

PODCAST 78: SUCCESS IN CROSS GENRE WRITING – WITH AUTHOR MEL SHERRATT

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

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with Mark Dawson and James Blatch. Hope you've had a really good and productive week, and delighted you've joined us again. We've got two author interviews in a row. This is the second of them.

This is somebody we've had on the podcast previously, but she's had even more success since we last spoke to her. This is Mel Sherratt, who is an SPF friend.

Mark Dawson: She is, yes. We had her on before, I think, with Rachel Abbott. So, two very big selling UK authors.

I think it's probably fair to say that Mel is a hybrid author, so she's published herself, under her own steam, and also with some publishers, as well. I think she might be with Thomas and Mercer, as well.

Mel's got lots and lots of experience, sold tons of books. She writes from Stoke, which is where my brother moved to for university, so I've been to Stoke a few times. Is a gritty area of the UK in the midlands, and she set some of her fiction in there in the estates, as well as you probably say for our American listeners sink estates in Stoke ... They're kind of slightly hard scrabble areas where life is a bit tougher, perhaps, than in other areas. Mel's carved out that kind of ... What does she call it?

James Blatch: Grit lit.

Mark Dawson: Grit lit. She's made that niche all to herself and has done really, really well with it.

She's a good example of a hard working writer who has demonstrated that you don't need to be writing in the kind of mega, big, thriller, action, adventure, romance genres to have a really successful self launching career.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely, and in addition to all of that we did a brilliant photo bomb of Mel at the London Book Fair, which does crop up in the interview. So, you need to watch this episode on YouTube to see that, fully appreciate it. Okay, let's hear from Mel.

Mel, welcome back to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. We did have a brief chat at London Book Fair back in the day, well, last year 2016, I think, but we said there then that we wanted to have you on, because we're all excited about your career and you've had amazing success. I think every one of your books has at one point or another been a best seller, right?

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, crazily, so yes.

James Blatch: Not crazily so, it's because they're good books, Mel, and you're good at marketing.

Let's talk about you first, so people understand who you are and your background and when you got into writing.

Mel Sherratt: I started writing in 1999, getting serious about it, but I literally wrote three chapters of the same book, and I only wrote three chapters for quite some years before I decided to send them out to get an agent.

Then I had interest from an agent that was back in my women's fiction days when I used to write under ... I used to write chick lit to be honest.

James Blatch: You know Mark and I have just recorded a podcast and I used the words chick lit and got ticked off by him about that, he said that's so 1980's, you can't say that anymore, and it should be women's lit.

Mel Sherratt: I love it!

James Blatch: A lot of women describe themselves as chick lit writers and I don't really see a problem with it, but there you go, you've helped me out.

Mel Sherratt: To be honest, there's so many different genres out there that if you do say chick lit everybody knows exactly what you're talking about, and my writing does fit that chick lit genre completely.

It's just about shoes, and shopping, and friendship, and love, and there's obviously a lot of deeper women's fiction books out there. But yeah, mine are definitely chick lit ... Talk about coffee and shoes, and love my life. I had an agent for three years. It was way back 2004, 2006 and we worked on this same book, this women's fiction book for probably all that and I did eight different beta readers.

So, what you do is you get someone to read it, send it back, I'd do all the work on it, and then she'd get somebody else to read it, and they'd change it and I ended up working on this book for so long and it was so frustrating. Then she retired, so I'm not quite sure if she dumped me or not to be fair, but I did realize that was the one that she helped get signed.

I started working as a housing officer then, and I started watching Shameless, and I love Coronation Street and stuff, so, the main thing for me then was I started to get a bit darker with my writing, and I started to write, what I call, grit lit.

It's in between women's fiction and crime. I got another agent, and I was with her for three years, and we tried to ... I think we took about four, I was probably on my fifth book by then, I was writing really one a year and trying to get it published and really weren't being successful, because they were cross genre.

I wrote different books, that's what she asked me to do, maybe. Try to be different ... Not try to be different this time, try to get in with the main stream.

That got rejected because it was too much like Martina Cole or too much Lynda La Plante or they got somebody else on the book.

I just got to the conclusion that, unless I do something about it myself, I'm not going to get anywhere, and the Kindle was on the market then, so in 2011 I decided to self-publish, and I haven't looked back since then. It just literally just took off.

James Blatch: We'll talk about the marketing and self-publishing aspects in a moment, and I'm aware that our American audience, which quite a lot of American audience may not know what Coronation Street is.

I think Shameless has transferred, hasn't it, to America. I think there is a U.S. Shameless, so that's obviously people will be perhaps familiar with that, as a kind of working class, British council estate.

It's a comedy drama, wasn't it? It was funny as well.

Mel Sherratt: It was, yes.

James Blatch: How do we describe our lovely Corri to an American audience?

Mel Sherratt: It's basically a soap opera about people that live on the street and the ups and downs they get into. The relationships and they have some hard hitting subjects on there, which is what I like to cover as well. But there's always a sense of, there's always somebody there to help you get out of a situation. Some people get you into the situations, but there's always people there to help you, as well. So it's just about basic life.

James Blatch: And what was it about the community aspect of it, you drew out then the fact that there's always somebody there to help you out of it, even if potentially there was somebody that got you into trouble in the first place.

That community, I can feel that that's something that's pervasive in your books.

Mel Sherratt: It's very important to me, I think that was because I was a housing officer at the time, and there was a huge community spirit on the estate that I worked on.

I just felt like there were so many different stories that you could tell about behind closed doors without being too violent, and yes, there was a lot of violence in some of my books. It is just the case of you are so down sometimes that you think you're not going to get out of a situation, and then you can.

I wanted to put different issues into different books, and I do touch on a lot of the things like self-harm, there's domestic violence, there's social services. Probably not an American thing, but having your child taken away from you, and then trying to either get that child back or get on with your life again, and raise other children and start again, really. And then I tend to murder.

James Blatch: Yeah, that famous sentence always creeps into a conversation at some point. And then I tend to murder.

You've actually got quite a few different series now. So, there's Berrisford, Eden Berrisford, is your detective isn't she?

Mel Sherratt: She is. I've got two detective series. I have two books out with Eden Berrisford, hence, I've got the scooters on the wall at the back because she's my inner Maude, and I live my life through her to be honest. I have another series, DS Allie Shenton, and there's three in a trilogy with that one, and that's set in my home town of Stoke-on-Trent in the midlands. I have a series called the Estate Series, which is the one that I've just been talking to you about, which is basically Shameless meets Coronation Street.

James Blatch: With those issues, what tone do you go for with those books, because obviously you could be very bleak or you could be the more comedic Shameless route. What have you chosen?

Mel Sherratt: They're probably a bit of both, actually, maybe that's why they were cross genre. Sometimes you'd be laughing and joking with people as they were trying to get on with their lives, or the times you'd been really in the hard hitting times with them, and the domestic violence and that sort of thing.

For that purpose, I think that's why they failed to hit the market of women's fiction and also the basic crime thrillers, because obviously crime thrillers are more about the crime that's being committed and the justice, whereas these were more about the family and their lives, and about the cause and effects of the crimes.

James Blatch: Mel take me back then to 2011, your decision to self-publish. You saw something going on.

2011 and this doesn't seem five minutes ago to me, but actually you're a bit of an early adopter I would say in this field. There was a band of you, but it wasn't like today where there are half a million people probably online doing a similar thing.

Where did you start?

Mel Sherratt: I think it was really good timing for me. I knew that the Kindle was gonna be the present under everybody's Christmas tree in 2011 Christmas. I've watched Mark Edwards and Louise Voss come up in the rankings, and Kerry Wilkinson, and there was a couple of others at that time, and because my book had just been rejected and had been with my agent for quite a while, and I'd also had feedback from several of the editors at big five publishing.

I just decided that if I didn't take it out now I would never know. Before that, I wrote in the pen name.

So just going back to the original agent that I had working with women's fiction book, I decided to take that out under a pen and have a go first, so it wouldn't be attached and affect my career.

She just literally took off, it was one thing, she was there for a few days, then all of a sudden she was in the top 20. I didn't know whether it was the book at the time, there wasn't much competition as there is now, but because of that, that gave me a bit of confidence.

I learned how to do it, how to market a bit. From doing that book, because I couldn't tell anybody who I was. That was a really hard thing to market. I decided then just to have a go, and I knew that I needed to do it before Christmas, so I just literally got a blog at the time, called High Heels and Book Deals, where I was talking about my writing career and how I was being rejected, and then writing the next book, et cetera.

And then interviewing other authors, so I got a lot of feedback. I hadn't built up my network then really, and I just put a blog post out on 8th of December 2011, just said this is the book, this is the one that's being rejected all the time, it's 99 pence if you think you might like it then please share.

I think it sold 34 copies the first month, and then in January, it just exploded and within five weeks it was in the top ten.

James Blatch: At first you weren't doing huge amount of marketing, when you uploaded it.

Did you do the formatting yourself and uploading yourself?

Mel Sherratt: I did everything myself, yeah, with the help of a very good friend of mine called Telly Rowland, because she's an author and she had just done it before me, so she was showing me how to what to do if I was stuck.

But I genuinely haven't done any marketing, even now. I've taken Mark's course, I've paid for it, I haven't done any Facebook marketing, I did it maybe a month, and then just came away.

I've just been so busy writing. I haven't done any Amazon ads or anything, the only marketing I've done is in direct from blogging and knowing people.

James Blatch: I'm guessing in those early days that Amazon saw ... So something happens, I don't know quite how you get this ... The initial visibility, as you say, it wasn't so much competition, but I know Amazon then kicks in and starts pushing your book, because it sees that there's a take up of it.

I'm guessing that must have happened quite early on for you, so success breeds success, doesn't it in that sense?

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, I think that may have been what happened, and then obviously every book that you have out, and you have just got that tiny bit of audience that you've built from the last one that they can send to you.

They know who bought your books, so that's a real good way of getting out there. I think it's just a case of you have to just keep putting books out, but not as quickly as I've been putting them for the last 18 months. I'm actually drained. So I'm slowing down a bit now.

James Blatch: We'll go back to the books in a moment.

Just to re-cap: you've got three series, are they all live those series?

Mel Sherratt: Allie Shenton is a trilogy so I don't think there will be any more of her now.

Eden Berrisford I've written a couple, and I'm not going to be doing anymore for the foreseeable future.

The Estate series is always there, people are always asking me when I'm going to be doing the next one, but sometimes, for me, I've moved on from a few of them now, and I would love to continue to write them, but there's so many ideas in my head now, I just want to move forward and do something else.

I'm writing a psychological thriller, it's a self-publish at the moment.

James Blatch: Your chick lit, I'm going to use that expression just to annoy Mark, your chick lit, is it Marcie Steele, I can't remember.

Mel Sherratt: Yes it is, it's Marcie Steele.

James Blatch: You are Marcie Steele. I haven't just uncovered you have I?

You have told people that?

Mel Sherratt: No. For three years though nobody knew who she was, I always talk about she, but nobody knew who she was.

James Blatch: Who is she? But that's life.

Mel Sherratt: It is, yes. She's got three big series.

James Blatch: No wonder you're drained.

Mel Sherratt: Yes, actually this past 18 months. Because I republished the first two Marcie Steele books, and I wrote a third one and published them with BookTube, so, I did two Edens, and I did the five in 16 months, and it drained me completely.

James Blatch: What's the operation like for you publishing now then?

I think last time we'd spoken, you'd just had a lot of your covers re-done. You presumably go out to professionals for that.

Do you get your formatting now done professionally? You've got VA or you've got assistants to help you? What's your set up?

Mel Sherratt: No, it's just me still, James. I still keep thinking I need to get an assistant, but I just never find anybody.

I just sit down and I write. What happens is, once I'm getting into a book nothing else gets done, and unfortunately, that's when I can't market, so that's why I'm going to take some time off now, and hopefully get the marketing done and learn it.

There's just me and I can only do so much. I have obviously a team behind me, I hire my editor, I hire my own cover designer, yes, like you say, I've just changed The Estate series, and I've been very lucky with the publishers I've worked with, because the editing has been good and I've learned from them as I've gone along.

I haven't actually self-published a book since 2015 and I did it all myself before anything came out and so it's going to be very interesting putting the next one out.

I'm looking forward to the challenge, we're looking forward to having the control of that book and seeing what I can do with it now. After you guys have come along and done so much it's given me an enthusiasm back to see what I can do now. Off the back of everything I've done before, because you'll probably be the first one to know that actually gone live with it yet, but I've just clocked on million sales.

James Blatch: Wow, congratulations, Mel!

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, exactly, wow, because, as you know, it was 12 years of rejection before putting the books out. So yeah, it's pretty massive.

James Blatch: Well it's just yet another example of how the old model didn't really work for everybody, it worked in part, but the gate keeping system right at finding readers, rather than enabled them, and self-publishing has enabled writers finding their readers and vice versa, which is a great thing.

One million sales, that's brilliant, Mel.

Mel Sherratt: Thank you, and I think of this as well, is social media that's helped as well, not in the fact of share and buy my book, but the fact that I can talk to my readers on a regular basis.

I've got my Facebook page, and I know that I need to be doing more on there, and haven't had the time. I know people say that blogging doesn't work to sell books, but I don't do it to sell books, I do generally want to interact with people, and that's what sells you books afterwards.

I haven't blogged for ages for as well, I miss blogging, so I'm going to start doing that as well. I really enjoy talking about some of the TV programs

that are on, I can talk about them, and relate them to my books because they are hard hitting subjects. I need to start doing things like that, and that's what I call indirect marketing.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mel Sherratt: It's been great getting a mailing list up, and then just talking to people all the time, and I have so many messages, it's fantastic. It keeps up my spirits.

James Blatch: I imagine you have quite a varied audience, because your books do vary from genre to genre, so you've probably got people who might be local to the midlands, and then like that kind of reflection of the area that they knew and grew up, and I don't know, housewives and husbands in Southern England reading the psychological thrillers and stuff, you must have everyone.

Mel Sherratt: I have, yeah. I've probably written in four different genres and majority of my audience are women in their 30s to 60s, and I can tell that from the Facebook stats that I have.

A lot them they like The Estates series, but wouldn't actually cross over Allie Shenton and vice versa, Allie Shenton people wouldn't cross over to The Estate series. I did think they would work and cross over, they don't.

You have to start every series from brand new thinking that you may get new readers, but you might not necessarily cross over, and I think that's something I learned along the way, thinking everybody come on board and they didn't, so you have to just generate another audience.

The same with Marcie, but obviously Marcie is totally different. Some of them will cross over, because some of them say they'll read everything that I write, so they do cross over. I have a lot of men who read Marcie and absolutely love it, because I think it is chick grit.

It's not really chick lit, chick grit is The Estate series, so there's a bit of girly writing, as I call, but there's a bit hard hitting things in there as well.

James Blatch: I can't believe I just said house wife, that also dates me. It's a political nightmare isn't it trying to describe audiences. Mums, I should have said mums.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, a lot of mums.

James Blatch: You obviously enjoy that interaction and you do that. A lot of people listening here are building their mailing list at the moment, or work off big mailing lists, but I guess you're not really at that stage. You might have a small-ish mailing list, or do you have anything like that?

Mel Sherratt: I have a mailing list of about two and a half thousand, and I get 50% of them that open it. I only send one out every two months, and sometimes I think that's too much, but it isn't they enjoy that, I get a lot of feedback from there and I don't get many unsubscribes.

I've got one list that's on a free boot that I gave out, and then there's obviously one list that's been with me from day one. It's just organic, I've never actually done any ads or anything, although I keep thinking that I should. I just never get around to it be fair, I do need that VA.

James Blatch: You say you're taking a little bit of time from writing now, maybe focus on marketing. It'll be really interesting to see what happens next with Mel, and Marcie, because you've got a fantastic foundation without really spending half your day everyday marketing.

If you do put, even two days a week, or less than that for the next few months into, I wonder what difference it will make.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, it has surprised me when I look at things like look at Book Report and then I can see that every time I put a book out my back list clearly goes straight up in the rankings again.

That's really, really nice for me, because The Estate series was published in 2012 and there's only book come out in 2015, the fourth one in the series. The first three are still selling now, and they came out in 2012, which is incredible really. So people buy one, they tend to go and buy the rest and I get some really good reviews on number four, saying that I've read them all, I've really enjoyed it.

Sorry, I forgot the first bit of your question.

James Blatch: That's alright I was just wondering what was going to happen when you start marketing, could be a sensational, but we'll see. Anyways, we'll come back after you've done the course and see if you get into it. Let's talk about writing for a little bit. So, the actual writing process, how and where?

Mel Sherratt: Where can be anywhere, but I do tend to work in my office or at the kitchen table with the laptop depending on what I'm doing. I supposedly now I'm just finishing my 14th book now, so I can say that every book is probably written different over the years, but I am just getting to the stage now where I am learning that this is what I do.

Basically I do what I call a dirty draft. I'll have a rough idea of beginning, middle, and end of the book, and I write myself a synopsis so I know exactly where I'm going. Yes, I can veer off if I want to, but I know that's where I'm going to end.

Then I get to know my characters for a bit in the back of mind, normally while I'm working on something else, and then I sit down, and for one month I write the first 50 thousand and I'll write a couple thousand words a day if it comes out like that.

I don't allow myself to look back if there's any ideas that come up for the second draft, then I'll read them into the second draft, and then it's another month doing the second draft, which then tends to iron out everything, make it into a book.

The third draft is making sense of everything, and the fourth draft that I do, which is just what I'm going to be starting doing now with this book that I'm working on, is basically once everything is in place, and every single scene is in place and doesn't need to change, then I can start looking at all the language, and how it's in all the fear, and how it's in the emotion and making sure that all the dialogue is right, the sense of place is right.

But until I've got that structure down I find I can't do that, so that last draft is then probably to take me good six weeks to go through everything and enhance what's there. Hopefully that goes off to the editor then.

James Blatch: That sounds like a really good process. When you say draft, so do you literally start with another blank page or a document or whatever it is that you write in?

Or do you start with the previous draft and sort of do a re-editing draft of it to make it the second draft?

Mel Sherratt: I start with the same draft. The first draft will have the 50 thousand in and I'll create a copy of it, which will be the second draft. Sometimes the second draft doesn't even add words, sometimes the third draft doesn't even add words, I may add maybe 10, 15 thousand if that last fourth, final draft when everything is in place that I feel that I can let my mind go and then start to evolve the book then.

It's the only way I can do it. I wish I could work a different way sometimes, it's quite frustrating when you're on that third draft mode and you know that the words aren't adding up, but the story is getting there.

That second and that third draft for me are the hardest times, the first draft is a blast, and the fourth I suppose, because you know that you've done all the work. But that second and third draft ... I have to make myself sit down and do the work.

James Blatch: That's an impressive system, and you've developed that just organically yourself.

You didn't pick up one of the books on writing and followed a formula?

Mel Sherratt: No, but I probably did that for the first ten books, because I think I absolutely love 'How To' books and I read them still. Now I just devour everything like that.

And also when I'm reading somebody else's book, when I'm doing that second and third draft, I can't read anything at all, because I know I will take in too much.

When I'm doing the other drafts, or when I'm not not working on a book, the ideas that can then come from somebody else is just one little line that you'll think, I need to do that, I need to enhance that, not pinch the ideas if you know what I mean, but I'm just think that I should have done something like that, or maybe I'll take that into my next book. So I think even reading a lot of fiction sets you up, and the How To books are great. I still love them.

James Blatch: Yeah, I do as well.

Mel, also you've had some exciting news recently haven't you in terms of options?

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, my psychological thriller, *Watching Over You*, has just been optioned for TV by a company called Gray Point Media, and that's really, really exciting because that's been going on in the background now for a good ten months.

And then just all of a sudden been signed up and yeah, we can announce it now. It's wonderful, you just never know whether anything is going to go to the next stage, but actually somebody having interest in you is another tick in the box, it's brilliant.

James Blatch: That's really exciting and good luck with that.

Mel Sherratt: Thank you.

James Blatch: I think in Hollywood a million things get optioned all the time and it is a fraught thing. In the UK it tends to be a slightly smaller thing. My experience a couple of friends who've gone down this route they kind of set their minds on it, and somebody's nodded and said, "Yeah, we're probably going to do this."

It seems to be, although it's still absolutely not a guarantee, it's a slightly higher thing than a Hollywood production company showing interest, which can sit there for 10 years. Well, best of luck with that.

Mel Sherratt: Although it is a Hollywood director who's actually bought the book.

James Blatch: Oh, wow, okay. So how involved are you in that now?

Mel Sherratt: It's just been signed, just about a month ago, I think, not even that long, so I haven't heard anything about it yet, so I can't tell you anything about it.

James Blatch: No, no, okay, well that's exciting and we hope that goes well. It's good production company, isn't it? You were saying they've just done one of the high profile British TV series?

Mel Sherratt: They have, yes, it's called The Line of Duty. They're on their fourth, fifth season, I absolutely love that programme, and to be fair that's

why all the scooters in the background are ... And my DS Eden ... Getting my characters mixed up ...

James Blatch: Berrisford.

Mel Sherratt: Yes, Eden Berrisford books because one of the main characters in there is a British actress called Vicky McClure, and I would love her to play my DS Eden Berrisford, so that's why the scooters are on there, because she loves them as much as I do.

James Blatch: Oh, okay.

Mel Sherratt: She's had copies of the books, so who knows?

James Blatch: Great, and I think last time we spoke we talked a little bit about how geographically important some of your work is, because you mentioned Stoke-on-Trent.

I don't know around the world how many people have heard of Stoke-on-Trent, it's quite a famous in the UK, the potteries there.

Mel Sherratt: Exactly, I think that's thing. The potteries or sometimes you can mention Robbie Williams, and what happened to Robbie Williams.

James Blatch: Right, I'd rather Take That, surely.

Mel Sherratt: Yes, Take That.

James Blatch: I know certainly The Estate series is very much about that area and that geography is important, but I'm guessing it carries as well. I sort of glibly said the local people to midlands must be reading it, but actually I think that once you get inside an area that you know well, an author knows well it becomes quite compelling. It's important to you, that geography?

Mel Sherratt: Yeah, The Estate series is actually set nowhere. I was supposed to set it, although people say to me, "Oh, it's set in London. It's set in Manchester."

I have some funny reviews telling people exactly where it is, and it's not set anywhere, and I purposely did that because I believe that there's an estate around the corner, in America or anywhere that people know about that you just don't want to go on.

You know it's there, it could be a mile down the road, it could be five miles down the road, but every nation has got places like that.

I set it in that way purposely, and my DS Eden Berrisford series, I use the same city, it's basically called Stockly, which obviously is a bit like Stoke-on-Trent, but it's never an intentional place, but everybody, but few people will say ... I have readers who will say that I know that estate, it is literally just around the corner from me. That's the reason I did it.

When Eden Berrisford went out I had quite a lot of American readers then start reading The Estate series, and they call them sink estates over there, and they really enjoyed them.

That really surprised me, because The Estate series has been out for so long, and I haven't been able to crack the American audience, and all of a sudden off the back of Eden they did start to sell.

James Blatch: Well, awesome.

Mel Sherratt: And I've had some wonderful messages from people in America.

James Blatch: That's interesting, it's an odd life and all, the reason you have all these other personas ... Marcie, these other towns, you'll never meet her and you'll never to go the town. Could they all exist in your head, Mel?

Mel Sherratt: They do. I do have some weird conversations.

James Blatch: And then I turn to murder, of course.

Mel Sherratt: Yes. Must do a blog post of that ... And then I tend to murder.

James Blatch: That'll be the quote we take away from this interview for sure.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay, look, we've hit the half an hour mark.

I like following your career, Mel, and you're a fun person and we should mention the photographs that happened at LBF, because we might stick that up on the video version of this.

You were taking quite a nice posed photograph and then Mark Dawson and I were in the background and we couldn't resist the opportunity to ... And no one noticed at the time, the person taking the photograph ...

Mel Sherratt: No, we didn't!

James Blatch: You didn't notice, then later you saw me and Mark being ... We'll put that on the YouTube version of that.

Mel Sherratt: It is the best photo of LBF though, it was great.

James Blatch: It was fun, and we always like bumping into you there.

Mel Sherratt: That's good to hear.

James Blatch: Very excited about the option.

I always quote this as a great Douglas Adams quote about when he optioned Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy that it's going to be made any decade now, and unfortunately he did not live long enough to see it made. Actually wonderful books, but it was a terrible film.

Just as well, but you've got a real strong possibility there, so we're gonna stay in touch, Mel. You live vicariously through your characters, and we're going to live vicariously through you as an author who has been successful in the indie space, and quite inspirational to a lot of people.

Mel Sherratt: Thank you.

James Blatch: Yeah, so you set that up very well at the beginning, Stoke is a sort of heartland of the industrial revolution a couple of hundred years ago in the UK, and like all the places that used to thrive on industry when times change, fortunes went down a little bit.

I guess Detroit might be a good kind of American equivalent, there's areas of Detroit that are pretty poor now because industry has changed.

Mark Dawson: Detroit obviously with cars and Stoke with pottery

James Blatch: Yeah, the potteries, yeah.

Mark Dawson: Different in terms of the products that were made, but I think Detroit is probably a little harder off than Stoke is with things like problems with the water, and all that kind of stuff. But yeah, Stoke is a tough area, I've been there a few times, as I said.

James Blatch: You're a tough guy, so ...

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: No one's going to mess with you, are they?

Mark Dawson: There's no nonsense when I'm in town.

James Blatch: The Godfather they call him.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely.

James Blatch: Mel has thrived on that, she has lived in the area, she's created her fictitious town, which very clearly based on local areas. She obviously enjoys writing about the intricacies of family life in that environment and she's made that her own.

It's quite refreshing and unique in that sense. There's a series called *Shameless*, which we referenced in the interview with Mel of which there's been both a UK and U.S. version of it, and it's similar to that perhaps not quite as comedic in places.

I love talking to Mel, she was there ... Early days, 2010, 2011 around there, when there was not really very much ... There wasn't things like the SPF community, and Nick and so on where you could just go online and start to get advice and help and she had to find other people doing the same thing work a path.

She hasn't done a huge amount of marketing, I think she was lucky in the sense, in those early days of being at the van guard and visibility was perhaps easier than it is today, but she's keen as buttons to get on and start ...

Mark Dawson: Keen as what?

James Blatch: Buttons. Keen as buttons?

Mark Dawson: No, you just made that up.

James Blatch: No, you're shaking your head?

Mark Dawson: John's shaking his head. Keen as mustard.

James Blatch: Keen as mustard. Neither make much sense, but she's very keen.

Mark Dawson: She's very keen.

James Blatch: To get on with new techniques at the end, and we love bumping into her, at the London Book Fair, particularly when we were standing behind ruining her nicely posed photographs.

Mark Dawson: Yes, absolutely. You shouldn't have mooned her.

James Blatch: No, probably shouldn't have done that, yeah. I can't help myself. Good, thank you very much indeed.

I did tell you that after a couple of author interviews, we're going to move back into the realm of marketing and we are going to talk about author collaborations, and Nick Stevenson's move into that area and what he's setting up to try and help authors get together with each other, and collaborate.

That's going to be an interview with Nick, we're always happy to have him back on the podcast. Always a great interviewee as well, so that's next Friday.

Until then if you want to pick up the back catalog of SPF podcast, it's been put into a book actually, as well as being on iTunes and Stitcher et cetera, and our own website, and the YouTube channel, and the multiple places and the app.

Where you're going to find the podcast, you can also get this book, if you go to selfpublishingformula.com forward slash vault. V-A-U-L-T. The advantage of that of course is, unlike a list of audio files or video files, you

can search this for topics that you're interested in and working on at the time.

We should also talk about patreon.com. And look at this mug coming into shot, if you watch one YouTube, the mug that says James Blatch in huge letters on there. That's amazing that Mark's so magnanimous about the organization that he allowed me to have my name ... Oh, hang on, you don't spell James Blatch M-A-R-K.

Mark Dawson: James Blatch's self-publishing failures.

James Blatch: I suppose that would be a bit of a fraud if my name was on there. Yeah, [patreon.com forward slash spf podcast](#), we're enormously grateful for people who have become supporters of the podcast, helps us keep it going. Keeps our enthusiasm going, pays for all this equipment and travel, and that's great for you to be a part of it, thank you very much indeed.

Okay, that's it, so until next Friday, and our old friend Nick Stevenson, have a great week, have a productive week, and we'll see you then. Bye.

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