

## **PODCAST 45: FROM U.S. MARINE TO INDIE AUTHOR SUCCESS WAYNE STINNETT**

**James Blatch:** Hello and welcome to podcast number 45 from the Self Publishing Formula.

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 this little intermission podcast in the strange inter-nicene time between 2016 and 2017, so here we are between Christmas and New Year. Hopefully we'll get this up and ready to download either later today New Year's Eve, or tomorrow New Year's Day. This is a bit of a stopgap podcast. We've had a tremendously busy and successful 2016 and we've just taken a little bit of downtime with our families between Christmas and New Year, so it's just me today. Mark is over there in Salisbury preparing to see in the new year with his family, and John Dyer's down near Stansted Airport about 40 miles north of London with his family, and I'm the one working, but there you go.

We've done a little bit of work, all of us over Christmas, so an hour or two a day for SPF, but we are bracing ourselves for what's going to be a tremendous 2017. When I say a tremendous 2017, that entirely depends really on you because we are now a community of nearly 65 thousand writers, people who are interested in writing. And so your success is our success and vice versa.

This is a community and I'm very much a part of that. I'm really hoping that 2017 is going to be the year when I become an author as well, so that's taken a bit of a back-burner for me. We did the course obviously in

November and December and it was incredibly busy and writing was barely a focus or a feature of my life then.

I have to say hallelujah, since Christmas Day I've done a couple of hours a day writing. Tried to make sure I've just done my work in the mornings and left myself free in the afternoon to be with the family, and that's felt good and I'm getting back into it.

I think I mentioned before that I'm finding this stage quite difficult now, so post editors notes, writing with her voice in my mind with my discoveries of what I need to do to make the book better and to make it work.

I'm finding it much slower progress than I did before where I could just bash out thousands of words quite easily. So yeah, writing badly is easy and writing well is more difficult. Who knew that would be the case?

Now, this is not just going to be me rambling. We do have a really good interview with you today. One of my favorite moments of 2016, you haven't heard the interview before. It's relatively short for this little intermission podcast, but it's coming up in just a moment and you won't want to miss it. We've got another course launch planned in March, which is going to be advertising for authors, but the more advanced course really gets into the detail of Facebook and social media advertising, which as Mark will tell you and will tell you ad nauseam, and you'll hear it from lots of other people in the industry.

That is the golden ticket. If you can understand that, you understand Facebook Ads, you understand social media advertising, you can find your audience. And that raises the issue that's occurred this week, and I'm not going to name her, but there has been a fairly high profile author who's published a blog disparaging self-publishing this week, and it's been brilliant to see our community reacting in a very positive way, mostly very dismissive.

This blog was very, very elitist, and basically said that most self-published books were not worthy of being published, and it was a terrible thing for

members of the public to be exposed to this awful writing without the gatekeeping process there.

Of course, it was utter nonsense. Very, very snobby and elitist. And as I think I made the point, I think I made it quite clearly on Radio 4 here in the UK earlier this year, surely it's down to readers to be the gatekeeper. Readers are the arbiter of whether the book is going to sell or not. It can always be published, everyone can publish anything, why should anybody not be allowed to publish? How dare you. You can't publish, you can publish.

Now, if your book's no good and no one wants to read it, no one will read it. If your book's good and people want to read it, people will read it. In fact, even if your book's not good but people want to read it, people will read it, and that's surely how it should be.

You wouldn't apply this logic, this gatekeeping logic this particular author was hanging on to to any other area of life. You know, standup comedians will start their trade and they'll go to the lowest pubs that take anybody and they'll hopefully end up at the Royal Albert Hall or Carnegie Hall or somewhere where they've been booked because they're tremendously successful. But they're allowed to start at the bottom.

They're allowed just to pitch up at local pubs and there's lots of open microphone evenings, I've even done one myself on one occasion, it was terrifying in London, and that's a good thing, right. And there's again, an ultimate arbiter because you've got the crowd there, and the point about that system is that they will get it wrong the first few times they do it, and then eventually they'll start to find their voice and they will become less terrified, and if they've got the perseverance, they'll learn their craft and they'll go on. That's a really pure market driven system if you like, you know, the audience being the market that you've got to sell to.

You would never say, would you, that there's going to be a secret group of agents of people who sit there who will never allow that person even to set foot inside the first pub and the first open mic evening, because they've decided that they're not good enough. And again, this is a point I think I made on Radio 4 about authors, so you know, J.K. Rowling and everybody else always famously have these rejection letters for their works early on. Well, how many people of their ilk never got past the rejection letters, whose names we don't know, who went back to work at the car showroom or whatever and put away their typewriter in those days or whatever it was forever, because of that gatekeeping system?

Whereas now, that doesn't have to happen, and with the technology and the know-how, and we're part of that in SPF, we can enable people to publish their works and see how it's going to go. Even if you just do it for yourself, even if you write books for yourself and you see them up there for sale and you turn over tiny little pieces of money, but you're happy that you're writing and producing books, then that's a success story, right. That's a success story and don't listen to a word spoken by somebody who thinks that you shouldn't be able to publish.

Okay, rant over. It's a bit like a rant here. It's been an odd year. We've lost lots of people in 2016 and I was trying not to get too involved in the long list of celebrities who we've lost in this unusual year. I was thinking it's probably a product of mass media and that we know lots more people these days, but it really does feel shocking.

For me personally, Star Wars was a huge part of my life. I was 10 years old when I saw Star Wars for the first time, and Princess Leia, I had a strong mother, a strong role model. My mother was a leader in our house, and then as a 10 year old boy I saw this confident leader in Princess Leia and that's informed my hopefully positively view of women and probably the reason I have a strong female lead in my book today.

Pretty certain the world would be better if we had more women in charge, which I guess makes me a feminist in a way, but I'm probably not a very traditional feminist in that sense. But that Princess Leia character who I, yes, I also did fall in love with her, that's true, but that lead that she gave that was counter to the way women were presented to me at that time as a 10 year old boy, I've never forgotten it.

Even when she was doing the victim stuff, even when she was as a princess being held captive in the original Star Wars, she was still full of aggression and self-confidence and, you know, what did she say to Grand Moff Tarkin? "I recognized your foul stench when I was brought onboard," she said to this guy at the head of the Empire, played brilliantly by Peter Cushing at the time.

And so it was with great sadness, like just 10 years older than me Carrie Fisher died, and I was very fortunate that I met her earlier this year for the first time in my life.

And then of course her mother died heartbroken 24 hours later. And we all feel, well some of you don't, some of us do feel sort of emotional about that, but it's part of life.

It's also the stuff of stories isn't it, this thing that gets us going and makes us think and hits us hard. That's what we try to do in our stories, and we try to take those feelings and somehow through the craft of writing make people feel that way, get in touch with those base human emotions.

Anyway, I think I probably am rambling now summing up the year that we've had. I'm going to move on to our interview, and I'm going to leave you with the interview, so I won't be back afterwards, and it's a short interview, so for this intermission podcast. And it's one of my favorite moments of 2016 was interviewing this guy called Wayne Stinnett. Now, many of you would've heard of him, many of you may not have done. But Wayne writes a series of books. He has a character called Jesse who's a

retired marine and lives in the Keys in Florida. I think he runs a fishing charter boat. And what's great about this is that Wayne himself is a retired marine.

We spoke to Wayne, we'd had a lovely meal there on the Gulf Coast of Florida in September, I think at a place called Crabby Bills, I think that was it, and we'd eaten crab and seafood obviously and had a really nice meal. A few beers had gone down and I met Wayne and I said I've got to interview you Wayne for our podcast.

So I sat down with him and what's immediately apparent about Wayne, well two things are apparent.

One is that he's a really nice guy, one of the nicest guys you'll meet, and secondly is that if you got into any kind of trouble or danger, you would want this guy next to you. He just exuded that he could handle himself and he could probably handle other people as well, which is no bad thing when you're writing about marines, so obviously he knows about what he writes. He's been very successful, Wayne, lovely guy.

I'm going to leave you with these 15 minutes or so that I spent with Wayne back in September. Mark and I will be back for podcast number 46. We've got a fantastic lineup.

We've got three or four months of podcasts already in the book, already recorded, well the interviews recorded. We'll do contemporaneous stuff as well. We're going to do some more masterclasses in 2017. Can't wait for all that to begin.

Finally, from me, from Mark, from John, from our team here at Self Publishing Formula, I want to say have a very happy 2017, a prosperous and successful 2017. Let's make it our year and I look forward to speaking to you next week.

Wayne Stinnett: My name's Wayne Stinnett. I'm the author of the Jesse McDermitt Caribbean Adventure series and the Charity Styles Caribbean Thriller series.

The first series is about a retired marine who moves to the Keys and becomes a charter fishing boat captain and gets into a lot of trouble and trouble always seems to find him no matter where he goes. It's nine books long, I'm working on the tenth one now.

James Blatch: A retired marine, sounds familiar. Maybe a semi-autobiographical?

Wayne Stinnett: A little bit, yeah. Jesse and I have the same moral compass. He's a lot taller and he's buff and fit and he has all his hair, but we have the same moral and ethical values I think.

James Blatch: Give us a little bit of background, Wayne. You've alluded to the fact that you started in the armed forces here in the US.

Wayne Stinnett: I served in the Marine Corps from 1977 and 1981, then again from '82 to '83. I served in Beirut during the Beirut bombing. Came home, started working in construction, moved up to management level, then the stress got too much and I started driving a truck. I did a whole lot of other things in between, jumping around from job to job but.

James Blatch: It's slightly odd to think that you were in the US Marines for a few years, but it was the stress of being a manager that got you, not the stress of-

Wayne Stinnett: Well, yeah. That's a whole lot more stressful. In the Marine Corps you just do what you're told, and at management level, I'm the one telling others what to do. I had employees calling me at 11 o'clock at night, homeowners, builders, everybody.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's no good, that's for sure.

At what point did you think writing might be in your future? You were driving your truck at this stage now.

Wayne Stinnett: I first started writing back in the 80s and I wrote several short stories and they didn't go anywhere. Of course, nothing back then, your only option was going through traditional publishing.

In 2013, my wife encouraged me to take up storytelling again. I had a lot of time on my hands in the truck, so I started writing stories and I compiled some of the short stories from back in the 80s into a full-length novel with a little bit left over, and that became the start of the second novel.

And I suddenly realized that I could probably make just as much money writing as I could driving a truck, so it was a no-brainer. I said, "Here's your keys, boss."

James Blatch: And when was that?

Wayne Stinnett: That was May 14th, 2014.

James Blatch: Okay, so it's only a couple of years ago.

Wayne Stinnett: Six months after I published the first book.

James Blatch: Wow, so only two years ago from where we are now, two years and a bit.

Tell me about your career now in terms of your sales and your production levels.

Wayne Stinnett: I'm trying to slow down, but something keeps kicking me. I think it's my main character, Jesse. He drives a boat, he tells me how fast to go, how slow to go.



But next year I want to go a little bit slower and get a little bit more in depth and a little bit longer novels. But next year I'll do two.

Every year for the past three years I've done three, sometimes four. And so I just want to slow down a little bit and enjoy what's going on now. Sales are up to, my average day now is 140, 150 books, and then an equal income from Kindle Unlimited.

James Blatch: So 140, 150 bucks or books?

Wayne Stinnett: Books, sales, and then almost an identical amount in income from Kindle Unlimited, and paperback sales, five or ten a day, and ebook or audiobooks, usually about eight or ten a day. It's taken a long time to get here, three years, three and a half years.

James Blatch: Well, it's not that long really and they're awesome figures, so congratulations Wayne, and a lot of people here look up to you and what you've done and where you are now and quite inspired by it as well. So I'm fascinated in the fact that the storytelling was always a thing, you say back in the 80s, and was Jesse, is it Jesse as your character?

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, back when I was just a little kid.

James Blatch: Oh, like Stephen King, right.

As a boy you told your friends stories.

Wayne Stinnett: My cousins would come over, my friends would come over, we'd go out and camp in the back yard and I'd tell stories and just make them up as I'm telling them.

And that got to be a habit and then I started writing stories, you know, little boys do, they write a short story on a back of a napkin or something.

And in the 80s I started doing it on a computer. I didn't have a computer, but my boss did, and I wrote a computer program that allowed me to cut back on my hours, but he had me on salary, so I had to stay all day, so I spent my time right. But I've always enjoyed entertaining people with the written word or with the verbal word.

James Blatch: There's a lot of depth to you, Wayne. You just said that you wrote a computer program at work to make your life, or to make the-

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, this isn't like computer programming, this is in the 80s. This was in-

James Blatch: Even more difficult.

Wayne Stinnett: This was in Basic. It made a little square on the computer screen and asked a question and you punched in a number and that's it. But it allowed the boss to eliminate two other estimators and I was the only estimator, and I only really worked four or five hours a day, so I had a lot of free time then.

James Blatch: And you did some writing.  
And you're entirely self-published?

Wayne Stinnett: Yes. 100%.

James Blatch: And you do all your own marketing or not?

Wayne Stinnett: I do all my own marketing. I hire somebody for editing, cover creation, proofreading, formatting. I hire a narrator to record the audios, but everything else, all the marketing I do myself. I'm the author, the publisher, the publicist, the agent, the chief bottle washer, you name it.

James Blatch: And what is working for you at the moment in terms of marketing? What techniques are you using?

Wayne Stinnett: BookBub is always the fundamental go-to answer if nothing else is working well. If you get accepted to a BookBub, you're going to have a really good month. It doesn't matter how bad sales have been.

But lately I'm doing a lot of marketing strategy on the actual launch, and trying to suppress that initial huge number of sales on the first day and spread that over three or four days until the Amazon algorithms kick in, and I think that will cause my book to stay at a higher rank. Not as high as if I did a sudden release to all my subscribers, but it'll allow it to get to a high enough rank to where it will stay and continue to stay at that rank.

James Blatch: How often do you write now?

Wayne Stinnett: Every day. Well, every weekday. I cut out weekends about six months ago. But I write every weekday for ever how long it takes to write 1200 or 1500 words.

James Blatch: Okay, so that's your word count, your daily word count you look for.

Wayne Stinnett: Well, it was a thousand a day seven days a week, and so now I'm cutting out weekends, so I had to make up for that and spread it out over the others.

James Blatch: And are you a plotter or a pantser?

Wayne Stinnett: 100% pants. Well, except for the destination. I try to pick a place that I've been to that I'm familiar with and I think my readers might want to know about, and I tell my main character hey Jesse, go to Cuba, or go to Cozumel, he ended up in Cuba.

Once I start the book, I have no idea what the next paragraph will be, no idea the way the book's going to turn, what characters are going to be in it or anything.

James Blatch: And your books are set when? Are they contemporary?

Wayne Stinnett: No, about 10 years ago.

James Blatch: Okay. I was going to say, because how do you keep in touch with, I guess a lot of the marines stuff is the same, but significant parts of it will be different today.

Wayne Stinnett: I live seven miles from Parris Island where marines are made and eight miles from Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, so I've got a lot of Marine Corps around me and I can immerse myself in at any time I want to.

James Blatch: So you can write in the Ospreys and all the stuff they use today. Okay. So you're a pantsner as it were, you sit there, the stories come along. You've got quite a loyal audience.

How big is your list now?

Wayne Stinnett: My mailing list's about 2800, 2900. It's not real big, but it's all organic.

James Blatch: I'm surprised, because the sales you're getting, so a huge amount of sales off list are just coming through.

Wayne Stinnett: Well, what I think is to get a really huge mailing list, you have to give stuff away for free. When you do that, you end up with a bunch of people on your mailing list that are waiting for more free stuff.

Everybody on my mailing list, not a single one of them signed up because they got anything free. They signed up because they like the stories and

they want to be notified what's going to happen next. I send an email to them twice a month, and I interact with them and we have contests.

My listeners or my readers have made up the names of some of my characters, some of the main character's equipment, and they contribute a lot to the stories too. In this latest one, I had so many contributors on this one just from my mailing list, about 30 or 40 people came up with ideas about this one character, one of the lesser protagonists.

James Blatch: Are a lot of your readers in the military?

Wayne Stinnett: Quite a few of them. Surprisingly, a lot of women. I'd say my mailing list is probably 50/50, men and women.

James Blatch: Well, you're a good-looking man, Wayne.

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, well thank you. But I think it just, the characters reach anybody, any age group. They're just plain old people. They're not anything fancy, they don't drive around in fancy cars. He's got a five hundred thousand dollar boat, but, there are a couple of them. But he's a down to earth kind of guy and people just like that.

James Blatch: You've got a very personal relationship with this guy Jesse, and it doesn't seem to me like it's a sort of friendship in that sense. There's a business relationship between you and you sense him taking you in directions that you don't necessarily always want to go.

Wayne Stinnett: Jesse's been with me for a long time. The main character in the short stories I wrote 30 years ago was Jesse McDermitt. He's been my main character, he's been my alter ego for 30 something years now. Back then, he was like me, served four years, got out of the Marine Corps and went back in. But now he's a retired marine, he's retired as a gunnery sergeant, he's a sniper instructor and the Marine Corps was his last billet.

And all he wants to do is go to the Keys and relax and fish and go scuba diving, and then somebody picks on somebody and he sees it or hears about it, and he doesn't like bullies, so he solves the problem. It's kind of vigilante justice.

James Blatch: So there's that moral compass that you were talking about, and obviously that's one of the reasons perhaps your books are so successful as they have that theme too in them, as well as simply a story. There's something behind, there's some depth to them.

Wayne Stinnett: Yeah, well, when you stretch a character out over 10 or 11 books, your readers really get to know him. Some of my readers can tell you exactly what day he was born. I've never written it in any book, but I've alluded to it here and there enough.

James Blatch: They've worked it out.

Wayne Stinnett: Yeah, yeah. There are people that know when he was born, where he was born, what his first wife's name was, his second wife, his kids' names, his grandkids. They know every detail about him, and that's because there's been little droplets of it all throughout the 10 books, and they've gotten to know him like a friend.

James Blatch: And how long's Jesse going to go on?

Wayne Stinnett: As long as I do. John D. MacDonald wrote 21 books in the Travis McGee series, and there was a big turning point in my life was when I found that first book and read Deep Blue Good-bye.

When I turned 16, I had to go to Fort Lauderdale to see Travis McGee, this hero I'd been reading about all these years. Drove down there, found the Bahia Mar Marina, but there's no Slip F18, and there's no boat there called the Busted Flush, and there's nobody named Travis McGee. And I was like, oh man, a big letdown for a 16 year old. So there's a lot of Travis McGee

and John D in my books and in me, because everybody's a product of what they've read and what they've experienced throughout their life.

James Blatch: Do you think there are people going down to the Keys looking for Jesse?

Wayne Stinnett: That'd be cool if there is. That'd be really cool. The island where he lives is a real place. It exists. I used to go camping there all the time, but the main hangout, the Rusty Anchor Saloon, it doesn't exist, it's an empty lot. But one day soon, who knows, maybe there will be a Rusty Anchor Saloon there.

James Blatch: Has Hollywood been interested?

Wayne Stinnett: I've had a couple of people send books to people that they knew, but nobody's contacted me. It'd be nice. Just to get an option, that would be pretty cool.

James Blatch: A sort of film I'd probably go and see. You've done terrifically well, Wayne. Congratulations on your career and it's great to chat to you because it's quite inspirational to hear, and what a life you've led as well.

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, just, yeah, having fun.