



Library podcast

The Business of Books: How To Start A Book-Related Business: Session 1

Stesha Brandon (00:00:01):

Welcome everybody. Thanks for being here. Maybe I'll use a microphone just in case. Hi. That's not too terrible, right? That doesn't take us out of the space too much. Hi everybody, I'm Stesha Brandon. I'm the Literature and Humanities program manager at the library. And as we begin tonight, I wanted to take a minute to acknowledge that we are on indigenous land here in Seattle. These are the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish people, specifically the Duwamish people. We honor their elders past and present, and thank them for their stewardship of the land. Welcome to tonight's program, The Business of Books, which is an entrepreneurship workshop for BIPOC literary entrepreneurs. Welcome. Hi. Hi. And we are so grateful to all of the program partners who helped us plan this series the African American Writers Alliance, Business Impact Northwest, Hugo House, the Indigenous Peoples Institute at Seattle University, Langston Seattle, Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association, Seattle City of Literature, Seattle Credit Union, Seattle Office of Economic Development, and Seattle Urban Book Expo.

(00:01:17):

We're also grateful to our sponsors, The Seattle Public Library Foundation, the Gary and Connie Kunis Foundation, the Seattle Times, and For Culture. So, tonight is going to be kind of casual, but I thought I'd just give us a quick overview of what to expect. First, we're going to have a presentation from Gary Luke, or a conversation with Gary Luke called The Life of a Book. And Gary is a long time publisher and is going to kind of set the stage for us, explaining how the publishing industry works.

(00:01:47):

And then we'll have a short break time to get more snacks. And then we will have an informal panel on the things that we wish we knew when we were getting started. And that is something that we're going to invite the panel to share, but I also want to draw on the shared wisdom of the group here because I think we all have a lot of wisdom that we can share with one another. So, I'm putting you on notice now that we'll be inviting you to share some things that you wish you knew when you were getting started on the project that brought you here tonight. And actually, let's just take a quick minute. So, how many folks have started some sort of entrepreneurship project in the literary sector? Okay. Okay, we got some folks. And then how many people are lit-curious?

(00:02:37):

Excellent. That's good. So, it's almost kind of equally split. Maybe a few lit-curious folks more, but that's great. So, I do want to encourage folks, there'll be plenty of time for questions. The panelists here are all so amazing and lovely and so want to help answer your questions. And so, don't be shy about sharing those questions with us throughout the course of the evening. Oh, and feel free to get up to take bio-breaks at any time. I believe the restrooms are through the door and into the lobby. Food is allowed in this room and then in the lobby, but not in the library proper, if that makes sense. So, I think without further ado, I'm going to welcome Gary Luke. First, I'm going to read you the long list of his accomplishments and credentials. How do you feel about that, Gary?

Gary Luke (00:03:27):
You don't have to.

Stesha Brandon (00:03:28):
You don't have to. Well, we'll just give them some context. How does that sound? Okay. So Gary Luke has held editorial and executive positions in the book publishing industry for over four decades. And he recently retired as publisher at Sasquatch Books in Seattle. And he's worked as an editor of both fiction and nonfiction books for a lot of the fancy publishers in New York. Big publishers, Dell Doubleday, Penguin USA, Simon Schuster. And he also is currently the... Are you the board president? Vice President at Richard Hugo House, or now it's just called Hugo House. Sorry, I'm showing my age. And then a past board member over at Arvest Trust. So, Gary, please tell us about The Life of a Book.

Gary Luke (00:04:15):
So, do you think that the microphone could be lowered so I can sit in the chair?

Stesha Brandon (00:04:20):
Yes.

Gary Luke (00:04:20):
Because I don't think I can stand, hold my things, and hold the...

Stesha Brandon (00:04:28):
You bet.

Gary Luke (00:04:28):
I know it's taped down. [inaudible 00:04:28] I can move my chair.

Stesha Brandon (00:04:28):
Well...

Gary Luke (00:04:33):
I breathe too much of my own carbon dioxide or monoxide. Okay, so let's see. That handout that you picked up when you walked in, that was something that I created to give to new authors to give them

a sense of, "This is what you're in for." And I've given versions of this talk at [inaudible 00:05:02] conferences and things like that. Okay. First of all, publishing is just about the slowest form of communication left. It takes two or more years to write and publish a book. So, if you're an author and you're contemplating a book project, make certain that it really holds your interest because it's going to be in your life for a really long time. So, for the purposes of this presentation, I'm going to talk about how a non-fiction book works its way through the process. Works of fiction are sold to publishers in basically completed form. Non-fiction books are sold generally based on a book proposal. I've tried to categorize the many steps of creating a book and taking it to market under three major activities. So, there's just thinking and writing, and then there's editing and book making, and then there's selling. And all of these three categories of activity... Sometimes they happen one at a time and sometimes they're just a jumble and they're just all happening at once. So, we'll start with the thinking and writing heading. It starts with an idea that refuses to fall out of an author's head. The author, I think, realizes that this is something that's bigger than a post; longer, more complicated than an article, maybe even deeper than a podcast.

(00:07:02):

So, a lot of research is required to figure out what belongs in the book and more importantly, what doesn't belong in the book. So, over much research and rumination, that can take a couple of months, couple of years, a decade, these things emerge. They kind of take their own time, but eventually an organizational skeleton will emerge and that can be put down a paper and that forms the basis of a book proposal. There are a lot of resources online that can describe what a book proposal is. We have a literary agent in the room. I'm sure she can give you advice as well.

(00:07:55):

Let's see. So, okay, now we're in the selling... The selling categories is up, and the author needs to pitch the book to either a literary agent or directly to an editor. Now, getting a literary agent can be a daunting task, that's where writers' conferences come in, or you can meet some... Talk to other writers who have literary agents and they can introduce you to theirs. One other trick is to find a book that you admire that maybe is in the topic zone of what you want to write about, and look in the acknowledgements page. And where generous authors thank their agents, sometimes their editors. And so that can give you a clue that, "Oh, here's an agent who likes this kind of work. I think my work is an ally of that."

(00:08:58):

Let's see. So, I'm going to assume that there is a literary agent involved and the selling continues. In this case, the agent pitching the book to editors at publishing houses. Then the editor who reads the proposal and falls in love with the book, will pitch the project to an editorial board. And if the stars align and the profit and loss, P and L, works, the editor... It will be given permission to make an offer to the agent. And along the way, of course, the editor has to sell himself to the author and the agent that he is the best person to shepherd this book through publication.

(00:09:53):

So, now we have, everybody is happy and a book contract is issued and the author will get some money on it. I just want to make a note on the publishing contract. So, the whole book business rests on contracts between authors and publishers. And this is the binding agreement where the author promises to deliver a manuscript of a certain length by a certain date, and they promise that this manuscript will not have any plagiarized or lightless content. And then further, the author is saying, "I own this copyright to publish this book and I'm going to loan this to the publisher to manage the book publishing copyright for as long as the book is in print." Once the book is out of print, the contract is void, those rights go back to the author. And in fact, the author owns them all the time.

(00:10:57):

There's never an ownership transfer of that copyright. And so, in that contract, the publisher promises to pay the author a set amount of money as an advance with an opportunity to earn more money based on as a percentage of book sales going forward. And the publisher agrees to pay for the editing, the production, the Xerox machine, printing, warehousing, selling the book, and keeping track of every sale. And they report those sales back to the author, or to the agent who shares it with the author. There's other stuff in the contract, I don't know what it means, but it's all in there. I will say, I don't know why it takes so long to get a publishing contract done, but it does.

(00:11:53):

Okay, now we're back to the thinking and writing phase of things. The author generally has 18 months to a year, sometime longer to deliver that manuscript. Some take much longer because there's more involved, there's a lot of reporting and research to get done and some can be very quick. But regardless, now is the time for the author to get busy, to get organized and to be disciplined throughout the writing period. There can be multiple meetings, phone calls, lunch dates with the editor. And it's not uncommon for... There's a deadline out there in the contract, 18 months, two years, whatever. But there can be delivery of chapters on kind of a rolling schedule.

(00:12:49):

So, now we're back to the selling part again. The book is assigned a publication year and the season, usually the seasons are divided into spring season and fall season. And the book, actually, it's not always at this point, but eventually it will receive a specific day of a month when that's the pub date, that's the On Sam date. And there's high level of specificity built into that day because a lot of things sort of depend on it. And let's see. So, the editor now is attending a launch meeting for that season and is presenting the book to a wider group of people from the company. Those are sales managers, marketing and publicity people, designers, production people. And in that meeting, the editor's goal is to whip up enough excitement and enthusiasm for the book so that the company will commit a sufficient amount of resources to publish the book to make it great.

(00:14:12):

And note that, at this point, the manuscript is not done yet by any means. The only reading material is probably the proposal. Maybe the proposal came with one chapter and the editor has created a document that is sort of a pitch sheet of book description that describes what the book is, who's going to read it, why it's great, why we aren't committed to this project, the publishing company.

(00:14:49):

So, a note on this publication day thing that it's a specific day on a calendar, usually a Tuesday. And when the books arrive at the bookstore, there's a label on it that says, "Do not sell this book until this day." Now, I was told, and I'm not sure this is true or not, that this whole, specific Tuesday on sale date came about in the time of Harry Potter. And because it was kind of a Wild West, books were always arriving at warehouses and bookstores and they were arriving at Amazon and Barnes and Noble and Safeway, and only the independent bookstores are following the rule that "Don't open this book until that date." And so Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Safeway had an unfair advantage, and so publishers started to really enforce that update.

(00:15:59):

So, Karen is nodding to me that that's true. Okay, I wasn't sure if someone's pulling my leg when they pulled that. So, now shortly after that launch meeting, believe it or not, work on the cover begins. Book's not even done, it's just a glimmer in the author's eye, but people start talking about, "What should this cover be?" "Who do we want to attract with this book?" "What are the analogs that are out in the stores?" Sort of the cousins of this book. And then a designer gets to work and can produce three to 10 to 25 different versions... Propose, "This is what I think this book could look like," around the meetings that happen. And it eventually gets windowed down to maybe two or three options that get developed more seriously. And in all of this, the author is generally not involved. When it gets to that final or just about the final version of the cover, then the editor will share it with the author.

(00:17:18):

I was told one, you don't have a design sense as an editor, and I think that was probably true. And that the cover is a sales tool, it's not an editorial thing. And so my philosophy as an editor was, "If I don't hate it, I'll let it go." If someone can convince me that this is a reasonable way to present this book, and I said book designers are great. They are key into design trends and sometimes I see a lot of covers that look kind of alike. There's some design motif is in the zeitgeist and it just, I don't know, start to see all these sort of novels that are aimed at mid-thirties women that have a similar...

(00:18:19):

So, now, I'm going to get back to the editing. Now the editing... Oh, back, sorry. We're [inaudible 00:18:27] getting to, so back to the thinking and writing. The author has now been working steadily and has been revising the book, sharing it with colleagues and with her writing group. The book has been worked on and self-edited multiple times because the author has been told, "Do not deliver the first draft to your fellowship because they will be upset with you." But now, the author has finally delivered, and the editing and book making part of the process, that was this one, begins. So, the authors delivered, a couple months late, it's okay. Thing looks like it's in pretty good shape. But here I want to say that a lot of books are delivered a little bit, sometimes a lot, past their contract due date, much to the chagrin of editors and publishers. And in one case, when I was at Simon & Schuster, there was this book, this manuscript, it was a decade late. And the editor, not me, was a powerful enough person that he could say to the business people, "Hang on, it's coming, don't worry about it." And eventually it came in and it was published and it was [inaudible 00:19:57] surprise.

Speaker 1 (00:19:56):
Oh wow.

Gary Luke (00:19:58):

So, it was worth the wait. So, this editor has received the manuscript and will read the manuscript and think about it and write an editorial letter that can address big structural matters of organization and tone and pace and length, and even get down to sort matters of word choice. Editorial letters that run on for 25 pages or more, it's not uncommon.

(00:20:34):

So, after a month or two, the author's back at work. Addressing the comments in the editorial letter. Now, as the editor, I always said to authors what I said to my son when we were having dinner, "Eat what you want and leave the rest." Ultimately it's the author's call as to what is contained in this book. But the editor is there to serve as the ideal reader of the book and to offer his or her take on that. So, that back and forth can happen multiple times, draft one, draft two, draft three. But ultimately, it has to end. And at some point the editor says, "This manuscript is complete and final." And those are important words because they're in the contract, and when the editor says complete and final, that triggers a payment to the audit. And that's always a great day when that happens.

(00:21:54):

So, still under the editing and book making, this manuscript enters the production process. And this is where the manuscript is copy edited and edited, I mean, designed, proofread, indexed. I really dislike a non-fiction book that does not contain an index. It's just very frustrating to deal with. And so the author gets to review all of these stages as they go through, takes three to six months, sometimes longer. Just a word about copy editing and proof reading. So, the acquiring editor, that person who made the pitch to the agent, who's been working with the author over these 18 months, that editor's job is to make sure that the book is the best version of itself that it can be. And in terms of content and structure, voice and payoff for the reader. Now, but copy editing is a little more granular and it is to make the book consistent in terms of language and apply some fact checking to it and to make sure the names are spelled properly and to really squeeze out every error in the state in the book. And proofreading, which happens after that, is the check to make sure that all of that copy editing has been incorporated into the manuscript properly, into the book properly. Because the proof reader's reading actual book pages. The copy editor also provides an impartial final read of the manuscript to make sure that this thing makes sense. The editor and author are close to it, maybe is too close to it at this point.

(00:24:04):

And I consider copy editors and proof readers to be really the angels of the publishing process because I think they're people who are born with an attention to detail. I, myself, have the attention span of a chipmunk, so I could never be a copy editor or a proof reader. So, now we are four, seven months out from the on sale date and selling. We're back to the selling category, it's underway. The author is called to have a meeting with marketing and publicity people to create a plan for generating as much interest in this book before it comes out and after it comes out. And this was always one of

my favorite meetings to attend because I think people bring so much creativity and energy and hopefulness, and frankly, I think they're just excited about the book. And it's just wonderful to see that after slogging your way through manuscript editing and the details of copying. And so, right around this time, a not yet final version of the book is pulled out from the computer and is sent off to make an advanced reading copy.

(00:25:42):

Sometimes they're called arcs and they used to be called barren galleys when there were galleys. Galleys is old term from the printing world. I myself, at Sasquatch, would take something... Take a file to Kinko's and make a really low-fi reading copy.

Gary Luke (00:26:01):

Reading copy. And so, publicity will send these out to advance review publications like Publishers Weekly, Kirkus Reviews, Library Journal. I would say The New York Times probably gets a copy at that point, The Atlantic, other publications that are still in print. And the editor gets a stack of them to send out to famous authors begging them for cover blurbs or blurbs that we put on the back of the dust jacket.

(00:26:39):

So, next up in the selling is the National Sales Conference. And this is where all of the regional sales reps from around the country are brought either to New York or... It used to be some fancy place like Puerto Rico, but I think that's all over with. And that's where the editors present the books to the reps. And then shortly thereafter, the sales reps go back to their territories and start calling on bookstores. And they're selling the book. They're actually selling the whole catalog, but your book is in there.

(00:27:25):

So, now back to the editing, book making part of it. The book files are finally ready. Design has completed them, and they're ready to go to the production manager and they're sent off to a printer. And that's a kind of an important moment because the book has left the publishing company. It can't be pulled back at that point. It can be, but you know what I mean. And so the publisher sets a print run based on some of these initial orders that have been coming in. Based on their own sense of enthusiasm. Based on the advanced blurbs that have come in. And then there's a healthy amount of wishful thinking that, "We have so much faith and hope in this book that we're going to print this many copies." So, books roll off the press and are sent to the warehouse where orders have been piling up ever since the sales conference. Yes?

Speaker 2 (00:28:36):

I'm just curious, at Sasquatch Books, about how books you can print in one run?

Stesha Brandon (00:28:42):

And, Gary, can you repeat for the audio recording?

Gary Luke (00:28:46):

Oh, how many books...

Speaker 2 (00:28:49):

In the first run.

Gary Luke (00:28:51):

In the first run? Well, basically I think the formula is that the publisher wants to print about the first three to four months' supply. So, if it is a tender first novel, that number might be 5,000 copies. If you're ripping the covers off some political scandal and a certain president is probably going to go to jail because of what's in this book, you're going to print a half a million or more. So, really it's a very case-dependent kind of number.

Speaker 3 (00:29:41):

Michelle Obama's book is coming out in November. How many do you think that run is? I can't remember the title, but it's...

Gary Luke (00:29:45):

2 million?

Speaker 4 (00:29:51):

I pulled it up at least that. There's a huge work tour planned and a large...

Gary Luke (00:30:02):

So, publishers have access to this thing called Book Scan and it's like the Nielson ratings of books. And about 80-90% of all cash register sales of books are recorded in this database. So, a publisher can look up "What have the last 10 Trump scandal books actually sold at cash registers, not printings." And they can kind of triangulate among all those numbers and figure out a print run. And the same with the delicate first novel or the science book about frogs or whatever.

Speaker 3 (00:30:52):

Thank you.

Stesha Brandon (00:30:52):

Gary, can I just say the library's deciding how many copies to order as well, to purchase as well?

Gary Luke (00:30:57):

Yes.

Stesha Brandon (00:30:58):

And often in reviews, pre-publication reviews, they will say the print run, like in Library journal. So to help get an idea of how popular it might be or is anticipated to be.

Gary Luke (00:31:20):

[inaudible 00:31:19] I will say about those numbers are aspirational. [inaudible 00:31:27]. So, let's see. We have the books rolling off the press, orders have been stacking up at the warehouse and now the editor gets to send the author and the agent a final, finished copy of the book. And that's always a very happy day. The author's proud, the spouse is proud, the parents are gratified, the cat is happy. And at that point the editing and book making part of the process is done. But now, they're kicking to the selling again, the on sale date is finally arrived, and the author goes into full selling mode with interviews that haven't been... Some schedules been booked in cooperation with the publicity department and the author, but there will be interviews, readings, lectures, blog interviews, social media, multi-city tour, if you're lucky enough to have that kind of support and justification. I'm sure there's some TikTok stuff happening, but I don't even know.

(00:32:59):

And this publicity effort around this book, the goal is to draw as much attention to the book in a relatively compact period of time; three months, four months, maybe. After that time, the publisher has to turn their attention to the next set of releases that are coming out. And so the author needs to be energetic and entrepreneurial and proactive to keep the events and readings happening and to be reaching out to new audiences and giving, I don't know, book talks, whatever's available.

(00:33:48):

The author who just sits back and waits for it to happen, it won't happen. So, now the Gods have smiled on this author and her book, the publisher will have sold enough copies to eek out a satisfactory profit and the author will have become a minor celebrity, and the advance from the initial contract will have burned out. And this author can receive a royalty check over and above that check that says first to the agent, of course the agent takes her commission and sends the rest to the author. And so, in our little fairytale here, the author is gratified by the experience and ready to get back to the thinking and writing part of things again for our next book.

Stesha Brandon (00:34:49):

Is that it.

Gary Luke (00:34:49):

That's it.

Stesha Brandon (00:34:49):

That's a good thing.

Gary Luke (00:34:49):

Yeah. I didn't want to go into the returns [inaudible 00:35:03].

Stesha Brandon (00:34:49):

No, we don't want to return those books. We want to buy them, right?

Gary Luke (00:34:49):

Yes.

Stesha Brandon (00:34:49):
Or send them to the library.

Gary Luke (00:34:49):
[inaudible 00:35:11] Pardon me?

Stesha Brandon (00:34:49):
Will you repeat?

Gary Luke (00:34:49):
Oh yes, yes.

Speaker 4 (00:34:49):
Are we doing Q and A now?

Gary Luke (00:34:49):
Yeah.

Speaker 2 (00:34:49):
I'm curious about indexing. Is that something that's manually or finished software to do that?

Gary Luke (00:35:25):
As far as I know, it's done manually, just the... I'm sure it eventually will become digitized, but the categorization process is, really works. Oh, this was a question about how does indexing happen? Whether it's done through machine programming or by a person. And in my experience, it's always been done by a person. People have tried digital and gets funky.

Speaker 2 (00:35:58):
How much time is usually devoted to that?

Gary Luke (00:36:02):
Three weeks.

Speaker 2 (00:36:05):
Thank you.

Gary Luke (00:36:07):
Yes.

Speaker 6 (00:36:07):

There are thousands of books that are published in here. What is the usual shelf life of a book at a bookstore?

Gary Luke (00:36:17):

So, of the thousands of books that are published a year, what is the usual lifespan of a book in a bookstore? Well, as I said, toward the end, there's all that marketing and publicity. The goal is to get the book established so that it becomes a core title on that topic and can live in the bookstore for years. That's the goal. I'm sure there are ephemeral books that come out with a burst of activity and then they're gone. The culture doesn't meet them anymore and they can go away. So, it's variable, but the goal is to establish the book, so it has a good, long life at the bookstore.

Stesha Brandon (00:37:15):

Gary, do you want to talk about going to paperback?

Gary Luke (00:37:18):

Oh, yeah. So, here's a hardcover book. So, if this book came out for one year... let's say it came out on January 2nd, a Tuesday and a year later, the paperback would come out. Sometimes it's nine months, but a year is pretty average. And if this hard cover costs \$28.95, the paperback will cost \$18, \$16 even. And so, that opens up a new audience for the book. And also, this cover is not very exciting, it gives the publisher a chance to put a sexy new cover on it, too.

(00:38:07):

Yes.

Speaker 4 (00:38:07):

A couple questions. One, who determines the final book title?

Gary Luke (00:38:17):

No, That's a pain point. Who decides the final book title? So, it is the book. The author and the agent submit the book with a title. Sometimes it's gold and it will never change. That's pretty rare in my experience. At that launch meeting where the editors presenting the book to salespeople, marketing people, designers, production people. Frequently, there is a marketing person who says, "Ah, I don't like that title. It's a downer." And it's like, "Ugh." So the editor has to go back and the author and the editor have to come up with alternatives. And same thing happens, if it's a non-fiction book, the subtitle is a whole other area of contention. But the goal is to make... The author has to be happy, the editor has to be happy, and salespeople have to believe that this title is a selling title.

Speaker 4 (00:39:30):

So, it does have to get the authors final approval?

Gary Luke (00:39:34):

Yes. Yeah. [inaudible 00:39:39].

Speaker 5 (00:39:40):

Okay. A lot of us know authors, or maybe it's because we know them, that after they publish, they kind of promote the hell out of themselves on social media. And will you say that that's the duty of the author or does it matter? They don't have to do it?

Gary Luke (00:40:09):

So, the question is, do I have this right? Is it required that the author promote the hell out of themselves on social media? Or maybe you said, heck?

(00:40:16):

It's not required, but I think that if you are an author being published in this period of time, that's a tool for you. I don't really do much on social media, but I don't have anything to sell. But if you want to reach out to people, get an audience, spread the word about your project, I think social media is necessary. When social media was just sort of getting underway, I was working with an author and we were encouraging him to post on Facebook. And he said, "What? You mean you want me to write stuff for free?" He was old and his book didn't sell that well. It was a great book, but he couldn't make that leap. And I love him, but he was left behind.

Speaker 7 (00:41:25):

Hi, Gary. I first met you when I was at [inaudible 00:41:31] we haven't... You look the same.

Gary Luke (00:41:30):

So do you.

Speaker 7 (00:41:30):

[inaudible 00:41:38] Can one self-publish and then pick up two, number three, approaching another agent.

Gary Luke (00:41:45):

Yes. Self-publishing is a way to get a book out there and if you... One, it what it shows entrepreneurial spirit, I think, to self-publish. And it can demonstrate to an ignorant publisher, "Hey, there's a market for this thing because this author, all on her own, has sold 2000 copies," and think what we could do with our machinery and if we put a better title on the book and a better cover or whatever.

Speaker 7 (00:42:27):

So, you can print a different title, and then we print with the new title?

Gary Luke (00:42:31):

Well, you have to say "Originally published as that," but sometimes it's not necessarily that you change the title. I was trying to make a joke, not a very good one.

(00:42:43):

You had more questions?

Speaker 4 (00:42:45):

Yeah and it was actually on the self-publishing. Kind of what are the pros and the cons. And you kind went over some pros, but what are some cons if you kind jumped the gun too soon and you decide to self- published. Is it where a publishing house will not look at your book? Or is there a point too far out [inaudible 00:43:10]

Gary Luke (00:43:10):

So, the question is about the pros and cons of self-publishing. So, one of the cons is, you're doing it by yourself. And the process I described, there are many, many characters and people involved in it. I think it takes a lot of the pressure off of you, and I think it's hard for one person to know all of that and to be able to control all of that. And you have to finance it. In the case, if you get published by a publisher, the publisher is paying for the ramp, the lights, the paperclips, the editor, editor's salary, the designers, et cetera. A publisher can see a self-published book and think, "Oh, well you know what? The author really got all the sales from it already. There's not really much left for us." So, that just kind of depends on the book.

Stesha Brandon (00:44:23):

Any other questions?

Speaker 8 (00:44:26):

I have a question. Does the same record keeping process that happens in cash or Strata, Barnes and Noble [inaudible 00:44:35] happen at used bookstores as well? Do they have copies?

Gary Luke (00:44:38):

Oh, no. Used bookstores are not part of the book scan. So the question is on book scan, which is that record database of book sales are sales at use bookstores counted? And the answer is no. It's new books only. It would be interesting to know what sales are at used bookstores. I've often been curious.

Speaker 8 (00:45:09):

So, that's just completely off the grid, then.

Gary Luke (00:45:15):

Yeah.

Speaker 8 (00:45:15):

Interesting.

Gary Luke (00:45:15):

Right? Yes. In that.

Speaker 9 (00:45:20):

I'm curious to know how the scenario, if a book is published by a very small press without the kind of machinery that you talked about with many, many different actors and lots of press and publicity, is it possible for that book to then be taken on by a publisher that has a bit more machinery behind it?

Gary Luke (00:45:40):

Yes, absolutely. That has happened. And some of those books have gone on to become insanely huge best sellers.

Speaker 9 (00:45:48):

How does that process happen? Can you outline it a little bit, please?

Gary Luke (00:45:52):

I'd say usually the small publisher publishes the book. It starts to get attention reviews and a modest amount of... It starts to see sales, and either the small publisher will realize, "We just don't have the resources to realize the potential that this book has." And they can offer it. They can reach out to the big four publishers to say, "We have this little gem, we're willing to sell it to you."

(00:46:27):

Or it can be, maybe it's slightly mercenary. An editor at a big company can look around and see what's being published by independent process. See it, recognize a gem, and approach that little publisher and say, "Hey, you know what, you can't realize the potential of that book. I don't know if you know it, but I can give you pile of cash to take it off your hands and we will publish it better."

Stesha Brandon (00:46:58):

Any other questions before we take a little break? One more?

Speaker 4 (00:47:04):

Yes. Sorry, I just didn't one call out. But so it seems like when it comes to getting a publisher that it's the big name, people who are already famous or who already have some traction behind their name and sometimes the peoples whose name is not known as well kind of gets in there. How does someone, who does not have all that behind or name, how do they get...

Gary Luke (00:47:41):

So the question is, is the world is dominated by big name people, they take up more space than they deserve. How does a normal person get noticed and how do you convince a publish company to take a chance? A literary agent has a certain amount of power and they can say, "I have this client who has this project. You've never heard of them, but I believe in them. And I'm telling you, because I have sold you 50 other books over the past two decades, that this one is real, so take a look at it and take it seriously." So, the literary agent opens doors and it gives an unknown author a kind of legitimacy. The other thing is, great writing stands out, great ideas stand out. And so editors at publishing houses don't want to reject books. They want to find something new and something great. So, there's great incentive for them. They're hunters.

Speaker 10 (00:49:09):

What is the best resource or what, who might you refer? Is there a particular book or website or if somebody's looking for how to write a book proposal, is there some go-to resource that you always recommend? If somebody says, "I want to write a book proposal," where do you point them to? What's your favorite?

Gary Luke (00:49:34):

Well, I had written up how to write a book proposal document that I gave out at writer's conferences. And if someone came to me and said, "I have this crazy idea and I'm not sure what to do with it." And so I had created my own, but I'm not really up on what the current resources are. There used to be a book of How To Get Happily Published and I don't know if that's even still in print. There's probably a dummies guide.

Speaker 10 (00:50:05):

Yeah. The best places I've seen, just randomly when I search on Google, I often find that there's good outlines for that process. But I just wondered if there was a go to resource that you would recommend.

Gary Luke (00:50:24):

I think maybe because I didn't... Can I go back to the question, what's the gold standard resource for how to write a book proposal? That was the question. And maybe because I wasn't finding what I had, I wrote my own.

Stesha Brandon (00:50:43):

All right, I'll chime in, just I know that there... So we, here in Seattle, have something called the Northwest Independent Editors Guild, and there are editors there that are freelance. You can hire them to work with you on your project before you even get an agent or do any of the other steps. The easy 59 steps that Gary outlines. And there are several that actually will do consultations on how to write a book proposal. Now that costs money, of course, so it may not be open to everybody, but maybe I'll do a little research between now and the October 8th session and see if we can find a little book list that we can pull together. Because I think that's a great question.

Gary Luke (00:51:28):

I think that Hugo House periodically has classes on that. So, watch the catalog.

Stesha Brandon (00:51:36):

Maybe we'll get a letter sent [inaudible 00:51:41] So, are there any questions before we take a little break, a little stretch break and all that? No. All right. Well, let's get Gary around applause. Thank you, Gary. What I was struck by, when Gary was talking, was just that in every step of that process, those are jobs, right? The...

Stesha Brandon (00:52:03):

... that in every step of that process, those are jobs that people do. And before I got into this industry, I never knew that that was a job. So, depending on where your project or entrepreneurial project is at, you can learn a lot by getting any one of those jobs. Right?

(00:52:19):

The other thing I wanted to mention is that some folks that are in on the second part of tonight's firm event are... We have a representative from a small publisher, a smaller scale publisher, and we also have somebody who has self-published several books, and as well as founded the Urban Book Expo. So Urban Book Expo. So, for folks that are really interested in self-publishing, we've got some folks, somebody that's an expert in that. And then we also have a small press expert. So, very, very soon. Thank you for your time, sir.

Gary Luke (00:52:50):

Thank you for having me.

Stesha Brandon (00:52:55):

All right. Hi everybody. Hello. Are we on? Hello. Okay. So that was great, right? We learned so much about the industry, and now we are going to talk with some folks that are going to share the things that they wish that they knew when they were getting started. So, I'm going to get my bios ready, but I'm also going to invite our analysts to join me up here. I'm not going to call them to stage. We're just hanging out, very cas. Okay, we've invited these folks to share three things that they wish that they knew when they were getting started. And I would also invite all of you now to take a minute to maybe think of one thing that you wish you had known when you were either getting started on the project that you're here about tonight, or maybe something else that you're working on or feel good about in your life and that you'd be willing to share with the group. And so we'll have a little time for that sharing, maybe during a more interactive moment after our panelist chat.

(00:54:12):

I also just wanted to mention there's going to be a closing announcement at 7:30, it'll be over the loudspeakers, don't freak out at all, it'll be fine. Always a little like, "Oh, what's happening."

(00:54:25):

So here to your far right is Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II, who is an award-winning children's book author and the creator of Seattle Urban Book Expo, an organization that produces ... provides promotional and writing services for aspiring self-published authors of color. And there, Jeff, you had your, was it fourth?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:54:47):

Fifth.

Stesha Brandon (00:54:47):

Fifth.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:54:47):
Fifth, yes.

Stesha Brandon (00:54:50):
Fifth Urban Book Expo this summer.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:54:52):
Yeah.

Stesha Brandon (00:54:53):
And it just keeps growing. It's amazing.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:54:54):
Thank you.

Stesha Brandon (00:54:55):
Yeah. And how many books now that you've published?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:54:58):
Five. Five children's books and one comic book.

Speaker 11 (00:54:59):
That's amazing.

Stesha Brandon (00:55:05):
So Jeff is going to share some things in just a minute that he wished he knew.

(00:55:09):
Karen Maeda Allman recently retired from Elliot Bay Book Company after 23 years of service. Yes, our full name Karen. And she has served on juries and award panels for Hedgebrook, the Washington State Book Awards, the NEA Big Read Book Review Committee, and the NEA Literary Translation Fellowships. Oh my gosh, this is small. The Kiriya Prize and the 2016 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. I don't see the National Book Award on there. National Award. She was on the jury for the National Book Award two years ago?

Karen Maeda Allman (00:55:53):
Three years.

Stesha Brandon (00:55:56):
Three. Three years ago, as well. She's very fancy.

(00:55:59):

Karen has worked in bookstore since 1989 and in 2017 won a Seattle Arts and Lectures proud of Literary Champions Award. So we love her. And if it happens in a bookstore, Karen knows about it.

(00:56:12):

And now we have Christina Vega, who is a queer Chicana poet from Mexico. They're a publisher at Blue Cactus Press and serve on the board of directors of the Pacific Northwest Book Sellers Association. And they self-published their debut poetry collection, still clutching maps in 2017. And I'm going to go ahead and read this last part of your bio, if that's okay. It's the statement of Christina believes that we have the power to reshape our communities with principles of emergent strategy, transformative justice, and collective laboring of love. They believe revolution starts at home. I love that. So let's give our panelists a big welcome, and now I'm going to sit down so ... it's not weird, me standing up. So who wants to go first? And again, this is kind of informal, but ...

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:57:08):

I'll go.

Stesha Brandon (00:57:08):

You'll go? [inaudible 00:57:14]

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:57:16):

So the three things I wish I knew before. [inaudible 00:57:19] about this?

Stesha Brandon (00:57:20):

No, use the mic for the recording.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (00:57:21):

Oh, recording. Oh, okay. Sorry. The three things I wish I'd do before I got started, I'll go with self-publishing and with the events. First, with self-publishing. I wish I would've knew how many jobs I was asked myself to take before I started self-publishing. Because self-publishing, is the dream. Like, "Oh, I get to publish my own book, it's going to be great. I don't have to worry about publishers. I can do all myself." And you realize, Oh man, I'm doing it all myself. Yeah, you have to be... Not only are you the writer, you're the marketing team, you're the publicist, you're the head hunter, you got to look at buying all the resources you need. You're the legal department. So I wish I'd knew that beforehand. I've learned as I grew, cause I started in 2014, so I've been learning as I grow. So now I'm almost capable of all those jobs, but I still need all the help that I can get. I'm never going to be too prideful to ask for help. So that's one thing I wish I knew.

(00:58:29):

As far as the Seattle Book Expo, which is our BIPOC book fair that we had every single year. The one thing I wish I knew before I started doing that was how many people I had to talk to every single year. So I knew what languages to use, what people need. Cause each year we have an average about 30 authors every single year. And also we're talking to 10 to 15 different sponsors. So I'm literally, every single year or every summer, I'm talking to 45 to 50 people to coordinate ... coordinating, to make

sure that the expos isn't successful and everybody gets what they're looking for. The book vendors and also the community leaders in the businesses that are working with us. So wish I knew that beforehand. Wish I knew what kind of paperwork I needed beforehand. So the good thing, I'm not in trouble yet.

(00:59:26):

But the third thing that I wish I knew is regarding the creative aspect. When you're a book, you want to get out there, you just want to make it work, make it work. But at the end of the day, you have to listen to your artist's spirit and make sure that you do it correctly. And the one thing I love about self-publishing, you don't have a deadline. I mean, some publishers, you do have a deadline to meet before they can release your book, the runs. But when you're self-publishing a book yourself, you can take your time to make sure you do it correctly. So that way you can present yourself to the world the best way you can. And I wish I'd have ... I wish I was more patient with myself in the beginning. Cause now look at some of my older books and I was like, Dang, I could do that a lot better if I just took my time, actually did multiple edits of my work I'd be much more satisfied with what I got. So just being patient, just being patient with myself. So those are the three things.

Stesha Brandon (01:00:38):

I love it. I love the being patient too. And also, I love your hoodie, which says, be kind, read books.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:00:42):

I support and live it.

Stesha Brandon (01:00:46):

Karen, do you want to share some things?

Karen Maeda Allman (01:00:49):

So first of all, I didn't realize that being a book seller was a career when he started out, I was a nurse, I was working in nursing education. I was not really happy for a variety of reasons. And I thought, well, I can meet some people. I can be in a friendly space, which my department and my profession was not at the time. And I'll be around books and isn't that fun? And what I found out was that there are a lot of opportunities. You can work in book selling for a little while. You can work in book selling for a long time. Some people come in right after high school or college. Some people come in like me. I was 30 ...probably 32 or so. Some people come in even later. And there's such a variety of things that you can do, a variety of stores that you can work in.

(01:01:43):

I worked at a bookstore collective, owner operated feminist bookstore on Capitol Hill for 10 years. It was a multiracial, queer friendly feminist space and it was a really great experience. And I also worked at a large general independent, which is Elliot Bay. And I worked for many years on author events. And I never dreamt that I would travel to Sri Lanka to help judge a literary prize, for example. Or last year was on the kurpish [foreign language 01:02:18] prize. And so if you look on bookstore websites and Amazon websites, you'll see kurpish [foreign language 01:02:24] reviews. They're

known for being very picky. And so there's reviewed books are eligible for a \$50,000 prize. There's a children's one, an adult one, and adult fiction and nonfiction. They also have resources for self-published authors. So there's just so many things that you can do and so many things that you can learn. It's hard, it's not high paying, but it's a really fulfilling, really fulfilling career. And I think there's efforts now to make it pay a little bit better. The second thing is, like most people, I did not understand that publishing and writing and book selling, a lot of our labor is invisible. And you just got a flyer here that shows you a lot, step by step, a lot of that invisible labor that's done by people that you'll never see. So if you see that book on Peek Picks or in the library, or maybe you saw a book on the Daily Show, it's because there's a whole chain of people building relationships with media, with librarians, et cetera to try to get your book noticed. That doesn't mean that the book is going to make it, but it is an opportunity for that book to be seen and to have a chance.

(01:03:49):

And as Author Events Coordinator at Elliot Bay, we were approached many, many times by self-published authors. We did present some, we still do. They still do. And people would ask me, "What should I do? I have this book." And what I learned, and I didn't know this, but I eventually learned to say.... Look on yourself, find some self-published books. If there's none there, then go look for them. Find somebody who's doing it well and learn from them. And you were one of the people I thought, you're really doing it well. And I have to say that one of my favorite parts of the store is the self-published zines part of the store. And if you've never seen that, go into Elliot Bay sometime and look at it. And that's how many people get started, self-published, little stapled zines. And some people that's what they do. And other people will take it a step further.

(01:04:53):

And then finally, well this is a hard one and it's my observation that interest in certain types of books is cyclical. And I was around for the big interest in books by BIPOC people, Asian American black Native American people in the nineties. And that went away. And it was shocking to me that it went away. And so when we had another ... we're in another little boom right now, but could very easily go away, also. However, in this case, we have some more agents, some more editors, some more people working in media and on prizes that really care about our writing and really, really are working to promote it.

(01:05:49):

It's really important that we buy those books. If you have a favor author, if you buy it from the used bookstore, that's great. The author is not getting any money at all from that. So try when you have money to spend to really use that to support your favorite authors or, and or, check their books out from the library. If these books are being picked for Peek Pics and nobody cares, they're not going to get picked for Peek Picks next time. So really find those books and support them. Don't assume that they're always going to be there. So I have to say I have hope, but also I have a little bit of ... I have a feeling that nineties boom, that was not the first boom. But I'm really excited by the number of the types of books that we're seeing now that I never saw 10 years ago, five years ago. That we had a national book award finalist by a black gay writer that really was, this is called, the book is called *The Prophets* by Robert Jones, Jr. You might know him if you're a social media person as son Baldwin.

He was anonymous for a long time. At 50. He published that book. It's amazing book, but it really centers love between two gay black men during the time of slavery.

(01:07:13):

That book was published by a very commercial publisher and a very dedicated but very commercially oriented editor who's who Korean American. And it's sold like gangbusters and I couldn't be happier. But we have to support Robert Jones Jr. And the next people and all of you. So we could have those books.

Stesha Brandon (01:07:40):

Thank you. Christina.

Christina Vega (01:07:43):

Hi. I really just want to second what you just said because I very much agree with it, and I am also very scared that this wave of interest in authors from historically marginalized places and groups is going to wane. And as a small publisher, one of the best things that you can do for an author at that scale, at a smaller micro press scale is to ask for that book at the library. Because that ensures that the book is going to get bought in, that it will get read and that it will remain in your community. So by all means, please, if you have the ability, just request your favorite books from the library, even if you've already read it. Just in case. Make sure it's there. Okay, thanks.

(01:08:43):

Three things that I wish I had known before I started is really three pieces of advice I should have taken. Cause I don't think anything I'm saying is new. And one of them you just spoke on, you spoke about already. Patience.

(01:09:01):

I'm using different words, but I would say something you should make sure you do. Something I wish I had done was to take my time. Take way more time because to do whatever it is you're doing, whether you're writing or publishing or editing or starting a business because you need all of that time to make mistakes while you're small and nimble. Because if you throw too mon too much money or too much energy into something at the get go, you won't have time. You won't be able to pivot to kind of pick yourself up. But if you're just writing your first book and you make mistakes, you can republish a second edition. You know? Or if you're as well as a publisher, you can make another addition. There's all sorts of ways.

(01:09:51):

If another pandemic happens, you can survive as a business by staying small and nimble rather than having thrown all your money and resources and time and energy and clout in the community. If you're going to Kickstarter a book sort, which is a great idea, by the way, do that. You're probably only going to get one shot to do that in your community. So just make sure you're ready for that and just take your time. I've only been publishing for five years. That's like I'm a toddler in the book selling industry, and I needed all five of those years to make some big mistakes that I was able to come back

from because I was so small. Another thing that I would say is a piece of advice that I didn't realize at the time is that you don't want to be a generalist. You might think that you want to cast your net wide and far to pull in as many people as you possibly can, but you need to actually cast a very narrow specific niche net to pull in the right people. Whether that's a creative team you're building on a business around your book or with the content of your book. Get in there, get niche, get specialized, because we don't need generalists. And I think when you get clear on your vision, you'll realize just keep honing it and honing it, and in the book gauge you really shine. And I think that's very true for publishing as well as writing, especially if you're trying to grow a publishing business. One of the big keys to growing is having sales and distribution, and when you're looking for a distributor, it's kind of like matchmaking. For a long time you're looking and you're looking and nobody wants to date you and you're like, "Come on, I look good, I sell good, I talk good."

(01:12:02):

And they're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. What are you doing though?" And if you don't have a really clear vision and a very specific sort of niche of content or ideas of what you want to be doing, they're going to say, come back later. Because they can't sell you until you can sell yourself, and publishing and book selling and writing they're... whether or not we want it to be there, that aspect of selling is there and is very important. So just get as specialized, get as deep, just like Adrian Marie Brown says, "Don't go wide. Go deep." Go deep.

(01:12:44):

The third thing I would say, and I think this one is the one that makes me most excited because in my heart I'm still a poet more than anything else, and it's that ... I think that sometimes ... Well, the short version is I think your perspective, your unique, individual, distinct perspective is your superpower in the writing industry and the book selling industry. And the longer winded version of that is that I think especially for me, I grew up really poor in a very rural place. And so I learned really early on that the way to succeed in the world, or one of the ways to succeed and to kind of push forward was to pretend I knew what was going on and pretend that I had the skills or the money or the appearance or any of the other things that people in the room with power had.

(01:13:45):

And so what that led to was me sort of pretending like I knew what I was doing in business, in publishing, and in front of people. You know, nobody wants to look, they don't know what they're doing. But what happened I think was that I sort of lengthened the amount of time it took for me to recognize the power of my own perspective and for other people to recognize what I was really getting at. And so I think that often the things, I use that as an example of something that I was ashamed of, I think. But it's that thing, It's that shame around poverty, that lived experience of poverty that helps me connect the most with young people right now.

(01:14:32):

And that is what they remember when I go talk to them in classrooms or give them books. And that's what they're going to remember in a couple of years. That one person. They're not going to know my

name, they're not going to know anything I said, but they're going to remember I was kind to them and that I was poor like them.

(01:14:48):

And so the poverty, there are so many things that society tells us we should be ashamed about. Poverty. Skin color. Class. Education status. Where we live. So many things. And so we hide them, but those are the things that give us such a unique lived experience that when we are writing stories that's going to give you that beautiful polish, that detail, that depth in the end.

(01:15:18):

If you're selling books, that's going to help you relate to people. If you're publishing, that's your perspective is what's going to make you different from the other publishing houses. And so I just encourage you to look inward and consider how those things that you might have felt held you back in life, how you could flip that narrative and take charge of that story again and ask yourself, "How can I use that? What did I learn from that? And how can I of apply that as my superpower?"

Stesha Brandon (01:15:54):

Oh my God, let's just give that. I love that. Thank you all. Those are really interesting and different things that you were all sharing. I have a question before we take some opportunity to share wisdom with the group. Would any of you do anything differently? If you knew then, what now? Would your path be different? Would it be ...

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:16:36):

The only thing I would've done differently was I would've traveled more, visited different cities, different countries with my books. Cause the one trip that changed my life and I've told you the story plenty of times was my trip to Toronto, Canada for the Toronto Urban Book Expo, and that's where I got inspiration to do the Seattle Urban Book Expo. With their permission, of course. So they know I got similar names. So I wish I would have done that more, not just for selling my book but just gaining knowledge and gaining different perspectives of publishing from visiting different places. So that's the only thing I would've done differently was I traveled more.

Stesha Brandon (01:17:13):

Karen appreciates the [inaudible 01:17:19]

Karen Maeda Allman (01:17:23):

And this goes ... I got a distributor two years in and I was still way too small for that. And so if I could go back, I would definitely not have done that because it will just really shoot you in the foot if you're not ready for it. Yeah. So I would've gone back and taken some advice from that.

Stesha Brandon (01:17:47):

Can you say more? Shoot you in the foot because you can't ...

Karen Maeda Allman (01:17:49):

Sure.

Stesha Brandon (01:17:50):

You can't supply the books they want or ...

Karen Maeda Allman (01:17:53):

It wasn't that I couldn't supply the books that they wanted. The problem was that it wasn't profitable. I hadn't built my business model on B to B.

Christina Vega (01:18:03):

I hadn't built my business model on B2B sales instead of, I hadn't built it on business to business sales. I had built it on business to customer sales. And in the book selling industry, it's very standard that no matter whether you're consigning your book at a bookstore, or have a distributor or a wholesaler, they take usually 40 to 55% of the cover price of your book. And so if your business model isn't built to sell your finished product at 50% or less with a profit, you will just lose money. And so I was just sending money and materials out into the world before I had the systems in place to make that money back.

Stesha Brandon (01:18:49):

Thank you. Thank you for expanding on that. So do folks, we have a few minutes. Oh, Karen, do you have one?

Karen Maeda Allman (01:18:55):

I think I would've started younger and taken it more seriously. Seriously. As a career.

Stesha Brandon (01:19:02):

You were a punk rocker.

Karen Maeda Allman (01:19:03):

Yeah. No, no. I had left all that behind and I was going to be a nurse. I was going to be a nurse educator, so I wish I had not hung on to that as long as I did. I think it was time way earlier to kind of switch over and get really excited about this new career. And it was really great that my bookstore offered health insurance, which I did not have teaching as an adjunct. So that was, And I think that more stores are able to offer that now, but that was really important. So...

Stesha Brandon (01:19:42):

Thank you. Interesting. We have a few minutes. Do folks in the group, in the crowd want to share?

Speaker 12 (01:19:55):

I just had a really specific question and I don't know who it's too, but I think, I'm just so curious because I buy a lot of books, and the price of eBooks is like three times the price of a physical book-

Stesha Brandon (01:20:11):

For the library.

Speaker 12 (01:20:12):

... for the library. And I wondered, if publisher, if authors, writers, the creators of these books, if they get three times the royalties-

Speaker 17 (01:20:24):

Oh yeah.

Speaker 12 (01:20:26):

... when they sell an eBook.

Stesha Brandon (01:20:29):

Anybody know that? Gary, Other folks? Oh, Christina.

Gary Luke (01:20:34):

It's still 25 percent.

Speaker 16 (01:20:36):

Yeah, it's, there's a universal rate, but you can get in the weeds of contract and knowing that if your client has, I'm an agent, if your client has a library market, you might get in specifically mention a different [inaudible 01:20:57]

Stesha Brandon (01:20:59):

Okay, so what I'm hearing from the crowd is that it's standard four to 5%, but is that correct? 20?

Gary Luke (01:21:13):

It's... So standard physical book royalty for a hardcover book is 10% the list price. So that, for this book, I'm carrying around 10% of that 28.99. And for the first 5,000 copies, then it escalates the 12 and a half percent and it gets the 15. Who knows what Stephen King is getting. But for eBooks it's 25% of net. So if a book is an eBook is sold at Amazon, and there's a 30% discount, then, and the retail price of the book is 9.95, is that what they usually are there? Then the author gets 25% of what the publisher gets. They get 25% of the 70% that the publisher gets. Because Amazon's taking it's \$3.

Speaker 12 (01:22:28):

So you make less money on eBooks if you're a writer, even though it could cost more?

Gary Luke (01:22:34):

Well, it costs the library.

Speaker 12 (01:22:36):

Well, it just costs the library more. Yeah. I just wondered, is that money getting passed on to the creator, getting passed on the author in the form of royalties if any?

Gary Luke (01:22:47):

I would say yes.

Speaker 12 (01:22:48):

Okay, Good.

Stesha Brandon (01:22:50):

I would say, yeah. Christina?

Christina Vega (01:22:51):

I'm in a very different publishing world than Gary is, or an agent is. Sometimes micro presses can be kind of the wild, wild west of publishing, but even in those cases it's, they're still getting a higher percentage. And I would say that almost everything is negotiable in your contract. And the contract is really what you're establishing the terms of your relationship with people you're going to hang out with for years. So really read the contract and ask questions, and try to negotiate what matters to you. Think about what matters to you, and try to negotiate that.

Speaker 12 (01:23:34):

I just want to make sure authors are being paid.

Stesha Brandon (01:23:46):

Yes, this is a question I shared with them. Oh, no. Questions are great. Yeah. Questions are great. Lisa, don't yell at me for ripping up the tape.

Speaker 13 (01:23:48):

Thank you so much. I have a question. I love the idea of having this whole team helping move the process along and not wearing all the millions of hats, but I am an entrepreneur, so that sounds exciting too. But, I deal with old procrastination. So how do you, and yourself publishing find this schedule, or this journey that you can commit to, and stay focused on to make it from the idea, which is my favorite part, to holding a book in your hands, or seeing it on sale online?

Stesha Brandon (01:24:26):

That's a great question.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:24:30):

Great question. I would say you have to know yourself, and know that you are a procrastinator. If you are a procrastinator. So that really, it's planning like schedule, scheduled, treat it like it's a job. I have to start, sorry, treat it like a job. I'm only writing from five to seven on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, because that's only days I can write. On Saturday and Sunday, I have to write from nine to five. So it's based on your self awareness.

(01:24:57):

And also too, when you do feel that moment of mental block or procrastination, there's a reason why. It's not, it doesn't just come out of nowhere. There's a reason why you don't feel like writing today. So get to the root of that reason and address it. And usually when you address it, you end up getting it out of your system, and you can continue the writing. Like me personally, most of the times my mental block comes from me not believing in the story no more. And that happens a lot where you stop believing in the story that you're writing. It starts sounding stupid. It sounds redundant, nobody's going to want to read this. And I ask myself, why do I feel like that? And it comes from insecurities. Okay, why am I insecure? You solve that, and you tackle it, and you go on and you continue writing the story. That's my answer.

Speaker 14 (01:25:49):

Just a follow-up question, did you do your illustrations for your children's books?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:25:56):

I wish. I just wrote the story and I meet my illustrators on Instagram. And the trick that I use is, on Instagram, you know those hashtags? Just type in hashtag children's book illustrations, and they show you all the children's book illustrators on there, and you just DM like, Hey, are you free? And it was like, Yeah, I am. Well, I got a project for you.

Speaker 14 (01:26:10):

And then how does the money work?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:26:17):

Oh, the illustrators I work with, they have two different payments. Whether you can do a large payment up front and they give you all the rights to the illustrations, or you can do a plan where they get a percentage from the sales. And it is based on what you're comfortable with. It's also based on the system that you created. If you have the financial means to continuously pay somebody else a percentage from the sales if you're self-publishing. That's why I was like, hey, I'll give you more money up front, because I don't have the structure to pay quarterly based on the percentage of the sales I get.

Speaker 14 (01:26:57):

Thank you.

Speaker 15 (01:27:01):

Thank you everyone. My name is [inaudible 01:27:00] Daniels, and I guess I will give my one thing where, I learned, and then I just have questions for each of the panelists. Is that okay?

Stesha Brandon (01:27:04):

Sure.

Speaker 15 (01:27:11):

So I would say the one thing that I learned is, it unfortunately takes money to make money. And what I should have done in the first portion of my writing is just like I would do if I wanted a cool dress, or some tech, start putting money to the side. Treat it like an investment, like you do anything else. So that would be the one thing for me. So Jeffrey, so quick. So I have a two part question. If your first one is... Okay, do you have books where you went through a publishing company or all your books self-published?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:28:03):
All my books are self-published.

Speaker 15 (01:28:06):
Okay. Well then that invalidates my next question.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:28:08):
I'll still have an answer.

Speaker 15 (01:28:12):
It was, would you self-publish your first book again, or would you try to go through a book publisher? Knowing what you know now?

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:28:20):
I would try to go through a publisher. For two reasons. One, takes all the pressure off of me for all the groundwork. And two, to learn. To learn the actual book publishing industry. If I work with a book publisher, that's basically, I have to learn how the industry works. So that would be the two reasons why I would do it.

Speaker 15 (01:28:48):
Ok, awesome. Thank you. And Karen, I share your nursing roles. I'm a nurse. How was your transition from nursing to the book world? So very left brain, to right brain. How was that for you?

Karen Maeda Allman (01:28:57):
Oh, rocky. It was rocky. I had this idea of what I was going to do with my life, and it was very specific. I was going to do this, this, this, and that. And then along the way I kind of lost track of why I was wanting to do it in the first place. So I think, I don't know, I think I had a supportive partner that allowed me to do that. That was really wonderful, and helped me try to think about doing something different with my life that I really liked. And first, it started with me trying to encourage people in my discipline to read outside just their own professional writing, especially if they were trying to deliver care, take care of patients from backgrounds not the same as theirs. And to not just look at somebody else's idea of what people's experience is.

(01:30:06):
And then it publish... It was a really interesting time in publishing. So I don't know, I just kind of slid into it, and just really liked it, and found my purpose. Because I really thought, maybe I was a 30 or

something when I read my first book by an Asian American author and my background's Japanese American. I'm multiracial though, and there were books out there. I just didn't know that they were there. And so I thought, okay, I can participate in helping people find books. And people from all different backgrounds. Not just Japanese people reading about Japanese books. No, I think that there's a wider audience, but like Christina said, the more specific beautiful experience, is the one that people are going to connect to. Whether or not from that one particular background, you kind of fall in love with someone's writing and learn about their experience. So I guess you could say it was intuitive. A bit long. It's a long answer.

Speaker 15 (01:31:12):

Thank you. And Christina, how do you sell a poetry book? The reason I ask is, poetry is, it's so specific. I started out, my first books are actually my cheaper college books. And where it's self-motivation for kids on, and about their bodies and just learning about the world. And then there were parts of poetry that came into it. And I realized when I was writing a poetry, there was certain poems that I just started crying. It became a feeling process. And then I took that, and then I wrote a new, just a poetry book, it's a self-help poetry workbook. But it seems so specific. Certain people like this type of poetry. Some that rhyme, some that doesn't rhyme. Something to talk about, this and that. It just seems so... Too niche I guess. I don't know. So how do you sell a poetry book? I guess.

Christina Vega (01:32:22):

Well, I think going back to what Karen was saying, poetry, just like any other genre of books, it's all so specific. It's all so subjective. We like what we like. And I think when it comes to writing a book, something to keep in mind is, very much for new authors, and very much for folks who don't have a built-in platform, first you're going to be selling to, the majority of people you're going to be selling your book to are people that want to read you. They're not going to pick up your book because... Like, unless you have a built-in platform or your books are all over, they're not going to pick up your book because they just walked past it in the store and it looked amazing, and they thought, oh, I just want to just look at the back, and oh my gosh, they look inside and oh, maybe I'll buy it.

(01:33:16):

Unfortunately, when we think about our behaviors as customers, when we were talking about the business of books, we can't divorce that we are sell, we can't divorce the idea that we are selling ourselves and our writing as products. And I don't think of a person as a product, but when we think of ourselves as a customer or any customer, there's five or six touch points before a customer decides to buy something usually. And the chance of all five or six of those things happening out the gate in a bookstore is pretty low.

(01:33:51):

And so I think it's really important if you're a poet to, or any writer, to just get out there and get yourself in front of your readers and talk about your book. And it will be uncomfortable until it's not. But if you really believe in the content, it won't always feel like selling. Once you get used to, once you train yourself to just be okay with, or get over whatever hurdles you need to, if you believe in what you

wrote, if you believe in your story, and you believe there's value, then that is going to come across to people.

(01:34:28):

And so really it's figure out what your value proposition is. What are you bringing? What does your story, what do your poems bring to people? And I think if you kind of just focus on that, you can stop thinking of the word selling, selling a poetry book. Don't sell a poetry book. Read me a poem. Read me a poem. Look me in the eye at the [inaudible 01:34:56] house, and make me think, oh my God, I've been there too. Or, I know what you mean. Even though poetry's just like, sometimes poetry is just like a word cloud that's like you feel it in the air. It's also, ephemeral. Yeah. So I think, keep the business aspects of it in mind and practice them until you don't think about them is what I would say.

Stesha Brandon (01:35:21):

That is some excellent advice. Well, you heard the announcement. Unfortunately we have to end even though, oh, Christina has some announcements. Of course.

Christina Vega (01:35:33):

Okay, two announcements. They're both shameful plugs.

Stesha Brandon (01:35:38):

What you just said.

Christina Vega (01:35:42):

First request, please follow us on social media.

Stesha Brandon (01:35:44):

Blue Cactus?

Christina Vega (01:35:45):

At Blue Cactus Press on all platforms. And if you don't see us on a platform, it's because we're not on TikTok yet.

(01:35:56):

The second one is, we are open for submissions. We have two calls for submissions. And if you are a writer, I encourage you to go to our website and check them out. We Blue Cactus Press publishes work primarily by folks from historically marginalized groups. And we're looking for work that offers a liberatory lens on life, and interpret that as you will. Let's think about living better, living more fully, deepening our relationships using different systems and paradigms. So please submit. And, if you are thinking of working with a publishing house that's rather small, or you just want to educate yourself a little bit, we're giving a understanding publishing contracts, specifically book contracts, workshop in Port Townsend in mid-October. And we would love to see some of you there. And there should be a virtual option as well.

Stesha Brandon (01:36:59):

That's awesome. Do either of you have things to plug? Yes, please.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:37:09):

Follow my organization, the Seattle Urban Book Expo on Facebook and Instagram. I'm also not on TikTok, so yes. Seattle Urban Book Expo. Spelled like how it sounds. And all of our upcoming events are on there. October the seventh, we have an event called Ode to the Five Senses, where we're going to have authors who have holistic poetry or spoken word books, reading selections from their stories. We also have licensed massage therapists doing 20 minute demos. We have charcuterie and wine. We going to have music. This is vibes. So the events are on the Seattle Urban Book Expo social media pages. And our website is S-U-B-E seattle.com.

Stesha Brandon (01:37:55):

Awesome. Karen, can you follow that? Do you have charcuterie?

Karen Maeda Allman (01:38:01):

I'm going to encourage people to support their neighborhood bookstores, independent bookstores. Please. Find one that you love. Maybe you love Estelita's. Maybe you love Elliot Bay. Check this out. There's probably an independent bookstore in your neighborhood. And go support authors. Go to the readings. Check them out. Can learn so much from listening to authors read their work, and also reading their books. So thanks.

Stesha Brandon (01:38:37):

Thank you.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:38:37):

Oh, sorry.

Stesha Brandon (01:38:37):

You got one more.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:38:38):

Oh, there's an independent bookstore that just opened up in August called, The Loving Room. The Loving Room. Yeah. Loving Room is on 20th Avenue, which is off of Union. So just opened up. It's owned by Christina Clark. She's amazing. So yeah, The Loving Room.

Stesha Brandon (01:38:50):

We're trying to get her to be a part of a later panel, so stay tuned.

Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:38:55):

Okay.

Stesha Brandon (01:38:57):

Although she did just open a bookstore. So she's kind of busy. She opened a black owned bookstore. Let's say that out loud. She opened a black owned bookstore.

Speaker 14 (01:39:06):
In the Central District?


Jeffrey Lee Cheatham II (01:39:08):
Yeah, that's right.

Christina Vega (01:39:09):
They're also good friends with the folks who opened the black owned book store in Tacoma called Parable. And I don't know if they did it up here, but they crowdfunded Parable. Yeah. So if you're interested in just learning how crowdfunding can be utilized in the publishing industry, try to go to some of those events with those folks.

Stesha Brandon (01:39:33):
Thank you for that. Cause that leads me to my plug, which is that we have more of these sessions happening. There are sessions on October 8th, and November 12th. Those will be four hour sessions. The October 8th session is going to focus on financing, and business plans, and things that I don't really know much about.

(01:39:54):
But Jay Lyman, who is at the back there is our library to business manager. And he will be talking about all that stuff with some other folks who are experts on those topics. And we also have, I think that day there's a panel on book selling as well. So if you're particularly interested in opening a bookstore or wanting to work in the book selling side of things, there'll be a panel that afternoon. There's also, in November, there's going to be a series of case studies, some of which are around crowdsourcing, crowd funding your business, whether that's a publishing company or a bookstore, that kind of thing. And then that in November, there will also be a panel on writing as well. So for the writers in the room. I'm so grateful to everybody who helped make tonight possible. Thank you Christina and Karen, and Jeffrey.

(01:40:48):
Thank you Gary, and the crowd. And thanks all of you for being here tonight. Thanks to all of our wonderful partners. And I do want to give a little shout out. We have somebody from Seattle City of Literature at the back, Juan Carlos Reyes is at the back there, who's on the board of Seattle City of Literature. And so I mentioned that because, if you want to know what is going on here in the area, if you go to Seattle City of Lit dot O-R-G, there's actually a tool on the website where you can figure out how many bookstores are there in Seattle. It's a lot. There's like 60. If you want to know how many publishers there are, you can look that up. I honestly don't know. I think it's like a hundred and something. So particularly as you're starting to do research about your specific projects, that's a really good resource for you to kind of check out and see.



(01:41:43):

And it's also an opportunity to kind of see what else is going on, so that you can start being a part of that community if you're not already. And then I'll just close by saying, the thing that I learned that I didn't know when I got into this work was, that there is this community. We're all here and, to support one another. And if you show up to things, people are going to remember you. And then they'll yell your name when you come in the room like we did to several of you. So anyway, thank you all for coming. We're... There's a few more snacks, we got to be out by eight, but thank you and we'll see you in October. Thank you.

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