

## **EPISODE 110: HOW I QUIT THE 9 TO 5 TO WRITE (AND NEVER LOOKED BACK) – WITH ERNEST DEMPSEY**

Speaker 1: Two Writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blanch 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 on this Friday, from the United Kingdom, speaking to the world. Like the Year Vision Song contest if you are familiar with that.

It's been a busy week for the SPF community. We've got a buzz going on in the groups because we have our periodic, one of those moments where we open the course for enrollment. This is the 101 course, so it's lots of people who are chomping at the bit to get going in the Indie world.

**And let's just say again, there's never been a better time to be a writer.**

Mark: Yeah, so could add value into the podcast James. Yeah it's been really good, we've had quite a few people join up, so the group is buzzing right now.

One of my favorite post's is to ask people to take pictures of their workspaces. And so we're seeing people, Australia, all across the states, in the UK, and in other places sending pictures of usually quite attractive desks. In a couple of cases not so attractive.

Kevin Partner, he's one of our alumni, won't post a picture of his desk cause he says it's too untidy, so fair enough. But no one here has beaten the-

James: The 747, or 737.

Mark: Seven three seven picture from the cockpit of a 737. I think that's never gonna get beaten, but unless someone goes up on Branson's galactic.

James: Yes.

Mark: That might translate but until that point I think he's safe. A fighter pilot, that would be a good one.

James: That would be a good one.

Mark: You'd get excited.

James: Yeah, I would. I have done that, but I didn't take a book up.

### **Would you go to space on The Virgin Galactic thing?**

Mark: Maybe, not the first one.

James: No.

Mark: I'll leave that to Richard. I'll go in five or six years time.

James: Yeah, I would definitely be up for that, although I think it's a sort of trajectory, just dips into orbit briefly, but I prefer to go to the moon, if NASA are listening.

Mark: Too old.

James: Too old, yes I am too old. Rude.

Okay, we've got a lot to get through in this podcast and we've got a really great interview with a very laid back sardonic Tennessean. Is that what you say, people from Tennessee?

One of the things I want to do before we get going Mark, it's a very happy time to welcome our new Patreon subscribers. I'm gonna rattle through this list and hopefully you will hear your name in the next few minutes.

We are going to say a very great welcome to John Weston, from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Welcome John.

To Danielle Davis, who is from Beaumont, California. From Mariam Vibeek, who is from New South Wales, in Australia. Teresa Connor, I'm gonna it's Connor, from Oxford, Alabama. Not Oxford, UK but Oxford, Alabama. Is there a college in Oxford Alabama that I could go to, and get a correspondence degree? And then say I got my degree from Oxford. I'm sure somebody else has done that.

Mark: Most def.

James: Yes, that's fine. Natalie, NL Raymond. Now I wonder if that is actually her author name potentially. Natalie is from ... I'm not sure where Natalie is from. It says Audrow-lan. Does that mean anything to you, Gusselby, Audrow-lan. I think it's possible that Natalie fell over her keyboard.

Mark: She's making some strange words.

James: And just random letters came out. Jennifer Grenenol, is from San Diego, California. We have Karen Inglis, our friend Karen who is from the United Kingdom, from London in United Kingdom. Hopefully we'll see Karen next month at London Bookfair. Gretchen Shirley Berlind. Careful how I say that one. Kent, Wisconsin, Kent, WA, is that Washington? That

must be Washington I think. Gia Koom Ramirez from NS MT. You're testing my codes for the states now. MT, Massachusetts?

Mark: Massachusetts.

James: Yeah Massachusetts, okay. From Tom Bagaman, from Bridgefill, Pennsylvania. I know PA. Paul Fitzsimmons from Dublin in Ireland. Elizabeth Hager, is from nowhere. I'm sure she's from somewhere, but it's just not down here.

Joseph Little, welcome Joseph to our Patreon list from San Antonio, Texas. Valerie Francis, who is in St. Johns, NL, which I guess is New Newfoundland. That must be St. John's, Newfoundland, you think, or is it?

Mark: Or Netherlands, but yeah.

James: Or Netherlands potentially. It says Brooklyn Avenue, sounds like it might be in Newfoundland.

Mark: Yes, it is.

James: What a wonderful place to come from. Paris Singer, sounds like a good name. He's from Albicantia, here's a nice holiday destination here in Europe, in Spain. Julia V, from Sunnyvale, California. Steven Moore. Our friend Steven Moore, who hasn't got a location here but I'm pretty certain he's in Mexico, although he does do a lot of traveling.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Rana K. Williamson is from Fort Worth, Texas. Kanisha Williams is from Clarksberg, MD. All the Americans are shouting at us, cause they all know these off by heart of course.

Mark: Maryland.

James: Maryland. Did you Google that, or you made that up?

Mark: No, I am just very clever.

James: Lee Jackson. Lee is from Austin, Texas, great city. Melissa M. Green from Monument, Colorado. And finally Jillian Troic. Troic, am I saying that right? Troic. Jillian, I think Jillian has just joined our 101 course. I had a little conversation with her yesterday about that, so welcome Jillian, both to the 101 course and to our Patreon subscribers. If you want to get a shout out for yourself with your location stumbled through by me, you can join us at [Patreon.com/SPFpodcast](https://Patreon.com/SPFpodcast).

And within that list, we're at the very last of the mugs, I have to say. The last of the mugs, it sounds like a novel title. We are now moving over to pins.

Now the pins are smaller than the mugs, it has to be said, but they are rare and collectable. Only special people will get SPF pins. They're gonna be winging their way to our gold level subscribers on Patreon. Good, well we've done that.

**Mark, amongst everything else that's been going on this week, you flew off to Luxembourg yesterday. I assume just to check on your bank accounts.**

Mark: Well, actually I posted a picture in the airport to my Facebook page and everyone suggested given that a spy had been poisoned at Aylesbury, on Sunday, that I'm just leaving the country for safer realms.

Yeah, it has been all a bit weird. Actually where I am right now is literally five minutes from where he and his dogs were found. This is all very strange, especially for somebody who writes espionage thrillers, like me.

There's that, but anyway, yeah I jumped on a plane the day before yesterday. Flew to Luxembourg, and I was put up in a rather weird hotel, which is kinda like a high end hostel, little bit odd, by Amazon.

And then me and three other Authors, one from Germany, one from Spain and one from Italy spoke to a 150 Amazonians. Some of whom worked with basically the whole Kindle team from Europe has this kind of Luxembourg conference, two day conference every year and then have a big party.

And they were joined by some very senior Amazonians, maybe one or two rungs down from Jeff, who run the Kindle program both devices and the store and all of that kind of stuff.

We had a Roundtable and we spoke about that, and it was great. It was really lovely to be able to, again, to meet up with some old friends from Amazon. And also to meet some new friends and to tell the people working on the Kindle program and to demonstrate their work has real work consequences.

I suppose you'd probably class me as an outlier now, and some of the others I was talking with were outliers, but as we know in the community we have dozens, hundreds probably of people who are earning 3, \$400, a \$1,000, \$10,000 every month and that's money they wouldn't have otherwise, and that's something that they've had to generate through writing.

To be able to, I suppose in some ways just to say thank you to the Amazon staff, who do all this, make all this possible. It was a privilege to be able to do that.

Flew back home last night and back in the office today after a couple of days out. And it's bedlum so all kinds of stuff going on. It's busy times, that's how it is.

James: Yeah, yes the spice story was absolutely extraordinary and we had a guy Alexander Litfanyenko, who was poisoned in London a few years ago.

Mark: Eight years ago.

James: Eight years ago was it? Yeah.

Mark: Ten.

James: Ten years ago, so okay. He had polonium 232 was it or something like that. One of the isotopes of polonium dropped into his drink and he died. Once you get this stuff it's apparently very difficult to recover from it.

And then we had this absolute struggle. I mean what is extraordinary also is that probably a lot of people haven't heard of Salisbury. I mean Salisbury is a smallish market town and the most unlikely place in the world to have a Russian double agent.

This guy spied for Russian, then spied for Britain against Russia. I mean I don't know what the life expectancy of people who do that is, but he put himself into a bracket where this sort of thing is a potential thing, which is unusually in Salisbury.

I was speaking to our accountant this week in the exciting world of doing our sales tax returns. He has friends who walked passed as it all happened.

Mark: I was in Salisbury then. I was working that Sunday afternoon. I know the pub, I've drank in the pub before. I know the restaurant, I walked past it most days. It is really weird and you see them and there's a police car, but there was a policeman, I think he's recovering now, but was critically ill.

James: Yes.

Mark: From the contamination, they think now from this guy's house and are actually on the street. Which is why there's lots of cordons everywhere in Salisbury now. And I walked past them this morning. A lot of police military now is getting stuff out. It's all pretty nuts.

James: Well the reason we're talking about this, cause you know you're an espionage writer, a thriller writer. A lot of the audience write thrillers.

I know you draw some of your inspiration through life, cause I read one of your books and the opening chapter was a case I remember very well of a guy being gunned down.

Mark: Yep, yeah so I actually put a question in my Facebook Group last night. I think there's three things that I'm thinking about writing next. Two are Milton books, and one is a new project I've been working on.

I just asked them what they would like, and the overwhelming winner was Milton goes to Russia after investigating something in a town like Salisbury.

James: Right, yeah.

Mark: One of the benefits of writing the way we do is we don't have to submit it to a publisher and then wait for publishing slot two years probably. Hence I can write this in six weeks, publish it, whilst the case is still fresh. That might be what I do next. Yeah interesting times.

James: Yeah, definitely. Okay look, let's get onto our interview.

We are going to hear from Ernie Dempsey. This is a companion interview to last week. Last week we spoke to Maria Lewis in NOLA, in New Orleans.

Maria told the story of her getting going writing, which was about a year ago now. She planned her launch, she planned her first three books. It was very interesting, and that was the best feedback we got about the interview.



Was listening, people found it very valuable listening to the way that she planned this. You helped her a lot more with your materials, which was great, and this is another one.

Ernie was a few years before Maria, a couple of years before Maria and he was somebody else. He's a really sweet guy, really lovely guy. I don't feel like being called sweet.

We got on very well with him in the States when we were there, so I sat down and did this interview with him. And he told a story, which is for me, an every man's story.

This is a guy who worked in a high school, who had been writing stories since he was in high school. Wanted to be an author but just knew that it wasn't for him. Got all the rejection letters and then suddenly, things start changing. His whole Indie world, what you were just referring to, Amazon have enabled and that you are a great propagator of. Again, he has learned from you as he'll make clear in the interview.

Ernie posted a fact. Funny enough, I'll say this. Maria was last week, Ernie is this week. Both of them unprompted not knowing that we had scheduled their podcast interviews. And this interview was done in October, both of them are done in September/ October last year.

Both of them spontaneously wrote us an email. Didn't they? Last couple weeks just to say, I just want to say to you again, thank you for everything you've done for me. And then he posted a lovely picture of his house with his father I think sitting in a rocking chair with a shotgun on his lap.

Mark: Yeah that was really lovely. I mean Maria told us in what she made last year, which was a lot. I won't mention how much but it was lovely to see that.

And Ernie has just bought a house, which has a lovely view and he sent a lovely picture of his dad looking out over this golf course. And I think Ernie's dad was telling him, Ernie says how proud he was of him.

Ernie's got one or two kids I think and has a bigger house now. And he's bought that through book sales and that's what I'm talking about when I say how we should, Amazon get a lot of stick sometimes, of course it's not just Amazon. Or any mate sold a ton on another platform but these kinds of platforms and the people who work on them are enabling us to do amazing things that wouldn't have been possible 10 years ago. Maria would still be in a tour guide, potentially in New Orleans and Ernie might still be a teacher. And as it is they're both full time writers doing what they love. If I had a glass I'd raise it.

James: Yeah. I do have a glass, it's got squash in it but I'm gonna raise it.

Mark: You got a mug.

James: You are a mug, okay let's hear from Ernie. Ernie Dempsey.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: Welcome to the SPF Podcast.

Ernie: I just practiced this interview in my car like two days ago.

James: Well, so this is going to be a perfect interview then.

Ernie: Really I had no idea this was happening.

James: How long was your car journey?

Ernie: Ninety minutes.

James: Okay. We'll see what we can do. We got 30 minutes interview. Ernie, you are somebody who's been a very, you are early member, almost a founder member of the SPF community.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: Really back in the day.

Ernie: I couldn't get in fast enough.

James: And we're going to hear your story but the long story short is you're a school teacher. You embrace self-publishing and now you go to Super Bowl games.

Ernie: That's right, yes. That's great.

James: We don't need to do the interview do we?

Ernie: That was a great way, that was great. It was awesome.

James: Tell us a bit about who Ernest Dempsey is.

**Tell us a little bit about you and your books.**

Ernie: Yes, so my real name is Ernest Dempsey, Ernie's a nickname. A common nickname, everybody calls me Ernie or Ern.

I write action adventure thrillers and I guess that's what I would call them. A lot of history involved with them like National Treasure, Indian Jones, that sort of stuff. And so I have a former government agent turned archeologist getting in all sorts of trouble and that sort of thing.

James: Excellent, so the book sound great, they look great as well. You've got a good cover designer, someone told us that.

Ernie: My cover designer's awesome.

James: Let's go back a couple years then. And people are always, I do and I know other people listening want to hear your story or transition from everybody, every kind of nine to five Joe out there.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: With Joanna, through to living the dream of writing at home and making money doing it.

Ernie: Yeah. Telling stories.

James: Telling stories, is that your English accent? You're pretty good at English accents.

Ernie: I talk in it all the time when I'm alone. I don't do it in public, when I'm driving in my car I'm like-

James: Ernie is English when he's alone.

Ernie: That's right.

James: You are based in the US. You say you live in Atlanta, actually you're in Chattanooga.

Ernie: Mm-hmm (affirmative), Chattanooga, Tennessee and then part time in Atlanta. Which is just 90 minutes away.

James: Yeah okay, Brave's fan.

Ernie: Big Brave's fan, yep.

James: Okay.

Ernie: Big Falcon fan, Atlanta Sports.

James: And a school teacher a couple years ago.

Ernie: Yep, I was a High School Guidance Counselor and Soccer Coach for, I did that for 12 years, and yeah.

**James: But there was a part of you that was a writer.**

Ernie: Yeah you know it was funny cause people asked me, "When did you start writing?" And I tell them my freshman year in high school. And that's true, I started writing stories and I got in trouble. I just told this story to a friend the other day.

I got in trouble my freshman year at Collegedale Academy, pretty conservative institution. We got this writing assignment and I wrote this very graphic action sequence and there was a lot of blood and shooting and stuff.

And there was the first, I'll never forget it, it was the English teacher's first year as an English teacher and so she's young. And she reads this story I wrote and was appalled. I mean she was so appalled she called a parent teacher conference.

James: Probably alarm bells are going off.

Ernie: Big time, you know like this kid's gonna go nuts. But it was the kind of movies I liked to watch, it was the kind of stories I liked to read. And so yeah, that was kind of a funny little foray I guess into the writing world.

I had great encouragement from my English teachers and it's so funny because I never finished a story. Like the short stories we were assigned I

did but I would start stuff, I always had ideas. I got you know, good feedback from the teachers but I never had any followup.

And then I was attending a funeral of one of my professors when I was in college and I bumped into an English Professor. And all the other professors and old teachers I had in the English departments that I'd ever had all found me and asked what I was up to. And, well I'm doing this and they're like, "Are you still writing?" Every single one of them asked me if I was still writing.

And I said, "No, not really." And they all said the same thing. "You need to be writing cause you have a knack for it, you have a gift for it."

### **James: They spotted that? They knew that?**

Ernie: Yeah and I never really thought I was that good because I don't have a huge vocabulary. My vocabulary, I don't use a whole lot of fancy words.

And I don't get in deep into descriptions of things. I didn't think that I was really that good and when they told me that, that kind of lit the spark again and so I started.

I had an idea for the first novel, *The Secret of The Stones*. There's a place about 45 minutes from where I live in north Georgia where there's this mysterious wall.

It's made out of these rocks but it's not a circular wall and they calculate it to be between seven and eleven hundred years old but nobody knows who put it there or why it's there. And I went there for a picnic and I said, "This is gonna be the basis of my story."

Now for the people in the know you don't wanna do a plot driven novel. You want to do a character driven novels, true enough but I started with a

plot driven novel. And it took a couple years to write it, so if it's taking you a while, that's okay.

James: Thank you.

Ernie: But it's once you get the first one out, the rest are much faster. And that's how I ended up writing the first one.

James: No that's good, you got a novel in you. You decide that you have some encouragement. It's a shame in a way that you didn't leave high school knowing that you were a good writer.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: That it was a sort of chance meeting after it.

Ernie: I'm self deprecating. I have low self-esteem, so I don't think I'm any good at anything. My lot in life I felt like was to try to fit in and get a job.

But I was bored in school. I did enough to graduate and get degrees in college and stuff. But I never felt like it was my real calling. And I felt like a round peg in a square hole for 12 years in the public school system, like the whole time I felt like this is not what I'm supposed to be doing with my life.

And now I don't wake up a single day feeling that way.

James: Yeah, well that's the, we can get to that point in a moment.

Ernie: Yeah.

**James: You've written this book. You're working at high school at this stage when you write the book?**

Ernie: Yeah, so this is funny. I would wake up at like 5:30 cause my commute from Chattanooga down to that little town was about 35 minutes. I would wake up at like 5:30 in the morning and write and then I would, which you've interviewed lots of people that did that or wrote on subways or trains or whatever. That's what I did.

And then I would write on my lunch break. And then first thing I got home, you know when I got home from work I would do a little more writing. And then spend time with my girlfriend or whatever.

James: That's dedication.

Ernie: Working in the school had a couple of cool perks. The librarians loved me and I loved them and I still do. I used to go in there and chat with them all the time. I like being surrounded by all the books too, so I like that. And currently I go to my local bookstore and work.

James: Right.

Ernie: They brought in some authors, kids authors. One wrote children's books, another wrote books for like middle, early high school age and he was William Slater.

We were chatting and I was trying to get some advice from him like what should I do. And he said, "When do you write?" And I said, "Well you know," I told him what I just told you about the 5:30 wake up time and all that. And he goes, "I couldn't imagine how hard it would be to do that, work at a full time job and you must write a lot on the weekends."

I said, "No, I'm a Seventh Day Adventist, so I don't work on Saturdays. So it's kind of like the Jewish Sabbath, I don't work on Saturdays. And in the fall I'm watching football on Sundays, so I don't have time to write on the weekends."



He looked at me like I was crazy. And it's like yeah, that's what I do. I just write really fast and I go as hard as I can and when I have the time.

And you know people would come up to me all the time and say, "Man I really wanna write a book but I don't have time."

I'm like, "Then make time." If it's a priority, then make time for it.

**James: You wrote this book and then at this stage, what did you know about the editing process and covers?**

Ernie: It was terrible; I knew nothing. I didn't have you guys and Mark and all at that point. I did the same thing everybody else did, I pitched query letters to agents.

A lot of people have like 7,000 rejection letters. I stopped with 17 rejection letters and I used, there was a website that I used to contact agents. I don't remember what it was but it was, I got a lot of rejection letters, they weren't interested. There was no interest in the story whatsoever, the manuscript was pretty lame I guess.

And I was chatting with a friend and they said, "Well have you heard of this?" And I'm not gonna mention the company's names cause I don't want authors to use them. They're not scammy, they do what they tell you they're gonna do but there's better ways to do it.

And you know Mark shows better ways, Nick [Stephenson] shows better ways and Joanna [Penn]. I went through this company, it was essentially a vanity press. They did the cover for me. They did a very rough edit for me and I didn't have much money so I got an English professor I was friends with and an English teacher I worked with to edit the book.

If I could give advice to any writer, the two things of advice that I would give are don't design your own covers and don't get English teachers or

professors to edit your books. And I'm sorry if there's an English teacher listening to this right

now. It's like, "Wait hold on just a daggon minute." They probably gonna say it in a Southern accent like that or say daggon. But it's a different ball game than what they do.

James: Yeah.

Ernie: They're grading papers. I'm not knocking it. They do a great job with it but it's a completely different process and it killed me in the reviews for a long time.

I got the number one review on my first book that I ever wrote, it's on Amazon, is great story, needs an editor or good book, needs an editor. Something like that.

James: Yeah.

Ernie: And they missed, they missed typos, they missed grammatical things. I'm not the best with grammar and so that was a big problem and the first book didn't sell many copies either.

I didn't know how to get it to the distribution. I didn't know all the KDP stuff. I didn't know any of that stuff and so yeah, it was tough. But you know, I had that one English teacher I worked with.

She said to me, I'll never forget it, she said, "Ernie," when she came into my office just to ask me this. She said, "When are you gonna write the sequel to your first book?"

I said, "What are you talking about Carol? I'm not gonna write a sequel."

And she goes, "Yes you are. You left it on a cliff hanger. This book is a sequel, at least maybe three books."

I said, "Well I was planning it as a trilogy but I didn't sell many copies and you know I'm in the hole a couple grand on it and I just, I don't think I'm gonna write the next book."

She grabbed me by the shirt and she said, "Write the next book. I've read the first one three times." And I said, "Really? With all the bad edits and all?"

She's like, "I don't care, the story is great." And I said, "Okay fine." I said, "If there's one person like that, then there's three. And if there's three, there's a whole world of people that would like what I'm writing."

I wrote the second one in six months and I scrapped the whole cover that that company did. I actually designed my own covers the second time around, which I don't recommend doing.

But I figured out how to do it using like Gimp, the Gimp software and I'd learned enough to at least make them better than they were.

James: You know you started off a little bit. I remember we were both talking earlier and you were apologizing. I don't mean to be down on teaching and stuff but you were pleased to be out of it.

Except you know what, teachers are coming across really well in this interview so far. You have those guys at the funeral who came up to you and gave you that encouragement.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: And then you had your colleague who said to you, "Write that book."

Ernie: Yeah.

**James: If it wasn't for those teachers...**

Ernie: Right, yes exactly and so yeah, that's exactly right. Without great encouragement from teachers that were both my teachers or co-workers, I wouldn't be sitting here doing this interview right now.

James: Yeah.

Ernie: Overlooking the beach.

James: Yeah, yeah we should say we're in Florida and if you're watching on YouTube it goes very bright every now and again and then very dark. That's because we can't adjust the cameras, we're running them dim and the Florida weather is going from hot and sunny to hot and cloudy.

Ernie: It's that time of year where it starts getting very erratic down here.

James: But always hot.

Ernie: Yeah, yeah.

James: Which for us English people is...

Ernie: It's sweltering.

James: Oven.

Ernie: But thank you for using Fahrenheit.

James: I like how you appreciate the fact I pulled the fuse out of the air conditioning unit.

Ernie: Yes.

James: We're not used to cold air. I did literally do that. Look, this is the exciting bit then. There you are, your book is languishing a bit.

Ernie: Yep.

James: You've got this encouragement because somebody's told you it's a good story and you're a good writer and you start writing your second book.

**Then at some point, things start to click in terms of being able to sell. What was that transition?**

Ernie: 2011 was when I wrote the second one and I did the cover re-designs for the first one. I sent it to another editor and had it re-edited, still not perfectly but much better.

And in December of 2011, I re-released the first one. I released the second one and what happened was after that woman talked to me about that, I said, "Okay I'll do a second one but I'm gonna do it not my way, but I'm gonna find a better way to do it."

I started researching, like Google searches on like how to Publish on Kindle. How to publish Barnes and Noble, how to do all this stuff right, and I find out like you can do this all yourself.

You don't need a vanity press to do these things for you. You can do it all yourself so that's what I did. I re-release the first one in December 2011 and at the same time, released the sequel. And I was selling like five books a day, ten books a day, seven books a day and at that point I was narrow, it was all exclusive on Amazon.

In 2011, people who are in the industry know back then that you know the perks of being exclusively with Amazon were really good. I mean you got the free days, you got those other little promotional things you could do.

And so after 20 days, I was like, "Man, this is not friends and family buying these books. These are just strangers in Timbuktu somewhere reading them on a bus in Chicago or something." People I've never met. And I was thinking, I could scale this up. I could do more of this.

I could write more books and sell more books and really supplement my income, but also do something that I really want. I feel like I have stories that people will enjoy and it will help them escape from the rigors of life.

And so I wrote the next one in like two months and I've just been going fast ever since then. And it hasn't always been easy and good, I started listening to another podcast who was really helpful about six months later in 2012. And those guys was really funny, they were talking about the same pitfalls that I went through or the same issues and I was like, "Oh so that's why that happened in my books during that month?"

I started learning a lot but it was good. I was making you know, gas money for my commute to work and whatever.

Then, I found Mark Dawson, I found him and Nick [Stephenson] at the same time. I bought both of their courses simultaneously. And that's when everything just completely changed.

James: I've got a lot of things for you. In what way, can you be specific about the changes?

Ernie: No, no I'm just gonna leave it at vague.

James: Yeah.

Ernie: No, I'm just on a beach in Florida.

James: You've got such a British sense of humor and you're from Atlanta.

Ernie: Re-state your question just so I can make sure I get it right.

James: Well okay, just tell us about, you basically said you found Mark.

Ernie: Yeah.

**James: You found Nick Stephenson and then things went stratospheric for you I think you said.**

Ernie: Yeah, well they didn't go stratospheric yet. I started Googling things, doing searches on like how to market your books. How to you know, sell more books. That typical stuff right.

I found blog tours, there was a blog tour company. I did one of those, total waste of money. At one point I literally went to a coffee shop in Chattanooga, my hometown, my favorite coffee shop and I went to them and I said, "Hey, here's the deal. I'm gonna give away all these books to all the, I'm gonna give away digital copies to all these people. Just go on leave a review." I was trying to figure out how to sell more books.

And I somehow stumbled across the K-boards and Mark Dawson was talking about what he'd been doing. And I can't remember how I found Nick Stephenson but it was a similar way.

When I found them, they talked about how they were going to offer a course. Mark gave a place where you could sign up to find out more somewhere along those lines. You guys were behind the scenes making the thing.

And I kept checking, I checked daily. I'm not kidding, I was checking my email daily like when is this freaking Brit gonna start this course? I'm sorry, that was offensive. When is he gonna open this course? I couldn't get in that fast enough so when I said that earlier I wasn't kidding. I'm like, "Let's go, chop chop. Make the course guys."

Finally, he opened it up. I blew through everything. I'm like video side picture here, I'm like doing what he's talking about. And the results were pretty much instant.

I started getting subscribers, I started getting more sales. The sales didn't spike tremendously, I had I don't remember how many in my main series at that point. But they went up and they were going up.

Every time I released a new book, they went up and every time I was you know, brand new ads, I got more sales than I did before. And so that was huge, I mean those two courses, those two guys. They saved me from a life of drudgery.

James: When did that happen? When did the income, can you give us some.

### **In terms of income, when did things start to become savable serious?**

Ernie: Well I started you know, touching four figures a few times in-

James: A month?

Ernie: Yeah. I wish I can remember my first thousand dollar month, but I really can't. And partly because that wasn't my goal, my goal was never to just fourth, like I wanted to replace my income. And so I really don't remember when that was.



I would say probably 30 days after I did Mark's course maybe. I mean I'm not kidding, like I think it was probably the next month I did four figures.

And then in April of 2015 I made more money gross from my sales than I did from the school. And so this is a funny little story, but they called me into the office, the Principal and the Assistant Principal and they said, they started asking me lots of questions.

There was an anomaly that happened during a testing session where I was testing a kid who had missed a standardized test, like a week before, so I'm testing him alone.

Well something strange happened, he only completed half the test on the computer and submitted it. They asked me, "Why?" And I said, "He told me he finished it." Well didn't you check? It was a new test, I didn't know how to check this. I went through the training, they didn't talk about this.

Then they asked me other questions, "Well we hear you're writing your books on school time." And I'm like, "No, if I was writing my books on school time, I wouldn't need to wake up at 5:30 in the morning." Then they asked me a couple other questions and they were really prying.

I said to myself, "I see what this is. I have tenure, you can't fire an educator with tenure without a significant case against them." They were putting a case together for the following year so if I screwed up at all, they were gonna just be able to say, "Here's the deal, we're getting rid of you."

I said, "Guys, I see what's going on here." And I said, "I'm gonna make it real easy for you." And they're both my friends and I respect them a lot, they were my bosses but I love em, I mean they're great people but they were doing what they were told.

I said, "I'm gonna make this easy for you. I'll let you know by Thursday or by Friday if I'll be back next year."

And they looked at me and said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well you just sat here and told me that I'm gonna have to do more work next year for the same amount of pay. I'm gonna document all these things I'm doing. You're asking me all these questions. To me it sounds like a witch hunt.

I made more money with my books last month than I did here and I'm happier sharing stories with the world than I am sitting in pointless meetings in central office, so I'll let you know by Friday." And that was a Wednesday.

I walked back in the next day and told them I was quitting and I emailed the human resources guy. I said, "I know that I signed my contract for next year but I'm pretty sure you're not gonna put up a fight on this one." Cause he wanted me out too I think. And he said, "Okay." I was like, "Perfect," so I quit.

**James: Did you quit with a really strong sense of confidence that you could replicate these monthly figures?**

Ernie: Yeah.

James: And grow them?

Ernie: I did, I sat down with my wife and we had, this is what was scary, we just had a baby two weeks before this happened. I mean we had a little newborn right, and so that made it scary. And you know, there's no guarantees but there's no guarantees in anything. If you have the safest job in the world, you can get fired. You can be the best at your job in the world and all of a sudden you lose everything.

Talked it over with the wife and she was extremely supportive, very supportive and so I quit. And it wasn't all roses and perfect because that

year in 2015, I made a major misstep. I decided to do a spinoff trilogy for my main series. I got a lot of good feedback on one of my side characters, my main characters.

And instead of producing the side trilogy and releasing a book every 60 to 90 days or whatever, I built it all up at once. And didn't release anything for six months. And my income, it just plummeted and the ads helped sustain a little bit but I maxed out all my credit cards. I had like 15 grand in a retirement account that I had saved up, gone. Like in a six month period of time, it was about ten months-

James: And a baby. Scary.

Ernie: I believed through all of it, we ended up selling our house in 2016, not because of that but from other stuff. And I was dangerously close to having to take a job in 2016 and it was my own fault because I wasn't working as hard.

I said two pieces of advice, three pieces of advice. Work your butt off, like this is not something where you write one book and you sell a million copies.

Everybody's read the Hugh Howie story, everybody's read about Amanda Hawking and EL James and all these people that wrote their seventh book and they made 10 million on it. Or they wrote book one and they made it, it's not about that.

Nobody looks at their job that way. Nobody goes to work at the post office and says, "Today's the day that I put in my eight hours and I'm gonna make a million dollars from it."

Writers shouldn't look at it that way either. And unfortunately, I kind of was because I was listening to all these success stories and reading them. And I'm like, "Okay my day's coming."

The truth of it is is that the more you write and the more you work on your marketing and you balance those two things, the harder your work at both of those things, the more successful you're gonna be.

And that's what happened with me. And when that clicked and it just blew up. I hit my first tipping point in October of 2016.

James: I see you recovered from this period.

Ernie: Oh yeah.

James: Yeah yeah.

Ernie: Big time.

**James: Are you focused back on your main series?**

Ernie: Yeah I'm focused on the main series, mostly the Sean Wyatt series is what people know it as, that action adventure thing. I do have a spinoff short novel that's coming out here in a couple of months that is that side character I mentioned.

But my readers have been asking for it so I'm doing that. I think that one's gonna be one that I think Mark donated money with this Phoenix book, I'm gonna use this one I think for disaster relief.

And I'm gonna give it to all my subscribers for free initially and then tell them, "Hey if you want to support the relief fund stuff then you can go buy it."

James: What's this the hurricane?

Ernie: Yeah the hurricanes, you noticed all the stuff that's happened, there's been a bunch of crazy things.

James: Yeah.

Ernie: Doing it for that but yeah, as far as the financial recovery it's been crazy.

Since October 2016, I've had five figure months every month. I've hit \$20,000 a couple times and it's, I mean that's gross obviously. That's not net but I never dreamed that I would be doing something like that. And doing something I love and getting people emailing me.

I've built up a list of so many awesome people; that's the best part. I'm not famous but like I'm famous to those readers and the best part of fame is the friendships that I've made.

I'm pretty sure I have a free place to stay anywhere in the world. And that's awesome and these people, these readers are so cool. I mean they're so nice and their age ranges are from 30's to 80 years old and retired. And they're so kind and they're so awesome. I don't know, I'm just so blessed, I'm just blessed that's all there is to say.

James: You've worked hard and that's one of the great things about this. And your beloved Falcons got the Super Bowl and I was joking at the beginning. Well not really joking but now you go to the Super Bowl. I know it's a painful memory but-

Ernie: No it's okay. We went, we dominated the best team on the planet for three quarters and we had the greatest tailgate of all time. And I met a lot of cool new people there and we had a blast, so it was a good experience. I'd do it again.

James: You are yet to go to Cambridge match so you haven't quite reached the pinnacle sporting events.

Ernie: That will be a pinnacle. Do you guys have a good tailgate, you get like the grills out and do some barbecue before the game?

James: We have pasties and pies and-

Ernie: Pies?

James: There's a reasonable chance if you eat one you'll end up in hospital.

Ernie: That doesn't sound good. It seems like maybe I should bring you guys some charcoal and a barbecue.

James: Yeah, if you do that you'll be arrested in the UK.

Ernie: Really? You can't have a charcoal fire going?

James: No.

Ernie: Really?

James: Not near a car in a car park.

Ernie: But it rains. It's perpetually raining, there's no fire hazard. What's the problem?

James: Anyway, you do have place to stay in the UK but it does come with a trip to Cambridge Ignited with that.

Ernie: I wanna do it.

James: You'd be there. Well, congratulation is what I want to say to you Ernie. You know you've built this house yourself. I know you say you're blessed and you've built this house. You got up early. I assume by the way you're not getting up at 5:30 now because-

Ernie: No.

James: This is your job right?

Ernie: Well I was for about two years because my daughter was waking us up at like 5:30 in the morning. But she's sleeping in til seven now so I'm sleeping in til seven.

And there's a part of me that's like, "You should get up at six and do a little writing. No you do this full time now."

My mom comes up, my wife goes to work. She still works and she works very hard in the medical field.

And then my mom comes over and babysits for about six hours everyday. Let's just say I couldn't do it without the team, like that's my team. You know you guys have a team.

My team is my mom, my wife, my sister, who you know is always encouraging and always tries to bend her schedule cause my mom helps with their kid too. I have all these people, this great support that on top of all the readers, all the people behind the scenes that I couldn't have done it without them.

James: Yeah, seems hugely important.

Ernie: I just sit at a laptop and make my fingers move, like that.

James: Well, there's a trick to that as well. We all know. And let's finish off, let's wrap this up. Try to get a little bit of value out of you for now.

Ernie: Oh so none of this has been valuable? I see.

James: None of it's been valuable.

Ernie: I'm out of here, going to the beach.

James: Waiting for this bit. You know the beach looks lovely out there.

Ernie: I'm looking at you, you told me not to look away.

James: Yeah, you can turn around and look at beach.

Ernie: I can see the reflection in your glasses.

James: Oh yeah you can.

**What's working for you at the moment? Obviously Facebook advertising's probably been a major driver for you.**

Ernie: Yes. Yeah, so the whole Pat Flynn thing of being everywhere is the key, is for me.

Pat Flynn, great blogger, podcaster, a lot of people know his story about how he lost his job and then become a blogger and kind of at first accidentally learned about how to make money from his website. He said one of the biggest secrets to success is to be everywhere.

And so what I try to do is I try to give content in as many places as I can, so that may be in an ad, an ad is content. I mean it's got an image, it's got, or a video. It's got copy that will lead people to more content right? That's a part of it, so Facebook ads is a piece of the pie.



I'm not doing anything with YouTube or Twitter ads right now but I'm using YouTube to do self interviews with my readers. You guys have set up cameras here, I set up my iPhone and I position myself you know. And I look at the camera and I talk and what I do is I'll answer questions that I get from readers. They don't even know I'm gonna answer them sometimes.

Or I will give them a behind the scenes look, so for a book that I released in March this year, of 2017, the Denali Deception, I did some on sight videos where some of the action took place in the story. And showed them some of these historical places, these landmarks in Chattanooga that a lot of civil war stuff happened there.

The readers loved it. And they love even just me sitting in my living room answering questions because they feel like they're getting to know me.

If you're an Author, you need to do that and it's hard with video because you don't know what content to give them. Well start with just a little interview like two, three minutes.

Answer a question that you get or that you would have for yourself if you were reading your own stuff and put it out there. I'm not consistent with it, I do it around release time, so it's about every couple months or so I do videos. But it's content you're putting out there.

I do Book Bub PBC, I do Book Bub feature deals when I can get them. That took a long time before I got my first one. And so if you're applying for them and getting turned down, it's not you it's them.

James: Keep going.

Ernie: Just keep going. And then I've done what else? Amazon Marketing services, now AMS, I'm doing a lot more thanks to the interviews that I

heard you guys do with what's his face. Who's the one that did that? I don't remember.

James: Darren Hardy.

Ernie: Yeah, I don't know it's one of those guys, yeah yeah. I'm doing that and then I'm constantly writing, so it's a balance of you have to have lots of marketing.

I call it the spinning the plates of chaos. You have to have all those plates spinning at the same time while you're creating new content but you need to do it. And it's a lot of work and people don't wanna hear that. They don't wanna hear it's hard, it's a lot of work.

Do you want something awesome or do you just want mediocre for the rest of your life? I want awesome and so I spin a lot of plates and that's what you have to do.

You have to be everywhere like the Coca Cola and the McDonald's thing. They run advertising, they don't need to run advertising but they do it. That means you should do it, everybody knows Coke and McDonald's.

If you're like me, most people don't know who you are. Like most people don't know Earnest Dempsey, it's just a fact. That's okay but they will if I keep those plates spinning.

James: I think I heard the line for our teaser this week coming in. Do you want awesome?

Ernie: Our teaser?

James: Yeah we just drag out 30 seconds of the podcast and put it on Facebook Groups. I think I just had that line go through.

Ernie: Okay.

James: Won't editorial it. I love that line, I love the point you make about advertising and you will get cynics. Partly people don't wanna hear that you've got to work hard.

And people also I think if they don't understand or they underestimate, they're under confident about using advertising platforms, which I completely understand. Sometimes that comes out of the kind of antsy, the whole thing but that point you make, everyone's heard of Coca Cola and McDonald's and yet they spend millions of dollars on advertising every day of the week.

Ernie: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James: It's not for fun.

Ernie: No, they want their brand to be the first thing you think of when they're hungry or thirsty. You should want readers to think of you when they are ready for something new to read.

Maybe they don't buy on the first time they see your ad. They don't buy the first seven times, but they might buy the eighth time. They're like, "Man I've seen this guy or gal a billion times. They keep coming through my feed. The must be popular."

And that's the other thing too you know, the perception. If you're not advertising, then you are no one because you're not putting the effort out there to get in front of the readers and so it's vital. It's extremely vital that you be advertising.

And look, no business starts and then starts advertising, they begin and then they start advertising and they turn a profit like that. Everybody's like, "Well I screwed up, I just lost a hundred dollars. I'm not gonna do this,

doesn't work." You can't look at it that way. You have to consistently test over and over again.

You have to tweak your copy, your images until you find what works. And in the meantime, you're not losing money because your brand was still there. It was put in front of them, just cause they didn't click that time. Maybe your copy wasn't right but they'll remember you the next time when your copy is right.

Mark: Yeah.

James: You've always got to think the seven touch is more-

Ernie: Sure.

James: The theory that goes into it, it's not as simple as selling sport, oh they haven't bought my book, that advert didn't work.

Ernie: Right.

James: That's not like that, the advert worked cause it's part of that chain association eventually becomes a familiarity.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: And then they make a purchase. Look we're right up against it in terms of time.

Ernie: Yeah.

James: Ernie it's been hugely fun meeting you and talking to you. I should say and it's Wednesday the 4th of October, we are about to go and have few drinks because it's the SPF credit card, which is over there. It's gonna be poured out from John Dyer's wallet.

Ernie: With the moths that fly out of it and everything.

James: Moths fly out. Dust everywhere. The credit card's gonna go behind the bar of the Shark Tooth Tavern in 30 minutes we need to get over there. And we're gonna have a few drinks.

Ernie: Sorry, I talk too much.

James: No no no, well you've talked yourself out of dinner I think.

Ernie: That's okay.

James: We can find a sandwich somewhere.

Ernie: All right.

James: If you're coming along to that we're gonna see you later.

It's been huge Ernie, inspirational. Congratulations, we love your success and wish we like to feel a part of that as well but it's been brilliant.

Ernie: You're a huge part of it and I'm tickled that I got to do this, this is awesome.

James: Tickled is a very English word.

Ernie: Is it?

James: He does a pretty good British accent. I think it's a slightly mocking British accent.

Mark: Yes.

James: He was great to hang out with and we're going to the states, we're not going anywhere near him in July. But we're going in September and if can somehow make it to Atlanta see him I'd love to do that and have a little glass on his terrace there. Because I think you know that's the story that we all want to hear. We got our foot on the ladder somewhere.

This is a point you made to Maria and when you replied to her email. The number one reason for their success is they're good writers. And that's just put that out there. Maria is obviously a talented writer. Ernie is obviously a talented writer. He also works very hard at it, in making it happen.

But with the know how, which you provide and with the platform, Apple and Kobo provide, there's a real opportunity out there now.

Mark: Absolutely, yeah it's you know, I can show people how to get people to download their books. And I can show them how to put great covers on the books and write great blurbs.

Those are all really really important steps. If that's being successful, then at that point it is on the writer. If someone starts reading a book and they don't like the story, it doesn't matter how good the master goes, they won't buy the next book by the author.

That's not a problem that either of these guys have had. And it's not a problem that tons and tons of our other students have. What we're doing is kind of giving them a gentle push in the right direction. And then once they get going it's over to them.

James: Okay. There's a few more days of the course open. Have I got that right? This will be going a week Friday.

Mark: I think it's about four days, five days left, yeah.

James: Of the 101 Course, which is the foundation course. There's a 30 day money back period if you are not sure about it, you wanna have a little advice so he won't be offended.

If you take advantage of that but there's also a very good walkthrough on the sales page and you can get to the sales page. There's a link in the show notes below. Or go to [selfpublishformula.com/101](http://selfpublishformula.com/101) at anytime at the end. If the course is open it'll take you to the course. If the course isn't open, you can sign up for a notification when it opens.

Okay, that is it. We've got a lot to do. I know you've got to get on with stuff and so have I and it's been brilliant here. The last two weeks I've really enjoyed both those interviews. I say so myself, I did them but I've really enjoyed my chats with both Maria and Ernie.

I think they were super and check them out, check out their books as well if you wanna see how good their writing is.

Tread carefully in Salisbury.

Mark: Yes I will.

James: Then cross the yellow ticker line, whatever it is, not ticker type, yellow tape because we need you here next week. Bye bye.

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