

PODCAST 70: LIFE AFTER TRAD WITH AUTHOR – SUZY K. QUINN

Speaker 1: Two writers, one just starting out, the other, a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark with you. On a Friday as always, a Friday is a day that you download us in a sweltering week. I felt like it goes on. Doesn't it? Because it was hot last Friday and here we are a week later it's still warm and it's going to be a mini heat wave.

Mark: It's very warm. Yes. It's 32 degrees in Salisbury, and I've just been for a run. And it was the slowest run I've done for ages. I'd basically lumbered around. Also just eaten, which isn't very helpful. Not my fastest run ever.

James: Always the best way to run with salt steak and kidney pie in you. I don't know if I've told you, but I've moved over to cycling, because my knees were really giving me some gip. So I've done the middle-aged men in Lycra thing. Finally joined those legions and started cycling, and it's not a pretty sight.

But I'll tell you, I went cycling on Sunday night and it was hot, hot, hot. And actually it was Sunday afternoon, about 5:30. But the great thing, the difference between cycling and running is that you're cycling at 20 miles an hour, so you've always got this 20 mile an hour breeze over you. So actually, even in hot weather, it's not too bad, I've found. One of the big differences.

Mark: Well done, Einstein.

James: Thank you. Yes. Well there might not be a 20 knots wind, of course, if you've got bit of a head wind or tail wind.

Mark: That's true. Very true.

James: But you also do eat lots of flies, which is the downside of going at that speed. But it's important to me and it's important to you, I think, particularly with our sedentary lifestyles that you and I have.

It's to get out and get the blood flying around the body. I couldn't do without it. Because running's gone ... not completely gone for me, but it's painful. To have something else is absolutely vital for me. For me it's cycling. I've got my Man-Cave going up in August, so I'm thinking about what I do in terms of desks and stuff, so looking at that for the moment.

Mark: Standing desks are great.

James: Yeah, and Russell Blake has his walking desk, as well.

Mark: He does?

James: It's supposed to be very good.

Mark: I've got a lovely standing desk, which is really nice. I actually put up a picture of that up in the SPF Community Facebook group the other day, and everyone was slightly surprised at how tidy it was. It is very tidy. There's no two ways about it.

James: Sign of a sick mind.

Mark: And of course what they couldn't see, outside of the frame, was how messy the rest of the room was, and how messy it's going to be next week, when you and John hole up in Salisbury.

James: We've said that. With half a ton of equipment. Yeah it's been a good week.

It's been a good day. I had a really interesting meeting in Cambridge today, of which there'll be more, probably in August, which I will tease you with with that now.

We've got quite a few things going on, despite the fact it's summer. Don't worry, we're not breaking the podcast. We'll be here. We've got loads of interviews in the can.

I think I mentioned last week we've got quite a few author interviews. I think tomorrow I'm recording three interviews in a row, one with an editor to talk about developmental editing. And I can't remember who the other two. Ah yes, I think one with our old friend, Nick Stevenson. And another one.

So lots of good stuff coming up. I'll have to check my calendar to see who the other one is. Anyway, so despite the fact it's summer, we keep going, and actually probably from an advertising point of view, if you're spending any money on social media ads, a pretty good time to be investing, because a lot of the big companies do slow up a little bit in the summer months. And that means good pickings for us.

I'm back into the laboratory on YouTube. I'm delving into YouTube again and AdWords, seeing what's new. And I'm going through the YouTube course that we've got and updating that.

There will be some new things. I can see them already. At some point in the future podcast, we'll have a recap with where we are with YouTube ads, which are still a good prospect for authors and for other businesses.

Mark: Okay. Yes, and I can beat you on that. When it comes to the lab, I've been creating messenger bots in Facebook, and having all kinds of fun with that. It's a really interesting area. Just from kind of the surface top-level statistics. Messages through Messenger get open rates of usually over 90% and click rates of between 60% and 70% on my testing.

If you compared that with a really healthy email list, you'd be getting 50% open, maybe 25% click-through. So just on those metrics, it's really interesting.

And something else I did today. I've been nominated for an award, a fairly well-known, mostly traditionally published award, the Crime Festival in Harrogate in July. One of the things I've started to do today was to send out notifications to my 25,000 Facebook followers, just to say that I've been nominated, and if they like the character that's been nominated, that they should go and vote for her.

And what I've been able to do is, by hooking this particular message up with my Facebook bot, all people need to do is leave any kind of comment in the comments, underneath the message, and I automatically send them

a message in Messenger with a thank you video that I recorded especially for it.

And it's all seamless. It's absolutely amazing. I can't wait to get into them. That is definitely going to be something that I will do a new module, or at least some new sessions for, for the ads course in November.

James: That's exciting. I know you're really getting into the bot stuff, and ultimately you will be replaced by bots, won't you?

Mark: Maybe I've already been replaced, James. Who Knows?

James: Like Fry in Futurama, who became a robot for one episode, until someone cut him open.

We always say, don't we, that what we're doing now won't be the same in five years time. And I feel that there is things happening. But what's also going to happen is that platforms like Facebook will want to keep as relevant as possible and as profitable as possible.

They will adapt themselves to make sure that they're relevant. We just have to keep up with where those changes are happening. Which we are. We're the leading edge.

Let's get on to our featured interview today, and when we get back, we're going to talk briefly about your launch, because you've launched a book this week.

Let's have our interview first, because it's a good one and it's about writing. It's a really fun interview with Suzy Quinn, who lives just down the road from me in Essex, in the U.K. And Suzy's a great writer.

She's got a good pedigree, and she's an enthusiastic person who has picked up and made stuff work for her, when the trad. industry didn't want to help her out. When things didn't work there, she hasn't been idle for a moment, and quite rightly so. She's got quite a following, Suzy Quinn.

Some of you, if you read the genre, will be familiar with her.

I caught up with her a couple of weeks ago. And let's hear from Suzy now.

Suzy: I was published with Hodder. It was about five years ago, I think. And I was absolutely chuffed to be published. I was really, really happy. I was pregnant, quite late on in the pregnancy, I think, with my first daughter.

I'd been trying to get published for years and years, and then I just got this email from my agent, just saying, "Yeah, you got published." It was a really big advance, and I was absolutely over the moon. It was great.

James: When was this?

Suzy: This was, I think, must have been at 2010 or something like that. Yeah, so it was really exciting.

Those books, they did okay, but I wasn't too happy with the publishing experience, I suppose.

And I don't think my publisher was too happy with me either, to be absolutely fair. I don't think I was a kind of the author they were used to dealing with, because I think they don't really want a lot of input from authors, which I get. Because it's probably quite irritating, but it was difficult.

I suppose I had quite a clear idea of the target market and who the book was aimed for and who I thought would like it.

And the publisher was more broad. They were just sort of, "Ah, you know. We'll just kind of put it out there and see." And the cover didn't really match with any, in my reckoning, with an audience that would read it. Because it was more sort of literary cover, and it wasn't really a very literary book.

So you can see the picture of me being a really difficult person to work with, and the publisher's getting irritated with me. The book, it did okay. I did an awful lot to boost the first book, and it didn't do bad.

The second one kind of limped it on a bit. And I just thought the books weren't right, really, which is possibly true. They were my first books.

I've learned a lot since I wrote them. And then I wrote a romance book about a teacher and a student. And it was just after 50 Shades of Grey came out.

Let me get this right. I can't quite remember the order, but it was along the lines of basically my publisher, they wanted it, but they gave me a much lower advance. They couldn't match the advance with the sales of my books, so they lowered the advance, because my first book hadn't earned out its advance. But I'd put it on Amazon. I think I'd already put it on Amazon.

James: You'd already self-published it, and uploaded it?

Suzy: Yeah, but I can't quite remember the order of things. I think for that reason, my publisher then, I think they got quite offended that I put it up myself, and they pulled out.

And to be honest, I don't think it was very professional of them, actually, because they'd already come and said, "Yeah, we'll give you this advance." And then they said, "Oh, no actually, it's not going to work. We need that kind of book at the moment."

I was really disheartened and felt really sad about it, but it was on Amazon. And I did a lot of SEO stuff for my ghostwriting business that I had before. So I took a lot of time on the keywords. And it just did really, really, really well.

It ended up selling about half a million copies, something like that. It's still selling now. I was even more chuffed, much more chuffed than when I got published, because it seemed more deserved in a way. Because I'd actually done something to make it happen, you know?

James: Well the story is not untypical of somebody's experience with traditional publishing. It's not everybody's experience, but it's actually probably the majority of people who you get chatting to and it turned out they had a book published ten years ago.

And the story they tell of this slightly despondent experience. It's almost word for word, Mark Dawson's experience and very common. Mark will tell very similar things. He looked to aspects of the way they were marketing and thought, "I could do this better."

Suzy: Yeah.

James: And so all those things that you say made you an irritating author, which I'm sure is your words, not mine, but I'm sure is not the case. They also are the things that will make self publishing such an ideal fit for you, I'd think.

Suzy: Yeah. I do still talk to publishers sometimes. I do still have an agent. My book is on sale in different countries, unlike marketing, it's published in different languages. So that kind of makes sense to have a publisher in those situations.

I wouldn't rule out having a publisher, I suppose, but I've spoken to some publishers recently who are much more modern and much more up to

date. And do more of the things that I would do and take a more marketing approach.

But you're right, it is loads of fun self-publishing and it is, if you're not egotistical and you're not putting books out there for your own self. If your agenda is to write things people want to read and then to find those people. It works out quite well, or is at the moment, anyway.

James: Let's talk about the books, first of all. I know you've spread over a couple of different genres. And you mentioned the kind of 50 Shades. In fact, when you said it was a student and teacher, but we should probably qualify, not like a 65 year old man and a primary school pupil. Just because, student / teacher has lots of different connotations.

Suzy: It's good to get that clear.

James: But that's quite different from some of your other books, isn't it?

Suzy: Yeah. It is. My first two books were thrillers. I used to work in Japan for a little bit, so the first book was about Japan, and it was a thriller set in Japan.

The next one was a horror story type thriller. And then after I've pretty much written romance. I thought I'd cleverly staged here ... This is the book I'm writing at the moment, or have written recently, most recently. The Bad Mother's Diary.

James: Okay. So for people watching on YouTube, I should just say, you're holding up The Bad Mother's Diary. Now that's done. That's a notable book.

That's done really well hasn't it?

Suzy: It's currently in the top ten, actually. In the Kindle top ten. And I don't really know why, because it was in the top ten last year. And then it sort of slid out, as books tend to do, and it kind of wavered around the 100 mark for a while, which is very nice.

And then this week, I don't really know what's happened, but it's gone back in again. So it was at number four yesterday, and it's on break today, so I think it's sliding out again. But yeah, I'm really happy. Brilliant. I'm really chuffed.

This is the only copy I could find of this, but this is part of my teacher student series that I wrote ages ago. But to be honest, it's kind of a bit ...

sort of ahead of its time now, but it's still setting in Germany, so this is one of the German copies, Von Mont Blackwell. I won't try to pronounce the rest of it. So this one's the Blackwell Lessons, which obviously translates literally, it's obviously the same. But it was the Ivy Lessons was the original series. The really nice thing about The Bad Mother's Diary's it's got like really amazing reviews. I'm so proud of the reviews. It's a five star average. The Ivy Lessons books were more, like some people hated it. Obviously, some people loved it, or it wouldn't sell, but it's a real mixed bag of people. "Oh, I've seen it and loved it. I want to see more of the characters." And some people absolutely say, "Oh, this is the worst thing I've ever read." So I'm kind of prouder of the romantic comedy one. But, taste is a funny thing with books, isn't it?

James: The Bad Mother's feels very zeitgeist and I don't really know quite what the expression is for that particular genre. Kind of Bridget Jones. Kind of fictitious, badly behaved. Perhaps Bridget's not quite the right fit though, but the newspaper column turned into book type thing.

Suzy: I think there's a word banded around at the moment, which is Mom Lit. or Mommy Lit. You probably wouldn't have come across this, James, because it won't be targeted towards you. The UnMumsy Mum, those kind of books.

James: My wife adores The UnMumsy Mum.

Suzy: Does she? Yes, it's that kind of area. So I suppose it's this generation of Moms aren't very good at it. Aren't very well designed for motherhood. They're more designed for careers and stuff, and then you end up having kids and you do a really terrible job. In some way-

James: Yeah that is certainly phrased like that.

It is hilarious, The UnMumsy Mum. So there's certainly something going on at the moment. People are enjoying that satirical poke at modern life, I guess. I don't know.

Where did it come from for you? Did you look at this happening elsewhere and thought, "I could do this."? Or is it genuinely just your life experience, you thought, "This is funny."

Suzy: The second one. It was genuine, just my life experience, and I wrote it just after I had Leia, who's my second daughter. And I just felt like I bet

there's very few Mums who have already got a sort of author career who can write from this point in their lives when they can remember everything, remember all the stuff that's happening.

So I just sort of thought to write it for that reason. But, to be honest, I've been quite lucky. When I've written books by the time I finish them, I don't know, they seem to be in sort of something with trends. So I think something must go in subconsciously that I feel like I probably did feel subconsciously this is the sort of thing people would be looking for.

James: You're effortlessly in tune with what's going on, what's happening.

Suzy: I wish that were true, James. I mean, I hope so. A lot of the books I've put out so far, I've hit things, but thank you for saying that. I'm going to guess I probably just write a lot of books, and so the ones you end up seeing are the ones that have effortlessly hit the trend. And the ones you don't are the ones that didn't.

James: Well whatever it is, congratulations. It's great to see the success, and it's working for you.

What are you working on now? Are you going to stick with the satire stuff?

Suzy: I've done a typical author thing.

The sensible thing, of course, would be to carry on The Bad Mother's series. I have written another book in that series. Bad Mother's Detox and Bad Mother's Pregnancy is a short read, so they're out there. I really should be carrying on and doing some more of those, but I'm not.

I've got waylaid. I've got sidetracked. I'm doing a book called What Happened at School, and it's about a single Mum that moves to a new area. And then her son goes to school and he starts coming home with bruises and things.

And she's sure something's going on at school, but Social Services is investigating, thinking it's the Mum.

I just started writing it, because I don't really know. I hope it hits some sort of trend, because that's exactly the same thing why the books did well, and just something just went, "Oh, start writing that one." And so there you go. Or it might disappear without a trace and then carry on with the other ones.

James: It sounds a little bit darker. Isn't it?

Suzy: Yeah, it's completely different. I'm going to have a hard time explaining to my current audience, but I'm just going to say at the beginning, "If you're expecting anything nice here, you won't get it. Go have another book."

It's really much darker, it's like a thriller. Well, it is a thriller. It's all about the intrigue, and what happens next, and page turning, more than nice feelings and that kind of thing. So I suppose it's depending on what you're in the mood for, but it's certainly not fluffy comedy, feel good stuff.

James: Sounds great, Suzy. Let's talk about marketing for a bit. So that's you, as a writer. In terms of marketing, so right from the beginning, when you saw your publisher doing stuff you were chomping at the bit a little bit to get involved in: cover design, and blurb, and stuff. And now you've transitioned to self-publishing.

What's your approach? What's working for you?

Suzy: Okay, so first of all, it obviously all starts with the book. I know that sounds really obvious, but having a great concept and title, and starting with that.

Because when I first started writing, probably like a lot of people, I had wooly kind of fuzzy ideas. When I went to Japan, I was, "Oh I'll just kind of write something about Japan. This happens. That happens." It's much better to just start.

If you've got a really fantastic title and fantastic first sentence, or marketing paragraph, that's step number one. Sorry if that's really obvious, but it was not obvious to me, at first. Might be other people it's not obvious to.

So with the self-publishing marketing ... assuming you've got your fantastic product and you know who is going to read it and what it's going to give to them.

With *Bad Mother's Diary*, this is part of marketing, so excuse me holding up, plugging my book again.

James: Absolutely.

Suzy: Everything about this is all designed for a certain person. The person mine was aged between 30 and 50, was obviously female, had obviously had children.

So everything from the colors to the comedy feel, the light feel to it. The feet in the bed and that kind of thing, was all targeted for this person, and also to let them know that when they read the book, they're going to get something.

You're going to feel. There's going to be some romance in there. There's going to be a love story. It's going to make you feel happy. It's silly. It's a silly picture, and so it's going to give you these kinds of feelings.

You're going to read something funny. You're going to read something light. It's not going to be too serious. So all that kind of stuff came initially, before starting marketing.

On top of that, obviously KDP, the keywords. I'm not too sure how important keywords are these days, because Amazon don't let you have a lot of them. But I feel they're quite useful.

It won't let you use the word "Kindle", for example, as a keyword. But anyway, I do do a lot of keyword research, so that will be the next step. And then I'd put some of those keywords in the description, as well. But obviously, it's really important that you're being genuine and authentic in what you're doing. So you can't just put in keywords like books like Harry Potter or something.

It's got to match up with other books that people are going to like, or things they'd actually search for. And when they search for it, they're going to be happy to find your book. They're not just going to go like, "Ugh, this is getting in my way." They're going to say, "Oh, okay. Yeah. I'm looking for pregnancy guide or something." There's not an outside chance that they might see a comedy book about parenthood and think, "Oh, yeah. I might give that a try.

I also do a fair bit of stuff on Twitter. I really don't know how effective that is, but I watch other authors and talk to their fans, and stuff like that on Twitter. The jury's out a bit on Twitter on what it actually measurable results and stuff.

I've got a Facebook profile, which I use to talk to readers and find out about what they like and information about what they liked about the books, or even just their lives and stuff. So I can get a picture of their habits.

If I'm selling something to them, it won't be annoying. I can say, "I know you like-" ... My readers really like a good price. I would be very much keen to show them that, "You're all bargain hunters, because I am as well." A lot of my readers are. So you're going to be interested in the fact that my book is discounted or something like that.

But other than that, to be honest, I don't do lots and lots of marketing. I'm planning to do more this year, but I think a lot of it is, in my case, just kind of having the right product in the right place, if that makes sense. Where people want to pick it up. Does that make sense?

James: Yeah, it does. Absolutely. And I've got a few questions. So going back over your points.

First of all, you talked about having a person in mind. I think something they call "Persona Marketing" in marketing circles. And that's something I've come across in my other job, which is video production in the corporate world.

And we sometimes go to these conferences with B and Q and Home Depot type stores. And the people behind their campaigns talk about these personas, and they do exactly what you've said.

Usually they'll create two or three for bigger organizations like that, but I think for a book, it's a brilliant thing to have this person in mind. It really stop the generalities. Stop diluting things, and just fix it on that person who is going to enjoy the book. And that helps focus your marketing, so that's a really good tip.

So keywords, I was going to ask you a bit about that.

You're talking about the keywords in the books entry on Amazon? Or are you talking about keywords in advertising campaigns?

Suzy: I don't actually have any advertising campaigns, so it's all on KDP. The keywords you put in KDP for the book, which you're allowed to have seven aren't you, as an author? That's right.

James: Yeah. So when you advertise you can have more of it. See up to a thousand on AMS phrases and so on.

Suzy: Oh, really?

James: Yeah, so slightly different way of doing things. And AdWords, I'm not even sure if they have a limit on keywords, but you can certainly put bunches of them together.

Suzy: I was thinking about looking at Amazon AMS today actually. That's interesting. I'll bear that in mind. You can just have unlimited keywords.

James: Well I know a man who's written a course on AMS.

Suzy: I have Mark Dawson's course, so I've probably one of his extra files might be one of those. But if not, I should definitely-

James: Yeah it's coming your way shortly, Suzy, I'll make sure you've got it.

Suzy: Awesome, thank you. Mark's course is fantastic.

In terms of me not having marketing campaigns, I'm trying to step up my marketing efforts. And all of it is going to be based on Mark's videos, which I think are fantastic. They're awesome. I feel I have all the information. I just actually haven't done anything with it.

James: Do you have a mailing list?

Suzy: I do have a mailing list. At the end of my books, I put something in. I can't remember what. I think I used to have secret scenes I used to put in. If you want secret scenes, send me your email. I'll send you the secret scenes. And that means if it's okay with the person who's emailed me, I can then contact them to say, "I've got a new book out." Yes, so I've got that aspect. That definitely has some marketing, doesn't it?

I think that's really important, being able to email people, so that then when your book first comes out, it gets a bit of a boost and then it's more visible.

James: It definitely helps with launch, doesn't it? The marketing? The mailing list.

Do you use any of your list as advanced readers to help shape the book in its final stages?

Suzy: I don't do that, but funnily enough, I was reading, or listening to, I think it was one of your podcasts actually, with Mark.

I was so impressed, that he gets hundreds of readers to email, and then he reads all of the emails, which I think is amazing. That actually really interested me. My sister, who's also an author, she reads the first draft, and then my husband reads it.

I've got a lady in America who's awesome, who's an actress who reads it. And then it's edited and stuff. So it does get a good amount of feedback, but you can always get more, can't you?

James: Mark runs it to hundreds, but other people have a smaller team like you, whatever works for you I think.

And then you talked about Twitter and Facebook, so they're both organic kind of campaigns. And you have a bit of a presence on those.

It's interesting that, at the moment, you're not sure about the return you're getting from Twitter.

Suzy: I don't know. It's very hard to measure. I suppose it makes quite a nice business card in that I've got quite a few followers. When people contact you, they sort of think, "Oh, you've got 17,000 followers or something." You're instantly put into like, "Oh, this is an author who's definitely got a fan base." That's quite a nice side of it.

I used to have this rotation. I experimented last year with having a rotation of things. First lines of books, and quizzes, and stuff like that on Twitter. Probably, I should have done it differently, in terms of being able to measure it better. But it never felt like it was doing all that much. But I don't know. Maybe it was. I didn't know.

James: We had Ian Sutherland on recently, and he's recently done a bonus course for one of our main courses. Actually, probably you have access to that as well, but I'll double check afterwards. He's come out with a methodology for really using Twitter in a very purposeful way.

Suzy: Oh, cool.

James: Very targeted on building your list up and turning followers into fans. But it does require a bit of following their steps. But it's interesting anyway.

Some people have reporting some really early successes following his campaigns.

Suzy: I'll definitely take a look at that. The only thing I say, in my case, is, and this might be interesting for other people listening, from what I've heard and read about Twitter, it has a more sort of male, intellectual user base.

Not saying my readers aren't intellectual, but they're more sort of ordinary people. A lot of them, their career is like their children. They're not quite of in this cerebral, hyper-intellectual environment.

So it might not fit my fan base, but it might fit other people's fan bases more. But I would definitely watch that video and experiment as well.

James: There's certainly a lot of politics and junk on Twitter. I'm not sure I'd use the word intellectual with Twitter, anyway, but I know what you're saying.

I think maybe the Caitlin Moran on Twitter's been very popular, and Grace Dent before her. That must be your audience, I would've thought.

Suzy: That's a very fair point. I think Caitlin Moran is a slightly more kind of radio for ...

James: Jeremy Fine.

Suzy: Yeah. Let's go with that.

I think she's a bit less mainstream, really, and more intellectual, I would say. Her books and things. But yeah, I totally see what you're saying.

To be fair, Cheryl Cohen and all sorts of people have accounts on Twitter, so it's not like ... It's all best you've got a mass market appeal. So I'm sure there is a way.

If it was the only social media out there, I would be paying more attention. And I'd think, "Oh, I'll just find a way to make this work, because there's enough people on it to make it work in one way or another." So yeah, I'm sure you're right.

James: That's interesting, isn't it? We don't really know where Twitter's going to be going in the future. I don't think Twitter knows where it's going at the moment. It's trying to work itself out and work out how it can make adverts. work and sell them. But let's keep a watching brief on Twitter, as you are, and other people are. See if it's going to work for us in the longer run.

Suzy: Yeah.

James: In terms of some of the mechanics, Suzy, like the formatting, and uploading, and stuff.

You do this all yourself? Do you outsource any of that?

Suzy: The covers are done by my brother-in-law, which I know initially sounds a bit shonky like, "Oh yeah, bringing all the family in." But he's really an amazing, amazing designer. He's fantastic. He designs for loads of big names. He does my covers.

The typesetting, I used to do myself. I learned how to do it and did it, and probably did a really bad job. So I outsource that now.

And then the uploading, I do have an assistant. He helps me with stuff, but, by and large, uploading it doesn't take very long. And the keywords, I do. And the editing, I outsource the editing.

I really probably operate something like a publishing company, really. Like a small publishing company. Just a very disorganized one. I should do more marketing.

James: Only Mark Dawson's organized. Everyone else is disorganized in the world, as far as I can tell, including me. That sounds great.

And in terms of career and income, compared to your traditional publishing experience, this is a career and an income for you?

Suzy: Yeah, absolutely. I can give you all the figures I had before. My first advance was \$50,000, which was great, and I was really happy about.

But after that they offered me, because the book sales were around about \$10,000, so they weighed the options and said, "Okay, we assume you're going to sell around this much." That was per book.

Then when my 50 Shades-esque book came out, the Ivy Lessons, my publisher offered me \$10,000 for it. And it sold well. It's part of a series of about seven books, but that book alone, I think, sold about at least \$250,000.

And then I get around about a pound per copy. So you can work out from that. I was getting a much better income. And if I'd given the book to my publisher, they would have taken 90% for print, 20% or 75% for eBooks. I don't know. I might have got \$100,000, I think.

It's not all about the money. And this is assuming they would do a good job on it, as well. Because one of the other issues I have with my publishing company is, it was a big issue. eBooks had just started. Kindle was sort of becoming bigger and bigger in 2010.

I had a Kindle, and I realized they were awesome. And I had a real thing about this is the feature. This is how people are going to be reading. With my publisher I was saying, "Look, we really need to get onto this and make sure the eBook is great." And they insisted on pricing it at \$4.99. It made me absolutely furious, because every single book in the top 50 at the time, in the eBook top 50, was priced at 3 pounds or less.

I was saying to them, "It's just common sense isn't it? If you're pricing this book at 5 pounds for an unknown author, why would anyone try that when there's every other book is priced between 99 pen and 2.99?" Doesn't make any sense at all.

And they absolutely refused. They said, "No, this is our pricing policy. Amazon are awful. They're trying to pull the value out of books." In fact, I remember them taking me to a meeting and kind of saying, "Oh, well. As an author you have to ..."

The exact phrase they used were, "You have to be poor, but happy." That's what an author is. You're poor but happy. And then I went on two and a half million pounds through self publishing.

So there is money to be made in books. And it's, I think, adding on to your profits, a team of people that you haven't hired, that you haven't chosen, working in London, in an expensive office, on quite high wages is an inefficient way to go about doing things.

I know everyone's story is different. A lot of people have great experiences with publishers, and there are different publishers out there. If I respect the people in the publishing team and what they're doing, I'm happy to work with whoever.

But I'd say, for authors, I can't recommend self-publishing enough. I may have wandered from the initial point. I'm sorry, James. I've forgotten your initial question.

James: I was just going to say, that was a brilliant answer. Suzy, that was really interesting and thank you for sharing the figures as well, because it actually helps a lot of us.

Because people don't always talk about the figures. Mark does. He's very open about it, as well. And it does help people calibrate and understand, when you're faced with decisions.

A lot of authors, if they are approached by a publisher, don't really know where to start in evaluating whether they should be saying yes or not.

Suzy: Yeah. Exactly.

James: Self-publishing's definitely not for everyone, but if you are quite enthusiastic about it and think you want to be self-publishing, at the moment, it's difficult to hear you talking and others, listen to those figures, and think, yeah I'm going to go the trad. route. And make sure 75%, 80% of my book is paying for that building in SoHo.

Suzy: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

I would recommend self-publishing for anyone before they even went near a publisher, because I think you learn so much more about writing and who your audience is.

I didn't know any of this about audiences. I'd never done any marketing at all. I don't have any marketing qualifications. So it's purely from literally putting my book in a book shop and seeing what happened, that I got to work out like, "Oh, okay."

And talking to people who bought the book and stuff, which you get more of a feel of self-publish. Well because you realize I have to talk to people and build a fan base somewhere. You start to learn about the people who are reading the books, and what they're getting out of it, and what they like about it, and what it does for them.

Then you start realizing the purpose of ... Okay, so I'm writing because this person has had a bad day, and they want to pick up a book and feel really happy and up-lifted. This will be how to do it.

And all of this I learned through self-publishing. I think if I was published and let's say my book became one of those books, the kind of ... This is kind of what I dreamed of, when my book was first published. Oh, I'd be one of those, the sort of *Gone Girl*, type of thing. It would just run away with itself.

And actually, I'm so glad that didn't happen. Because if that had happened, I would have just been so full of myself and my abilities. I would have been just thinking, "Yeah, I'm just such an amazing writer."

You actually find a lot of published books. They have one amazing book and then they're gone. You never see them again. You never hear from

those authors. Because they just write another book not based on anything, really. Not based on any understanding of who their audience is.

And that book doesn't do so well. And then, over time, it just declines, you know? Whereas if you're self-published, you get to learn the whole, everything about your readers and you get better and better, as opposed to less and less popular, if that make sense.

James: It does make sense. It's very lucid case for self-publishing and the state of publishing at the moment, Suzy. You have a gift for this interview thing.

Suzy: Thank you. I do like to talk about myself, working alone a lot.

James: Well, it's funny you saying, "Not having success early has been helpful." And it's a bit of a cliché that you hear on X-Factor or America's Got Talent every week.

It is about the journey, because that's what shapes us, isn't it?

Suzy: Yeah, exactly.

James: And if you don't have those moments, those hills, those roadblocks to overcome, you don't really improve.

Suzy: Yeah, exactly. I don't want to name celebrities, but celebrities that just appear out of nowhere and then they have all sorts of massive personal problems, because they didn't really do the work and tread the proper path, you know?

James: Yeah. You need to live life a little bit, right? You need to have a few knock backs to shape you up.

Suzy: Exactly. Yeah.

James: You've got your new book, which you say is a bit of a departure, again. A bit darker. Social care type thriller.

What's the time table on that?

Suzy: It was supposed to be a short read. I just had this great idea. It's such a good title, What Happened at School? Who wouldn't want to pick that up and find out what's going to happen, find out the ending.

I thought, "Oh, I'll just write it as a short read. Just 10,000 words." Short reads are big right now, which apparently they are. Just more information if anyone's interested.

And then I did it as a short read and I gave it to my sister, who's the first person I give my books to, and she said, "What's this? It's completely unfinished. This ending is just sprung on me. It's come out of nowhere." And I was like, "Yeah, but if I maybe just added a few more words to it." And she was like, "No, no. It needs to be a full book." And I was quite bitter and irritated, as I often am when my sister gives me advice that I know is right.

It does need to be a full book, so I'm finishing it. I want it to be finished tomorrow, but it will probably be another one or two months.

I'm actually really dying to get going with the Bad Mother's series now, because it's in the top ten again, and I really feel like, "Oh I should do more material."

But probably a couple of months, and then that will be, I think it's finished. And then I'll get feedback and everyone will tell me how incredibly unfinished it is, and it will be another month or so. So probably summertime.

James: Just about the writing process. How do you write? Where do you write?

Suzy: So at the moment I write at home. When I lived in Brighton, I used to have an office, and then I had kids, and I've moved somewhere that isn't the same. Brighton has lots of co-working spaces.

But I'm in this small village. It's called Wivenhoe, and there's not much stuff like that here. So I work at home.

I'm very disciplined. I start my work at the same time every day. I do my whatever number of words, and then that's it. I do the same thing every day. I don't have a problem doing that, really.

Probably sometimes are much less fun than others, but I make sure I do the same amount of time each day. I'm probably quite impatient. I start things I should have researched in the beginning, I end up having to research while I'm writing. So I kind of walk onto Google and research stuff.

I'm watching a lot of YouTube videos at the moment. People put a lot of stuff on YouTube that probably shouldn't be there and should've been taken down, of things like Social Services coming to the door and stuff.

Crazy people whose kids are being taken away, but you can kind of tell from the videos that their kids definitely should have been taken away, because they're crazy. But they put the videos up of, "Here I am and Social Services ... These are the thieves that took my child."

I know it sounds a bit un-compassionate, because obviously these are human beings and bad things happened to them. Awful. Sort of data of the moment in terms of finding out what social workers look like when they come to the door, and what they do, and what they say, and stuff like that. So that's part of my writing process at the moment. YouTube is wonderful when it comes to research. Amazing.

James: It's a time of unparalleled access to people's lives, isn't it?

Suzy: Yeah. Exactly.

James: You say you have a word count or a period of time. What is that?

Suzy: Depends what stage of the book I'm at. If it's at the beginning, I have a word count. I do like 3,000 or 4,000 words a day, or something.

And then, it's probably just time. If I'm going back over stuff, it would just be like, how many hours? And I wish I could have more hours at the moment, but my children have ruined my life and I have to spend time with them from time to time. Pick them up from school and stuff.

James: I do that.

Suzy: Usually three or four hours writing in the morning, pick my daughter up from nursery. Then when she's asleep I do all my marketing stuff in the afternoon, and that's my day. Although today, my Mum has my daughter, so I get to have a full day of work, which is awesome.

James: Great. Suzy, you're only down the road, actually, from me in Essex. So quite close, which is why, of course, the broadband is terrible between us. Because when I interview someone who's in Chicago or Atlanta, it's perfect. But when it's Essex and Cambridge...

Suzy: Essex broadband. I know. Yeah.

James: Essex. It's a lovely county. Much maligned.

Suzy: Much maligned, but lovely county, in some parts. In some parts maligning is correct, but still. One of the places, I like it.

James: It is true that there are chunks of Essex near London on the South that are completely different from the bit on the North. It's like Constable's

country, right? The bit that overlaps with Suffolk? The old English oil paintings of the countryside is that part of the world.

Suzy: Yeah. It's similar. Well kind of similar to Cambridge here. But you guys have Cambridge, which is fantastic. So we don't really have an equivalent fund to go to.

James: There's a technical college in Chelmsford, I think.

Suzy: Yeah. We go there from time to time. You know?

James: Suzy, it's been great. Thank you very much. I should long remember the answer you gave about being told, "Authors, know your place."

Suzy: "You have to be poor, but happy." Yeah, I remember that quite often as well. When I'm reaching certain chart positions, I remember that quite vividly. And then when I'm sinking and not doing so well, I remember it in a different way.

James: A wagging finger from the trad world. Suzy, thank you so much of you for joining us. It's been brilliant.

Suzy: Okay, thanks. It was nice, James. So nice talking to you. And take care. Have a good day.

James: Suzy. Loved that interview, and quite a few people were quite excited about Suzy coming onto the podcast, because she has quite a loyal following and gets quite a lot of publicity, certainly here in the U.K.

Mark: Yeah, she's great. As you say, she's very enthusiastic.

Very similar kind of background to me with traditional publishing. And a similar mindset now. Her view is, and I completely subscribe to this, should rather be to earning the money to pay for her own house, rather than an office in London. I'm completely on board when it comes to looking at it that way.

James: It's funny how quickly this has become a no-brainer. For lots of people there is still this view that traditional publishing is proper publishing and self-publishing is some kind of narcissistic whimsy of you. And how wrong they are, when you listen to someone like Suzy talking.

And actually there was a post to one of our groups today, I think.

Somebody who did some number crunching, and the figures he came up with, I can't verify these, but he did some analysis of a typical traditional deal.

JH reckoned that if you sold 150,000 books on an average traditional deal, you'd make about \$116,000. You would have to sell just 38,000 self-published to make the same money.

Mark: About right, yeah. I didn't see that page, but yeah if you're looking at maybe 10% as a royalty, once you've paid the advance back. Amazon will give you 70%, so that may actually have been a little bit ... 38,000 might be too high.

I don't know if he's including costs in advertising and stuff like that, but it's certainly easy to make money with self-publishing, especially once you're a little bit further down the road with books behind you.

James: The bottom line is you'd have to sell far fewer books to make more money yourself, personally, than you would with a traditional deal. And maybe the traditional publisher brings access to areas that you can't reach. And if your book's going to be huge, has a chance of being absolutely huge worldwide, I would imagine the trad route is probably the best route for you from a standing start.

Although, having said that, we've had some pretty big successful self-published books. But for you, me, everyone else, for the person who's not going to write *Girl on a Train* necessarily as their next book, the traditional route is, for me, absolute no-brainer.

I say that now, and then the big deal will come in for me and I'll say, "Goodbye. I'm signing with-"

Mark: We've got Chloe Esposito coming on the podcast the next couple of weeks, I think. And she had a performance last week, and I saw some posts on her Facebook page today.

The trailer for her book was shown on the enormous screens at Worsley Station, above the platforms. I'd say there's some pictures of that today. I think they're only going to be there for today and tomorrow.

But still, if you're going to do old fashioned broad based advertising, that's the nuclear option. How many commuters go through Worsley every day. Must be half a million, I'd have thought. And they're all going to be seeing Chloe's first book.

That kind of thing works, but the authors who get their kind of exposure, 1 in a 100, maybe traditionally published. Maybe less than that. She's quite

unusual in that she's got a big advance film deal taken care of. And now the publisher is investing to try and make back that money that they've already spent on her.

James: Let's briefly talk about your launch.

I have literally no idea where you get the time in your life to do stuff. In the middle of a busy course launch, you announced that you were launching a book. I realize it was probably a bit of a scheduling mix-up, but nonetheless, you managed to do it. And Jenny tomorrow, when I interview the developmental author, will say, "How's your book coming on, James?" And I'll say, "I don't know how Mark writes books and does everything else, because I have no time left in my life", but anyway, you did and you've launched.

Mark: You were talking about romance earlier. That's just proof that there's more than one of me. Yeah it went very well. I won't go into too much detail.

I'm going to actually go through this in a lot more detail that RWA in Orlando, when I speak there next month. But the differences between previous launches that I've spoken about before is that this was the first time I had a Facebook group for my advance team.

So about half of them took that route. And it was a really vibrant Q and C and the edits that came back, it was the hardest I've had to work on an edit. People were sending back documents that must have taken hours for them to do.

A couple of guys sent in color-coded PDF's with, I don't know, 300 or 400 suggestions. It must have taken them ages to do, and it took me ages to go through the document and pick those up.

It had three different copy edits this time, so I spent nearly \$2,000 on copyediting, which is way more than I normally spend. But the upshot is the book is very, very clean.

And the reviews have been almost universally positive, with a lot of people saying this is their favorite Milton book so far.

And it charted. I've landed about number forty, I think, everyone in the States. And I think around about number twenty in the U.K., so that's pretty good.

It's selling several hundred copies of that at the moment. So it should end up being a pretty lucrative launch. The most important thing is that my fans have really enjoyed it, so I'm enthused to crack on, so I can do another launch in, a couple of months time.

James: And have you kept up your record of each launch being greater than the previous one?

Mark: It's a bit early, yet. Because it's only been out a week, but in terms of ranking, Phoenix did better, because it was a charity book, it was cheaper, and I was getting a lot of push from the community, as well.

Lots of authors telling their readers they should go and buy it as well. So I don't think it will beat Phoenix in terms of rank. It will beat it, I think, in terms of revenue, because it's twice as expensive. And it won't sell half as many copies.

I suspect when we look at the financials, when things have died down, it will probably have done better than the last Milton one did.

James: Congratulations. It's great. We'll keep going on launches from time to time, because it's a subject people are really interested in. And we've had some more suggestions of what people would like to see and ask, free mini course we're going to put together for starting authors.

Launch is one of the ones that's come in a couple of times. How a launch works, to demystify that. John Dyer and I also chatted through some ideas today, so we're getting close, I think, to formulating how that's going to look.

Busy time for us over the summer.

Mark: Hang on. You spoke to John. What? What are you talking about?

James: About book stuff. I know.

Mark: What?

James: I know. It won't happen again. I'm sorry, boss. Great, thank you very much, indeed, Mark. Thank you to our guest Suzy Quinn. What a fabulous interview. Wonderful to speak to Suzy and somebody we'll revisit at some point in the future.

Have a great week. If you're in the U.K., enjoy the sunshine. Enjoy that. If you're in America, you're probably just used to the sunshine, and I will speak to you next week. Bye.

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