



Library podcast

Seattle Writes: Taking the Mystery out of Getting Published

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[00:00:39] [David] Hello, everybody, welcome to Seattle Public Library. My name is David Wright and I'm a librarian here at the Central Library and I want to thank you for joining us for our panels presentation of **Seattle Writes: Taking the Mystery Out of Getting Published**. I want to thank the Elliott Bay Book Company for cohosting this reading. They are here with copies of titles by all of our authors, and these are for sale and available for signing, after the program. I also want to thank the Pacific Northwest Writers Association for helping to bring this group of authors together. They will be presenting at the annual Pacific Northwest Writers Association conference tomorrow. And thanks to the Seattle Public Library Foundation, whose support makes possible many of our free program. Tonight is not the first event that we've done here at the Seattle Public Library for writers. But it is the first one that we have placed under the general title Seattle Writes. We hope it will be far from the last. If you search for Seattle writes in the library's calendar of events, you will see a wide variety of programs in the coming months aimed at writers, including a program on writing your memoir or family history here at Central on August 17th.

[00:02:01] A program on poetry writing at the Northeast Branch on September 8th, a program on marketing and social media for authors at Lake City, September 21st. **Bloggng for Beginners** October 6th at Northgate, **Start Your Novel** at the University Branch, on October 19th. And that leads into programs we'll be doing in celebration of National Novel Writing Month here at Central. We will be having weekly write-ins and a special culminating event at the finish line at the last day of National Novel Writing Month, November here at Central. We'll be keeping the library open until way past closing, in fact, till past midnight to celebrate everybody's finished novels. If you don't know what Nano Raimo is, the resource sheet that some of you have and others can get the very first book on there will tell you all about it, *No Plot, No Problem* is all about that wonderful program. Now, without any further ado, I would like to introduce your moderator, the author of the Seattle based urban farming series debut *Animal Vegetable Murder*, which, by the way, what a great concept, Judy Daley, who will introduce you to the rest of our panel. Thank you.

[00:03:14] [Judy] Thank you very much, David.

[00:03:19] I don't think it's possible to be a serious writer without having access to a really great public library system. And we are so fortunate here in Seattle to have the Seattle Public Library system, and people like David who make it all happen. So thank you again so much for this opportunity. A funny thing happened to me when I was on my way to the panel this evening. I figured as moderator for this group of writers, I needed to read a book by each and every one of them.

[00:03:48] Now, I don't know about you, but I've been reading two or three, four or five murder mysteries a week all of my adult life. And then I go on vacation and I really read. So I have read thousands of murder mysteries. But, you know, I hadn't read any books by the panelists that are before you this evening. So I got a copy of each of their books, and I started looking at the pile I had and I thought "ugh, political thrillers... I'm just not a political thriller person, you know?" And then I thought, "ugh historics, I don't read historics. I know what I like to read. And they're not political thrillers and they're not historics and, hairless dogs? No. And I just was on a jury for a murder case, and so there was nothing that I needed to know about our court system. And finally, there was a book that took place in Singapore. Well, a good friend of mine just came back from a year in Singapore and she did not like it very much. And I thought, these are not my kind of books. So I thought what I do. I read the first chapter. I'd read the last chapter. I was a banker for 30 years and I knew I could fake the rest of it. OK. So alphabetical order by first name. I started with Bernadette's book. And I thought, I'm just gonna read the first chapter just to be polite. Well, when I looked up next, it was midnight. I was halfway through the book and it was just excellent. And that is been my experience over the past couple weeks as I have read these books. I have discovered in my own town, my own community, my own northwest, a bounty of readers that I had never experienced before. Even though I read a lot. So if you're like me, and you think you know what you like.

[00:05:28] Please just open your mind tonight, because I think you will really find an extraordinary group of people who are here to talk to you about themselves, writing, and most importantly, how we all managed to get published. Now, when we talk about traditional publishing, we're talking about paper and ink and we have all published in that area. Now that we have e-books and audiobooks, dadada. But what we're talking about tonight is how we broke into the traditional publishing. I'm going to ask each one of the members of the panel. First, I'm going to tell you just a brief thing about them, and then I'm going to ask one, each one in turn to describe their writing to you and their current project. And maybe they could tell you, and me, why they chose that particular subgenre of, of crime writing that they did. So the first the first person I'd like to introduce to you tonight is Leslie Budewitz, who is an attorney in northwestern Montana. She's the author of *Books, Crooks, and Counselors*, which was a 2011 Agatha winner, which if you're in writing, that's a huge deal. Her short stories have appeared in major, major magazines that we all dive to get into. And her stories, *Snow Angels* was recognized in Best American mystery stories of 2009.

[00:06:46] So, Leslie, would you take a minute, please, and talk to us about your current project and why you chose to write in this subgenre of crime fiction?

[00:06:55] [Leslie] Okay. Thank you, Judy. Thank you, David. And it's really great fun to be here. For years I worked in the building across the street before I moved back to Montana. So I am a North Westerner, but I don't live in Seattle right now. I hope you'll forgive me for that. I come back as often as I can, and I am actually here on a research trip as well as talking about the books. I also want to tell you about, let's see, two books. Judy asked me to talk about the nonfiction book because I am the only one of us who has published non-fiction. And some of you may be interested in how that gets published. It's a little bit different from fiction.

[00:07:38] Typically, nonfiction is sold by proposal, meaning you have to outline your book in great detail. *Books, Crooks, and Counselors* is subtitled *How to Write Accurately about Criminal Law and Courtroom Procedure*. And it is one hundred and sixty questions and answers that people might want to know about things that people might want to know about the legal system. I have been a practicing lawyer for nearly 30 years, which is a scary thought. It's one hundred and sixty questions and answers in 12 topics. And so in order to sell the book, I had to write what all those questions were. Fortunately, I didn't have to write all the answers, but I had to break them down into their topics and provide that table of contents, as well as an overview of what the book would do, who would be interested in it? Mystery readers or, excuse me, mystery writers primarily, but other writers too. And any competition? There wasn't any. There were similar books written from, or by, a medical doctor and by a psychologist. And then additional information about how you would market a book. Those are the typical ingredients of a nonfiction proposal. I put all that together. I had an agent who did a marvelous job at shopping the book around, but it didn't sell. Publishers were interested in it, but they thought that the market for it would be too small. And that's something you sometimes hear from publishers that they're not quite sure how they would sell a book.

[00:09:11] And that's very important to them to be able to put it on the right place, on the shelf, the right slot. So I put the proposal away for a couple years, and pulled it back out and tried again, this time on my own, and did sell the book to Quill Driver, which is a small house in California that publishes non-fiction only, but has a line of books for writers, and they have been really wonderful to work with. The second project, Judy asked me to mention the current project. This is the only copy of the book in the room. It is *Death Al Dente*, a first in the Food Lover's Village Mysteries, set in northwestern Montana. In its official release date is August six, and that's why Elliot Bay wasn't able to get it. But I believe, and Casey has given me permission to say this, that Seattle Mystery Bookshop will have them on Saturday. At least I hope so, because I'm supposed to be there signing them at noon. The town of Jewel Bay, Montana, known as a food lover's village, is obsessed with homegrown and homemade Montana fare. So when Aaron Murphy takes over her family's century old general store, she turns it into a boutique market filled with local delicacies. But Aaron's freshly booming business might go rotten when a former employee turns up dead. So that's the mystery.

[00:10:33] [Judy] Thank you, Leslie. Why don't we continue introducing the other people and then we'll get into more specifics about the publishing.

[00:10:41] [Leslie] I'm sorry. I did sort of jump ahead there on how that non-fiction got published.
[Judy] You're an attorney, so we're fully prepared.

[00:10:49] Bernadette's books are historic mysteries set in Seattle, and I'll let her tell you about them. But I have to say, I live by the University of Washington. And since I've read Burdette's books, I just look at campus entirely differently now. It's just kind of transformed that daily walk for me. She's the author of three of these books.

[00:11:11] And Bernadette, would you tell us a little bit about them? [Bernadette] Yes. Thank you very much. And thank you for organizing this panel. And thank you, Seattle Public Library and all of you on this gorgeous summer evening for coming in here, away from the sunshine and everything and to listen. So how many before I start, I'd like to know how many of you here are writers. Quite a few, that's great. I'll you'd be pleased to know that, and if you've been struggling a long time and you just wondering if it's ever going to happen to you, it will. I had a very long journey to publication.

[00:11:48] Many, many, many years. Many, many, many manuscripts.

[00:11:51] So hang in there. I'm proof, I can hold it. I can touch it. I can listen to the audio version. It's there. It's, it's very exciting. And it's it's worth not giving up, so just keep writing. So I write the Professor Bradshaw mystery series. They are set in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest in "The time of Tesla" is sort of the catchphrase that has come about. It's, 1901 is when the series begins. And Professor Benjamin Bradshaw is a 35 year old widower with a son and a crotchety housekeeper, and he lives on Capitol Hill, and he pedals his bicycle daily to the University of Washington, which at that time consisted mostly of Denny Hall, which they called the administration building. The Lewis and Clark halls were there. There wasn't much more on campus. The observatory, a gymnasium, that sort of thing. So anyway, the electrical engineering labs were in the basement. Yes, they actually did teach electrical engineering in 1901 in the frontier town of Seattle. And it was still a fairly small city, about 100,000 people at that time. But a boom town because of all the gold and people going to Alaska. So I have a lot of fun doing research for my books. That's what I enjoy the most. So I, I have fictional whodunit plots, but I weave in the true history of Seattle, the UW, Pacific Northwest, and electrical invention in my stories.

[00:13:25] So is that enough?[Judy] Yeah, that's quite a heady mixture. Mike Lawson, at the far end, has published eight political thrillers, and his most recent one *House Odds* was released with a starred review from Publishers Weekly.

[00:13:40] And I tell you, if you're gonna set a murder mystery that involves killing somebody, I would have killed for a star review for Publishers Weekly. Congratulations, Mike. I read the book. I finished it two nights ago, and I think I've read two more since then.

[00:13:53] So they're fabulous. Can you tell us a little bit about why you chose political thrillers?

[00:14:00] [Mike]When I started writing, I'm like Bernadette, took me a long time to get published it was over 10 years before I found the right agent. And after that was pretty easy. But, I made three decisions, I guess I'd say, when I started writing. And one is I didn't think in terms of genre or

subgenre, anything like that. I the first decisions I wanted the book set back in D.C. I work for the Navy, when I had a real job and I spent some time back in D.C. and for a writer, I've always told people D.C. is a target rich environment. There's always something that's in the press, in the media. If you know something absurd, stupid, dangerous, sometimes heroic, and almost all my books except one have come out of something that I read.

[00:14:45] For example, in my book *House Divided* is kind of odd that I wrote that book based on what was going on with with the warrantless NSA wiretapping programs going on during the Bush administration, 2004. Here we are in 2013, the Obama scandal. So it's some of this stuff even repeats itself. So the first decision I made is I wanted a DC setting. The second decision I made, which is writers, yet I think about I decided to write a series and there's some pros and cons to that, but I made that decision. I wanted to write a series. And then thirdly, I needed a protagonist. It was something different. There's no point to the detective that you know that, Robert Crais has already done, or a cop, that John Sandford has done or something like that. And so essentially in my books, the protagonist is basically a bagman working for a corrupt speaker of the House. I realize a corrupt politician is maybe stretching things a little bit, but I thought that would work. The books aren't about politics. And when he starts talking about subgenre, isn't it? I didn't think about it. And I never thought in terms of political thrillers I never like the title political thrillers. It puts a tone on this thing that they're about politics and they're not. And, you know, you as a writer, you might give them some thought, because when you look at the placement of your book in Barnes Noble's, you find like in my book, sometimes they'll be in the literature section. And the last thing I do is write literature. No, they're they're not in, you know, sometimes be in the mystery section. If you go on Amazon, they'll be in the subgenre political thriller. And so that some thought process going into, you know, exactly how would you want your book categorize might be important. And frankly, I didn't categorize that the publisher did. And for that matter, the publisher usually made up all the titles, too. But that's a different story. So that's how I got started.

[00:16:27] [Judy] Ok. By bit by guess, and by gosh. Charles Philipp Martin's book is the one set in Hong Kong, not Singapore. I apologize, Charles. And Charles has a musical past, which I think as an incredible amount of richness and texture to the story that he's telling.

[00:16:46] I'm not a musician at all, but I just found it so interesting to see how he kept that metaphor, that analogy going. So, Charles, tell us about your journey to writing.

[00:16:58] [Charles] Thank you. Thank you all for coming here. It's wonderful to see people who like to read and to actually even like to listen to writers a bit.

[00:17:07] And thank you for doing this whole wonderful panel.

[00:17:11] I lived in Hong Kong for a little over 17 years. I went there originally as a musician.

[00:17:17] I'd like to tell people I was assembled in Hong Kong and then I quit to become a freelance writer and broadcaster and journalist and worked in Adage. These did a lot of things. Hong Kong was

a very good place to try out new things, but I always loved to read crime and I decided to write a crime novel. And this one features a Hong Kong police inspector, Inspector Lock. This is the first of a series. Might be a short series. But I'm completing the second one now.

[00:17:48] And I had originally written it started writing about some something autobiographical about a musician in Hong Kong, and it was going to be an amateur sleuth.

[00:18:00] But I got so interested in the police angle because the Hong Kong police force is so interesting and Hong Kong criminal life is so interesting. And to just be an amateur involved with Chinese criminal societies and stuff gets kind of weird and far fetched. So I got to know police people and did a lot of research and ended up writing a book that is half amateur sleuth and half a police thriller, and they're two separate plotlines that merge. In one A body washes up on the shore in Hong Kong, and first they think it's an illegal immigrant who didn't make it. That happens quite often in Hong Kong, where it did back then. And but it turns out she's had cosmetic surgery. So it probably wasn't just a poor person from China trying to get into Hong Kong.

[00:18:54] And so Inspector Locke is tracing that case and finding out it gets involved with the Triads and smuggling a lot of criminal stuff. Meanwhile, a musician in Hong Kong finds that his best friend just disappears and he looks and he starts to search for for him. And gradually, these two cases merge. It's all part of the same big dark conspiracy.

[00:19:21] [Judy] Lovely. Just lovely. The final person on our panel tonight is Waverly Fitzgerald. And she has 20 years experience teaching, writing, as well as being a writer herself. And she is the only one of the panel who writes with a partner at which I just find an extraordinary idea. I find it writing even in the house with somebody else living there is almost more than either of us can bear. So I'm very interested.

[00:19:45] Waverly, too, if you would explain a little bit about your latest endeavor and how that team writing thing goes.

[00:19:54] [Waverly] Yes, I'm here as Waverly Fitzgerald. But I'm representing Waverly Curtis, which is the pen name for these books that I'm writing with my friend Kurt Culbert. And the publisher told us that we had to use a female pen name because we couldn't have two names on the cover. And we it had to be a woman because only women write cozy mysteries. So we combine our two first names and that's how we came up with it.

[00:20:18] The series is called... well, the first book is called *Dial C for Chihuahua*. The second book is called *Chihuahua Confidential*. And the third book is called *The Big Chihuahua*. And those are all courtesy of our publisher, those were not our title choices.

[00:20:34] But really, the idea for the book came from my friend Kurt. He started writing a book that featured a talking Chihuahua. And, if you know, Kurt, you know, he's got a great sense of humor. He's also the author of a series of historical mysteries set in Seattle. The first one is called *Rat City*. And I

knew Kurt's inclination or tendency was not to finish books that he started. And I really wanted to find out what happened in that book. So I asked him if I could collaborate with him. And he said, yes, we have known each other for years. And we had been writing partners, writing similar novels for years.

[00:21:14] So we had a long sort of history. And I have edited his work and I coached him for a while, but I fired myself as his writing coach when he stopped writing. So that was why I volunteered to collaborate with him. And it works pretty well for us. I have to say, it's a lot of fun to write with somebody else. When you get stuck, there's somebody else you can brainstorm with. One thing that I have to say about the books is that we did not choose the genre either. Our agent sold it to Kensington. Kensington put us in the cozy mystery category. We were both mystified and horrified, actually, because neither of us read cozy mysteries or knew what cozy mysteries were. And it's been an interesting sort of dance to try to figure out how to stay within the guidelines for that genre. We also didn't think it was a series. And so that was another issue because the joke of a talking Chihuahua sort of starts to get flat after three books.

[00:22:14] I'm telling you, we're really struggling with this. So can we have some more animals start to talk? I think so.

[00:22:22] [Judy] That's good advice. What you start with you'll get stuck with.

[00:22:25] My personal writing journey is, I quit a really nice job in a very stupid move to write full time. I wrote eight books before I finally sold one. I felt really, really stupid about that until I went to a conference and met a wonderful writer who had written 17 before she sold one. So like all of our panelists have said, you know, unless you have a stack of manuscripts you can put your feet up on, you haven't written enough, probably. My book is about an urban farmer in Seattle. Her name is Sunny Day and she lives in an exclusive neighborhood. And her neighbors really, really, really hate her chickens. And then she finds a Mercedes Benz salesman in her organic Swiss chard and her neighbors are convinced that she's trying to bring down property values. And then even worse of the dead man is holding a picture that could destroy her life and then her neighbor's house blows up. So now we're at the chapter three. So it's a pretty fast moving book. OK, the first question I have for our panelists is that it seems that the first step in getting published is having a great manuscript. This is not a session about craft and we gave you some resource materials.

[00:23:40] What I want to talk about is what did you do to get your manuscript to greatness after you had written it? Did you have a critique group? Did you use beta readers? Did you have an editor? What worked for you and what did not work for you? And remember, we're talking about breaking into it. So the first time. What did you do to get your manuscript ready for publication? Leslie, you're nodding. So you get to go first.

[00:24:09] [Leslie] I probably shouldn't go first because I probably have the story that is the exception to the rule, but I do want to comment on the stacks of unfinished, excuse me, of unpublished manuscripts. Many of you probably know Earl merson, Seattle writer of great renown. And I heard him speak once, years ago when he said he had eleven unpublished manuscripts and eleven books

published. And so he considered himself halfway successful. And I've always taken heart in that in knowing that he had 11 unpublished manuscripts made me perversely feel a little better for my four unpublished manuscripts. Most fiction is sold on based on a completed manuscript. All of you who are writers, if you have tried to sell a book, know that fiction is sold on a completed manuscript. And I sold the Food Lover's Village based on a proposal, not a completed manuscript. And this is where choice of genre comes into play a little bit. Unlike Waverly, and Mike, I was very deliberate in my choice of genre. I chose to write a cozy because I knew that publishers were buying them. What is a Cozy. Not all of you are going to know that term. I call it the lighter side of mystery. They're the descendants of Agatha Christie, the traditional mystery. Lots of, excuse me, no graphic violence or sex, lots of graphic food. Some of them don't have food. They have talking animals. Some of them don't have talking animals, but they have other animals. Pets are really big in cozy world. Waverly's books, of course, have a Chihuahua on the cover. You can't see this one, but there's a little bitty cat right here and he does take part of the story. That's really a good indication of the overall feel of this genre.

[00:26:11] These are not books that are going to have you staying up past your bedtime because you are too afraid to turn out the lights. They are going to have you staying up past your bedtime and then maybe going downstairs for a snack because the food sounds so good. There are recipes in the back. So I sold this one to Berkeley Prime Crime, which is a division of Penguin. I knew that they were buying books based on proposal, which means an overview of the series, an overview of each of the first three books, a synopsis of the first book, and then the first three chapters. There are other cozy publishers who who buy those as well. Typically, you have to have an agent to be able to make that contact. Again, I'm the exception. I had a friend who had read it and thought that her editor would be interested in it. So we bypassed the agent route and went directly to an editor. These things don't happen very, and who bought the book, obviously, and has now bought the second series, which is set in Seattle. I'm just starting work on that, *The Seattle Spice Shop Mysteries*. These things don't happen very often. And so that's why I say I'm the exception. But they happen to me because of the four unpublished manuscripts and because of the two unsold, well, one unsold proposal and one sold book. I paid my dues. I spent a lot of years writing, even though this story didn't sell the traditional way, the traditional way was when all the craft and all the sweat and tears and probably some blood, too, that got me to that point were were the reason I was able to craft a proposal that sold.

[00:27:55] [Judy] That's a really interesting story. Bernadette, you were the person who told me about, "Find yourself a better reader". Can you, not better, beta. Right. I'm not saying this right, am I? Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about how you get your manuscripts ready for submission?

[00:28:12] [Bernadette] Yeah. I'm not sure I use that that term because that's not a term that I use. I know a lot of people to use the term beta reader, but I do encourage you to find readers you trust, find somebody who will be honest with you.

[00:28:25] And it can be a little bit tricky because if you have a friend who's also a writer, that friend might try to advise you to write it the way she would write it.

[00:28:36] So finding a group or a couple of people who you trust, who know your voice, who know what you're trying to say, and then can then read it for you because, your writing, you are way too close to your own writing to be a good judge of it.

[00:28:50] You'll never be able to be a judge of it. And with a name like Bernadette, I have this this weird metaphor that came to me one day, you know, because I was raised Catholic and, you know, the whole thing. Anybody know about Saint Bernadette and how she, she dug in the ground.

[00:29:04] And in this I think the spring came up and it was miraculous water and people were coming and drinking from it and dropping their crutches and going away and being cured. But when Bernadette got ill, she could not drink from this, even though she it was her who dug it up and discovered it. And she said, "The water is not for me". Well, I'm telling you, your books are not for you. So your writing journey, when you write them. That's your joy. The creation is your joy. You're digging and getting that spring to come up. That's your that's what you do. But when it comes time to actually read the book, drink the Water, that metaphor starts trickling out here after a little while. But you can't see it the way other people see it. You know the journey too well of your characters. You know what you were trying to say. You have no way of knowing if the words you put on the page take your reader on a journey until they read it. And I think that's probably for beginning writers the scariest thing to do is to share your work and to hear somebody say, I didn't get it or I didn't like this or, you know.

[00:30:11] But trust me, you need you need to hear that. And, you know, it takes a while to learn to trust that. In hindsight, I would have had readers much earlier on. I, I was just writing them and sending them off. And luckily, I did get agented right away, but it didn't sell for very, very long time.

[00:30:34] And I think the process might have been speeded up a bit if I had found a good writing group and and and gotten some of that feedback.

[00:30:43] I think I was sort of using the professional publishing world as sort of my, my beta readers. And they would give me lovely and, you know, give me hope and say, you know, I like my very first rejection letter. It's sad. She writes with warmth, yet with sufficient discipline. I didn't really know my craft, so, you know. So yes. Fine.

[00:31:07] Trusted readers joining writing groups get that feedback. Thank you.

[00:31:13] [Judy] Mike, do you have a group of people or by eight novels, you know?

[00:31:17] [Mike] No, I don't. You know, one of the problems with writing or taking writing class or anything else is this isn't a science. It's all, it's it's it's subjective. And so what you're going to hear is a whole lot of different and conflicting advice. For example, I've told several writers, "Finish your book first before you ever approach anybody". I know at least three people. In fact, one of them was lucky enough to have my agent interested in this book. And they said, well, show me the book. The guy goes, well, geez, I know I haven't done for three more months all the way agents work. They couldn't

remember who this guy was three months from now. So my advice, you know, and I'm not saying your experience is not the way to go, is finish your book. My own person. [Another author] I actually agree with that. [Mike] Yeah. I think know I think that if it's for fiction, I think you almost have to. As far as a writing and for some reason I never felt comfortable when I was first started writing,

[00:32:10] sharing the book with other people. I was actually afraid is gonna embarrass myself, to tell you the truth. And so I started spinning query letters, I it took me about, you know, 10 years before I found the agent that I've got. And the feedback I got was primarily from agents. In fact, I've got, I've received two pieces of great writing advice in my career, one of which is from an agent that rejected my first book. And the advice was, "I like the writing, I like the dialogue, I like the characters. Too much of what you've written does not advance the plot." That simple piece of advice caused me to whack about 60 pages out of that book because too much what I'd written just didn't advance the plot, chopping out all the philosophy and your musical, you know, the musings you do and that sort of thing. Today, I don't I, I really don't use a readers group. There's only two people whose opinion I care about. If you give a book to 10 people, I really believe you'll get back ten different opinions, frankly. And I really care about two opinions, and that's my agent and my editor. I've had the same editor on six of my eight books. Now I do what I do do is I'll take part of a book sometimes and I'll give it to somebody because I want an opinion on a part of a book.

[00:33:20] And one of my books, because I what I don't want to do is write about politics. I chose a friend who is you know, his political persuasions are completely opposite of mine. And I said, "Hey, Bob, read this chapter. I really want to find out, are you offended by it?" You know, I'm not trying to alienate half my audience. And so I will go out selectively and ask people to read parts of books because I'm looking maybe for a believability check or something like that. I don't disagree. That's a good idea to have writers groups and have, you know, people to bounce off of. I just never felt comfortable that way. What I do. It I'm usually working on more than one thing at a time. I'm usually working on, you know, at least a couple of books. Now, if I got the luxury of doing so, I like just put distance between myself and the book and I'll finish the book. I mean, if I have the luxury of time, I like to just sit it down and just not look at it for two or three months. And then I go back and I do that. I try to pick it up a fresh and, you know, just look at it again. And that seems to help me if you if you've got the luxury that kind of time.

[00:34:18] [Judy] I think that's marvelous advice. I think the hardest thing to do. I don't know about you, but when I write scene, I've worked on it really hard. I think it's just fabulous. I want to send it off to The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, you know, maybe the Paris Review. What the hell? And I gotta stop myself from doing that. And my critique group helps me do that. But it also what you're saying, Mike, is put it in a drawer, you know, and then you take it out after three months and you go, "Well, maybe not the Paris Review this time." So I think that's just a really excellent point. Even if you are seeking the input from other people.

[00:34:51] Charles, did you find yourself looking for editorial assistance with your book?

[00:34:57] [Charles] Well, most people at some point, especially with the first book, want some kind of opinion. By the way, I just have to say, Waverly, about collaboration. Somebody once said two people getting together and write a book is like three people getting together and having a baby.

[00:35:11] So I salute you on your ability to do that.

[00:35:18] And I agree with Mike. The best thing is when you've written something, just put it away for a while. You have more of a luxury with the first novel because nobody wants it. We have editors and publishers clamoring for it, you know, sometimes and I think we've all read things where you said, well, you know, this person should have put it away for a while and stewed about it. When did that Whidbey Island writers conference... About ten years ago, or more, Aaron Elkins spoke. And here's some, he had some nice hints for writers and one of them was, don't listen to unpublished writers. What do they know? Now, other people belong to writers groups and they and they love them. So every piece of advice is this. The other side of the coin, I found I was better off either with published writers or with readers. People who read the stuff that I like just give it to them and see what they think. And if you live with somebody, it can be very instructive. Say, if you're married and you give it to that person to read and you can watch them read because you can never do that with anyone else, you watch me and you wait until they go *sighing noise*.

[00:36:29] That's where you have to cut.

[00:36:32] [Judy] So we get marriage and family advice coming here as well as writing. And Waverly,

[00:36:37] I know you were an editor and you helped people polish their writing. So can you talk about from that perspective a little bit?

[00:36:43] [Waverly] Okay, well, first to answer the question about whether I use readers or not. That is one reason why collaborating works. Because Kurt and I are each other's readers and we actually read out loud to each other when we get together. And so there's this you know, you get to see whether what you wrote lands or not, you know.

[00:36:59] And we also used a writing group and for the first book in the series, and we could tell whether they left at the right places. So that was extremely useful. I have to say, I've also had the experience, I've got another series of mystery novels that are unpublished. I had an agent for it. They went around New York. They didn't sell. And when I finally got that book back, I read it. And it had been ruined by the committee process because I had every I had asked a bunch people to read it. I had made every change they asked for. My agent wanted to change it. I made every change she asked for. And it was just had changed from being a really lively book and just being sort of lukewarm because it was sort of trying to satisfy everybody and not, you know, sort of hitting the mark. So but I also just picked that book up after probably about six years of not looking at it. And it was damn good. The only part I didn't like was the last chapter, which I had changed because of repeated reader feedback and I still don't agree with the reader feedback. So I'm going to have to try to figure out a way to fix that. But, you know, I do also do this service for writers of providing feedback for people. As

an editor, that's another way to get feedback on your writing. If you're not able to get it from a writing partner or a writing group. [Charles] Can I just clarify one thing?

[00:38:19] I don't send my books out to somebody that I want to edit the books. I do always send my books out to a guy who proofread my books and there's a big difference in that. But my books are filled with typos. Even when the published book comes out, we'll have a typo when but because of my the way I write and how fast I write sometimes. But I do send it to somebody to proofread the book. So when it does go to an editor or agent, or at least it looks professional. It still may not be a good book, at least it will be it won't have the typos of things like my proofreader also does fact checking for me to a certain extent of if it doesn't sound right that this fact may not be. We'll check that out. But it's different than an editor. Yeah.

[00:38:56] [Waverly] And I should probably say there's several levels of editing. And for those of you who aren't familiar with it, there's something called the developmental edit, which is where somebody looks at the whole manuscript and says, is this working or not? Is the suspense right or are the characters developed? Is there stuff missing that needs to be done or is there too much stuff and that needs to be cut out? And then there's a kind of editing which looks at each sentence and says, does the sentence work? And then there's the copy editing, which you're talking about, where somebody goes through. And this is extremely useful. I've hired people to do this for me where they look at the continuity. You know, you said the heroine was 17 here and now she's 19, suddenly a chapter later or so and so works in this business. But now there's something working in a different business that's a very time consuming and detail oriented kind of person, which I am not. I don't do that kind of editing. But they also catch grammatical mistakes and spelling mistakes and typos. And that's a very useful thing to do before sending your manuscript out because you want it to look professional.

[00:39:55] [Judy] And Charles, do you have [Charles] Just one more thing about getting a manuscript ready to show. One piece of advice I think works for any writer writing anything is to read your work aloud because the ear is much less forgiving than the eye. You can read something you've written ten times to say, Oh, that's great stuff. And you read it aloud once and you can you see what's really there.

[00:40:16] [Another Author] Yeah, I will load my book on my nook, put it in a PDF form, so I read on my Nook.

[00:40:21] And I've been known to walk around my house outside on a nice day and the neighbors just know me. I'm reading aloud, you know, my son's playing and it's amazing what you hear. And then I will just stumble on my own sentence, run in the house, fix the sentence and go back out and start doing a lap and and the moving helps. Took says otherwise, you know, you've kind of put yourself to sleep reading this because you've read it by the time you're ready

[00:40:42] To do this final, final, final polish, you could throw up if you have to read this book again, really? It's like drinking 20 glasses of water when you get to that 20th glass. You do anything to avoid swallowing. But you know that final one, you got to do it.

[00:40:56] And so aloud is excellent advice. [Judy] She's very athletic, isn't she?

[00:41:02] For a writer. All right. Leslie and I went through this process without an agent. And we'll talk about that for a second. But I think maybe our other panelists might talk about the best way to approach an agent, because so often an agent is the gatekeeper to the publishing industry.

[00:41:19] And you're nodding Waverley, which means you get to talk.

[00:41:22] [Waverly] Ok. Kurt and I knew that we had a really fun book and we started looking for an agent just about as we were finishing the last chapters. And we used the thing that's on your resource list, Agentquery.com really as our filter because you can plug in someone who's accepting new authors, somebody who represents mysteries. And we then went to the web sites and looked for pictures of dogs. So that was our our secret. We decided we set a cap. Also, we were going to query 50 agents before we gave up and self published it. We got an agent on number twenty one. But the other thing that I would advise people to do that we didn't do is there's another service called Publishersmarketplace.com and you have to pay for that service, agent query is free. But Publishers Marketplace is thirty dollars a month. But it is extremely valuable if you're in the process of looking for an agent because you can go on there and you can see what that person sold in the last three or five years. And you can also you also get a daily report of what is selling. So under the mystery category, that would be so-and-so sold such and such a book to such and such a publisher for such and such an amount of money, which is cleverly disguised with these little euphemisms. A nice deal. A very nice deal. Great deal, I think. So those are two tools that I think every writer who's looking for an agent should know about.

[00:42:46] [Judy] And anything different to contribute about approaching an agent. Just keep sending those query letters out.

[00:42:53] [Charles] Well, one thing I think you have to understand, it's not like getting a plumber. An agent is not going to take you on unless they really believe in the book. So you can't really get an agent. An agent has to get you.

[00:43:05] you approach the agent...

[00:43:07] But everybody I think probably most of the people here have gotten letters saying, "I like your book. It's well-written. I just wasn't enthusiastic enough to take it on."

[00:43:18] And, you know,[Multiple Authors interjecting] it's I didn't love it. You.

[00:43:21] It didn't love it enough. Enough. That's the catch. Is that a phrase like that? Yeah. It keeps us awake at night.

[00:43:27] [Charles] And, you know, they mean well, I mean, because you can write something that's just as good as what's out there. And that's not quite good enough because they want something is also a little different.

[00:43:36] [Leslie] You know, there is an art to the query and it is worth working on. Judy and I are both members of the Guppies chapter of Sisters in Crime. Sisters in Crime is a national actually an international organization of readers, writers, librarians, agents. And we are part of a chapter that is it's called The Guppies, because it stands for the great unpublished. Happily, they haven't kicked us out, now that we are published and it's possible to work with a group like that, or if you're here in Seattle and you've got access to the Sisters in Crime Chapter or the Mystery Writers of America chapter and find people who can help you work on your query, because there really is an art to synthesizing your book into a couple of sentences and pitching yourself. If you have not done that sort of thing before, you know, you're not writing a resume for these agents. You need to give them sort of the equivalent of the back cover copy of a book and a little bit about yourself and also a little bit about a little bit that establishes that you are a serious writer. And that's a really quick summary. But it really is kind of an art to to doing that and finding some help with that is is worth your effort.

[00:44:53] [Judy] Anything more on agents Bernadette?

[00:44:56] [Bernadette] Well, I'd also like to add that, you know, like number 21 was when he finally found an agent is an agent, is it's like finding a marriage partner, really. You could write a brilliant book, but you have to find the right person who it clicks with. So it it hurts when you get that rejection letter in the mail. I guess it's, you know, email these days is generally how you would get it, but it doesn't mean that you didn't write a fantastic story or that you're not ready to get published. Depends on you know, sometimes they give you some good feedback but know that you're looking to make a connection. Editors and agents are people, too. The people who love books. They love stories. And so you're searching for that, right? Marriage.

[00:45:39] [Mike] But it never occurred to me to not get an agent. And I realized today and in the world of self publishing and things like that, a lot of folks may not... an agent is not only selling your book to a publisher my age is negotiating television rights with you know, he's looking at movie deals. He's got a foreign rights department. He understands the books. You know, the contracts you get with a publisher. He understands the pricing. You might want to get paid for your you know, for your royalties, that sort of things. I I wanted from the get go. I wanted somebody that understood the business, which I didn't have ever seen a publishing contract, especially in American publishing contract. They're about 20 pages long as opposed to European was maybe sometimes like two pages long. I mean, this is a it's a it's a fairly complex document that you're entered into is I I wanted in Asia. Now, the way I went about it was a traditional way of write the query letter and I agree is the hardest thing you can do. I just kept, you know, just writing, your tweaking, your tweaking, your writing. And if one you know, someone bites on that letter, you just keep using it for a while. I mean, I was rejected by agents on both coasts multiple times. These guys don't know/remember when you sent them a letter. So send it again. But I heard one agent say one of these conferences, that this is a New York agent like mine, that they're getting something like 1,200 queries a week.

[00:46:57] The point being, you've got maybe two sentences to get some his attention. And that is that's not only on your book, but it's also on your query letter. So there's probably nothing more important than understanding that this guys can go through some rambling discussion when he finally gets the fact that, you know, you may be an expert on the NSA or something, you're not going to get that for.

[00:47:18] [Judy] And it isn't the agent who's gonna be reading the query initially, it's going to be some wet behind the ears.

[00:47:24] Person, that's an assistance problem. Yeah. Yeah, who knows? It's just the bike. I found it much easier to find my second husband than to find an agent.

[00:47:34] Yeah, true. Yeah. Oh, okay.

[00:47:36] What happened with me was that I submit to contests at conferences, writers conferences, and I happened to submit to Killer Nashville in 2011, which is a mystery writers conference. At the same time, I sent out three query letters because the book was just about done. When they told me I was a finalist for the contest, I'd gotten two rejections from my query, two of the query letters had been rejected and I thought, well, I'll just stop doing this for a while until I get back from Tennessee. And then I won the contest and the judge of the contest was the acquiring editor for Five Stars Engaged.

[00:48:14] They love the book. They want the book, blah, blah, blah, was wonderful. And I came home.

[00:48:18] I said my husband, "Which do I do?", and he said, just take the money and run. I don't wanna hear about this book again as long as I live. Well, then, of course, a month after I signed the contract, I heard from the third agent who loved the book that it was too late. But so there are some end runs, like Leslie said, that you can do. I think they're kind of like being hit by lightning.

[00:48:36] But, you know, so much of life is. Now, excuse me, now we have our agent and we have a signed publishing publishing contract. So what as a first, the first time you dealt with a publisher and and dealt with your book at a publisher, what were some of the unexpected and hopefully funny things that happened that you think that the folks in the audience might want to be alert for?

[00:49:02] For example, I had nothing to do with my cover. I love my cover. Nothing to do with it. It was one of those things that just kind of appeared in the ether. [Waverly] Nothing to do with the cover and nothing to do with the titles. There you go. OK, Charles.

[00:49:19] [Charles] One thing was a they. They found it very nice. They put together. Well, the first couple of covers were terrible, but my editor agree they were. So we sent them back. And you should never be ready, you know, reluctant to do that because it's your book and you have to look at the

cover. And a very good designer came up, I thought would a nice cover with this really scary looking arms coming out of the water. And I said to the other, well, the fact is she's already dead when she's dumped in the water. But here she is, you know, drowning. And my editor said, you know, it's a cover, not a truth serum.

[00:49:53] Don't worry about it.

[00:49:57] And Bernadette. [Bernadette] Well, I'm with a small press, Poison Pen Press. And they're they're small, but they're big. I think they're second only to St. Martin's and the number of hard cover mysteries they publish each year.

[00:50:09] That said, there's only about eight people in the whole company. And so it's fabulous dealing with a very small company. It does surprise me when I decide, well, I have a thought. I e-mail a publisher thinking, you know, Monday morning they'll get to it. It's Sunday night at 9:00 and I get an answer. And so it's like, "well this is kind of nice." You know, you get an answer so quick, but not if it's not the answer I wanted. But they do let me argue with them and talk with them. And I throw an idea publish-, you know, publicity ideas that them and, you know, they're really on board. I think a couple of things surprised me. One was, you know, I dreamed of the day I would get my contract, you know. And so I printed it out. You know, it came like e-form and I printed it out. And then my agent had a copy in New York. And so we scheduled a phone call to go over this. And my son had a friend over. I said I said, I'm going in the other room. Shut the door. Don't disturb me. I didn't realize I would be in there for three and a half hours. So luckily, they didn't burn down the house. Everything was fine. But we talked and talked and talked.

[00:51:16] And the thing about a contract, you wrote that baby, you put your heart and soul into it. This is what you've been your whole life. And you start reading this contract and it says that you're giving it to somebody else. They can do anything they want to it. They can edit it any way they want. They can put any cover they want on it. It's pretty much not yours anymore. So it's like it's you're selling your baby. And it's a really odd feeling. It really. I got over it. I signed it. You know, I got the book right. And then, you know, we could talk covers. And Robert, if you ever do hear this, I apologize for telling the story of not liking my first cover. But I write, as I told you, historical mysteries. They're sort of traditional whodunnits, fast paced 100 years ago in the time of Tesla. And so the cover it originally, you know, the title's *A Spark of Death*. In the first cover that they sent me had that skull, which is really recessed now, very prominent and some sparklers on the front. And you know that the spark is should be electrical. Also, they did change it to the sort of upside-down electricity. And but since then, I have gotten to know the, a little bit.

[00:52:31] They let me actually communicate with a cover designer now, and he's fabulous.

[00:52:36] I mean, it's a brilliant cover. I just didn't feel it matched the story within. So then the next one, if you guys will see afterwards, they put a historic telephone on the front. I love that one, *Fatal Induction*. And then the next one, I sent them some photographs of a historic electro-therapeutic chair, and they used that on the cover. So it's.

[00:53:01] I don't know. I mean, all my expectations of what it would be to be published.

[00:53:07] I don't know. One thing I do encourage you to do, just just like actors are waiters and waitresses. Right? Get a job in customer service. If you're a writer, because writing you spend a lot of time alone. But then someday you're gonna be sitting in the Seattle library in a chair holding a microphone, and you're going to have to get used to talking to people and working in a customer service job helps with that. And that's how I met Kurt Culbert, who so I heard about Waverly for years, because once upon a time we were all unpublished, working our day jobs and and writers find each other wherever they are. "Oh, you're a writer, too?" And we would we would talk while I worked.

[00:53:46] Okay, that's enough. [Judy] And Mike, with your books, how long between the point, you send that manuscript off and you have the book in your hand. How long does that take?

[00:53:58] Well, the case of Grover, we're on a one year cycle, essentially, and usually my manuscript goes in like, on this latest book I think I said in June, I've got a great editor. I'll talk about that in just a second. And I just finished that at the first editing cycle. He'll probably get it back to me in August.

[00:54:17] And essentially, they start a fairly slow production process for a book that will come on next July is unbelievably slow.

[00:54:24] But as far as my that the biggest thing about the publisher in mind, I mean, the titles and the covers and all that stuff in a way is is sort of small potatoes. The big deal is the editor.

[00:54:36] And that relationship you have with this editor, my my first two books were a double day and I was not in sync with the editor at all. It was just painful.

[00:54:47] At the same time, like Bernardette says, you've signed a contract and then there's something really tricky in book contract called the acceptance phase of the contract, which basically says, "If we don't like your book, we can just reject it. And by the way, we're not going to. You know, you're going to have to give us back some of the advance or we won't pay the advance on the second book" or something like that.

[00:55:05] So it's a business relationship. And I want two things out of an editor and that the most important thing is I want them to help me improve my book, not change my book. And there's a huge difference between improving my book and changing my book. You know, if I wrote a story about a, you know, a Red Dog and we change it to a Blue Dog, it's not a better book, it's a different book. The second you offer me editor or somebody is actually engaged in the whole complicated production process from, you know, after the book is out of the editing phase and it gets into production and go to marketing and distribution, all those kind of things. I was very lucky when I went to Grove that the editor I've gotten the last six books. This guy's just a delight to work with. He's younger than I am. He's fast. That was other thing I didn't like about the first editor, took her forever to get back the

comments on the first draft of the novel. And I had about a month to go ahead and incorporate her comments. The editor I currently have just the opposite, this guy, he gets them back to me

[00:56:05] and in less than a month, I get two or three months to go and try to fix the book. But that relationship with that editor is something you don't know what you're gonna get, you know, when you sign out the company, but also because it's a business relationship, you'll find yourself, quite frankly, I'll agree to changes in the interest of compromise. I'll give him the little things. So hopefully I won't have to give up the big things, just like you do in any negotiation. Again, a good editor, his ego isn't involved in the thing. And I don't have this problem with the editor. And I have got a third editor now with Penguin. Again, same kind of good guy and no big ego involved. The editor isn't trying to leave his imprint on the book. But I don't know what you do if he gets to the point in a relationship with a publisher where you just can't stand this editor. I don't what you do. I work through it on the first couple of books back. That's a tough one.

[00:56:57] [Another Author] How did you end up getting a new editor? [Mike] I got a new publisher.

[00:57:03] [Multiple People] That's pretty serious. Could I was well, [Charles] One thing you're mentioning about waiting for change is coming back. I was talking to I,

[00:57:11] I'm sure some of you of your Seattle mystery fans know K.K. Beck, who wrote some wonderful Seattle mysteries. I was complaining to her at her signing that I had sent something off and I was waiting for a response. And she said, Charles, "Writing is a game of constant waiting. You send something to an agent, you wait for a response that could sometimes take months. If it's accepted, you sign and then you you wait for the editor to get back and then more waiting."

[00:57:41] [Judy] And Leslie, you had a comment? [Leslie] I'd like to comment on a few topics we have touched on in the last few minutes. First about agents, I mentioned selling the book on my own, but I did then go get an agent. And I completely agree with Mike that you should have an agent at, it, at the very least, they will help you understand the contract. At the very best, they will negotiate a better contract for you. There are going to be terms in there that even as a lawyer, I didn't quite understand. Even as somebody who had spent a lot of years trying to understand the publishing business, there were things that my agent could explain to me and an advocate for me in ways that I had never anticipated. She's also been a terrific guide to the promotion process, which is huge and not something that we're going to talk about tonight, I don't think. But. She's been a good guide for that as well, because she does represent about a dozen or more of of cozy writers. You mentioned covers and I'm just delighted with my cover. I think it's one of the things that Burkley Prime Crime does does well. And while we don't have books here tonight, we do have bookmarks. And if you're at all interested, please take it.

[00:58:57] Please take a bookmark. It does have part of the cover on it. One of the things that Burkley tries to do with its covers is and Judy and Waverly's publishers have done this, too. They they set up the cozy mood. These these don't have sparks of death on them. They don't have hands reaching up out of water. They have cats and the boarded up window that says it takes a village to catch a killer.

And with the first book in a series, they they like to focus on the shop because most of these books involve a shop or a business of some kind. So I did have have some input. They asked me for ideas. They asked me for a description of the interior of the business and and the exterior. And the picture came out looking like... a dream to me, it looks just like I'd imagined this shot being. Except that I thought the door was green and I didn't tell them that. So the door is blue, but it doesn't matter. I love the door and I love the cover. They have some really talented artists, and it's a lot of fun to see somebody else who thinks in an entirely different way take your vision and make it come to life.

[01:00:14] And that's- that's the biggest.

[01:00:18] Kick out of this whole thing is seeing your vision come to life.

[01:00:23] [Judy] I have been requested to start taking questions from the audience as we have about 20 more minutes, the whole- the whole thing is open from craft to agents. Yes, sir. I'm going to repeat the questions for the podcast, so. And do you have a person you're directing this to, sir? OK.

[01:00:43] The question is, if you are an unpublished writer, do you think that it helps to have a visible social media presence when you go to approach agents about selling your book? Would anybody like to address that? That's true for non-fiction, isn't it? That platform like that is very helpful.

[01:01:01] [Leslie] I think most of us probably sold our books before it seemed to become essential to have a Facebook presence and and Twitter and I don't tweet. So I don't exactly know what what Twitter is. But it is certainly true that non-fiction depends on that blog. Scuse me on that platform. Earlier I mentioned what goes into a nonfiction proposal. And one of the things that a non-fiction publisher wants to know about an author is that people are going to be interested, that you have a platform, that you have things you stand on, that you have a certain number of people who already know you in the field. And I did have that because I write a blog called LawandFiction.com/blog, which is a source of information for writers, not about publishing law. That's not my area of expertise, but on how to use the law in your book. So, for example, your character needs to get a search warrant and you don't know how to get a search warrant. You can look it up in the book. And I wrote columns in writers, newsletters for Sisters in Crime for MWA Northwest for years. And so all those things gave me a presence among the people that would be interested in this book. And the publisher was very interested in that. They want want that from a fiction writer, too, but to less of a degree than for nonfiction.

[01:02:32] [Judy] Another question.

[01:02:33] [Charles] Do you. Do they allow you to do your own cover? And did I come up with the title *Neon Panic*? Thank you. Thank you. There's just all kinds of stories about titles. Oh, I'm sure we all have them.

[01:02:46] No, they um, at least my publisher, I was able, they the, I agreed with him that we reject the first two, uh, covers. But when this came, I had some more input. But they pretty much ignored

me from then on. They thought it was good enough. Maybe if I had a bit more power, I could have jumped up and down. But I liked it. Ninety eight percent. So I didn't, So I didn't argue with it.

[01:03:18] My, I originally given another title to my book a long time ago, The Hot Room, because there is a room in it that's hot because they keep the doors shut, the windows shut for Feng Shui reasons. Hong Kong police are very superstitious people. But the name said it sounded too much like a hardboiled mystery and not and they were going for suspense. And the agent I was using use the title Neon City, which I didn't like because it sounded too 1950s.

[01:03:49] And when a publisher took it on, I started to- they wanted a two word title because I have a three word name. So who who'd have thought it?

[01:04:01] So I started to I actually I had a background in advertising, so I named products all the time. So I have words here and words here. I have adjectives and nouns.

[01:04:10] And I fiddled with it and found words that had-neon I like because Hong Kong is awash in neon, and panic had that nice kind of

[01:04:22] Psychological suspense feel to it. So I went with that. And, of course, I had to justify the title in the book, which I did. But I'm smart this time around. I ran some titles by my editor for the next book.

[01:04:35] So I'm [Judy] In the second row, the question is, "if you've written a book like a cookbook and you're waiting to have publishers respond to you, would it be a good idea to publish it yourself as some sort of an e-book? In the interim, [unintelligible], Mike.

[01:04:55] [Mike] I've only got, I guess, a couple stories on that.

[01:04:58] I've never self published. I do know people that have, a couple of people who've been very successful, self publishing. I don't know very many, but there have been a couple of folks who've been out there and they've self publish the book and the sales were good enough that then they got the interest of a paper publisher. Most folks probably don't have that success. But, you know, on the other hand, it's kind of a why not?

[01:05:21] I mean, you've it depends on how long you can stand waiting to get published. I think the other thing is, is you're always working on those next book, you know, so you're never really waiting in a sense because you're always working on whatever the next one is asking. The first question an agent or publisher may ask you as well, what's the next one about? So I don't know if he should self publish or not. I was, it was just never a stream I had to cross because I was really, got published before that era. But I do know people have been successful at it and I even know writers today who they've been dropped by their publishers who claim they've been more successful. So provision and I get more money.

[01:05:58] [Leslie] Your question specifically was whether you should publish it while you're waiting to hear, right? OK. And I'm going to say no. If you still believe that a traditional publisher might be interested in the book and you still want to go that route, then if you self publish it, you're eating into your potential market. If you sell 5000 copies, you've already sold a good chunk of what the publisher would hope to sell. Now, you would have made more money, perhaps, but you have not advanced your career. If you want to start your career with that book, I would say don't self publish it first. That doesn't mean you can't print a few copies for the relatives at Christmas.

[01:06:37] [Charles] Also, your cookbook is the cookbooks are the one area of publishing that seem to thrive all the time in print. There's no problem. So you're actually a much better chance of selling a cookbook than me. Yeah. Mystery or just about any other kind of book. So stick with it.

[01:06:55] [Waverly] I'm going to just jump in here, too, because I teach classes on self publishing all the time. It really depends on your purpose and your audience. If you can reach your audience directly through, because they know your blog or they know your Web site, you can connect with them, then it's possible that self publishing is a really smart thing to do. But you have to really think about what your goals are as a writer. And also if you can reach your audience without the help of a traditional publisher, which provides distribution, all kinds of other good things for you.

[01:07:25] [Judy] So the question is, should you set up an author Web site before you are published? And this relates to the other question about social media, that I don't think that either of those things is going to sell a book for you, although there are some stories of people who have been found through Twitter and then sold. But the biggest risk of doing that, in my opinion, is that Twitter and Facebook and blogging are time sucks. And I think that that time is better spent on the page. Do everything you can to protect your relationship to the page and to advance your craft.

[01:08:05] [Waverly] But I think the question was about a Web site. So I would say specifically, yes, because the agent or the publisher can go to your Web site. If you've got a professional looking Web site, they can see your publicity materials, your, you know exactly who what you've published before.

[01:08:21] And and I think they expect every authored have a good looking Web site. So I would say yes for a Web site, I guess.

[01:08:28] [Multiple Panelists] So you can put a bunch of writers together and get contrary opinions. You know, certainly you need one once you get published. But in my opinion, a Web site isn't going to help you actually get published.

[01:08:39] [Charles] If you had the most beautiful Web site in the world, but if the agent isn't in love with your book, it's not really going to help you.

[01:08:46] [Bernadette] And when, like you said, everybody's kind of got a different opinion, I um, once you do sell, you will immediately need a Web site and you will need a Facebook presence. And, you know, to a certain degree, your writing has to come first. You don't want it to become, you know,

the time hole, which it really can be. But it takes a while. There's that learning curve of how to build a Web site because, you know, you can probably have to do it yourself because it's expensive to hire somebody. And so I think just dabbling in it, setting it up, make it look as good as it could, get used to understanding how it works, how to interact on Facebook that way, when you do sell, you've already you've got that down, you know how to do that because you're gonna be really busy editing when you finally sell and you're not going to have all that extra time to figure out, you know, how to use your Web site and to put information up there. And I have to say that just before I got published the year before, I've got this fabulous friend who always said, you know, think of this as an opportunity. And she told me about some book called *The Secret* or something like that, where you have to, you know, imagine yourself publish, you believe you're published, it's going to happen and then act on that. So. So I went home and I bought for like five bucks. Bernadettepajer.com . And I set about, you know, putting up a Web site just to tell myself I believed in myself and it worked. I don't know if I'd set it up. Well, 20 years ago, you know, there was no such thing as Web site. So I guess I couldn't have done it from the beginning. But yeah. So don't let it be a time suck, but get practice being a professional author and professional authors have Web sites.

[01:10:28] [Waverly] I guess what I would say, though, is I see a Web site as just your expanded resumé. And I think a publisher would go and check out what else you've done. I mean, I would Google, if I got a query letter and I was interested in the author, I'd go Google them and see how they showed up.

[01:10:43] [Judy] This gentleman over here, the question is, what do you do with all those manuscripts you put in the bottom of your drawer? My personal theory is that lots of people have a wonderful first book and I could name some names not in this room, but I can name some names. And then the second book just sucks. And I think it's one that's been sitting in the bottom drawer. And they hauled it out and they couldn't sell it the first time. And now they can, because I know that stuff in my drawer is just sitting there turning into compost. I mean, it is really not worth, I've learned so much more positively. I've learned so much more from going through that exercise that I don't see it for myself as a gold mine to be dug up. Other people may differ.

[01:11:24] [Charles] There's always a temptation. You spend so much time on that first novel and then it just sits there in a drawer. That's probably where it should be. And if you've written more and you've gotten better use, your taste should be better. And then you're going to look at that and say it was a learning experience. It's, it's never wasted, but it doesn't mean it needs to be published. I mean, I think we can all think of somebody who's a wildly successful publishing phenomenon and then they drag up all his or her juvenilia. And it's really kind of embarrassing sometimes

[01:11:55] [Judy] we are writers after all. Yes, sir. OK, let me repeat the question. We've all read books that are just terrible. And you've wondered how in the world they got published when you've seen manuscripts that are so good and what can we do to make this process more fair? How can we really grab an agent's attention? Mike, you're laughing. So you get to answer.


[01:12:15] [Mike] I guess I'm laughing a little bit. First of all, I was, there's something I should've mentioned earlier with agencies that you do have an opportunity today that I didn't have. And that's a these conferences. I've got so-called agent fests. I don't know if you're aware of that, like just PNW conference is starting this week. The writers sign up to have, you know, essentially a speed dating with agents where you go in there and you make your your pitch to an agent face to face. That's an opportunity I never had. But aside from that, I think you just need to realize that everybody is not going to have, you know, your

[01:12:48] Agent tastes are just not going to coincide. And the best thing you can do is write the best query letter you can write and probably the best, you know, first paragraph of your first chapter you can write. And the you throw it out there. It is not a matter of fairness. It's just a matter of some people like vanilla and some people like chocolate. There was an agent in California who represents Robert Byrd. She did represent Robert Ferrigno. She rejected my book for some reason three times and for the fourth time, for some reason, the same time I found my current agent, she came back and said, "Oh, I love this. Send it to me." Now, I don't have a clue as to why that was all of a sudden that caught her attention and why the three times before, it didn't. So I don't thing it's a fairness thing. I mean, you know what you may call a bad book. And I think I've read bad books to somebody else. Obviously just loves that book. So you just can't go that route. I think all you can do is write what you write and throw it out there, because what you are really looking for is this perfect meeting of you, an agent, and a publisher, is just the you know, the planets to be in sync. And it's not going to happen very often.

[01:13:50] [Bernadette] And I want to add to that. Don't give up. Yeah. Keep writing. Keep filling that drawer, because that's your foundation of craft. All you can control is how good you write and if you don't give up your writing.

[01:14:03] I kept telling myself, I'm gonna write a book so good, they can't say no. And eventually I got there. So you just don't ever give up. And I know a lot of people who have a lot more talent than I do, but they they're not sending stuff out. They're not completing books. So um, the more books you write, you're ahead of the game. You know, like Mike was saying, like agents are getting twelve hundred editors. Twelve hundred submissions a week. Right. Eleven hundred and fifty of those are not readable because these people sent them out before they're ready. So if you have polished your manuscript and you been working on your craft for a few years, you're ahead of that game. You're in the in the top 50. You know, if it's like your sixth manuscript because you've been at it a long time, you haven't given up, then you're in the top 10, you know. So the more you do yourself to improve your craft and you don't ever give up, it will happen. You will find success.

[01:15:00] [Judy] The lady in black, please. [Leslie] OK. The question is, do we see any trends in publishing? You're always going to see trends in publishing based on what's being published right now. The key to judging a trend and this is why you can't ever do it, is you don't know what was bought a year ago. Although there is a little bit of a way to find that out. And it's through publishers, publishers, marketplace publishers lunch. Okay. Publishers Lunch is a newsletter that comes from Publishers Marketplace. So if you if you see, News of sales, you can see what is catching the attention of agents and editors right now. But you probably can't catch that wave unless you happen



to have a manuscript a lot like that in your drawer. And I always think when I hear that phrase, “the manuscripts in your drawer”, I don't have any drawers in my house that are big enough for all these manuscripts. I've got a closet. Don't open the closet. You don't know what might fall out. I think that is you really can't catch a trend when you think of something like the vampires or the werewolves, for example, the dystopian literature that's so popular with young adults. I have been hearing that publishers aren't buying it now because it's it's kind of overdone. And yet I know somebody who just sold one. So there's always going to be exceptions. Right.

[01:16:25] [Judy] I've been asked to shut us down. I'm sorry about that. We could sit here and talk all night. You have been a fabulous, fabulous audience besides our books that are going to be out there for signing. Here's some lettuce seeds there, their heirloom organic lettuces. And you can plant them now and you'll have lettus through October. So pick them up at the signing. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you so much.

[01:16:56] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

