

EPISODE 112: TURNING PERSONAL STORIES INTO MARKETABLE BOOKS – WITH OWEN ZUPP

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

James: Hello, and welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula Podcast, with James Blatch and Mark Dawson, here in the United Kingdom, in the center of the European Union.

Mark: For not much longer.

James: On the edge of the European ... I mean, we've always physically been on the edge of the European Union.

Mark: And ...

James: We're now figuratively

Mark: Literally and figuratively.

James: Yes, well, the times, they are a changing. And I guess that's our theme to this podcast, isn't it? Because it's a new industry, an exciting new industry I must tell you. I know you're dying to say something, shut up.

I must tell you, go on and say something.

Mark: No, I wasn't gonna say anything. I'm just waiting. What gems are you gonna bestow upon us this time?

James: I do occasionally get told off for not letting you speak. But, it doesn't bother me.

What I was gonna say is I did an interview yesterday, which I think is coming up on May the 4th, international Star Wars day, of course. With a small publisher in East London.

I absolutely loved talking to this guy whose name is Jasper Joffe, and Joffe Books is the publisher. And I'm just doing a little preview of it because it felt so significant to me that there's this guy who is a Dorsonian man, you know, who's done your course, he listens to Joanna Penn, and everything, he's soaked up all this stuff, he understands how social media advertising can work, and how visibility works in this very modern way of selling indie books.

He's created a, effectively, a traditional publishing house. You know, he takes submissions, he picks one in 100 or so of the people who come forward. And he's just going like Billy-o. And of course he is, right?

Because, it's not rocket science that you can't go on in the old way. And this guy's sitting there and at one point this year, what did I say to you yesterday?

Mark: He had 17 in the top 100. I've known about them for a while, and I emailed him just to say well done. I'm impressed.

And we just got on the podcast, and he was very nice, that he was, you know, as you say, he knows who we are, he's been following what I do. And we look forward to hearing that one, too, because he's done so well.

"The Cleaner" got up to, I think, number 10 in the store, and he had at least 3 in the top 10 ahead of it. All from the same authors. I know, I'm not gonna share numbers, I have a fairly good idea what he's making every month.

And I don't think he'd mind, it's certainly 6 figures, and I would say it's extremely healthy, so, no, it's amazing to see.

He's just running things around trad pub, just as dozens of other indies do with price, with advertising, with outreach to readers, everything's possible these days, and he's a really good example of that.

James: Yeah, and I mention, Michael Anderle in the interview, it's somebody else who's, sort of, building a stable around the same principles, I think, and we need to do this, maybe? Do you think? Self-Publishing Formula?

Mark: It's crossed my mind, actually, a couple of times. I could publish other people. But I just don't know how I would find the time to do that.

My first love is still writing and that will always be the case. I get a massive kick with getting my stories out to my readers.

SPF takes up about half of my time. Beyond that, I don't know where I would find the time to set up and imprint like Jasper has done. But, you know, never know, one day maybe we could look into something like that.

That's something for the future.

James: I think it'd be a really exciting thing to do. But, yeah, let's put that one on the back burner for now.

Anyway, I wanted to talk about that because I felt very excited about it, and I'm looking forward to having Jasper on the podcast.

Actually, maybe it's been move forward, I'm now looking at the fluid plan we have is the 27th of April for that interview. But we've got a good interview today.

Today's interview I picked this up because, being a little bit of an aviation nerd, I attract other aviation nerds, and I hope Owen won't mind me calling him that but Owen's up whose up in Australia emailed and we started nattering backwards and forwards about our fathers, actually, our fathers have incredibly similar careers. Very similar careers.

And down to the character of our fathers and the kind of way we were brought up is very similar, as well. So, we've had interesting conversations about.

The reason that I invited Owen to come onto the podcast is because he's done a couple of things.

First of all, he's making money out of non-fiction writing. Question we get asked a lot, does the stuff you talk about on the podcast, and in the webinars, and in the courses, does it work for non-fiction? And we'll perhaps talk about that a little bit after the interview.

And the second thing he's done, is he's taken a personal story, the story of his father, and he's made a commercial success out of book written about it, which is more difficult than it sounds.

I think, in particular, because it's very difficult to write objectively in a way that's going to be suspenseful and page-turning about a story you're so close with, and you're trying to, sort of, tell from an emotional point of view. And I think Owen has cracked that with a very methodical approach to it.

So, that's the background to Owen, as I say, a little bit of aviation stuff coming up, there's no harm in that, of course. So let's hear from Owen about his book, about his remarkable father, and then we'll come back and have a chat off the back.

Owen is up, thank you so much, indeed, for coming onto the SPF podcast.

Owen: It's great to be here thanks, James.

James: All the way from Australia. There will be a bit of a delay but we'll see what we can do about that in the edit.

You are not the first 747 pilot we've had on. You may have noticed Susan Grant who flies jumbos for United, I think. If I got that right, yeah, I think United. And we've had a couple of other people on.

Of course, it's a bit of a passion of mine so my eyes light up a little bit when I hear that one of our authors is in the aviation sphere.

But, the real reason we brought you on, we're going to come onto it in the bit, is just to talk about the world of the non-fiction self-published author. Because it is a slightly different world, and ultimately I think a lot of non-fiction authors feel a little bit on the fringes when they look at a community like SPF and it's all romance, and thrillers, and mystery.

But, it's very important to us that NF gets a proper ... So, we'll come onto that in a little bit, but what I want to do, because you are an interesting gentleman. We've had a bit of banter, off-air, about the cricket, which is probably just as well because half of the audience are in America, and think it's a small insect. So, we'll probably leave that there, and also, for our English pride, we'll leave that conversation aside.

Let's hear a little bit about you, because you've got a great background, and in particular you and I share quite a lot in common in the fact that our fathers flew at around the same era and I don't think my father fired a shot in anger, but they both achieved quite a lot in their time.

And that's been one of your inspirations, isn't it?

Owen: Absolutely, my father, as you said, he was a combat fighter pilot. He flew 201 missions in Korea, and he was an army commander in World War 2, before that.

But he, obviously, instilled the passion in aviation that I subsequently followed as career, but, as you say, in terms of non-fiction I wasn't a typical author in that I didn't grow up wanting to be a writer.

I enjoyed writing, I enjoyed writing essays, and reading, but I was always focused on a career in aviation. And as you're well aware it's a rather technical industry determined by procedures, there isn't a whole lot of room for creativity when you've got a couple of hundred people down the back.

It was really when the airline I worked for collapsed in 2001 that I felt I didn't want to be solely reliant on flying as a career and a source of income.

So I did a master's degree, I did some technical writing and consulting, and whilst there were rewarding in a physical sense I really didn't enjoy it that much, and I thought if I'm doing it in addition to my profession, I've gotta enjoy it.

And that's really how I came into writing. I started by writing magazine articles, and that lead into books, traditionally published, and then from traditionally publishing I went into self-publishing.

It was a rather convoluted journey, possibly compared to some of your listeners and writers, but that's how I got here, where I am today.

James: And out of interest do you mind me asking how old you were when you started the publishing side of your career?

Owen: So, I would say my first magazine article was published in 2006, so that would've made me 42.

James: Okay, good, well that's good that it's come to me late in life as well. Or later in life, I should say. So, it's good to know that it can be done. I'm sure that'll be reassuring to some people.

The technical books that you said, and I think you said were traditionally published.

I've noticed on your Amazon page, are they the, the kind of, "How to Fly, the Nuts and Bolts of Flying"? You've done some instructional books.

Owen: You know, the traditionally published, actually, was a title called "Down to Earth", and it was a biography about a chap he flew right from Dunkirk through to D-Day.

His aircraft, actually, was dug up on the beach at Dunkirk in 1988 and flew last year, it is now 2017, in the UK. And it was his wartime story, effectively. So, it was a biography.

The "How to Fly", per se, books, no, that was self-published.

James: Okay.

Owen: The technical writing part of that was manuals for airlines and things like that.

James: I was interested in that, because when I did my pilot's license in my 30's, and I think there's a guy called Trevor Tom who's into call of market on those little instructional books that lots of fighter pilots brought.

Owen: Yes.

James: And yours looked similar to that.

I'm fascinated that they're self-published.

Owen: Yes, I particularly stayed away from the absolute nuts and bolts of it, because I do think there are good text books, which are also modified to the syllabus as it changes.

I wanted to write something that was evergreen. And so I have written more the practical aspects, hence the title "Practical Pilot". Simple things, such as flying with passengers in this day of mobile phones. Watch your passengers, so that if they're backing away to take a photo, they don't walk into a propeller.

How do you offset airsickness with passengers, and how to fly a decent approach. Rather than the fine details that you'd get asked in an exam question, the practical approach for a pilot, a low-time pilot, or a student.

James: Great, and those instructional books, and I know that there are people who talk to us all the time who, I mean, sometimes it's self-help, or it's an instruction in a particular area, and they do ask a lot of questions of Mark and others in the group. Who obviously have a fiction background on what's going to work for them, which of these techniques is going to work for them.

How did you find the marketing of those books, getting the covers done, and sold, and getting to market? And then did it work, and if so what worked?

Owen: I think I've tried everything to some degree in the traditional sense of marketing the ads, Facebook, IMS, having an email list. None of those I've done I would say in depth, and that's something I want to look to do more so in the future.

I would have to say the main marketing aspect was building a brand, per se. Was the fact that I'd written magazine articles and people came to know my name. Unfortunately, Zupp, double Ps, is more of a sound effect than a name, so people tend to remember it.

In that industry having experience, having held a job writing et cetera. The marketing was probably more based upon my route through my magazine articles, and having a degree of credibility from those articles.

I've written not only for Australia, but in magazines in America, in the UK. So, to be perfectly honest I think the marketing was a follow-on from being published in magazine in many ways. And that, in turn, got me the ability to support those books. By the by, I'm releasing excerpts, right now, in the editors or I'm just people saying how it's tough to put a new book out.

So, that was probably to easiest phase to my marketing.

James: That's interesting. We got a slight wobbly line here, I hope people will be able to bear obviously it's about as far as you could possibly get two people standing from each other so, well one sitting, one the standing for the line's sort of okay, we'll just give it a second, see if it settles down. But, that's really interesting.

Basically, brand-building and then some organic visibility from that. And this is something that we are going to cover in the podcast in the future, because we're in an era, I think, where the traditional way of, sort of, bunging large amounts of money to PR companies to get you that kind of publicity is moving on to something you can really do yourself.

A lot of journalist have their email address in newspapers, and you can simply drop them an email and say, "Look, this is my specialist area, and here's a really interesting thing about it."

Will you take an article? And that's obviously something that worked for you.

Owen: Absolutely, and another aspect of it is that while I started writing voluntarily through association journals, et cetera, on those first magazine articles, it wasn't long before I moved to paid articles. So, you're also obtaining an income from those articles so it's effectively building a portfolio of work, which is financially rewarding, but also as you move through each level, it's supported the fact that I write voluntary journals allowed me to get published for pay.

The fact that I had a number of magazine published articles, I think, helped me secure the traditional book publishing contract in the first instance, and then having been through that experience, I think I made to self-publishing.

You build a portfolio, not solely focused on one avenue, and you diversify, and I think that is possibly a little lesson I learned from losing my job that I didn't want to have all my eggs in one basket.

James: That's funny how many people can site losing their job as being one of the major markers in the rest of their successful careers.

Let's talk a little bit about you, Owen, 'cause I should've asked you at the beginning to give us a little bit of your background.

I think cricket was a passion of your early on, but at some point, obviously aviation took over.

Owen: Aviation was probably the prime passion. I must admit as a teen, I flirted with cricket as a potential option, but I decided to move up the ladder and such and I saw people of the caliber of Steve and Mark Waugh, who were my contemporaries, I soon realized that wasn't going to be option any longer.

That, in a way, diminished the passion, and I've remained active in the sport ever since, and been involved with the badminton foundation down here in Australia. So, it's remained a passion, but I've been very fortunate in that aviation has been my other passion, and I was able to do that for my primary profession.

I think about it, writing, cricket, or flying, I've been able to do things I love my whole life. I've never really been in a situation where I had to do anything for the grind.

There's been short periods where I was out of work, as a young pilot, where I drove courier vans, et cetera and that. But, even when I was paying for my flying lessons, I was a paramedic, and that was an extremely rewarding career.

I guess in many ways, I've been blessed in that I knew what I wanted to do for a job, and everything I've done along the way, I've enjoyed.

James: There's a lot to be said for that. And I don't suppose flying, at any point, becomes something that you treat it completely as routine.

It's certainly a long way from anyone's idea of a 9 to 5 job.

Owen: It's a challenging job to really dedicate yourself, and it does become seemingly routine. I've got over 10,000 hours of flying 737's, and the task there is to treat every day with the same level of discipline, much like someone on stage.

It might be your 500th show, but the person buying the ticket is their first show. So you have to bring your A game every day, and that possibly is one of the hardest disciplines of airline flying is to maintain that standard in the face of the groundhog day effect, almost.

James: We did, famously, have an airline pilot who purchased one of Mark's courses and then photographed his laptop open on the flight day, with a control column in front of him. Doing a little bit of the course, and when people were slightly alarmed by this he said, "On the long haul flights they're encouraged to keep the mind active, do a crossword, or Sudoku, or something, so that they're not drifting off."

Is that really the case?

Owen: It would depend on the airline. We've got a fairly rigid policy on the use of personal devices in the air, and we're not actually carrying personal laptops on the iPad and stuff. So, I can't speak for all airlines.

I tend to find stay reasonably focused for the conversation on the flight, and most people, actually, more interested in my writing than the aviation side of things to be perfectly honest.

James: Yes.

Owen: The last trip I did the other chap was very interested in self-publishing. I could see the wheels turning in his head.

James: Always a good time to talk on a flight deck.

You have this interest in aviation, obviously, you've made that happen to you. And that also, we should say, it's a competitive career. Lots of young people start out thinking that they're going to be a pilot, and actually it's a fairly small group who end up in the flight deck or the cockpit of a military aircraft. So, you've obviously got something about you, Owen, you've got some determination and you've, you know, you've got some achievements behind you.

I can see that's now being applied to your writing career. So, you've obviously got the ability to knuckle down, learn the processes, and get things done.

Was self-publishing, from that point of view, something you then opted to do, or did you think, "I can't get the traditional publishing off the ground, so I'm going to have to resort to self-publishing."

Owen: It was definitely something I made a conscious decision to pursue. I did the first book traditionally published, and, like all people, when they get the first contract signed it straight away, and it was a wonderful, wonderful experience to have a book launch, and see it on the book shelves.

I even got a photo sent from the Smithsonian in Washington, that it was for sale in the US. So, all of that experience was marvelous.

But, I did find that in the traditional world, once your title had been out 6 or 8 weeks, their enthusiasm had peaked.

And even though I was striking opportunities for the book to be kept alive, I couldn't say the support was there in all those situations. So, ultimately, when I decided to go down the publishing route again, I thought, it was 2013, and I had even started become aware of ebooks, I thought I'd give it a crack myself to use a colloquialism.

I actually enjoyed the process. I learned a lot, I made a lot of mistakes early on, and, to me, that is probably what I enjoyed the most.

I enjoy challenge, and writing has definitely brought that into my life, and self-publishing did as well.

James: We mentioned your father at the beginning for good reason, because your latest book, and the one that's occupying your time at the moment is about your father.

Owen: That's correct. I titled it "Without Precedent", because he was awarded an American decoration during the Korean War, which he was subsequently blocked from wearing. So that's where the title came from.

Yes, it was a documentation following the story of a boy who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, somewhat, in rural Australia, and dreamt of flying because he once to me he might as well have dreamt of going to the moon during the great depression, all he knew was dead cattle.

But, despite that, he became an air force navigator, an army commander, he was first onto the ground in Hiroshima, or might have been one of the first vessels, I should say.

And then kept pursuing his dream of flight. Whilst a mechanic he would privately, and finally got a pilot's course despite his poor education. And as we mentioned earlier flew over 200 missions in Korea, and then had a very expansive career after he left the air force.

It's as much probably the narrative of someone who, in the face of adversity, continued to pursue their dream, despite the odds. And I think that's where it struck a chord with a lot of readers as much, cause there is combat as much as there is fighter jets in Korea and all that interesting action.

I think it is the sub-narrative, almost, that has really brought the audience in, cause it's proved very popular. And I've had people email me from all around the world and some of the reviews, that they actually cry at the end.

I think that more than a traditional style biography. There's a lot more parallels between a novel and a biography than sometimes people admit.

James: I think there certainly should be. I think the person who writes their biography and sets out to tell a story is the one who, you know, who's going to do well with it.

Owen: Absolutely.

James: But that doesn't always happen, and I think one of the traps people fall into is that they're often too close to the story. Particularly, you're writing about your father.

I'm interested in how you stepped back and made sure, potentially also, is your father still with us, Owen?

Owen: No, no, he passed away 1991, so he's been gone quite a while.

James: My father's still alive, and I'm writing a fiction but it's sort of roughly based on him, and there is a potential other element to my experience that he will frown on. That'll raise his eyebrows a bit. But obviously that complication wasn't there for you.

I'm still interested in how you took a step back and thought, "Well, if I just make this an information dump of everything I know about my father, it's not going to be interesting."

You set about from the beginning, to turn this into a narrative with, presumably, some twists and turns, and some conceal and reveal moments.

Owen: Absolutely. As you pointed out, biographies tend to be that textbook style with footnotes and very detailed, factual content. I tend to find that breaks the flow down.

I wanted to tell his story, and as for being remote to the subject. As I researched it, it almost felt, at times, like it was someone who was remote to

me, because I knew him as a very, very quiet gentleman who wouldn't allow my mother to open a door, and never swore in front of her, ever. An absolute gentleman.

And yet, when you sit down and read combat reports from New Guinea, or Korea, it's almost a different person. So, from the combat perspective, that wasn't too hard.

I interviewed a lot of veterans who served with him, and it started to open up a different person to the person I knew in the role of a father. And I wasn't writing a book about a father. So that made it somewhat easier.

The other thing I did, was a made a conscious effort, and I'm sure this worked, was that when I found something in his files that was, probably, less than ideal.

For instance, on his pilot's course I will write through until he got Korea, I think he only go average plus on one occasion, everything was average. And he always said that. I didn't make him out to be Chuck Yeager breaking the sound barrier with ten victories. He always said, "I just worked at it. I was very average, I worked at it."

And I think through his attitude, his record, the stories from other people, and that almost distant relationship of man I was reading about, and the man I knew, allowed me to step back and write it without becoming emotive.

And the other thing, obviously, is not writing it from the first person perspective of, "My dad did this".

But, yeah, there was a few elements, I think, that contributed to that, but I was very conscious of not looking at him through rose-colored glasses.

James: Okay, gosh, there so many parallels between you and me, Owen, it's crazy, you could almost describe my father there, as well. And I'm also discovering the same sort of thing.

We should say to people that getting average in a military flying environment is a huge achievement in itself. On a very occasion, my father there was an above the average and one exceptional. He did go onto be a test pilot.

But, you know, that's one exceptional, and maybe two above the averages out of 30, you know, times when he's marked up.

Average was an achievement.

Owen: Absolutely, and I can say as a flight instructor, average are the best students. Over the years, you tend to find the people who are brimming with confidence and think that they're the new top gun, they're rather hard to teach.

James: I might also add to something interesting once when I went and visited the national archive and started looking at his squadron diaries and records.

On his first ever squadron he was sent out to the Middle East in Egypt, and after about two months one of the pilots killed, a guy called Pete Kutz, and there's a brief description of him being killed in the afternoon, and then they buried him the next morning, and then they carried on flying.

I mentioned it to my dad said, "Do you remember this guys, Kutz?" And so, "Oh yes, when I was introduced to him he was the daredevil in the squadron" He flew a bit faster, a bit lower, a bit, you know, almost a description of Maverick from Top Gun.

Owen: Yes.

James: This was the guy who had all of the tall stories. And my dad said what struck him is after he'd died, and spread his jet over two miles over the desert, everyone just shrugged their shoulders and thought, "Oh, well, we knew he was going to do that." And it was then they carried on with their business. They kind of knew.

'Cause there's an old expression isn't there? "There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there aren't any old, bold pilots."

So that's a really, really interesting observation from your point of view.

Owen: Absolutely, and it was one of the elements I was truck by was, as you mentioned with your father, that they were able to have this tragedy and carry on. And it was just the way it was.

I found one letter of correspondence to my mother during the war, and my mother, actually, her job in the air force was to process the correspondence of those who had been killed in combat, and there's another story in there as well.

But, she would look at these, and I found this letter, and my father simply wrote, "Oh, you're probably know Carl Brook's dead by now. The boy's in the tent next door, so I'm a bit upset but I'll get used to it." That was his only reference, and I often think that that was a product of having served as a commander in World War II as much as anything.

James: I do think the more I look into the more I reflect on my father's life. I'm certain that although there was this stiff upper lip, that casualness, which there had to be. In my father's test pilot era they lost a lot of people quite often in a close environment. Almost like being in combat, actually, the numbers he lost in that six-year period. But I don't think he came out of it unscathed.

Owen: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James: I don't think, probably, your father didn't come out of it unscathed. Things get buried, which is when you described your father, you described my father as well. And not necessarily buoyant, a little bit uncommunicative, not all that comfortable with showing emotion.

I don't think we should always say, "Oh they had a stiff upper lip in those days". They knew how to cope with thing.

Owen: Yes.

James: I think it had its effect.

Owen: Yes, absolutely.

James: It's a fascinating era, and you can probably tell that once I started looking into what you were writing about, it had a lot in common with the, sort of, the situation I find myself in.

We should bring this back to the marketing.

Owen: Absolutely.

James: And the publishing aspect of it. So, you've got your book on your father, this biography.

Owen: Yes.

James: Which looks a little bit almost like a fiction book from the way you presented it, I think that was probably a conscious decision as well.

That clearly it's a biography but it's a kind of story right from the beginning, and that's how you decided to market it, right?

Owen: I wanted to, I've always said with my writing, particularly is "Aviation is a Technical Game" I would rather tell you the color of the sunrise than the fact it happened at 06 one night.

And, that is what I wanted to do with this book. I wanted people to identify with who my father was, and become emotionally attached to him, which is something we do in fictional writing with a main character. So, there was a conscious effort there.

It was also a conscious effort, in the self-publishing process, to take it to the next step. My first ebook, to be perfectly honest, was an experiment, and I threw 50 of my articles together, published the ebook in 2013, went on a flight to Honolulu, and by the time I got there it'd sold, about, 300 copies. Which I thought that's when the penny dropped for me.

But, I had to then go and learn about cover design and put it in chronological order, et cetera.

And this book about my father, "Without Precedent", was the next evolution along that long process in that I hired a cover designer, I hired someone with internal formatting, I pulled all the strands together. So, for me, it's been a learning process, too.

From that first ebook where I put 50 magazine articles together in a, somewhat, haphazard manner in the first instance, to now, that I've got it done through Ingram, that you can get a paperback or hardback, you can get it as an ebook.

And then I even sought to distribute it myself. I went thought a commercial distributor, and I looked at what he wanted to charge me, so I then started to contact major book chains in Australia myself.

They were somehow resistant because I wasn't coming through the normal channels, so I sent them copies, they had to review that it was up to standard by their standards, and it got into major book stores that way.

But, as I said, it's the latest step in the evolution in the learning process for me from an ebook experiment, to something that comes in 3 formats and is in major bookstores.

James: And do you think you're going to follow up this book? I mean, that's one of the other things, of course, people in fiction will be planning their series very often.

With a biography of your father, which presumably comes to a conclusion, where do you go?

Owen: It's funny you mention that. There was, very much, film interest from the US in my father's story. They did have trouble seeing that I would work as an Australian league. They have come back to me about getting a screenplay done.

And in the process of doing that, I spoke to them about my mother's story, and my mother was a World War II writer-operator in the air force. In summary, she had a boyfriend who she broke up with, she was engaged with another chap, both of them made a crew, both of them were killed in action. And she subsequently withdrew somewhat and rejoined the air force before meeting my father.

Now, there's a number of overlaps there in that her fiance's squadron used to fly top cover for my father as a commander in New Guinea. My mother's fiancee's bomber is now in the war memorial and so is my father's jet. So, there a lot of parallels between their two lives before they ever met.

And Mom's is more of a romance and a tale of love and loss, so there enlies the overlap, and the "series", I suppose you could say, and it's my mother's story that'll be my next major work, and it's well underway, actually. And I think it will actually have a broader appeal.

The big marketing aspect for me that I had to consider is that my predominant reader is male 20-60, but this opens up a broader audience.

Does traditional publishing open the door that that female audience? And that, in a way, that I don't have already access to. So, that'll be a business decision once I've got the book written.

I'm definitely well into writing my mother's story, and I think it will actually have more of an appeal to a broader audience than my father's, to be honest. If I was to summarize, I'd say my father's a documentary, my mother's a movie.

James: It would be fascinating to see how that goes, and also if you end up box-setting those two, you'll be introducing one half of the audience to the other half, and they may well enjoy it so ...

Owen: Absolutely, and someone said I should write my biography as a trilogy, but at 53 I think tad premature.

James: I think you should write a fictional biography of yourself where you out-bat Mart Waugh and Steve Waugh, and you are the one who emerges. And then if you could write me into it and we could have a big ashes moment at the SCG, that would be great.

Obviously Huge Jackman and Nicole Kidman should be lined up to play your father and mother, I can see all this happening.

Owen: Yeah, Nicole's got a house not far from here, actually. I ran into them at the play gym one day.

James: There you go, type her up.

Owen: Yeah.

James: And how's it gone? You are still flying. I know you've taken a bit of a step back to try and rebalance your life a little bit, and I don't know if we can show it, but there's a great picture ...

Your wife is also a commercial airline pilot, and you do occasionally end up on the flight deck together, I think?

Owen: We did it once and that was last week. That's the first time we've actually been on an airliner together.

James: Oh, well, that's fantastic. So, your wife's ... I can't remember from the picture now whether she's in the left or right hand seat. Is she first officer?

Owen: Yeah, we were actually sitting in the back of the aircraft in that photo.

James: Oh, okay.

Owen: She was a 767 pilot, with Porters, and then they retired the 767 so she moved onto the 747 from there. But, yes, we knew each other well before the airline. We knew each other back in the learning to fly days.

James: Right. So you're both on the queen of the skies now, which is wonderful. I was just asking you, so how has it gone? Obviously you say pilots do start to think about retirement in their 50's anyway.

Is this something you can see replacing your aviation income at some point?

Owen: Absolutely, and I think the key there is that this has always been, I guess the phrase is "the long game" for me. The fact that I have full time profession takes all the stress of, "I need to do this for an income" off me.

I'm able to say that magazine editors, look I've got this on this month, I can't produce articles this month. It gives me total flexibility.

For me, all I need is my laptop, and my time. It's the perfect secondary profession. I would love to write full time, but I love flying.

It is, as you mentioned earlier, it's all about finding the balance between the two, but the long game is that in retirement, which is closer than I'd like to think, I can transition effectively.

I'd like to have a back catalog of books all ready to go. I'm writing for a number of magazines, and then as I move in retirement, obviously, my writing will become more prevalent, it will become a greater part of my active life.

And I've also done an amount of public speaking, so I'd like to do more of that in retirement. So, at the moment, it's balanced, it's tying it in, but there's definitely and transitional plan over the next ten years.

James: You're making some money at the moment?

Owen: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. To be perfect honest, there have been months where my writing income, the netting, can virtually match my flying income.

James: Wow.

Owen: So, it isn't consistent, and it couldn't be done all the time on the time I dedicate to it, and that will fluctuate. But it is definitely worth my

effort in a fiscal sense and it's absolutely worth my effort in a passionate sense.

James: Owen, it's been really interesting talking to you. Particularly, I think the learning point for me is to think, with non-fictional authors, more about their brand and their visibility. And some of the traditional methods of, as you say, magazines, and newspapers, and maybe doing some talking, and appearing on people's programs and podcasts, working well for you in a way that, for fiction writers, that's a slightly more difficult route, and they probably are the ones who have to do the grind with the mailing lists and so on.

That's not definitive. Or at least I'll bet clearly, that's something with the non-fiction era that lends itself a bit more to, I think, your type of marketing.

Owen: Absolutely, absolutely.

I would have to say the producing content, getting that content out internationally, and your name internationally is a magnificent way to transition and support your books, whilst earning an income from that, as well.

James: Yeah, superb. Owen, well I guess I don't know if you're gonna come over in 2019. We'll be in Australia, I think they're next due to tour the England, but if you do you'll be very welcome here, and we'll show you how to swing the ball.

Owen: Alright, that would actually be great, I might actually be coming over, because I do know that, I think the badminton side is having a tour at that time. So, I might well come over.

James: Well, that'd be brilliant. You let us know. Owen, thank you so much, indeed, for joining us. We will definitely keep in touch, and we'll follow your

progress, and good luck with your transition, which is a bit of an aviation expression as well, isn't it?

Owen: It is, transition model.

James: There you go.

Owen: Well, thanks very much, James, it's been great to chat with you. As you said, we've got so much in common, and hopefully I've brought a bit of the non-fiction aspect to it, but I love writing so it's great to talk about it.

James: Very interesting the fact that he makes scraps of money, probably not scraps of money, but chunks of money just writing magazine articles here and there, and had built up a little portfolio of work, which is starting to outstrip some of his flying work. Flying pay.

And that is one of the differences, I think, between fiction and non-fiction. Is that, with fiction you're investing in your books, generally. Non-fiction you are often finding other avenues all over the place to make money writing.

Mark: There are more opportunities, yeah, I mean for non-fiction writers I'd be very upset if I was pushing ... We do a little bit of non-fiction with our free books, but, yeah, they're free, we don't make any money off of those.

If you were to have an interesting area of expertise that you wanted to write about, there's two things to earn your advantage. You can charge higher, because non-fiction readers tend to be less price-sensitive than fiction readers do.

But then the other thing, which is more exciting is that you can effectively use the book as an on trade to something else that you're able to sell.

So, it could be, let's just say, looking at you I immediately put in mind of a gymnast game. So, you can be an ex-gymnast and you could write a guide

to some gymnastic training. But then, the interesting bit would be that you'd effectively lead that on to something that you could advertise in the back of that book. Knowing that anybody who's got that far is interested in gymnastics.

You could then up sale in the back of the book, of course on gymnastics how to limber up, or certain moves, that kind of stuff. So it's a terrible example, but it just gives you an idea of what is actually possible with that kind of ... I hate to use the word up sale, but that is kind of what you're doing.

You're talking the reader who knows interesting into what they're good at, and then sending them something, which is probably gonna be much more expensive than, like, 3, 4, 5.99 non-fiction book. It's very exciting if you're in non-fiction, there are several opportunities right now.

James: Owen had a good example, cause he's written these guides to learning to fly. There's a very famous series called "Trevor Tom", which I learned to fly years ago, and I bought those like everyone else did.

Owen's written a book, more of a supplementary helping hand through the process. But, you're absolutely right, it costs probably today about 40,000 pounds to learn to fly, something like that. I think it costs, depending on what license you get, I think it cost about 10 grand in my day.

So, you're already spending a lot of money, so someone says these books are 50 quid, these four books, you're probably gonna pay 25 pounds.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.

James: Good, okay, well I, as you imagine I enjoyed chatting today. He's also a big cricket fan, he keeps sending my pictures of himself at the SCG, the Sydney Cricket Ground and so on, so when we do eventually do that

SPF trip to Australia I think we'll probably have a pleasure flight sorted out for us.

Mark: Sounds great. And of course Nathan Vancoups is there.

James: Yeah.

Mark: He's also a pilot?

James: Yes he is, we have an aviation undercurrent to SPF.

Mark: Well, you do.

James: Good.

Mark: I'm staying on terra firma, that's for sure.

James: Yeah, unless there's a lie flat bed for you.

Mark: That's true.

James: That's the only flying you're doing

Mark: I might fly in that case.

James: Okay, excellent. Look, thank you very much, indeed, for watching and listening this week.

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Mark: Oh, why else would you want to after the podcast last week, with the BookLab, we will be looking for our next guinea pig to get their book page, their book, their cover, their blurb, torn to bits and then put together in what we hope will be a more commercial fashion.

We'll be looking for the next one, so after David Barrens we'll be looking again, so that's available to everyone who's a gold level Patreon subscriber. I think it's worth a lot to the community to see what we come up with, but it's worth an awful lot to the individual authors. It could be something that is worth quite a lot of money for books that sell a bit better after we've had our way with it.

James: Yeah, absolutely. [Patreon.com forward slash SPF Podcast](https://Patreon.com/forward/slash/SPF/Podcast).

We've got a bit of a technical episode next week, we going to be talking about website design, and that has changed a little bit over recent years, it's a thing of beauty today if you go to the right person, and we are going to the right person next week, believe me. Okay, that's it. Have a great week writing, and a great week marketing your books, we'll see you next Friday, bye-bye.

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