entrepreneur in this area, really interesting guy to talk to, lots of good advice on brand building as a personal thing, of authors in particular how

to build your brand, also a bit about how to build your team once you start earning a bit more money and you get busy, you need to increase your team and how you do that using virtual assistants and such. Chris Tucker's interview coming up in that short while.

Where we're sitting at the moment, Mark, what is it, 14th today, 15th? What date is it? Let's have a look

Mark: 15th.

James: 15th. We are 15 days away from launching 101. We've got everything up there and loaded on teachable platforms. We're seeing it in place for the first time. We're still making tweaks on it, a daily basis at the moment and some changes and more materials still coming in.

We've had a team of beta testers already selected and on it. One of them has already finished so that's somebody who's part of the SPF team, does some work for us and she's reporting. In fact, Carrie has put something in the groups already. She's so excited about it. We're very pleased, aren't we, with the feedback we've had so far.

Mark: Yeah, I'm very pleased with it. You never really know these things until someone else goes in and tests it. Much in the same way as when you release a new book. You've been working on it for such a long time, it's always a nervy moment when you let other people look at it for the first time. Our course is just the same and I was a little anxious before Carrie got into it, but she's been so positive with her praise, it's very encouraging. I'm pretty pleased with how it's looking. We're still adding stuff, I can't really announce this yet, but we're looking for maybe an additional couple of sessions from someone really, really big. I mean really, really big in the indie space. It will be worth getting the course just for these two sessions. It's not confirmed yet, but I'm hoping to close that down in the next couple of days or so. Still kind of moving on, adding stuff in,

working on the bonuses, and then we'll be ready to open the doors in a couple of weeks. Very exciting time.

James: There's one clear winner from this whole 101 process, which is me because I've had so much value for my author career. Including jamesblatch.com which is finally up there at as of this morning. We've created it in several places using different platforms as part of the course. If you want to go down the WordPress route which is more involved potentially for you, there's a session on that, very good, detailed session on that. Also, if you want to do it more quickly, more easily, just create a landing page, for instance using Leadpages, there's a session on that, the result of which is that I get a three page, which is there now.

Talking about my author career, I was invited onto Radio 4 in the UK. Radio 4 is ... I don't know what the equivalent is in the States, it's not really national broadcasting, it's the BBC anyway. It's the BBC's main news channel in the UK. It's the place everyone listens to to find out whether we're going to war or not.

During the middle of the day, they have a consumer orientated program called You and Yours. Six years ago I did a small piece on my book, when I started that, and they invited me back. We talked about self-publishing, they were fascinated with your story, Mark. They're fascinated with the course that we've done, and we got to chat about self-publishing.

There was a little bit of trolling in there, one of the questions from the wonderful Peter White, he's a fantastic, one of my favorite broadcasters in the UK. He always enjoys his interviews, I enjoy speaking to him. He did say, he quoted somebody from the industry, the traditional publishing industry, saying that the vast majority of self-published books were tawdry and terrible and shouldn't be published, so it gave myself and one of our key students, Adam Cross, a chance to re-post on behalf of self publishing.

Mark: You were very diplomatic. I would not have been quite so diplomatic. I guarantee you that.

James: I tried to think what you would say, but your chance will come.

Mark: I wouldn't have been invited back on the radio again.

James: Middle of the day language. It just goes to show that attention is coming on. I've had a lot of tweets afterwards, people saying I can't believe how little people seem to know about self-publishing.

This interview with Chris Tucker is really interesting. He's a quite big digital entrepreneur. We've got a big digital business, we've got thousands of students now, we've got hundreds of them, significant businesses in their own right.

Yet, when I listen to Radio 4, for instance, when I listen to the news in the morning and they talk about the economy, they talk about Brexit and the EU and Donald Trump being elected and the steel industry and car parts and they seem to be almost oblivious to this billion dollar industry on the digital space that we're all a part of, which is starting to take over people's lives. It's an exciting place to be and they're slowly just catching on now, I think.

Mark: It's very encouraging. For anyone listening to this podcast, you're years ahead of the mainstream and that's a really exciting opportunity. You occasionally, you'll hear people say oh, self publishing is dead, e book sales are down, everything is doom and gloom, I've missed the boat, all that kind of stuff. It couldn't be further from the truth.

We're right at the start, the crest of a wave here and the fact that people are choosing to listen to you and me when talking about this it's just, it's kind of evidence that they are ahead of the curve. You get the people that we heard coming to us after the Radio 4 piece. We had lots of emails from people asking about when can I get the course and all that kind of stuff. Those people are months and months and months behind listeners to the show.

I think that just underlines what a great opportunity it is still for people to put a stake in the ground and start to develop their online books businesses.

James: Let's get on to the meat and drink of today's podcast. We've got one of our favorite contributors. We spoke to him briefly in London in April, he's Kevin Tumlinson from Draft2Digital and this will form part of the 101 course as well. Draft2Digital is one of those platforms that we explore and explain and we even had a technical know how session in there about using them.

They are, in simple terms, an aggregator in that they take your book and they upload it and they place it onto various sites that will sell your book. It's a kind of one stop shop. Once you get into this you start to understand that it can be quite laborious getting stuff set up on each individual site, you have tax interviews and that sort of things to do.

Draft2Digital do a lot of that for you. They have a lot of value added stuff actually they provide free of charge including formatting your book. Kevin Tumlinson's a fascinating guy to talk to, not least because he's about to undergo a kind of lifestyle experiment, which we come onto in the interview and it's quite an interesting thing and it's, again, for people in our space, in the digital space, it just shows what's possible once you're no longer doing the nine to five. Without further ado, let's hear from Kevin.

Kevin Tumlinson joins us from Draft2Digital. Kevin, hello again.

Kevin: Hello. Thanks for having me on.

James: We meet around the world, don't we? London, Florida ...

Kevin: We're very international.

James: You have a fascinating side which I think we might get to at some point in this interview about your own domestic arrangements and how they're going to look in the future.

Kevin: Yeah, that's fine. It factors in somewhat with Draft2Digital. They're behind some of this.

James: Well, we'll leave that tantalizingly hanging there for the moment. First of all, let's talk about Draft2Digital and I know I asked you this at London Bookfair, but particularly for those of us who are starting on our writing career, can you explain to us what you do?

Kevin: Draft2Digital does numerous things for an author, but where we start is in converting your manuscript into e book format. We have a very clean, very cool format and process for that. It handles a lot of that stuff automatically.

We're able to add in, at your request, you get to select these options, but you can add in things like teasers for your next book, a notification so that readers can be notified every time you publish, a table of contents is of course in there. All of the things that you expect as far as in matter, it runs light, we'll say instead of there being a bunch of junk code. We made it very clean, so it's compatible with all of the various e readers. That's the first step thing that we offer.

In addition to that we offer, the biggest thing we're known for really, is distribution. We have several vendors worldwide, so we can get you into a worldwide audience and we go through the trouble of all the vetting, and customer service, and all the things that help us have a little more sway with these vendors.

They like dealing with us so we're able to get promos and other things that we can pass on to authors. Worldwide distribution is the thing we're most known for. Getting in at the markets, we get you into Apple iBooks, Barnes

and Noble, Kobo, a whole bunch of others. That's what we're most famous for, I'll say.

James: That's the really two sides to the formatting and distribution. Let's just get the formatting bit out of the way. I have to be honest, when I first started getting involved in self-publishing I didn't really have a clue as to how this stuff worked and really what formatting was.

I think if you'd asked me, I would have assumed at some point I uploaded my word document to Amazon and they created a Kindle book out of it, and the same at Barnes and Noble. It's not like that, you actually have to create a little file, which is a little bit different for every single platform. That technical process of turning your Word document or what you've exported from Scrivener or whatever into that file, it's actually not just a technical process, it's actually a bit of an art form as well because you want your book to be beautifully presented at that point.

There are options, you can do it yourself. There are some DIY options out there. You can employ somebody who works directly for you, more or less, and does that formatting. I guess you're somewhere in between, you're effectively employing somebody to do it, but you're an organization that does it for a lot of people.

I was interested in the fact Kevin that you talked about a lot of it being automated, but I'm guessing it still has to be somebody looking at each individual file at some point.

Kevin: Actually, the process itself is fully automated. You upload, and here's where I believe we're being very helpful. You can upload just your Word document for example, and if you wrote it in Scrivener and export it as an RTF or a Word document, we still use that.

But we strip out all the junk code that Microsoft Word and other programs insert by default. We have everything automated so that it's spits out a

clean, perfect EPUB or dot MOBI, or even a PDF. There're no human eyes that really touch that except your own. You can verify how the layout looks, make sure everything looks the way you want it to, and if there are quirks or questions, then we have this phenomenal customer service who will at that point go in and make manual adjustments as needed.

James: Do you give people advice on how to prepare the file in the first place? Because your software's got to pick up chapter breaks and in some cases some novels are divided into parts.

Kevin: Yeah, it's advisable. For example, in Microsoft Word you're going to want to use the heading, the term has just blown right out of my mind and I apologize, but they have their styles, style sheets that you can choose for heading one, heading two, that sort of thing.

James: Yep, yep.

Kevin: We'll pick up on that. That's how we construct your table of contents. There's a point where you get to review that table of contents before you publish. If it doesn't look right, if it doesn't include some of your chapters, then you can contact us. We'll add those in, fix them for you. But for the most part, we don't have to provide any real guidelines because most people do this by default. If they just put chapter one, chapter two, we'll pretty much pick up on that. It's easier if you do use headings for that stuff, but you almost do that by default.

All the major writing software that's out there does that by default. Makes it real easy, authors are very focused on making sure that they've delineated their chapters of headings and that sort of thing most of the time. It's actually pretty easy to scan and find that stuff. Makes it easy to output a clean file.

James: That's how everyone wants to write. They think in chapters from the beginning because that's kind of how we do it.

Kevin: Honestly, you're doing all the work of organizing right up front. We don't need to do that for you, but we will pick up on that system you've used and we'll spit out the appropriate chapters and the title of the book and everything gets folded in through the metadata of the book, it's handled right from the beginning, right when you're uploading your manuscript.

You'll tell us what the title is, you'll tell us if there's a subtitle, is it part of a series, what volume is it. All that stuff gets taken care of, so it can be folded in automatically. Including a copyright page, so if you didn't put a copyright page in your book we can generate one for you.

What happens is you get a whole selection of these things and you just check the box next to the ones you want and then that's it. This is all free, by the way, we don't charge a dime to do any of this stuff. We only make money on a percentage of royalty.

James: Which moves us on to the aggregating side, I think that's the right word? Is it aggregating?

Kevin: Yeah, yeah.

James: Which is really getting your book into the places where readers are going to be able to buy it. As you say, that's kind of what you're famous for. This process, people will have an idea that they want to sell their book on as many platforms as possible or they'll make conscious decisions about sticking to one or going wide or all the rest of it.

Once they've made their decision to do that, I guess it's reasonably complicated to set out to do this by yourself.

Kevin: Okay, now I'm going to start talking to you as an author. From well before I started working with Draft2Digital, I initially went and tried to get

into all the various e book markets. It became a nightmare on multiple fronts.

Not only just the fact that every retailer has their own set of rules for formatting and cover size and all the various rules that impact the way you have to work. There's also the reporting side. If I made sales, now I had forty or fifty different store fronts I had to check regularly to make sure I knew what my sales were and make sure I was being paid. I actively went looking for services that would help me aggregate that. Of course, there's Smashwords which I tried and didn't particularly like, I'm talking now as an author.

James: Completely accept that, yes, as an author.

Kevin: I mean that's all there really was. Mark Coker helped create an industry here and we're very grateful to him for it, but the user experience there wasn't quite what I wanted. It was at times frustrating and that was the same feeling that Aaron Pogue had. He's one of the founders of Draft2Digital.

He created this service, which is all about making things easier and cleaner and simpler. I think we've done a fantastic job of that. Where we help the author with this stuff largely is with this centralized dashboard that's very well designed, very easy to understand. Where you can see your sales, you know exactly how many volumes you've sold this month versus last month. You can generate reports of all kinds. There no special formatting to worry about, none of that stuff applies. It's all very easy.

James: You have a relationship with these distributors, this is not simply you uploading them? They know that you have a library of authors and of users and that puts you presumably in a position then to do some value added stuff.

Kevin: Exactly right, yeah. In some cases there are advantages that we can offer that the individual author might not get as far as promotions. And for a time, Barnes and Noble has changed this now, but for a time the only way you could get a book listed for free on Barnes and Noble was through us. Now you can do that directly, but I think most authors still prefer to do it through us. Because we handle all the customer service and all the hassles that the retailers would have to deal with, we handle all of that in house, and we're producing a huge volume of authors and books to these vendors as one client. It does give us some sway. We can't just ask for anything we want, but when we go and talk to them, they're more prone to listen to us. We've been able to help quite a few authors, well I don't want to say it this way because I don't want it to sound like we've got some sort of through line to best sellers lists, but we've helped with promotions. Some of these authors have hit best sellers lists. We've got quite a few New York Times and USA Today best seller in our database.

James: Let me try to work out how this works. If you set up an account, let's say Barnes and Noble and I want to distribute my book through Barnes and Noble, so I go there and I create an account, I fit in my bank details and my tax details and all the rest of it, then I start uploading my books. If I come to you there's one upload and you don't create an account for me, you use, presumably, your account where then you then just filter the money back through me. I don't have to worry about a lot of that other stuff.

Kevin: We have a tax interview so that we can help you take care of the tax side of everything. That was a big innovation over the past year.

James: But one tax interview? Because I've done one, funny enough, I've done one today for the very big orange company owned by Jeff and it's a painful process, a tax interview.

Presumably, I would have to do another one at Barnes and Noble, and Kobo, and iBooks, etc.

Kevin: Exactly. That was one of the author pain points that we discovered and wanted to solve. It was not an easy problem to solve. It was an expensive problem to solve. But this one tax interview covers all your bases with all the different vendors we deal with.

Before I ever came to these guys, I used to promote the crap out of them everywhere. On every podcast I ever appeared on because I love this aspect. They solve these pain points. Taxes were an issue, dealing with multiple sales channels, getting paid. All this stuff, they're very big issues actually. But they're small little details that get away from you very quickly, so we went and made all of that easier. That was the point.

James: I can see the attraction of that straight away.

We haven't mentioned, I don't think, the pricing model that you have. Do you want to explain that now?

Kevin: The only way we make any money is if you sell a book. It really is in our best interest for you to sell as many books as possible. We make a ten percent royalty off of the retail price of the book. It ends up, after all is said and done, it ends up being about a fifteen percent cut from your overall royalty. That's because ten percent goes to us, money goes to the vendor of course, that's sort of your overhead. It's a premium you pay to make your life easier. I was always fine with it. Of course, if we're helping you, increasing the volume of sales.

James: Well, that's the point, isn't it? Even a small amount of that is going to cover that.

Kevin: Right, that's the goal. That's the idea, there's never any guarantees that that's going to happen for anybody, but my personal take has always been that your odds are better.

One of the things people don't necessarily consider about marketing is it really is all about improving your odds. It's never a guarantee. If you fold this idea in of Draft2Digital as part of your marketing strategy, you are increasing your odds because we have that bit of sway with Barnes and Noble and Apple iBooks.

Apple, they kind of like dealing with us rather than dealing with the twenty-five thousand separate authors. It makes their lives easier. They're very appreciative. Apple's got a history of if you're scratching our back we'll scratch yours and we come armed with backscratchers.

James: They can afford a lot of backscratchers. I noticed they published their quarterlies yesterday and they have something like two hundred and eighty-six billion dollars in cash reserves.

Kevin: Yes, yeah. It seems odd to say something along the lines of Apple's becoming a major player because Apple always seems like they're a major player, but they're rivaling Amazon now in this front. We're excited to see that, of course. We have a very good relationship with Apple.

James: They own a lot of hardware that people have in their pockets.

Kevin: Exactly.

James: Depending on how people read their books.

Kevin: I've got five Apple devices within three feet of me right now.

James: Yeah. They're like rats, aren't they, in that sense? They always say you're always in ten yards of a rat, you're always within a few feet of an Apple device. Says the man who's eagerly anticipating the MacBook Pro release tomorrow. I can't tell you how I can't wait to get that.

Kevin: You're going to have to let me know. I'm waiting a bit because I been burned on early adoption in the past, but I've very excited.

James: I thrashed mine to death and it's just about hanging in there. I need to replace it. That's a fantastic description of all of that and people can obviously go to draft2digital.com and have a little poke about and see that. But I think particularly for new authors this is an option that just makes them think, just sighs a little bit because it can be overwhelming the prospect of then distributing your book and all the things you have to do when you're self-publishing.

We're not big fans of those companies that say we'll self-publish for you and they basically charge you a lot for every service their publisher does. We don't like that.

But we do like these little niche parts of the digital space where you can go to and say okay, I'm going to pay you and you're going to take care of that part of it. That's what you're doing there, which is great.

Kevin: Honestly, one of the driving ideas behind Draft2Digital is we really try to never charge the author directly for anything and so far we've been successful at that. Because we're authors too, we get it. We know how hard it is to maintain a budget.

When you talk to people about marketing, there's this idea that everyone's got a marketing budget, but a lot of authors don't. A lot of authors, they're flying by the seat of their pants here. We want to be able to help all authors, we just never felt like having a base charge was going to be beneficial to the indie author just starting out, but also even when you're making a lot of money at this and you're very successful at this, that overhead starts to add up after a while and we don't want to be one more drop in the bucket that could wash over you at some point.

James: Authors come in and out of Draft2Digital?

Kevin: Absolutely.

James: If they decide, actually I'm going to upload from now on to this particular platform, they can do that?

Kevin: Yeah, not only that but you do not have to use us for distribution at all. You can still get the conversion for your manuscript. You can come convert your manuscript to dot MOBI, for example, and upload that to KDP and go exclusive with Amazon and that's fine. Of course, we prefer that you go through us, but we made that service free and it is free. That's the whole point.

James: And I'll tell you what, I'm going to have to have a look at that because I have actually today been doing a couple of screen flows on formatting for our upcoming 101 course. One of the sites I went to, which I won't mention, which offers a free formatting service it really wasn't there yet. Too many messages came up saying this bit doesn't work yet. I'm thinking I probably went to the wrong place. I should redo that.

Kevin: I should say and note on the conversion, one of the reasons we do it the way we do, you can use services or software like Vellum and you get a beautiful manuscript out of that. Ours overall is kind of simple and the reason is we test this on all the different devices.

A new device comes out and we grab it and we test this to make sure that our formatting is going to be essentially universal. We vet this, we make sure that the manuscript you produce from this is usable anywhere. By the way, if you already have an EPUB, you can still upload that to Draft2Digital.

James: If people do like the idea of spending their own time in Vellum or whatever, they can do that and then come to you with the EPUB files. Was that a dog? Did you step on it?

Kevin: That was a dog. I am sorry, she was doing okay, I think someone came in.

James: Okay.

Kevin: I apologize.

James: Sounded like you stepped on her paw.

Kevin: No. She's a chihuahua, I'm sorry. These days it seems like every podcast gets a short introduction from my dog, Mindy.

James: That's good, that's how it should be.

Kevin: She's the unofficial mascot of Draft2Digital.

James: You know, I wanted to cover a couple of other aspects of Kevin Tumlinson.

Let's talk about Kevin Tumlinson the author first of all. You've been writing for a while, Dan Kotler thrillers?

Kevin: Yeah, that's my new series. It's a shift for me, honestly, because I started out writing science fiction back in 2008 was my first published work. I wrote sci fi and fantasy for a while, I still do technically.

Around this time last year, my friend and sometime co-author Nick Thacker, he writes thrillers. We have a show together and he just started daring me on the air to write a thriller. I did, I released it in May of this year and it just exploded. I was very, very pleased.

James: That sounds frighteningly familiar.

Kevin: Yeah. Isn't it?

James: As far as podcasters being bullied, not bullied into doing it, but I'm being gently cajoled publicly into putting my finger out and doing my thriller. That's exciting, then.

We spoke, I think, briefly about this in Florida, but this is the catch is the discovery of the Norwegians or the Nordics having got to North America before anyone else did.

Kevin: Right. The first book, called The Coelho Medallion, it's spelled so difficult that I don't even bother, but the general story is that Vikings actually made it into interior United States well before the Europeans discovered the continent and actually interacted and even lived among the Native Americans at that point.

The overall premise of the series, the Dan Kotler books is that he is an independent investigator of misplaced history. He becomes embroiled in all sorts of terrorist activities and FBI investigations and all sorts of things get kind of glommed onto this, but that's his general role.

He's investigating things that are out of place historically. That's an idea I've always enjoyed, I've always liked that notion. The second book, by the way, is on pre-order, it's the Atlantis Riddle and it's the same general idea. Same characters and I do sort of tie it back heavily to the first book although they both stand alone. They're a lot of fun. I consider them sort of Dan Brown, James Rollins type stories, in that vein of thriller.

James: That's a good sales target as well, if you can match Dan Brown.

Kevin: I think so. Funny enough, I've actually over the years I've had a few conversations with Dan Brown. I interviewed him on a radio show I did back in the late nineties when he had released Digital Fortress and no one had heard of him. Actually, I didn't interview him, the host of the show interviewed him that time around, but he actually mentioned Angels and Demons.

James: That's cool. It's really interesting, Dan Brown, it's difficult to have a conversation about publishing and writing without somebody quoting him at some point.

Kevin: Yeah, exactly.

James: It's very, very interesting also the way that he writes. You're a fool if you think that he writes down, he writes very, very clever book and quite difficult to do. Yeah, brilliant. Anyway, my editors talk to me about Dan Brown and his start recently. Well that's good, and you've got your science fiction background, I think it's quite a lot. You've got quite a back catalog. Do you know how many books you've written? Top of your head?

Kevin: I have around thirty books out right now.

James: Okay.

Kevin: And growing. Sometimes I mess up on my counts because I actually have four or five that are sort of in edit and ready to go or getting ready to go. But yeah, I think I have around thirty that are actually published at the moment.

James: How many books do you turn out a year? A couple a year? More than that?

Kevin: There was a transition period for me where I really started taking this seriously and in the course of a year I put out like twelve books. I slowed that pace where it's a book every other month, instead of a book a month. I may put out between, we'll say three to six books in a year. If I push it I could do a lot more, it's just that now I have other responsibilities like Draft2Digital, and we're getting ready to do this full time RV thing and there's a lot of stuff going on and I still manage to write everyday, I just slowed down production.

James: That is an amazing production rate though. Do you write almost fully formed or do you do a lot of work in the edit after your first draft?

Kevin: I'm a discovery writer, so I don't outline. When I've got a finished manuscript most of what gets done in editing is fixing typos and the occasional gaff. I don't do full rewrites anymore. I used to do that in a previous writing life.

For the most part the book comes out the way I intended it to come out. I have a street team now. I send it to them to get feedback on typos and things because no matter how I try, I can't catch them all myself. Sometimes I get some developmental editing out of that actually. Occasionally people suggest some things and I realize, yeah, that's a weak point in the story or I can improve that.

My process is just ever evolving as I discover new ideas. The street team idea was revolutionary to me because I was paying thousands to editors and still having people complain that there were typos and grammar gaffs and that sort of thing. I figure I can save that money and use it for other things to help promote the work or whatever. It's been a nice change.

James: I'm very impressed with your work right now. You mentioned, you just alluded to this RV thing as you described it. This is fascinating, because when we met you down on the west coast of Florida last month, you were I think in a hotel at the time, but you were basically doing a little trial run on your RV and doing quite a lot of traveling.

Your plan is quite radical with that.

Kevin: My wife and I decided almost two years ago now, we put our house up for sale. It took about a year to sell it. We lived in an apartment while we got our lives organized.

We've purchased a thirty eight foot motor coach, so it's not a small RV. But we're planning on living in that full time for at least a couple of years. The idea is for me to travel. I am very inspired by travel. Meeting new people and discovering new places, that's always been a very big inspiration for me. We've traveled overseas quite a bit, but hadn't really traveled the continental US, so we're hopping in, we're going to travel as much as we can manage.

Now that I'm working with Draft2Digital, they knew about this beforehand and that was part of our deal from the beginning. They were very happy to have me do this. I think there's an ulterior motive there because I can be at certain conventions and events.

James: Yeah, with somewhere to stay.

Kevin: Really keep the cost down.

James: It's a long way to Frankfurt.

Kevin: Yeah, and it's a bumpy drive to Frankfurt from Houston, TX.

James: That's fascinating. What an interesting thing to do. Obviously this is something you and your wife both really want to do. I'm trying to think through the kind of pressures and changes on relationships and stuff when you suddenly go from quiet, independent lives that we lead today. In your house you go off and you do stuff, you don't see each other all the time, to suddenly being together in even a thirty-eight foot vehicle.

I'm assuming, Kevin, you've thought this all through, right?

Kevin: We have. A lot. One of the reasons we did it the way we did, we transitioned from a four bedroom fairly large home to a one bedroom apartment. That was our first step. Then since then, since getting the RV,

we've traveled pretty extensively. Vacations and road trips, that sort of thing and spent time in that.

You know, my wife and I, we're very passionate people and so passionate people tend to sometimes get loud, but part of this whole thing honestly is learning how to live with each other. Learning how to you know, because you do have escape routes. When you have a house, for example, I had my office and I had a studio in my home. If I needed some closed door time it was very easy. This is a little different.

Although we did make sure we bought an RV that had three independent sections that could be sectioned off, cordoned off, so that we could escape each other every now and then. I do a lot of work from cafes and coffee shops and that sort of thing. I think we'll manage.

James: I'm sure you will. That would be great to talk to you in a few months time when you've got a few months under your belt and see how that's going.

You're a prodigious podcaster as well, Kevin. How is this all going to work? I presume you don't have a broadband connection trailing out the back of your RV.

Kevin: No, I am considering running a very long cable to the Draft2Digital offices in Oklahoma. For the most part, that's the trickiest part of this. For anyone listening, by the way who is in the telecommunications industry, there is a wide open opportunity for servicing RV and mobile lifestyle folks. There is really no good solution. Satellite and internet are both slow and has bandwidth caps. We're going to be heavily dependent on LTE mobile bandwidth for our mobile phones and hot spots, but it gets prohibitively expensive. A lot of the RV parks that we may use often have free WiFi, but it's usually very slow. It's going to be challenging, but I'm prepared ... Doing the podcasts, I've worked out ways that this can happen. It's going to come down mostly to organizing my time more than the resource. If I can

find places, there are usually a lot of cities in particular have these shared workspaces where you can go and rent a room and utilize their WiFi and that sort of thing. Businesses sometimes there are places where you can find a hotspot, or public libraries are sometimes available as a resource. I've been putting a lot of thought into this.

James: Yeah, I can see. You say planning your time, so when you get there you bash out six episodes or something like that.

Kevin: Exactly right. It'll be tricky, but not impossible.

James: It's tradition though, Kevin, isn't it? We live in our houses and we're fairly fixed and we have been I suppose for six or seven centuries, but you go back a little bit further and for millennia, people didn't have a fixed abode and they did wander and as a race we're not that far away from that. Who knows, this could be a trend. Well it is a trend, isn't it? You're not the only one?

Kevin: It is a trend. We're definitely not the only people doing this. Since doing this I've actually interviewed numerous couples who are doing this full time. Most recently, the Russos from *We Are the Russos*. Shout-out! *Gone With the Winds*, they're another group that does this. There's this idea, this nomad culture that's growing in the US and I think it's largely because we're tired of being tied down in one location. The way the world has evolved, we don't have to be. We can do our work anywhere. Case in point, I'm doing the marketing work for Draft2Digital and running my author career at the same time. Neither of those things requires me to be in any given location.

James: Do you think this will impact on your stories, Kevin? From your author point of view?

Kevin: Absolutely. I think in fact that's the point. I want it to impact my stories. I want to have new locations and new characters and new scenarios

flowing past me so fast that I can't use all of them. That just adds a richness to your work.

There was a time in our history where if you were sophisticated, if you were an aristocrat, if you were a part of higher society, you traveled all the time. It was a given. You maybe spent a month or two at home and the rest of the time you were traveling. It was specifically because of that inspiration that comes to you. That growth that comes.

Some of our finest authors in history traveled frequently. This is definitely something top of mind. It was literally the primary motivation for doing this. My wife recognized this in me pretty early on, wanted to encourage it. She's a saint of a woman, by the way. She'll never hear this, all she ever hears is me say mean stuff to her.

James: I've read some nice stuff about her on your website.

Kevin: Yes. I'm going to, I need to remedy that. She's wonderfully supportive in all this and she recognized pretty early on that the more I travel the more output I have. Since she's connected the idea of more output with more money, she's onboard.

James: Strange that. I think that's a really interesting point because we, although we travel more now than we've ever traveled before, there's a normalized nature to traveling which I don't particularly like. I love flying, but the truth is it's an easy thing to do, you get on this tube, you sit there, you wile away a couple of hours and you can be in Africa, in the Sahara, you can be in Florida as we were, or you can be in the middle of Europe. Airports are in cities, so you tend to be in an urban area that looks kind of like, Nairobi doesn't look very much like London, but actually there are quite a few hotel chains you're going to recognize straightaway. When you think back to, even a couple hundred years, people like Mark Twain, you read Huckleberry Finn and that is a journey. Every detail impacted newly in his life and Mark Twain traveled two hundred miles, it was an ordeal. It was

amazing and you spotted the change in the vegetation and the animals and the way people's accents change and all those things that we hardly notice anymore.

Kevin: Right. The thing about having our means of, not instantaneous of course, but our means of quickly and rapidly going from one location to another is these locations now become something consumable. When you're traveling by road or train or anything that requires you to slow down to a different pace where you're in that transition, it's during the transition that you pick up the most detail, that you pick up the most inspiration. All the things that affect you as an author in particular, but just in your life, they don't happen generally at point A or point B. They usually happen in the space in between. That's what we're after. We want to explore that space.

James: It's not the destination, it's the journey.

Kevin: Exactly, yeah. To sum it up much more succinctly.

James: Superb, Kevin. Look, we've raced through forty minutes and it's been really interesting. I knew that the RV would come up. Talking about it from a writing perspective I think was very interesting. That must be, it's one of the perennial things for writers, I'm already now thinking about my next couple of books and where the stories, the inspiration are going to come from and you know, you can sit and you can Google and you can look up things that have happened and then you can change your circumstance. Change who you're talking to, change your surroundings and you're much more likely to find inspiration from things you can't even envisage at the moment that's going to happen to you on your journey.

Cool. Thank you so much indeed, Kevin. It's been a real pleasure, we will talk to you when you can find a broadband connection in six months time.

Kevin: I'll have it all figured out, I got to, you know? Draft2Digital still has they're still people to find, authors out there who need our help.

James: They'll pioneer it and attach something to your RV.

Kevin: Exactly, exactly.

James: Do you fancy getting into an RV? A recreational vehicle, Mark? And spending the next couple of years, just you and your wife going on? The kids, obviously, you can't leave them at home. Driving around, just stopping off somewhere to do a little bit of work here and there?

Mark: I've always been interested in the crystal meth industry after watching Breaking Bad. That's exactly, I can just imagine myself kind of driving around Wiltshire, parking up in a farmer's field somewhere, cooking up.

James: Have you got an image of Kevin standing there in his underpants, because that's what Bryan Cranston's character did.

Mark: I have to correct you, you said we met him in London. We didn't, we met Dan Wood in London. But it's an easy mistake to make because they've all got huge beards, or at least they did have, Dan and Kevin and the guys at Draft2Digital. We met Kevin in Florida.

James: Yes, we did. We met Draft2Digital in London and then it was Kevin, yes and Dan and Kevin, yes sorry.

Mark: That's right. The image about Kevin in his underpants, that obviously that was a pretty hefty drinking session in Florida and I don't know what happened in the premise of your own hotel room, but if that involved you, Kevin, and his underpants, then that's fine.

James: What happens in Florida stays in Florida, you know the rules. Good, anyway. He's a great guy and he's on your side really. He's one of those

industries that we like, we rate them very highly. We like them because of their attitude and the way that they organize themselves and they work with the author to make the author successful, which is what everyone working in this area should do.

Mark: I love that about it.

I'll tell you a funny story. I've been using them for a long time, almost since they started, I think. They moved to new premises a couple of years ago, or something along those, or they redecorated their old place and they emailed me and asked whether I'd mind if they printed a copy of the cover of *The Black Mile* which was my first indie book so they could frame it and put it on the wall. That was a nice touch, I don't know whether they did that or not, but it was nice. They obviously didn't have to ask me, they could just have done it, I wouldn't have minded at all, but it was nice that they reached out and said that they would like to do that which is kind of a good indication of just how ... They're really nice people and they're a pleasure to do business with. It gives me lots of pleasure to see them doing so well.

James: Right. You and I have a few more sixteen hour days to put in between now and thirtieth of November to get this course ready and out there. Which is exciting for us. We'll be back next week with another interview and another hopefully value-packed podcast for you.

It's possible we're going to recruit a couple of more beta testers in the next week or so, I know a lot of you are hanging on, seeing if you can get that. We should also point out that we did have many thousands of applications for that. The odds are not in your favor, as the *Hunger Games* says, but it might be you. As they say, advertising in the UK National Nursery. Right, that's it. Thank you very much. Have a good rest of the week and we'll speak to you next Friday.

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