

EPISODE 144: FROM TEACHER TO STUDENT TO BESTSELLING AUTHOR – WITH JEAN GRAINGER

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

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast with James Blatch and Mark Dawson. We hope you're having a great week, and looking forward to a great weekend, and if you are taking part in NaNoWriMo, good luck. It's day two, so you should still be going.

Day two. I can remember doing it back in 2010, and it was the third week that was the killer. In fact, had I not, I think I've told the story before, I was scheduled to do a Radio 4 interview on it.

Had I not been scheduled to do that interview, which they said to me, "Oh it's going to be next week." I don't think I would've kept going because it is a real commitment.

Mark Dawson: Is it? If you want to be a writer, it's kind of important to write. So, I don't know...

James Blatch: I was in a full time job, at the time, and you've got to do, was it a couple thousand words a day?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Something like that. Fifteen hundred I think. Which is kind of nothing.

James Blatch: Yeah, but it's nothing to do... I'm mean I'm writing at the moment and doing two or three thousand words, when I sit down and

write. But to keep going without stopping and structuring and anything else, you do it. You're bashing out that... It's, you know, don't play it down. It's... Most people don't succeed.

Mark Dawson: First time, I can see that yeah, it's a bit more of a thing, but I mean if you're doing it for a while, that's a small word count. But if you are starting and you don't know what's next and you haven't written something before, then yeah, it's difficult.

James Blatch: That's what most people who do NaNoWriMo are. I think it's a first-timers thing. I know experienced authors use it to bash out a first draft and so on, but I think that most people who do it, are doing it because they fancy having a go at writing a novel.

Mark Dawson: Yep. No, fair enough.

James Blatch: If you're doing that, we want to support you on that and would love to hear from you, if you want to post into the group. Let us know how you're doing. Find your little mutual support groups and you can do some writing blast together.

Mark Dawson: We've got a subgroup we set up on Facebook, so I can't remember exactly what the URL is, but if you go to the self-publishing community on Facebook, and do a search for NaNoWriMo, we've set up a group with, there's about a hundred people in it at the moment, who are supporting each other and giving tips and sprints and things like that. So, it's a help to get your word count down for the day.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's good. Well that's how I started. You know, 2010, and that book is still going strong at the moment. Still enjoying my process.

Mark Dawson: That's good. You should ride the enthusiasm and get it finished.

James Blatch: Yeah. I'm enjoying it. It's not every day. It's not absolutely the easiest thing in the world.

I'm going through a slightly trickier period at the moment. I'm thinking more about character development than I thought I was capable of. In fact, I worry that because I write short stuff for the news for years, didn't have that longevity, that long form stuff in me. But I'm now really thinking about character development and who these people are.

I went to see *First Man*, which is the biopic of Neil Armstrong, and it was a fantastic film for me to see because what they show Neil Armstrong's character like, is the character, is the theme of my book. Is these closed off individuals who have people die alongside them, so often, that in the end they don't want to open themselves up to anything or anyone. Now I know this because I've been brought up by somebody very very similar to Neil Armstrong.

In fact, there was a little moment, at the beginning of the film where Ryan Gosling, playing Neil Armstrong, says, "I'm getting ready to go to the U.K. to see the Delta Wing."

Well that's what my dad was flying, he was flying the Vulcan, this aircraft behind me, if you're on YouTube.

And it wasn't Neil Armstrong who went. He flew with another Edwards test pilot who's alongside Armstrong at the time, called Major Harry Andonian, who I had an e-mail exchange with a little while ago.

But Armstrong, at that point, decided to apply to NASA because he was being grounded. So that little moment in the film, was a very close link to my dad, which is amazing.

Had my dad been American, he could've walked on the moon. He was doing exactly what Neil Armstrong was, at that time, but we didn't have a moon project wherever he was.

But that character stuff and this is new to me, so this slow change... It's many things.

It's character, which is like, just there. You can decide, this person's going to be evil. This person's going to be emotionally stunted. Better word.

Or you've also got a layer on it's got to be conflicted because people aren't straight forward. People often appear one thing, but internally they're a bit conflicted about or they're aware their frailties and also they change. So that's three things you think about, of that character, in the book and doing a lot of that at the moment.

So the word count's gone down a little bit, whilst we get this stuff right, but really enjoying it. Really enjoying it.

You've put me onto a fighter pilot to interview. Dave Gledhill. Where actually he was a navigator in Phantoms and Tornado F3, here in the U.K. And he's going to come up.

We're trying to put this together at the moment. Where three, basically traditional, authors who are moving into indie and their reasons, so I had a few exchanges with Dave already on the subject. Just read one of his novels, actually. So it's very interesting for me, his point of view. But it is generally, and Dave's one of these people who's just thought that's how you do it.

Traditionally that's how you do books and they're aware of the indie side, but not really looked into it. Now suddenly, they've got their toe in the water and it's you can see the enthusiasm building and the scales falling away from the eyes a little bit on some of the financial returns that are possible with the indie side. So, that would be a good little series.

Mark Dawson: Yes, indeed. I know there have been a couple, three authors, that we are looking to hookup for a little episode on that. So, yeah. Keep watching this space.

James Blatch: You're not doing NaNoWriMo?

Mark Dawson: Well I was going to, and I kind of am in a way, but I started a new project. One I've been thinking about for a while. A new character. Police procedurals. Private investigator. Series set is Salisbury.

I finished the last Milton book and I was going to wait until... well I don't wait around. So I've got two weeks for NaNo... I'm not going to do no writing until two weeks and then start, so I started writing. I've started dictating this one and three days last week, I did 25,000 words, which is just ridiculous.

I'm happy with a couple thousand words a day given that I've got a lot of other things I do as well. But I was doing, I think I did the most, was 8,000 words in one day and that's, my best ever is 11,000 writing normally.

The dictation has been amazing. I'm really impressed with it. And to my surprise, it hasn't affected the process of writing at all. It's just a different way of getting words out.

And it's much quicker. Provided that you accept that it's not going to be as clean a draft, at least for me as it would be if I typed it, it is blazing fast. I get my Scrivener word count up and I'm going like, good grief. I'm doing three and a half, four thousand words an hour. It's really unbelievable.

James Blatch: And you're sitting at your desk doing this?

Mark Dawson: I sit or stand. So, often I'll stand and just, it's weird. I kind of, I don't look at the screen when I'm dictating. I look away. I'll sometimes just close my eyes and just try and get into that kind of space that normally expresses itself through my fingers.

And then how it's just a different way of getting to what I want to say. I'd always been, not self-conscious, but I thought the difference in the process would affect the quality of the writing and it doesn't appear that that's the case. So this is, potentially, quite exciting for me.

If I can suddenly triple my word count instead of like four hours to do two thousand words, I can do two thousand words in an hour. That is a game changer.

I'm enjoying that moment now. I'm very enthusiastic about this book as well, so it's all good. Anyway, by this rate, I'll be finished by NaNo.

James Blatch: This new book then, it's police procedural. It's PI. Salisbury. No R. That we described it as, previously, have you plotted it out? 'Cause police procedural can be quite technical. They shouldn't read technically, but technically you have to be aware of procedure.

Mark Dawson: Not at this stage. In a rough sense you do, but all that detail will be, there will be a thorough edit, which will take longer than I would normally, my normal edits. 'Cause it will be addressing typos just from the dictation errors, so you know, you do get some things wrong.

But also, that's the stage, and it will always be the case. That would be when I go to experts and ask for help.

I've got the retired, I think a senior police man from the Sussex area. He works on Peter James' books. He's working with me on this.

And then I've got a private group of about 10 to 15 either serving or retired police officers who are helping me with detail as well. Also, last Friday, I mentioned last week in the podcast, that I did an event with Andy Maslen, that Salisbury author. And he knows the detective chief superintendent who's just retired from Wiltshire. And he's going to hook me up with him.

So he can help me with geographically specific questions with regards to the setting of procedural in Wiltshire and also just general police questions as well. I've got a pretty good team to help me with this one. And all of that detail, I'd layer that in the edit. That's the way I do it.

James Blatch: And when you've done your dictation, is your first round of typo corrections something you do? Or do you farm that straight up somebody else?

Mark Dawson: I may actually, I'm writing non-sequentially at the moment, so this afternoon I might actually jump towards the end of the book and write something there.

Scrivener enables you to write that way and I've got a rough idea, better than rough, of what the twists and turns are in the book. And the sense of it is discovery writing for me as well.

As I go along, I'll have an idea and maybe I'll change some things. It's happening quite a lot at the moment, but that's fun. Then you just go and write some different scenes. Then it all gets tied together when I go back and do the first edit. So, yeah, all very good at the moment. I'm enthusiastic about it.

I'll finish it before you finish yours.

James Blatch: You will. At some point you'll count how many books you've done in the time I've done my first. But, there you go.

Jean Grainger is our interviewee, today. And I don't know whether she dictates. I can't remember whether we mentioned this in the interview, or not, but she writes long books. They are big books. Lots of word count.

Dynasty type dramas set in Ireland where she lives. She actually came to London and we hooked up there together... Should I say hooked up as we got together. In American sense, hooked up means something different, but we got together to record this interview. I should say.

Mark Dawson: Keep digging.

James Blatch: We met each other in London. She was in a hotel room, but we just did the interview.

She's a very lovely person and she's somebody who, I think, probably we got to know her because she did... they asked for all scores that she mentions in the interview and it's certainly been a big thing for her. But very interesting to talk to.

And she's somebody who relies on a very close relationship with her editor as well. So very interesting to talk to Jean. She's coming up now. Then after we've heard from our hook up experience, I'll be back to do a chat with Mark.

James Blatch: Jean Grainger. Welcome to the podcast.

Jean Grainger: Thank you very much.

James Blatch: Thank you very much and Jean you've actually flown in. You're one of our guests, we occasionally have guests who fly in, to be on the podcast.

Jean Grainger: How jetsetty of me.

James Blatch: You've flown in. To be fair, it wasn't Ryanair, but you still flew in.

To all our American listeners, this is the, an airline inspired by Southwest airlines, which is kind of their budget.

But, we've had our chat. Funny we come on to that, 'cause I think it's an interesting area. We've talked about Amazon and Ryanair and the kind of criticism the big beast always get. But, you have a very healthy attitude, I think, to all of this. Which we're going to come onto in this podcast.

But first of all, let's hear the story of school teacher, Jean.

Was Miss Jean Brody a school teacher?

Jean Grainger: Yes, she was.

James Blatch: She was. There you go. Miss Jean Grainger, the school teacher, who is now smiling away because now she is a full time writer. Congratulations on that.

Jean Grainger: Thank you.

James Blatch: But let's see how you made that transition.

Jean Grainger: I started out actually, as a tour guide of Ireland. I did that for 10 or 12 years. And then I decided to become a teacher. So, I went and trained and I became a secondary school teacher and I did that for 14 years.

For the last couple of years, I suppose, my first book I published my first book in 2013. So, five years ago now.

At that time I had no idea or no clue, to be totally honest, about how things were going to go. And I was really in the dark, like everybody who starts out. Hoping that I would just stuff my manuscript under the door of some worthy literary person who would realize it's genius immediately and write me a huge check.

James Blatch: And the Booker Prize.

Jean Grainger: Obviously, yes.

But, alas and amazingly, that didn't happen. Weirdly.

James Blatch: Oh, you must be the only one!

Jean Grainger: I'm still head scratching about at that.

Anyway, I smile when I hear people talking about the rejection letters. Mine must have been so bad I didn't even get rejection letters. I got nothing. I just, crickets. Nothing. It was like I'd sent them a phone bill.

So for a long time, I sent it out to various different people and nothing. I chucked it in the drawer and said, "That's nonsense." And obviously, they know, you don't know. They know it's rubbish and that's the end of that.

Luckily, my husband who's my biggest fan, wasn't accepting that and he kept saying, "No, you've got. You've got to. You've got to." So, I stumbled across an editor and I had sent the book to several editors, all of whom shuddered and didn't even, responded in a one-line or didn't respond at all.

James Blatch: You couldn't even hire an editor?

Jean Grainger: No, not really. No.

The books that I write have lots of characters. Okay. It's tricky in terms of genre. They don't easily fit into any genre.

So, I found this editor. Helen Falconer is her name. She lives in County Mayo. She's British. She very bravely took on the book and a couple of other people had seen it in the industry, traditional industry, who said, "No. Too many characters. It's a mess. It's a train crash. Don't do it."

Helen was braver and said, "Yes. It's a train crash and yes it's a mess, but we can fix it." So we did and she's worked with me on every book since. And she's fundamental to the entire process.

So I had this book that was whipped into some kind of shape, but I didn't really know what to do with it. I uploaded it without a copyedit or really a proof read, other than myself and my husband and my mother, who we thought were pretty good at this.

Turns out we're rubbish at it. So when I say this is a very steep learning curve, oh my God... I uploaded this thing that was just full of typos and mistakes...

James Blatch: You had a cover?

Jean Grainger: It had a cover, yeah. I was really lucky. It's the only one of my books, I think, that has the original cover. I change covers often. I was rooting around on all these self-made covers and blah blah.

Couldn't find anything and that night on Facebook, a friend of ours, put up a photograph on Facebook that a friend of his had taken locally. And I was like that's it. That's the cover.

I used that and it's been, with the exception of my book that's just come out now, it's been my most downloaded book. I think the cover, it's a good cover. So I was lucky.

I had a decent cover and a friend of a friend was a graphic designer, so she put the cover together. So, that actually looked relatively professional.

However, the inside...

James Blatch: The commas and the...

Jean Grainger: Oh, it was appalling.

James Blatch: You weren't alone obviously, at this, somebody who's read a book doesn't really know what to do and upload it to Amazon. It's got errors in it, by the way.

There's lots of people listening, thinking yes, I did that or I'm doing it.

Jean Grainger: Absolutely, but of course then it was, people were actually remarkably kind. Like kinder than I deserved.

James Blatch: The kind of people that bought and reviewed?

Jean Grainger: Yeah. It was getting really nice reviews and people going, "Apart from the fact that it clearly doesn't have an editor, there's maybe something here."

I'm very fortunate in the sense that, because I was a tour guide for a long time and groups I would take around Ireland were Americans.

My market is Irish America, essentially. I have readers all over the world, thankfully and I'm grateful for each and every one of them. But fundamentally, Irish America is my market.

Because I had spent so much time with people who had either an interest in Ireland or who had Irish ancestry, I kind of got what was going on with them and what sort of things they would be interested in. So I wrote books along those lines.

The first book, did well. I realized, thankfully relatively early on, that it was a mess. Took it down and got it properly edited and proofread. And I think at that stage I might have encountered Nick. Nick Stevenson who I started on that process with him and his first 10,000 readers.

I didn't have a website. I hadn't the faintest idea how to set up a website. I certainly didn't have, when he was on about, "Well, give away one free one, and then there's another free one." I'm like, "Are you mad? I only have one." But I worked into it, and I figured it out, and that worked out fine in the end.

Then my second, that was selling quite well, better than I imagined. At one incarnation of my life, I was writing a PhD on Irish women's involvement in the Second World War. After a couple of years of it, I just realized that I would much rather people pay me to read what I write, other than me pay somebody to read a big, long, footnoted, boring PhD thesis. So I scrapped it, and I wrote it as a novel.

James Blatch: That sounds like a more interesting way of doing it, anyway.

Jean Grainger: It certainly is.

James Blatch: Let me just step back before we go forward. First of all your editor, who you've named, and said was great and has been a key part of your success.

Did she not steer you in the direction of proof editing and copyediting before you uploaded?

Jean Grainger: Oh, wait, so she's traditionally published. I think she would've assumed that I would've done that.

James Blatch: Okay, yeah.

Jean Grainger: Which you would assume, editing with me is probably a mistake.

James Blatch: We have conversations with editors quite often, and most of them are much less aware of how indie works than you think.

Because they're about the books, and they're used to the old world, and so, anyway, so okay.

Jean Grainger: Yeah, and she is very well-respected herself, in her own traditional publishing world, so she would find people to do that, I guess.

James Blatch: And so you followed Nick's advice, early on.

Jean Grainger: I followed Nick's advice.

James Blatch: And you started making sales.

Jean Grainger: I did. I write fast, which I suppose if I was to give any advice, some of my traditionally published friends, they write a book a year. You're not at the races in the indie world, if you're writing a book a year. You'll be on beans and toast for a lot of years, if that's how it's going to be. You need to be quick.

James Blatch: As quick as me, because I've been writing my first book for 10 years.

Jean Grainger: Well, I have to tell you, James, I smile because every time I hear the intro to the SPF, he goes one who's just starting out. How long more is he going to be starting out for?

James Blatch: We can't afford a new voice over.

Jean Grainger: One who started out quite a while ago, and should be further along by now.

James Blatch: Anyway, point taken.

Jean Grainger: But yeah, you need to be quick.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Jean Grainger: And everybody has a different way. I don't plan out my books. They occur to me as I'm writing them, so I don't know how they're going to go. I was working full-time, and I have four children. So busy house, as you can imagine.

But the second book I wrote because it was my PhD thesis really, which I had fictionalized, the research for that was done already. And I moved into the genre of historical fiction, so I write both contemporary and historical Irish fiction.

James Blatch: I was going to ask a little bit before we move on, let's talk about the books itself.

You said they're quite difficult to place clearly into a genre. So that first book with lots of characters ...

Jean Grainger: Oh, they're all difficult to place into a genre, yeah. I suppose, well, no. I have, let me see. One, two, three, four. I have four historical fiction set firmly in kind of the 20th century in Ireland.

James Blatch: What period of the 20th century?

Jean Grainger: Two of them are set during the Second World War. One is set during the 1916 rising, and the other one's set in the '60s.

Then I have a series that was inspired by a woman I heard interviewed on the radio one day who had been released from these dreadful orphanages that are in the news so much now, so I kind of fictionalized her and wrote a trilogy about her. The Tour series, which is the first book I wrote, the fourth book of that has just gone to the editor now.

James Blatch: You've got three series, or two?

Jean Grainger: I've got a series of The Tour. I've got a trilogy, and then I've got four standalone history books. Sorry, historical fiction.

James Blatch: Are these mysteries?

Jean Grainger: No, they're sagas, I suppose. They're family sagas.

James Blatch: Like Dennis Dill does. I'm joking, but yeah.

Jean Grainger: Yeah, very like that. Without the shoulder pads and the diamantes.

James Blatch: Oh, what a shame.

Jean Grainger: Thought maybe that'd be a thing I need to introduce.

James Blatch: What would be next?

Jean Grainger: There's what I've been doing wrong. I need more diamantes.

James Blatch: Well, shoulder pads and diamantes. Yeah. Okay, well that may give us an idea, and prolific 'cause truly '13 is not that long ago.

You've got nine, you say?

Jean Grainger: 10. I've one written that's going into an anthology. So that'll be out in January. I've another one with the editor, and I'm a third of the way through another one.

So I have three kind of on the go all the time.

James Blatch: Let's pick up the career side of things again. I got your book online. You sorted yourself out a little bit in terms of the basics. Learning through Nick Stevenson at this point.

At some point you were earning enough money to go full-time. How did that happen?

Jean Grainger: I did part-time for two years.

I was earning enough money to go part-time for two years. Being a cautious civil servant, I think there's a little bit of Stockholm syndrome that the public service that you kind of come to rely on your captor if not love them. So I was a little bit, oh my god.

The government permanent pensionable job, and in Ireland, civil servants are paid quite well. Teachers are paid quite well, and I was in a fairly senior position in the job I was in. So it wasn't likely that I was walking away, but it just became a time management thing. It wasn't that I didn't like my job.

It just became a time management thing that I was coming home in the evenings. My two younger children are only seven and ten. So it was difficult to do, like all working mums. Homework and dinners and finding the thing they need, emergency for tomorrow.

And in between that, trying to write, and in between that trying to correct and prepare lessons. It was just all getting too much. So I decided to make the leap.

This is my first September not going back to school in quite some time. I should be in history at the moment.

James Blatch: How does that feel?

Jean Grainger: Great.

James Blatch: I made the leap from full-time to working for myself as well, and it is unsettling, I think, at the time.

Jean Grainger: Unsettling would be an understatement. It's terrifying. Thankfully my worries are not financial on a day-to-day basis, but there's a ... You know, the thing about civil service or any permanent, pensionable job is you'll always be paid.

There wasn't any direct correlation between how hard I worked and how much I was paid, which is both frustrating and in a way, kind of reassuring.

This is very much connected. The harder I work, the more money I earn. It's really simple.

James Blatch: You're obviously quite entrepreneurial.

Jean Grainger: I wouldn't have said so at all. No. Not at all.

James Blatch: But you clearly are, or that has happened.

Jean Grainger: That's something I just discovered about me, but I didn't think I was. I come from a family of accountants, and I can't add.

James Blatch: Well, you said double maths?

Jean Grainger: No, history. Oh, god no. Not double maths.

James Blatch: I know you picked up Mark's course at some point as well, which probably helps. We should probably stick that in as this is the SPF Podcast.

Jean Grainger: Absolutely. I kind of feel like I graduated from Nick to Mark. That's not to say you couldn't stick with Nick Stevenson. I'm sure you could,

but I was intrigued by the Facebook thing, and I might as well be honest. The reason I don't do Facebook advertising is I find setting them up too hard.

James Blatch: Right.

Jean Grainger: I know with the course it's outlined, but I have a very low threshold for that, you know? AMS advertising for me, and the way Mark described it the first day, excellently done. I followed his advice to the letter. I now run maybe 300 ads at a time.

James Blatch: Wow.

Jean Grainger: I spend a lot of money on ads.

But they're profitable, and I do some book bump advertising that I learned how to do from Adam. Thanks Adam. Adam Craft of SPF.

Adam's another example. I just emailed Adam out of the blue one day and said, "Listen, I'm really stuck with this. What do you think?" And he's like, "Try this. Try that. Don't do this. Do do that."

Mark is open and helpful, he has created that kind of ethos or an atmosphere. I've never approached anybody in this thing, and I hope nobody's ever approached me where they've met anything other than, sure. How can I help?

Which is great. It can be quite a lonely business. You're on your own a lot of the time, and you're in your own head a lot of the time, which isn't an ideal place for me to be anyway. So it's nice.

There's nice camaraderie, and we have a bit of a laugh in this Facebook group now and again of things that happen. You can share your rules and your failures and you can share your victories.

James Blatch: You've got quite a good little group of friends in the SPF group.

Jean Grainger: I have. We've got the, what we call the angels, and there's a bunch of us. We're all over the world writing in everything from YA fantasy to erotica to Christian fiction to health to... I'm leaving people out, mysteries. There's everything.

Between us, we have such a wealth of information between us. But it's just great. It's a little side bar to the course, and we talk to each other every day.

I'm going to Australia at the end of this year, and I'm actually meeting up with them at Melbourne, which will be great. We literally talk every day. We've never met, but we talk every day.

And nobody really gets how this works. Nobody does. Even our nearest dearest don't really get how this works. It's really important, I think, especially starting out.

James Blatch: Outside of the indie community, yes.

Jean Grainger: They haven't a clue how this works.

James Blatch: You spend your whole time trying to explain why trad is different from indie, and then all the prejudices come up from people who don't really know.

It is quite difficult to explain, isn't it?

Jean Grainger: I feel as though they're trying to defend it or something. And then you get cross at yourself for even bothering.

James Blatch: Very soon you'll just be able to say to them, "What book did you read last?" And they'll name the book. "Well that was indie." They wouldn't know 'cause they know there's so many books, cross overs.

Jean Grainger: It's becoming so more acceptable, I guess. But to people who don't know, oh to see your self-published. Alright. It's kind of, "God love ya."

But you have to just let that go. That's people who just don't know, and let it go.

James Blatch: Let's go back to the careers. I'm interested, and I know people listening here are at various stages. And a lot of people listen to podcasts who want to do what you've done on this journey. So I'm trying to pick up some of the tips.

Jean Grainger: How to do it.

James Blatch: How to do it. Some of the tips along the way.

What have been the key moments do you think, in terms of getting your income up from books?

Jean Grainger: The courses definitely. They're basically it. Being very disciplined about time. I do think it's true, the harder you work, the luckier you get.

I work very hard at this. I put in a lot of hours. I will write every day for maybe ... even when I was working full-time. I realize something had to give. So I don't watch TV. I haven't seen TV for years. I'll watch an odd thing on Netflix with my husband when ... but rarely.

So at that time that people spend watching TV in the evenings, I'm writing and having to do the marketing.

I think one of the things for me was, I was a bit tech phobic. I still am, maybe, but to embrace that. That's the business. You might as well be sitting there howling at the moon if you're not going to do the marketing. You have to do it.

I see it all the time with people trying to find ways of outsourcing it. Trying to get someone to run your ads, or trying to get someone to run your website.

I outsource loads of things. I can't design covers, obviously. I can't edit. I can't proofread.

I have a guy who does the tech of my website, but at the end of the day, you have to stay in the driving seat yourself. And you have to learn it.

It's not easy, and there are days where you want to fire the whole bloody thing out the window. But you just have to go right, fine. Have a cup of tea or a gallon of wine or whatever floats your boat, and get back to it. It's work, and it's great when it works out.

For example, the AMS ads, people contact me and say, "Oh my God. I'm running five ads, and they're not working. And it's costing me loads of money."

I go, "Well, the first thing is, the ad itself isn't ... This is all about exposure." So that particular ad, you might be losing a dollar a day or two dollars a day on that ad, but people are seeing your book. They're seeing your name.

And if you're exclusive as I am, they're reading in the library. So there's more ways of measuring it than just looking at the ad cost and going, "Is it 70%? Oh, it's not. Kill it."

James Blatch: Yes. So it's a substitute that you learned through trial and error, experience, and as you say, there's no shortcut. I think Mark's shown in figures that he runs what look like campaigns as a loss, but they're actually at a profit because the read through that happens afterwards.

Jean Grainger: Ernest Dempsey said a great thing to me when I was trying to-

James Blatch: He says so many great things.

Jean Grainger: He does. He really does, and he's an ex teacher as well. Hello, Ernie.

But he said to me, and this really stuck in my mind from when we were talking about advertising, he said, "Jean, Coca Cola put billboards up all over the states. They have no idea how many bottles of Coke they sell, but they know if they stopped doing that, they would sell fewer bottles of Coke."

I think that's the way to look at advertising. I know that's easy to say when you have a small budget, and you're trying to make every penny count. But you do need to speculate to accumulate.

It could be my fear of maths, as well, that's leading to this, but I don't over analyze the ads. I make considerably more than I spend, and that's really, that's as much maths as I need.

James Blatch: I think that's a good idea. One of the things I do with our SPF campaigns, I run a lot of AdWords campaigns, is I'm now relaxed enough to start a new campaign, new imagery, new endpoint. Leave it for three days.

Don't look at it because if you start looking at it, then what if it's not serving? There's a problem. You need data before you can then start making changes. So leave it for a bit.

Jean Grainger: Leave it for a bit. Like with the AMS ads, leave it for two weeks.

James Blatch: A lot of people say, "I can't afford it." Well, actually you do need to spend \$150 on a campaign to get any kind of data out of it, and then start making changes.

Jean Grainger: And you know, when I see people who are on a tight budget, I would say, okay look at where you're spending the small budget you have. There are things you don't need to outsource.

You can go to Fiverr and get a cover. It's not going to be the world's best cover, but some of them are okay. Some of them are fine. There's tons of

stuff that you can do really cheaply, but actually turning sales, which is really what we're about.

Then you need to spend a bit of money doing that, and I suppose it's a bit like taking the course. It's going, "Am I willing to invest in myself?" 'Cause that's what you're doing really is investing in yourself and taking a chance. If you're not willing to do that, then you might as well go home because-

James Blatch: You're not going to get someone else to do it, if you're not prepared to do it?

Jean Grainger: Exactly.

James Blatch: Let's talk about process for a minute. You say you write a lot.

Jean Grainger: I do.

James Blatch: And long hours.

Do you write all day?

Jean Grainger: At the moment I don't write all day 'cause my children are on school holidays.

James Blatch: You must be counting the days down.

Jean Grainger: I can't wait. And my husband is a teacher as well. So I'm getting rid of them all in one fell swoop.

James Blatch: Oh, there you go.

Jean Grainger: It's one day, much as I love them.

I have a minimum thing in my head that I have to write between two and three thousand words every day.

But some days I'll try and get that up around five or six thousand. After that, a bit of head freeze kind of sets in, but I can do a bit in the morning and then go back to it in the evening.

I'll try and mix it up and do some marketing every day. I'll set up a campaign, an AMS campaign. Well, I'll set up 10 or 12 for the number of books that I have every day.

James Blatch: Do you get up early in the morning and write?

Jean Grainger: No, I get everybody out to school, and then I kind of incognito for the rest of the day 'til they come home. Frequently still in my pajamas when they come home.

James Blatch: How long do you do the marketing?

Jean Grainger: In between times where my head is fried from writing.

I go and do the marketing, and then when the head is fried from marketing, I go back to writing. It's very left brain, right brain action.

Because it doesn't require any creativity really to set up campaigns and to manage your ads.

I spend a lot of times answering emails. That was another piece of advice I got from Mark early on. I try and answer everybody who emails me. I don't always succeed. I get a lot of email, but I try in as much as I can to respond to people when they contact me. I have a very loyal base. I have a healthy list.

James Blatch: We'll talk about audience in a moment.

Sticking on process, you said earlier that you're a pantsner, I think is the expression. I hate that expression, but I think it's council so it sounds like a porn film council.

Jean Grainger: Exactly, yeah.

James Blatch: Basically you write and see where it goes.

Jean Grainger: Absolutely. I have no idea where it's going to go.

They say that every story that has ever been told is in the Bible, right? All the stories exist already and some people are just chosen to be the storytellers, and we're fortunate that we are. It's just a case of letting it happen.

For me anyway, I sometimes will stay up writing until maybe 2:00, or 3:00, or 4:00 in the morning, and then I'll get into bed freezing to my husband and go, "You're not going to believe what's after happening to him."

James Blatch: You're as surprised as anybody else?

Jean Grainger: I'm astounded as anybody else. Yeah. And things go in ways that I never really anticipated, which is good and bad. It's good in the sense that you have to just trust the process, because sometimes I think, "What if I don't have any more stories?" But nothing more to say.

James Blatch: I find that fascinating because it's different from what I'm doing now, which is really in the plotting phase again, but you can follow a character and you can see how they react to situations, but every now and again you've got to do something to them.

Like there's got to be a car crash, or there's got to be something that happens.

When you're pantsing, to use the expression, when do you decide, "I'm going to shake things up. Someone's going to get killed now."

Jean Grainger: It reminds me of Madam Zara. I'll be typing away. I type fast and next thing I'll go, "Oh, he's going to die now."

And sure enough, he'll die.

James Blatch: Your stories are all murder. I remember that.

Jean Grainger: Yeah, they are all murder.

James Blatch: And then you get to the end of the book and how different is the published draft to your first draft?

Jean Grainger: Wildly different.

The next thing that has to happen in my books is they have to get sent to Helen Falconer in Country Mail, and she reads them, and then I drive all the way to the other end of the country because it has to be a kind of a physical thing we do.

So we sit down for about five hours and she says, "I have no idea what you're doing with that. He should be dead. He should have told her that. I don't know why they exist, move her forward, take him back." And then I come home and bash it into shape.

Mark Dawson: It sounds like she's worth her weight in gold.

Jean Grainger: She 100% is. Yes. She 100% is, she's amazing.

James Blatch: We need to get Helen Falconer on the podcast.

Jean Grainger: You do. She's a structural editor and she can see things clearly.

Any writer, you're up too close to the work, you can't see. It's like asking if your own kids are good looking. Everybody thinks their kids are good looking, but they can't all be.

You're up too close to the work, so you need somebody who's got that precision, and Helen definitely has it. And she does it with hilarity and we are frequently in just hysterics at the things I write. She's like, "Seriously? No, come on. How could that happen?"

James Blatch: Well it was 3:00 in the morning.

Jean Grainger: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

James Blatch: We were talking about Helen and the hilarity that ensues when you read back what you've written. I suppose, but clearly there's an engaging story, then you are an engaging storyteller, that must be said.

Jean Grainger: Well, I wrote the book.

James Blatch: Which brings me onto your audience. And this is an area that I think that probably the most varied area when we talk to authors, just how they interact with their audience.

We've had authors on who are very prolific, best selling authors, who have a very active engagement with their readers, and there are others who are more in the traditional role like Stephen King who barely meets his readers.

You have an active community of your readers and I think you enjoy it.

Jean Grainger: I have a great community. I have two communities really. I have my advanced reader team who are 250 people, who have all volunteered to pre-read my books, and they are wonderful. I dedicated my last book to them because they are just incredible.

They find every single typo, even after a proofread, you'll still have one or two or 12 in my case. They find all of that.

I've just sent them a book where, there's quite a bit of French in it because it's set around the French Resistance and then there's an 'e' in that and that accent is gone the wrong way. I have people who send me emails saying, "That plant that you said, actually, when you put an E on that, that makes it a totally different poisonous plant." Just fabulous.

One of my advanced readers is part of the Ottawa storytellers: Bob Woods. Bob contacted me a couple of years ago and said they'd love to turn one of the books into a stage show and would I mind?

I was like, "Would I mind? I'd love it, it would be amazing." So my family and I have just come back from Canada where we saw that performed in the National Art Center in Ottawa.

Mark Dawson: Wow!

Jean Grainger: Looking at Justin Trudeau's office and it was an amazing experience to see my book turned into a stage show.

James Blatch: Lots of authors say Hollywood has the option, but few get to sit down and watch it being realized by somebody else.

Was it close to the way that you imagined the characters would be?

Jean Grainger: Yes, yes it was like an hour and a half of Deja Vu. What they're going to say next?

But they did such a spectacularly good job that actually, the way they interpreted the characters, they interpreted it better than I had originally written. It was just an amazing experience.

I wrote my husband into the book, in my first book, he's at an Elon Piper. The Irish bagpipes, but you sit down to play them and there're nationally protected and all that.

And so, he's in the book and in the course of a conversation with Bob in Canada, I said something. He said, "Oh, that's the name of the guy who in the book plays the pipes." And I said, "Yeah, that is it. My husband is a piper."

They had organized another piper for him to play in the show, who tried to kick off the boot, I'm sorry. And he was like, "Oh my gosh! Could we have the actual piper player?"

My husband was in part of the stage show, and my children came, and my parents, and it was amazing.

James Blatch: Did that contact come from readers?

Jean Grainger: Yeah, it was one of my readers. Yeah.

James Blatch: There's the benefit of cultivating that audience.

Jean Grainger: I will often get a phone call or an email to say, "We're coming on our holidays to Ireland. We're going to be in Killarney." And I go swing by, have a cup of tea.

People call to my house, I go out to meet them. I met a lady and her daughter just a couple of weeks ago for a drink in Killarney. I love it.

Why wouldn't you? What's not to love about somebody who's read your books and wants to meet you?

James Blatch: I do think it's a very good audience. The Irish-American audience. I've just got back from the States and people will very often tell me I'm Irish. I'm actually quite Irish because my grandparents, my maternal grandparents were Irish. Very often, more Irish than the American will say to me I'm Irish.

It just means a lot to them and it's also such a massive part of their life. For them, despite the troubled history that has been over the years, for them, it's a romantic connection with a beautiful green island.

Jean Grainger: Absolutely.

James Blatch: You've got people in the right frame of mind on the romantic part of what they want to think about and you're selling into them, so that's quite clever.

Jean Grainger: I didn't do it on purpose, but it's how it's turned out. I suppose, because I worked with people like that for so long. There's a danger in any culture to patronize the ex pats or those descendants.

I've always maintained that Irish-American culture is a culture on its own right. It's born out of Ireland. It doesn't necessarily have to do with Ireland today.

I think I'm probably good at that, if I was to say I'm good at anything. I'm probably good at knowing people who enjoy that culture and who apprised that culture. They don't enjoy being passionate, they don't enjoy what I call Paddy whakarae nonsense, about shamrocks and leprecauns and all that nonsense. They don't do any of that, that's rubbish.

But we have a really interesting history and culture, and a huge connection to the United States, huge, and I'll write about that. A lot of my characters have either dual citizenship, or they're Americans in Ireland, or Irish people in America.

James Blatch: And it's that across all the books? All the different series?

Jean Grainger: The trilogy isn't, everything else is, yeah.

There's an American element, I suppose. Not all of my books but most of my books. I won't say all of them, but most of my books there's an American.

James Blatch: How is your mailing list?

Jean Grainger: My list is about 6,000. It was at one point about 12,000 and I've cut that down because I don't see the point of paying for people who are only wasting my time.

When people unsubscribe, I don't get upset about that. I'm like, "See you. I couldn't be bothered paying for you if you're not going to ..." It doesn't bother me at all.

In fact, I'm quite relieved when people unsubscribe. They are not great numbers to be fair. And they're very active. I have about 1,000 people on

my Facebook page that are active as well. But I engage a lot with them. You know what you mean when people comment and I respond, or I like what they say.

There's a lot of work in that, but it definitely pays off. And even saying that sounds bad because that sounds like that's why I'm doing it, which it actually isn't. I love the idea that I'm connected, and that people feel like they know me.

And I even send them an email with a picture of the dog and tell them about where I was at the weekend, and they'll email me back, and tell me about their children and their families, and ... It's really fabulous.

I'm writing a book at the moment about a black soldier during the Second World War. And I had a lot of questions about that, about how things worked mechanically when they went back.

And I have such a vast audience of people who have such huge knowledge that I just put out a question. In an hour, I have responses going, "My grandfather was in the Tuskegee airmen, or my grandmother was this, or whatever." You couldn't buy that.

James Blatch: That's amazing. Well, Mark gets emails from people saying, "The Glock 9mm didn't have a safety catch. Didn't you know that?"

Jean Grainger: I get a lot of that.

James Blatch: Jean, it's been brilliant talking to you. I said right at the beginning, I think you had a really healthy attitude.

I think there's been probably a little switch from your public service life to being an entrepreneur. You're maybe not even aware of it. You're starting to work out how things work and you're good at it.

Jean Grainger: Thank you. I think the whole business with Amazon is amazing. Amazon is amazing. Let's stop for a second.

Where would any of us be without them? I'd be still a teacher. Everybody will be still doing whatever they were doing before with no possibility really of this ever turning into anything. And that is even if you do get a deal.

I have a lot of traditionally published friends who are very skilled. It's hard to make money even if you have a Penguin deal, or whatever. It's hard to make money.

This is amazing, and we can do it with such ease. And yes, they're a gigantic company, and yes, people will tell you, "Oh, they're awful to work for. People don't get to go to the toilet if they work for Amazon, or whatever." I don't work for Amazon.

James Blatch: Whenever it gets big, people will start talking, but it's been a transformative company, isn't it?

Jean Grainger: Absolutely. And I think it's a very bad mindset for you as a writer if you're going to decide that they're the enemy. You're on a trajectory there that you don't want to be on.

There's loads of help. If Amazon are doing something that is causing you some problems, if you do the course, they will be tons of people who can give you a work grant. There's always a way around it. There's always a way around it.

James Blatch: I love the way you put it back to the course.

Great job, Jean. Thank you so much indeed.

Jean Grainger: It is my pleasure. I really enjoyed it.

James Blatch: It's been brilliant really. I wish you success. What I should ask you finally, what's next is a new journal somewhere?

Jean Grainger: Yeah, maybe. I'm thinking of doing some traveling with my family, which I think will inspire some new direction, open a new direction.

James Blatch: Oh, I look forward to that.

Jean, a great person, really fun to chat with her. I'm struggling a little bit to describe the genre, but you know the type of book, It's a family saga; saga, that type of thing.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah, and she's somebody who has just gone from this position of not being a living for her to it being a very good living for her, which has been absolutely fantastic and she was very obviously grateful to you, Mark, for showing her the ways and hows of how to find your readers, something you're quite good at.

Mark Dawson: Apparently so, who would have guessed that? But yes, it's lovely to hear that. She said, well, so yeah, fantastic.

James Blatch: Now, I should say without plugging ourselves too much, the course Jean attributed so much of a financial success is opening again next week, so that's November the seventh.

It's going to be open for a couple of weeks. That's Mark Dawson's Ads for Authors.

And if you want to go on wait list, if you're not on it already or you want to go and visit the course page to read more about it, you can go to [Selfpublishingformula.com/ ads for authors](https://Selfpublishingformula.com/ads-for-authors), all spelled out using English ads for authors, F-O-R, in the middle, not the number four. Spelled, that's the one I always get confused about.

Spelt is like a seed or something. So a bit of wheat, and spelled I think is correct, isn't it? Or can you use both?

Mark Dawson: Oh my goodness. This is not a podcast about writing.

James Blatch: Yeah, you should know.

Mark Dawson: Spelled, something in the past is spelled with an ed. You can't have spelled something. So if I say it spelled ads for authors, F-O-R, that's correct because I'm saying it hasn't been spelled like that in the past.

James Blatch: Correct.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: So when the spelling is brought to you by grammarly-

Mark Dawson: Why can't I say spelt?

James Blatch: When you're talking about the thing that you can make bread with, that would be okay.

Mark Dawson: Oh, people do say spelt but then I have a phoenix one of those things that dictionary corner on countdown or UK show about words it's going to say it's okay to say spelled because that's what people say because language develops.

James Blatch: I was working with what the Queen would say. The Queen wouldn't say spelt, she would say spelled.

Get out of here, you have vulgar language. Good. Have you got anything else to say? Any other tips for me?

Mark Dawson: No, I just basically pull your finger out. Let's get this novel finished. You've got to the end of the month.

James Blatch: Oh my goodness! We're already at the end of the month. I'll tell you that now. Good. Okay. It's been fun.

NaNoWriMo. Keep going. Get that word. Can't just write the words. NaNoWriMo is all about first draft that worry about the order structure. Anything else?

Get the words done every day, and at the end of it you will have something to work on. Good. And you finish your police procedural, so you'll start something else during nanowrimo.

Mark Dawson: Probably. I'm not sure what I'm going to do next. I've got a couple of ideas, but you have got to get this done first.

James Blatch: He's a machine. Good. Have a great week, we'll see you next week. Bye. Bye.

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