

EPISODE 122: THE SELF-PUBLISHING RETIREMENT WINDFALL - WITH DAVID PENNY

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark on a Friday in June.

If we're looking slightly more drawn and tired than normal, if you're watching on youtube or sounding slightly more laggy, it's because we have cranked open the doors to Ads for Authors, which is always a busy time for us, getting the course ready.

We've added a session on GDPR, which is, without question, the most exciting and enthralling session in the whole Advertising for Authors course.

Mark Dawson: I couldn't stop watching it.

James Blatch: Yeah, although I noticed you did stop watching it.

Mark Dawson: I watched a bit and then I decided that it was in safe hands, seeing as I'd seen it before.

James Blatch: All the privacy policies and cookie policies, everything that's all bound into Advertising for Authors course and if you don't know about it, because we do occasionally mention the course, it's the driver for the SPF community. It is the all encompassing, all singing, dancing course to

really add rocket fuel to your career and create a commercial business out of your writing and that's what it's done time and time again.

We have delighted authors around the world who speak to us on camera about that and it is without question a very pleasing aspect of what we do.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it's the best bit when we an email from someone saying that suddenly the penny's dropped and they're suddenly making decent money or sometimes much more than decent money. And then we get the green light to send James and John to all points of the compass to record testimonials. We're looking forward to that.

I think we're doing some more in America soon, aren't we?

James Blatch: We are. We're gonna be doing that in New York in July and the east coast and Minneapolis, I think, and we've got a few new ones this time.

Sasha Black in the UK, Daniel Parsons, Dan Parsons in the UK, both been talking about the impact that Ads for Authors has made on their writing career.

I got a note the other day from one of our very early students who we've mentioned occasionally before and had on the podcast, Ernest Dempsey, who, first of all, bought a house and has just bought his dream car and every time he does something like this, he sends a little note to you and me to say, "I know I've said this before, but I want to thank you for doing that course because it changed everything for me," and he's also sent me some very exciting news.

Mark Dawson: Which you can't say.

James Blatch: Which I can't say and I'm not going to say anymore about. But you will be the first to know when there's an opportunity to talk publicly about it. So that's a great success story from the course.

I should say if you want to check out what's in the course, the meat of it all, you can go to the sales page. The URL is selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors and we're old school. So the for is spelt F-O-R. So it's Ads for Authors.

Mark Dawson: And the S at the end is actually a Z. I hate that.

James Blatch: Do you know what? I hate the Z. But I am thinking I might just say to John Dyer, "Just do the Ads for Authors with a 4 in it as well just in case." People are younger. There are some people younger than us in the SPF community.

Mark Dawson: It's hard to believe but yes, that is true. I'm 21.

James Blatch: You are 21. You've had a really hard life.

Mark Dawson: I have. I have, very, very hard.

James Blatch: Heard a strange noise then. Despite the fact that my computer's on Do Not Disturb, something just disturbed us. Don't know what it was. Anyway, hopefully it wasn't too alarming for anybody.

We have a few people to welcome to the Patreon family, the supporters of the podcast and we're very, very grateful all the time for people who join us.

They are Jamie Ferguson, who's joined our gold level at Patreon.com/spfpodcast. He's from Colorado in the United States. Elaine Bateman, from Solihull in the United Kingdom, and Cameron from Nova

Scotia in Canada and Mark O'Neil from the Mark O'Neil Show, gold Patreon for us from Germany.

What a good geographic spread that is and thank you very much, Jamie, Elaine, and Mark. Delighted for you to join us and because they are all signed up to the gold level, which I think is a whopping three dollars an episode of the podcast, they are all eligible to be handpicked for our next book lab guest.

I can tell you the current pick is Helena Harm and I have recorded the interview with Brian Cohen. I've recorded the interview with Jenny Parrot.

I'm yet to do Stuart. I'll probably do Stuart this week and then that episode will be ready to broadcast in the next few weeks and it's a really good one, particularly, so far, I would say, from Brian Cohen's point of view.

He really got into this and we deliberately chose a different genre from last time. So it's romance and Brian's eyes lit up about it. He's done a fantastic job with the blurb and talked very effusively about this. I mean, it started with a little spoiler.

He really liked what Helena had done and I think Helena, there was definitely a whiff of Brian Cohen about her blurb. I think she picked up his advice on how to put a blurb together. But he felt that as a challenge for him and his team to elevate it to the next level.

So it's a really good episode and some really good learning points in that for all of us. So that episode's coming. We'll let you know when nearer the time. Just one more thing on the course. We're going to keep it open roughly for three weeks.

We have closed it early before. It's possible if it fills up, we get too many people who close it early this time, but roughly around the 25th, 27th, around there.

We've got an interview today with a man in the later years of his life. He's actually even older than you.

Mark Dawson: And you.

James Blatch: And me. I am older than you.

Mark Dawson: You're much older than me.

James Blatch: Am I? I would say "much" is a strong word. I am older than you.

Mark Dawson: Six years. It's a long time.

James Blatch: Is it six years? You're the same age as my wife.

Mark Dawson: There you go.

James Blatch: There you go. I like them young. When you're 51, it's not that indecent.

We bumped into David Penny at the London Book Fair and I think you've been in contact with David for some time, Mark.

You've known him for a while?

Mark Dawson: A little while, yeah. David's involved with ALLi. So we've spoken before and I think he was one of the first to sign up maybe the second time we offered Ads and because David is involved with ALLi, it was really pleasing that he got such a great amount out of the course and has become a fairly vocal proponent of it.

Which is great, given that people to ALLi for support services and things like that. So we were really pleased that he'd done so well and also not in the kind of the most straight forward of genres.

He's not writing thrillers like me. He's not writing romances with those big, voracious audiences. He's writing historical fiction, really. So obviously a decent sized niche, but not as big as the ones that I traffic in, for example.

So it was really pleasing when I saw his early posts about how he was doing so well, posting in our Facebook group and making good money out of it. It was nice to meet him in the pub and he's also lovely. He's a really affable, friendly bloke that I immediately warmed to.

You're the same, James, and it was really, really great to get him on a podcast to talk about his experiences.

James Blatch: Definitely, a really lovely guy, little twinkle in his eye as well and one of the most pleasing aspects of this is that David has found and later in life, once you've retired from your main job, you're relying on your pension and there's not much beyond that. Particularly in the US, where I don't think the state helps out a huge amount later in life and to have suddenly a growth in the income from something that you've loved doing all your life is a really pleasing story. So let's hear from David.

We're back at the London Book Fair as described. In fact, we're in front of an area that is reserved for what they're calling Rights Management Discussions. David Penny, my guest.

We can discuss the rights and wrongs of things, but not the legal stuff.

David Penny: No, no. I think for indies, rights are a bit of a minefield and you want to be very careful about them.

James Blatch: Well, we've stolen a couple of their chairs. They may come with a contract to us. David Penny, welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast.

David Penny: Thank you very much, James. Thank you.

James Blatch: It's a delight to have you here. We're going to talk a little bit about you. I guess we'll talk about ALLi as well because I know you're involved in ALLi but let's start with you.

Why don't you describe to us who you are, a bit about your writing.

David Penny: I'm David Penny. I managed to fall into writing at an extremely young age. At 23, I acquired an agent and a publisher and wrote science fiction exclusively. I had four books out between 1974 and 1979, made the grand sum of 200 pounds on each one and in 1980, I got married and decided, couldn't afford to live.

James Blatch: Yeah because even in 1979, 200 pounds is not gonna get you much

David Penny: I was a hippie. I had hair down my waist and a great long beard and 200 pounds went a long way. Drugs were cheap in those days.

James Blatch: There you go. Money well spent.

David Penny: It was, yeah, yeah. The rest I wasted.

And then I gave up writing for 35+ years, got a job, ended up running a software company and then probably 10 years ago, I thought my ambition when I was young was always to be a writer. I was a writer and I'm not anymore and as time goes on, I'm running out of time to get back to doing what is my first love.

So I started to write again, lots of bits and pieces that never saw the light of day and then about five years ago, I got this idea for a 10 book series, historical mystery now, rather than science fiction, set in Moorish Spanish, 1482 to 1492. Really, if you're going to have a niche, pick one nobody else has ever done.

James Blatch: We're going to talk a little bit about niches and that is specific.

David Penny: It is fairly specific, yeah and I have no idea where it came from. We were sitting at home, me, Meg, the two kids because they were still at home then and I said, "You know, nobody's ever written a detective mystery novel set in Moorish Spain, have they?" They said, "Duh, Dad."

James Blatch: That was a random question.

David Penny: Yeah, yeah. I have no idea where it came from. I must have seen something on the TV or read a book or whatever and I knew nothing about the period in history. So lots of research required, lots of going to libraries where they give you a pair of white gloves and a thing, like a pair of ... I don't know if you've done this, rosary beads and you lay it on the book and you lay these huge 16th century tomes open and I made copious notes, went away and out of interest, I typed into Amazon the title of one of these books and it said, "Yeah, do you want to a facsimile copy?" So you can get all of this stuff.

James Blatch: It's all been copied.

David Penny: It's all been digitized.

James Blatch: So you don't need the white gloves and the rosary beads.

David Penny: You don't, no. No, you don't. So yeah, they're Amazon books. So the ink comes off on your fingers.

James Blatch: Yes. If my maths is correct, that makes you mid-60s.

David Penny: Yeah and a bit.

James Blatch: And a bit, little bit. Okay.

David Penny: Little bit over.

James Blatch: What a fantastic renaissance of writing for you and also I think from an income point of view. I'm of an age, a little bit younger than you where the whole pension thing was a big issue for us, as it is in the States, thinking about income.

I full intend to be working in my 60s, at least, I want to be and so I look at you and I think, "That's a pretty good set up to discover something you're passionate about and you told me off air."

I hope you'd be happy to share a little bit on air that it's more than paying bills.

David Penny: It is, yeah. I'm like Joanna Penn. I'm perfectly happy to tell people exactly how much I earn.

So three, four years ago, well, I started doing Mark's course, Mark Dawson's course, I think just a bit over three years ago. It might have been earlier and I was earning on a good year, I would get 800 pounds a year

James Blatch: Then you did the course.

David Penny: So now it's gone up quite a bit.

James Blatch: Okay, so pen money, really.

David Penny: Yeah, I was one of these authors where-

James Blatch: Although you beat your traditional deal.

David Penny: I did, yeah. I did significantly.

It's like you see people and they say, "Oh yeah. I didn't sell anything for three days this week," and you think I've been there. And you're looking at your sales every day and you're thinking, oh my God. I told two books. I sold two books.

So I've always had this belief that what I write is really good. I think if you're a writer, you have to do that. You have to think that you're writing the best thing.

I write what I want to read and I can't find it and so I'm writing what I would love to read. I'm my best audience and then there must be other people like me. That's what you think.

How am I going to close that gap between what I've written and the hundreds or thousands, the tens, the hundreds of thousands of people that are out there in the world that also want to read that kind of thing? It's a really difficult thing to close up because social media encourages us to talk to other people like ourselves.

James Blatch: The famous echo chamber.

David Penny: Exactly. As a writer, almost all of my social media friends were other authors and it's a very insularly existence and so you're talking to people and they're saying, "Oh yeah. It's hard. Amazing are doing this and that and something's gone wrong and, oh, sales are down and sales are up."

But I wanted to get to people who were not writers, who were readers and I think when I took Mark's course, he said something along those lines and so I thought, right. There's all this readership out there. How do I reach them?

I did Mark's course and like I said, I think I started two and a half, three years ago and I'd made a little bit of money, like 1,000 a year for three or four years and something. So I called it my slush fund just so my wife knows it's not hers and I thought, I'll invest some of that money in seeing if I can make Facebook adverts work and I ignored going for mailing lists signups and I thought, I'll try to sell books because I write books. I want to sell books.

That's what I'll go for and I put three months aside and came up with some ads and spent 500 or 600 pounds a month on those ads and at the end of that three months, my sales has gone up, but not by as much as I spent. So I'd lost 3 or 400 pounds.

But it was a learning curve and I was happy. The thing about doing Facebook ads is you don't do it unless you're happy. It's a gamble.

If you are desperate to get the income and you're not willing to lose some, then you probably really want to jump in and spend a lot of money and Facebook are very avaricious.

James Blatch: They'll take your money.

David Penny: Yeah, Amazon you can throw money towards them and they just let it go for pass. But Amazon, interestingly, I've noticed lately Amazon take more than my budget pretty much every day.

James Blatch: Ad words do that as well.

David Penny: Yeah. So not supposed to, but it seems to be the way.

So anyway, after three months, I'd made some mistakes and I tried to work out what I'd done. I took two months off from advertising and I sat down and I tried to think of, okay, that's wrong.

That's wrong and one of the things, and I tell people when they ask me, one of the things Mark said is a yellow image works really well. So I said, okay. Let's make it yellow and ever since, all my ads have been yellow or an orange hue.

I came up with an ad and it is really simple. It's an orange background with a castle on it. It's actually Edinburgh Castle and somebody did point that out to me very unkindly and it's got a silhouette of a guy on horseback and that was it and I put a few words on it and a strap line and pointed it to Amazon US and UK and for some reason, that worked and it worked really well.

I went from earning a thousand pounds in a good year to that first year earning 7 or 8,000 pounds and then over three years, I'm now on 60,000 pounds and I'm very, very pleased with that.

James Blatch: As you should be.

David Penny: You kind of go and talk to Mark and some of the other people that are known and you think, yeah. Mark's stratospheric. He's doing unbelievably well and he's the kind of beacon that everybody's aiming for.

But what I think people need to remember is that you can make a living, a good living, out of writing and nobody has really heard of you all that much.

I'm selling 150, 160 books a day on a good day and that's bringing in that income. I say that's all you have to sell. There will be people who are

watching this and they're going, "Oh my God. He's selling over 100 books a day," when I've got my zero days.

But it's feasible, but picking your market and writing books that people want and grabbing the readers and bringing them in. It's the readers. There's this, invent the best mouse trap and nobody's gonna beat it past your door unless they know you've got it and it's what they want. So that's what you have to do.

James Blatch: I think that's great and really good advice. Looking at what Mark's publishing now in terms of his figures and I'll talk to him off air about this or when we come back after the interview. But he must be heading for seven figures this year looking at what he's doing per month.

David Penny: Definitely because he publishes how much he earns a month.

James Blatch: So for those of us, I really hope in the next 12 months I will be published myself.

For those of us starting out, it's not a waste of time looking at what Mark's achieved. It's understanding where our ambitions are within that and for somebody who's approaching retirement age, God knows what retirement age is anymore. I don't know, probably 80. Approaching retirement age, to suddenly have 60,000 a year, I mean, that's an amazing.

All your pension worries must be out the window because that's what a 60,000 advance from a traditional publisher that then become 5,000 the year after. That's a recurring annual revenue for you.

How pleased are you with that?

David Penny: I'm just amazed. I had no ambition to do anything in particular. When you talk about retirement, the thing about being a writer is it's fantastic because you don't have to retire. It's not like work. You sit

down at the keyboard and you should love what you do and I do love what I do. If your writing is a means of obtaining money, it doesn't usually work.

James Blatch: No, don't play with scared money and the quote of course is John Lennon's, "Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life."

David Penny: Exactly, exactly, yeah and that's exactly what it's like. It's fantastic.

James Blatch: Good, now let's talk a little bit about the genre.

So pretty specific and I think when I think about it, I mean, it's fascinating. We Europeans holiday in that part of the world quite a lot. It's warm and sunny and Grenada's a beautiful city. In fact, John, who's standing behind the camera and I have had romantic times filming corporate videos there.

David Penny: I think that's more than I need to know.

James Blatch: We do these corporate video shoots around the world. We end up having these romantic rooftop dinners, I remember in Grenada specifically.

But the whole Moorish invasion... It doesn't have the same cache as the Roman time, does it? I don't know why because they're the same.

David Penny: Yeah, the Moors were in Spain for far longer than the Romans were in Europe.

James Blatch: Wow.

David Penny: Yeah. 700 years.

James Blatch: Dominant.

David Penny: They came in in 771 and they were finally rid out of Grenada fell in 1492, so that whole period.

James Blatch: What are they called? Where the knights went over.

David Penny: The Crusades.

James Blatch: The Crusades is the word I was grappling for here.

David Penny: Fought, not murdered.

James Blatch: During that Crusades time, there was this migration.

David Penny: There was and the weird thing is is that despite Spain being an Islamic country, up until about 1200, almost the whole of the Iberian Peninsula, including Portugal, was Islamic and the Crusades went across to Jerusalem. They ignored Spain altogether.

It was only as the Jerusalem Crusades died out that people started looking at, "Oh, yeah. Look at all these guys still in Spain in their hoods and their cloaks and everything else," and so English people and French and Germans and Scandinavians went and weirdly, a lot of mercenaries fighting on the Moorish side were northern European.

James Blatch: Oh, were they?

David Penny: Yeah. The Moors reached a stage where they couldn't be bothered to do the fighting themselves. You know what it's like? Civilizations evolve and it's like if you own a business, you end up as a manager rather than doer.

The Moors end up as the leaders and they just employed people to fight on their behalf, which is probably why eventually they lost.

But what I love about it is that last 10 or 15 years that the two, Isabelle of Castile was the queen, married Ferdinand of Aragon and if you mentioned Ferdinand and Isabelle in Spain, they look at you blankly and they say, "Who?" Then you say, "The Catholic king and queen," and they say, "Oh, you mean Ferdinand and Isabelle," which is really weird.

James Blatch: And that was the end of the period.

David Penny: That was the end. But expelling the Moorish invaders, the Reconquista honed the Spanish troops to such an extent, they were the best fighting force in the world and then by luck, Columbus discovered the Americas from Spain, even though he was Italian.

So they went out and those trained troops then took over South America and the west coast of America, Los Angeles and San Fran. All of that west coast America was Spanish.

James Blatch: Wow.

David Penny: Yeah, all the way. Just an amazing.

James Blatch: Spanish appears to be spoken as much out there as English when I'm in that part of the world.

David Penny: Yeah. I know. I think it was that period of history, that short period I'm writing about that honed the Spanish troops to do that and taught them how to do it.

Isabelle and Ferdinand died quite young and Spain just fell apart after that. So it's that really compact, really rich period that I wanted to write about.

James Blatch: So great, exciting period and untold largely.

David Penny: Very much untold, yeah. I mean, there's some books about it, but not many. Washington Irving wrote about the Alhambra.

James Blatch: The danger of that is that there isn't an audience for it.

David Penny: Exactly, exactly.

James Blatch: You had a hunch from the beginning.

David Penny: No, I just wanted to write it.

James Blatch: Okay.

David Penny: Like I said, I'd been writing for two or three years at that point and I'd written a book about a guy who could see 10 seconds into the future.

James Blatch: That's useful.

David Penny: I thought it was useless except he was the bombardier and a Lancaster bomber during the second World War. But he knew when the flack was gonna hit and so he told the guy. So they were doing this and he was just saying, "Left a bit, left a bit, right, no, go there."

James Blatch: I like that. You got me at bombardier.

David Penny: Yeah, I know and I wrote that whole novel. But I didn't feel it could go anywhere. I wanted it as a series and it wouldn't go anywhere and I wrote several other things and I wrote a fantasy novel I really like and I sold six copies of that over three years.

So I wrote the book that I wanted to write, without having any idea, probably thinking there wasn't an audience for it and also thinking it might

be popular in England because lots of English people go to Spain on holiday. It might sell in Spain and that was about it.

What I discovered is even before the sales began to take off significantly, 60, 70% of my sales are from the US because why would the US read about Moorish Spain and I'm not sure why but they still do.

James Blatch: Although, there is the thing in the US that people are really interested in the old country.

David Penny: Yeah, so they're looking to Spain that case or Europe.

James Blatch: Ireland and England.

David Penny: Yeah, and like you say, there's a very high proportion, Spanish speaking people in America.

James Blatch: So with a bit of an accident in a way, you've discovered this quiet, small niche. There's the old thing about show where the niche is, I'll show you the riches and that's obviously worked for you.

The more focused you are on one particular area, I guess the easier the targeting becomes.

David Penny: Yeah. Well, that's a good point, actually because most of your targeting is done by looking at similar authors to yourself and there are none. So who am I targeting?

I'm even putting things like Lee Child down because my books have an element of thriller to them, as well as mystery and I'm putting other mystery writers down and most of my similar writers are writing about English Tudor historical mysteries, C. J. Sansom, the Shardlake books and various others.

For a long time, that's what I was doing and it was kind of working. But then what I discovered is as I did adverts, people liked my Facebook page and I started out with something like eight likes of the Facebook page and I'm now up to 1800.

Once you get over 1,000 likes, you can take that, and this is one of Mark's big things, you can take it as a seed audience for a lookalike audience. So I am now targeting my books to people who like the same things as the people who have bought my books.

James Blatch: And the important thing is the lookalike audience is huge. You take 1,000 people and it builds an audience for 100,000.

David Penny: My lookalike audience is 85 million in the States. So that's fantastic. But it's too many.

So you then hone it down by other attributes and I like to have maybe 50, 60,000 pool to aim at and if things continue to go along as they have in the past, that pool will get larger and larger.

But at the outset, you don't want a huge number. In some cases, I've targeted 5,000 people because 5,000 sales is significant to me.

James Blatch: Do your sales still skew towards America?

David Penny: Yeah, which is weird still.

James Blatch: But it's also great because it's 300 million.

David Penny: There's more people out there and I've recently had a book translated into Spanish, which I thought would really take off in the States and hasn't.

But it has in Mexico. I was number one in Mexico a week after it came out because I got an Amazon ad. Five pounds a day in Mexico, six pence a click. There is no competition for that kind of book in Mexico. So I thought it was great.

James Blatch: What about Spain?

David Penny: No, no.

James Blatch: They're nice in the old country.

David Penny: Actually, they're not. No, because we now have a house in Spain, we have Spanish lessons and our Spanish tutor says, "No, no, no. We don't want to talk about the Moors. A bit of nice architecture, but Spanish architecture is far nicer."

James Blatch: It's kind of alien.

David Penny: Well, they repelled the Moorish invaders. It's like, suppose Germany had invaded the UK back in the second World War, we would not want to talk about that period of history as one of the things we really like.

So it's popular amongst Brits who know Spain and I've just started a blog series about Beyond the Beaches. It's talking about the places I set my books, get back away from the sand.

James Blatch: And if people have their interest piqued by this, I'm sure you will have as well thoroughly recommend that part of the world just for looking around at some of the old architecture. Grenada in particular is beautiful.

David Penny: Grenada is wonderful. Yeah. I like Malaga. Proper Spain and still the same history.

James Blatch: There are some flash pots around that part of the world as well, some young British, German and Scandinavian holiday makers. Probably best avoided, but yeah. Well, this is really quite inspiring, I think, for, I don't know where you'd place yourself, mid-list.

David Penny: Mid-list, yeah, solid mid-list.

James Blatch: And that is an absolutely, 100% bonifide good ambition for somebody to have. You don't have to be Adam Craft or Mark Dawson or Rachel Abbott. It's great.

David Penny: It is.

James Blatch: But to get to where you are, that would be frankly fantastic for me as well. So it's a really inspiring thing for me to look at.

To sum up your focus, you got quite a small niche. You went in, in your case, kind of bypassed the list building and went for direct sales.

David Penny: I still only got 31 on my email list.

James Blatch: Not 31,000.

David Penny: 31, yeah.

James Blatch: There you go. So the mailing list has not been big for you.

David Penny: It has not, no.

James Blatch: Which Mark would say is a huge part of his.

David Penny: He would do, yeah, and I can understand that it is the bit that you own and I'm totally on board with that.

I've only got those 31 because have joined it from liking my Facebook page and there's a link on there to it and that's how it's gone on. But it's not something I've put a lot of effort into and I should. But at the moment, I don't need to.

James Blatch: How many books in the series now?

David Penny: Five.

James Blatch: Five and you've got another one coming?

David Penny: Yeah, I'm writing. I'm halfway through the sixth and there's gonna be 10, at least 10.

James Blatch: Do you have an advanced reader team?

David Penny: Nope. I'm weird. I have a developmental editor who has been with me for four of the five books. She's really good and I use her all the time. I don't have beta readers. I don't have an ARC team.

I know what I want the book to be. I'm very happy to do the changes my editor tells me. Beyond that, I know what I want to say. So the first anybody reads it, other than me and Sarah is when it appears on Amazon and I always do pre-orders.

James Blatch: And you write as David Penny.

David Penny: Yeah.

James Blatch: So people can find your books.

David Penny: Easily, yeah. Number one on Google for my name.

James Blatch: You're the number one David Penny. Excellent.

David Penny: First page of Google.

James Blatch: Yeah, you've an advantage over all the Robert Jones's.

David Penny: I know. There's a lot of David Pennys actually. It's weird. When I was growing up, I thought it was a really unusual name.

James Blatch: Let's have a final word before I let you go, David. I should just say, by the way, if people heard some ringing, like Father Christmas-

David Penny: Was it Father Christmas?

James Blatch: I think it's the time for the rights management interviews to stop and change to the next interviews but anyway. That's what that bell was. It wasn't Santa Claus.

Let's have a quick word about ALLi because you're a keen member of the Alliance of Independent Authors and you were on the stand this morning talking the good talk.

We've had Orna Ross on the show before but a reminder of what ALLi is and why people should be a member.

David Penny: It's a weird thing because it doesn't do anything other than it's a place for independent authors to gather and it's a website. It's a closed website unless you're a member.

But they have a website selfpublishingadvice.org, which is free to anybody and until this February, I was technical manager of ALLi and it takes up quite a lot of time. I wanted to go and spend more time writing books. So I resigned from that post.

But I'm still a really keen member of the organization, which is why I'm hanging around the stand and helping out and doing whatever I can for it because ALLi, as well as what Mark did, ALLi is what helped me to be the writer I am.

It's a safe environment because we have this closed Facebook group. You know what Facebook's like. You put a post up and everybody leaps on you and beats you around the head. Never happens on ALLi.

James Blatch: Not in the SPF groups either.

David Penny: No, again, they're closed groups, aren't they? That's the secret, I think.

James Blatch: It is, yeah, a more secure area. That's a good description. I think ALLi is a ... What do you want to call it? Like a union.

It's a little pressure group that represents the interests of independent authors.

David Penny: A pressure group and so it's pushing and it's always at the cutting edge of what indie authors are doing and because they have partner members, you can get discounts with Ingram Spark on your Print-on-Demand production. So I save my membership fees two or three times over in the year from the discounts I get through just printing books, which is great. Fantastic, yeah. Love.

James Blatch: Well, David.

David Penny: Thank you very much.

James Blatch: Thank you very much indeed for joining us. I look forward to hearing you doing 120,000 next time.

David Penny: So do I, yeah.

James Blatch: But at some point, if your wife listens to this podcast, is she aware that you've made this money because I know you're trying to hide it from her.

David Penny: I know. No, no. She never watches the internet. So I'll tell her. I'll tell her, no, I haven't got anything at all. No, no. She was my accountant in the business. So she knows everything.

James Blatch: David, thank you very much.

David Penny: Thank you very much.

James Blatch: It's inspiration for all of us, but particularly people who are older, have some time on their hands.

It sort of felt to me a shame that David went through what you went through and other authors went through, but many years ago, back in the 70s, I think he started getting all the rejection letters and then a disappointing experience when a book was published. You just think, well, if only the world is as it is now then, he perhaps would have had a much more happier career.

But nonetheless, it's happened for him at the right time. He couldn't be a happier person, he should say. I don't think he dwells on this stuff at all and here he is now, not just supplementing a, what we'll call, a pension as income, but making good money and we were delighted.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, to be able to take what was, I suppose, a hobby, something that he really enjoyed doing and then to be able to make good money out of that. That's one of the wonderful things about what is possible these days as a writer.

People can take those passion projects that they might have been working on for ages and ages and rather than, as would have been the case before, waste your time potentially sending them to agents, sending them to publishers and then waiting to get rejected, it's almost just put them up.

Put them up there. Do a good job. Listen to the podcast. We've covered everything you need to know about getting your books up in good shape and then learn how to advertise them.

Advertising, it's common sense. I sometimes surprise myself when people ask me, "Does advertising really work?" Well, yeah. It's been the bedrock of many, many industries for, I don't know, a hundred years, more than that probably, ever since commerce has been a thing.

People need to be educated about what they might like to spend their money on and we're no different as authors to people selling motor cars or holidays. It's just advertising.

One of the amazing things about the way that we can advertise is that you can make an immediate profit. So it's not about sticking up billboards and spending 20 grand on a big billboard at a railway station and then maybe in time, suspecting that your sales might have increased because of that.

We know almost immediately to the last cent whether sales were generated by that particular ad. So David has completely involved himself in that. He's learned how to do it and now he's benefiting from it.

James Blatch: If you want to read more about the course as we mentioned at the beginning, if you're listening to this in June 2018, you can go to selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors and read all about the course that David and others have taken.

Gosh, there's so much on it now, AMS ads, Bookbub ads, YouTube ads, Pinterest for Authors is being added immediately after this launch, so in July.

Mark Dawson: Copywriting.

James Blatch: Copywriting for advertising. What else did I miss?

Mark Dawson: Images.

James Blatch: Images, yes. I think we probably missed something else. But anyway.

Mark Dawson: Almost certainly.

James Blatch: There's seven or eight modules now a part of Advertising for Authors. It's a monster. It's a monster and the same price it was in March 2017.

Mark Dawson: Yup. Absolutely.

James Blatch: Good. Okay, thank you very much indeed, Mark. I think that might be the last of the ... Oh no, we've got one more interview that we recorded at London Book Fair. That's with ... There's that noise again. Don't know what it is. I think it's that stupid WhatsApp. I hate WhatsApp. Everyone uses it for everything now, for selecting a cricket team, for organizing stuff in the village, for bike rides and stuff and it pollutes my mind. It's another beep I could do without.

Mark Dawson: Basically you're turning into a curmudgeon right before our eyes.

James Blatch: Quite happy to be.

Mark Dawson: 51 going on 61.

James Blatch: Hey, I did cycle 80 miles at 20 miles an hour yesterday.

Mark Dawson: That's quite impressive.

James Blatch: I'm really pleased with that.

Mark Dawson: How are you feeling today?

James Blatch: Actually, fine. I had a little bit of gas in the tank at the end of it as well and it was a proper race with thousands of people in it and I'd not been involved in one that size before.

One of the terrifying aspects is cycling in a group of 40 people at 20 or faster than that. The average speed is 20 miles an hour and things can go wrong quickly. And the other terrifying thing is seeing things that have gone wrong quickly and we probably passed six people covered in blood being scooped onto the side of the road. And you're just peddling on, thinking, I really hope that's not me next half a mile.

But it was a great experience just to underline the fact that I'm young at heart.

I think Imogen Clark is our finale interviewee that we picked up at London Book Fair and yes, I've just got one final thing to say that we are going to be in New York in July. I'm going to push that a couple of times between now and then.

It would be lovely to see you. I think that's going to Wednesday the 11th of July. We're going to be New York City, which is in New York state in the east coast of America. We'd be delighted to buy you a drink, even at New York prices. So come and see us and I'll give you more details about where and when closer to the date.

But if you want to put that date into your diary, the 11th of July in New York, we'd be delighted to see you then and John and I are gonna be traveling off and meeting a couple of people in the days before that and we should say we're there for Thriller Fest, right?

Mark Dawson: We are there for Thriller Fest. Yes, I'll be speaking three times, I think, two panels and once on my own. So that'll be fun and then I've got a few days and then I'll be in Denver for RWA and I may be going via Los Angeles potentially or if that doesn't pan out, I'm thinking about going via Boston and maybe dropping in to see the lovely folks at Bookbub. So we will see. But yeah, I'll be in both of those places for sure.

James Blatch: Great. Okay.

We look forward to seeing you then if you can make it. Otherwise, we look forward to talking to you again next Friday and we'll have another special interview from the podcast. Hope you enjoyed it. Hope you got some value and some inspiration from it and we'll speak to you next week.

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