Eric Weiner: I've got one of these headsets on, so hopefully the audio-

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: Good.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, that sounds good. What is your coffee preparation procedure? What does that entail?

Eric Weiner: I usually pour over method.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. What kind of pour over do you have, a Chemex?

Eric Weiner: I have a Chemex and I have just one of those Japanese flask things.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: My theory is that if you make the coffee too easy to make, like one of those Keurig K-Cup things that you drink too much and it doesn't taste as good, and then you actually have to sweat to make your coffee. And go through a little manual labor and then you enjoy it more.

Jeff Goins: So, by that rational, do you hand-grind your beans?

Eric Weiner: Well, that would ... I toyed around with that. But [crosstalk 00:00:49] you know, we've got a whole kitchen cupboard filled with coffee paraphernalia [crosstalk 00:00:54]. She kind of drew the line at that. But I've been eying one of those. Do you use one of those?

Jeff Goins: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. We have a whole counter dedicated ... In fact, we had to buy a new house just to fit all my coffee stuff.

Eric Weiner: Well, I figure you get a little exercise grinding beans, right?

Jeff Goins: You do. You know, I ... Let's see here. I have a Chemex. I also have this thing called a Ratio, which is like an automatic Chemex for when you're trying to do bigger batches.

Eric Weiner: How do you spell Ratio? Ra-

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Just Ratio. It's this handmade thing from ... It's a really beautiful piece of ... You know, kitchen appliance. Expensive, handmade automatic pour over thing. And my wife doesn't drink coffee. And I got this thing and ... A friend actually gave it to me. And she's just watching it and she's like, "Wait. What does it do? It just drips coffee? This is all it-" I was like, "Well." Really, that's all making coffee ... Like, any sort of coffee making devices.

Eric Weiner: Drips water over coffee.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Dripping water, pouring coffee, pushing water. It's all just water and coffee. Yeah. But I have a hand burr grinders. You know, and it was like $20 on Amazon.
Eric Weiner: Yeah. I think the Japanese companies tend to make them for some reason.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Hario makes one. And then I have a ... I don't love that one because you have to keep tightening it. There's ... I don't know. There's another one that I'll look up. You know, important germane stuff to our conversation. But I use that when I travel. Because my in-laws don't drink coffee. And we'll go spend, you know, at least two or three weeks with them during a holiday. And so, I mean, that's a lot of trips to the local-

Eric Weiner: And it's small.

Jeff Goins: Coffee shop.

Yeah. Oh, it's tiny. Yeah. It's just this little handheld thing. And I use an aeropress with it.

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I've got that too. It's kind of absurd. I mean, I recognize the absurdity of, you know, all these devices. But the convenience of the K-Cups, it just doesn't seem right. It's too convenient. It's environmentally bad. It's-

Jeff Goins: It gives you cancer. No, it's terrible. They grow mold in them. It's awful.

Hey, I'm going to shoot you over this link in case you're interested in getting this hand grinder and adding to your absurdity.

Eric Weiner: Yeah, please do.

Jeff Goins: [Koysina 00:03:20], I think is how you pronounce the ... [Koysina 00:03:24], is how you pronounce the thing.

Eric Weiner: [inaudible 00:03:26]

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Really consistent grind. And I use that with the aeropress when I'm traveling. And I just take a bag of beans with me when I go really anywhere. I went on a ski trip earlier, or last month, I guess. And-

Eric Weiner: And you're totally self ... All you need is hot water in that, right?

Jeff Goins: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So, there we go. We've already started bonding on our affinity for coffee.

Eric Weiner: All right. Well, I guess that pretty much wraps [crosstalk 00:03:52] Good talking to you.

Jeff Goins: So, Eric, what we'll do is ... I'm actually recording now. Our levels seem pretty good. I think I'm going to turn my mic down just a little bit. But we're just going to roll into the conversation, talk about your book.

Eric Weiner: How long are we going to talk?
Jeff Goins: That's your call. I've got the next 45 minutes slotted out. I like to shoot for, you know, about 30 minutes of conversation. Does that work for your schedule?

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I mean, I do have something at one o'clock, so.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. No problem. That's Eastern, right?

Eric Weiner: That is Eastern ... 46 minutes from now, yeah.

Jeff Goins: Great. So, all right. Let's just roll into it. Do you have any questions for me?

Eric Weiner: Are you going to edit it at all, or are you pretty much just throw it out unless I start cursing or something?

Jeff Goins: Well, the more you curse, the less we'll edit, probably.

Eric Weiner: Okay.

Jeff Goins: No.

Eric Weiner: [inaudible 00:04:43] No FCC rules apply, right?

Jeff Goins: That's true. Yeah. I figure you're probably used to the, you know, with the NPR connection, you're used to the radio then.

Eric Weiner: Yes. I've ... And the number of podcasts out there is quite remarkable.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. No, so we do edit it. We'll probably start where ... You know, I'll leave a little break and we'll probably start there. Although, I found this coffee conversation to be quite a [crosstalk 00:05:04] fun little.

Eric Weiner: Yeah, let's throw that in too. Okay, I'm ready to roll.

Jeff Goins: Okay. So, Eric, as a writer, do you know that feeling when you have this great idea for a book and you just think the world needs this book. And you're getting ready to write it, or write the proposal, and pitch it to a publisher, and then all of a sudden, that book comes out. Do you know that feeling?

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I've had that feeling.

Jeff Goins: Somebody already wrote the book.

Eric Weiner: Right. That does happen.

Jeff Goins: So your [crosstalk 00:05:35]

Eric Weiner: I sort of got past that, though. Because basically, I realized that everything has been done.

Jeff Goins: Right.
Eric Weiner: There was a historian named Will Durant, famous historian, 20th Century, who once said that, "Nothing is new but the arranging." And so, that's what I believe now, is that someone else may have done it, but they haven't arranged the pieces exactly the way I do. So that used to bother me a lot more than it does now. Now I'm like, "Okay. Well, they did their version of it. Now I'm going to do my version."

Jeff Goins: So, your book, The Geography of Genius, was that for me? I had been reading all of these biographies of very creative famous people like Ernest Hemingway or Vincent Van Gogh, and I had started to notice that this idea of the lone genius, which has been debunked before. And you address this in your book. It's a myth, or at least not the whole story. And I had this great idea that, "Would it be interesting if you examined the different places that have created some of history's most remarkable people, artists, inventors, etc. You know, these people that we tend to label geniuses.

And I'm like, "Okay. This is great." And I'm getting ready to write it. And no joke, the next week, your book came out. And I was like, "Oh. Okay. Well, I'm going to [crosstalk 00:07:00]

Eric Weiner: I'm sorry about that.

Jeff Goins: I wish you would have talked to me about it first.

Eric Weiner: At least you weren't like three quarters of the way through [crosstalk 00:07:06]. That would be worse.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Now, I love what you said about rearranging. You're absolutely right. And I've been reading a lot about creativity because it's affecting this next thing that I'm working on. But I loved your book because honestly, it wasn't what I was expecting. It was ... I think Walter Isaacson called it ... I don't have the quote in front of me. But it was like, "History and wisdom wrapped up under the guise of a rollicking adventure." And that's kind ... A rollicking adventure, that's kind of what it's felt like. It's almost like a travel log. And I love that.

Eric Weiner: Well, it is. It's a hybrid of part travel log, part history, part social science. And that's what I try to do, is arranging the pieces in a different way.

Jeff Goins: So, where did you first get this idea? Because I love this idea and, as a write, I'm always curious how other authors stumble upon their ideas and then how they test their ideas and turn them into a book. And what I loved about The Geography of Genius, is you weren't trying to be the expert. You're saying, "Hey. I kind of have this idea." And you go to Greece and you tell your guide through that part of your trip when you're sort of studying the culture of Ancient Athens.

They go, "Yeah. I don't know that you're right about this." And so, you have this hypothesis that you're not quite sure is true. And you're testing it through these little adventures. But where did you first get that idea?

Eric Weiner: Well, first of all, I am a place-person.
Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: There are dog-people and cat-people and people-people. I'm a place-person. I see the world through the prism of place, always have. And, you know, one of my previous books, The Geography of Bliss, I looked at the connection between place and happiness. When I wrote about the [inaudible 00:09:02] place and our spiritual lives. And, you know, what's the sort of other big piece of our lives besides, you know, happiness, spiritual contentment. It's, you know ... It's probably creativity. That is, in this day and age at least, for many people, not really seen as something as optional, but something that is really a necessary ingredient in a complete and meaningful life.

And it struck me that we really focus almost exclusively on the creative genius, whether it's Einstein or Steve Jobs, and we ignore the environment in which their geniusing takes place. You know, we almost treat them like shooting stars in the sky, just this miraculous thing that you have no idea where it came from or when there'll be another one. And I just instinctively knew that that was wrong.

And I looked around the world and noticed that, you know, over time, geniuses don't appear randomly. You know, one in Chicago, and one in Bolivia, and one in Siberia. They appear at certain places in certain times in these clusters, these genius clusters. And clearly, something was going on back then. And it seemed like a book that needed to be written.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. So, how did you go from that point to writing the book? Because the book is a travelog. It's you going to these different places. And then, as Walter Isaacson's endorsement mentioned, there's lots of great history behind the place and lots of deeper research that you do. But the book is told as you sort of going on these adventures.

Eric Weiner: Right. [crosstalk 00:10:43]

Jeff Goins: How long did that take and how did that unfold?

Eric Weiner: It took ... My short answer is it took too long. That's what my wife will say, at least. Because [crosstalk 00:10:54] stages grow and grow and [inaudible 00:10:56]. I keep saying I'm going to write a small book, like the History of Asparagus or something. You can really wrap your arms around ... But I keep ... I'm drawn to these big, huge, unyielding topics like creative genius.

So, basically my process works like this; I have several things going on simultaneously. One thing that's going on is I'm researching creativity, really in general. I'm researching where the idea of this concept comes from. And really delving into a lot of social science research, in of which there are hundreds, if not easily thousands, of paper written about not only what makes a person creative, but what makes a place creative.

And so, I read those pretty dense, kind of dry academic paper, looking for those nuggets of gold. And then, once I had my seven places
selected, I dove into the history of these places. Read everything I could get my hands on about their golden ages.

And then, I got on an airplane. Not exactly in this order, but at some point, I get on an airplane and fly to these places. Now, I realize I could have written the entire book without leaving my home, but as a place-person, I needed to go there. And I think, you know, why does anyone travel to Florence, Italy, or to Athens, or anywhere these days. In the age of Google Earth and everything, you can see it all online.

But there is something, still today, about commuting with the past by going to the actual place where these golden ages blossoms. And walking in the footsteps of Socrates or of Leonardo, touching the stone that they touched. And it also, I think, makes for a better read, to actually take the reader along on, exactly as you say, an adventure.

Jeff Goins: Absolutely. And having been to Florence, Italy multiple times, I loved revisiting it through your lens. And I think you would say this, I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but following along as a reader, it seemed to me that you discovered things by going to these places that you wouldn’t have otherwise learned if you’d just looked at the history and looked at Google Earth and just wrote your book.

Eric Weiner: Absolutely. And I think the key in writing a book like this is maintaining that balance between knowledge and ignorance. And what I mean by that is, yeah, I wanted to know about Florence before I landed there. I didn’t want to arrive completely ignorant. But I didn’t want to, you know, have everything “figured out”, in quotes. I wanted to arrive with unanswered questions and with an open mind to the possibility that what I had read had been wrong. And by finding the right people there and finding the right portals to the past, I think I was able to actually discover something on the ground. And it’s not easy because, you know, just to continue with the example Florence, you’ve been there, and it’s fairly a familiar destination.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: The products of the golden age are all on display at [inaudible 00:14:09] museum and other museums. You know, the great Michelangelo’s David and all this magnificent artwork. But the process reminds largely hidden. How that these genius works of art came to be remains ... Takes a lot more work, let’s put it that way, to excavate that. And that was a challenge for me.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. I Loved that insight from the book. You said something like, “Archeologists love mistakes because it shows process.” Am I remembering that quote right?

Eric Weiner: Exactly.

Jeff Goins: And one of the things that you ... I remember this. In the Florence chapter, which is one of my favorite chapters, you said that, “This isn’t ... We don’t see the process, usually. You kind of have to dig deep.” You had this fun, little idea that we should create a Museum of Crap to
show the process. Can you unpack that a little bit more? Why do we need a Museum of Crap?

Eric Weiner: Yeah. To show the mistakes. Right. I think in the Museum of Crap, you would have, you know, all these bad art that didn't work out. Perhaps, even by the masters themselves because they produced plenty of crap. You'd have, I don't know if you're old enough to remember New Coke that had just-

Jeff Goins: Oh, yeah. Of course.

Eric Weiner: Yeah. Maybe a Betamax machine, you know? Things that failed. If you think about it, we live in a culture that talks about the value of failure and how important it is. But we don't celebrate it in museums. In museums, we only celebrate successes. So, why not a Museum of Crap? Or, if we want to make it more PG13, a Museum of Mistakes.

I think it's actually a good idea. You know, to show people people things that didn't work out because ... It's a cliché, but it's true, we learn from those mistakes. Or rather, successful, creative people learn from their mistakes. There's no guarantee that a mistake ... A failure leads to success, but it's always part of the equation.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. And as you say in the book, even if that is a bad idea, that's one more piece of crap that could go into the Museum of Crap.

Eric Weiner: Yeah, I mean, that's what Thomas Edison said, essentially. You know, he had tried like a thousand ways to come up with an electric car. This is a good century or more, ago. And they all failed. And his colleague said, "Well, now you failed a thousand times." He's like, "No. Now I know there are a thousand ways not to create the electric car. I just have to find the right one." So, in that sense, obviously failure is helpful.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Absolutely. SO, what was something surprising that you learned form your journey?

Eric Weiner: Oh, there was ... I don't know where to begin. There was so much. The first thing is, simply, that all these genius clusters were almost always cities. The only exception I can think of is Silicon Valley, which began and essentially farmed there from capital America. Otherwise, all these places were pretty densely populated cities. They might have been small, like Edinburgh, Scotland had a population of only 45,000 during its golden age. But they were dense and they were vibrant. You know, if it takes a village to raise a child, as the African proverb goes, it takes a city to raise a genius.

That was a ... You know, I sort of knew that, but the extent to which that is true surprised me. I was surprised by how unlikely these places were. And what I mean by that is, you know, we often associate a golden age with a kind of paradise. The golden age everyone's lounging, eating grapes, and reciting poetry. It really wasn't that way and isn't that way. These were hard places. These were places that challenged people.
Athens, the land was essentially barren. It was really hard to grow anything. And it was ... The city state ... Which there were hundreds at the time, was not the wealthiest or the strongest. You know, if you were placing bets back then on which one of these several hundred Greek city states goes on to be the premier place, you would not bet on Athens.

And to get back to Florence, a couple of decades, really, before the blossoming of The Renaissance, an event that changed human history for the better, Florence was decimated by the Black Death, the Bubonic Plague. A third of the population's wiped out. It was terrible. On a human scale, it was absolutely awful. But it did shake things up. It did shake up the social order. And that kind of turmoil is always necessary for these places.

So, the golden age does not mean paradise. In fact, I would argue that paradise is probably the worst place for creativity because, right, you have nothing to push against. It's all ... Everything's there for you.

Jeff Goins: Right, yeah. And I think, correct me if I'm wrong, you talked about that in ... About Scotland, as well. Which I had sort of heard, you know, glimpses of this idea a golden age of Scotland, the Scottish enlightenment and all the things that the Scottish gave to the world. But I hadn't really delved deep into it. And so, that was a location that surprised me in your book. I mean, Ancient Athens, Silicon Valley, sure. You know, Florence, Italy. Those all make sense. But Scotland probably would have been one of those that I overlooked.

What attracted you to that place?

Eric Weiner: Well, first of all, exactly what you just said, because it was a surprise to you and I'm sure to many readers. As were a few other cities I explore in the book. I think that's what I wanted, I wanted to have a mix of some well known places, then some sort of off the map places. And the more I dug into Edinburgh, we're talking late 18th Century, the more I discovered that, "Wow, this was a place that produced so much of what still affects our lives today. Modern economics and sociology and geology."

And actually, a lot of ideas came out of Scotland that directly influenced the birth of this country, the United States. A lot of the founding fathers visited Scotland, including Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson wrote effusively about Edinburgh being the greatest city in the world. Some of the founding fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence studied at the medical school there.

So, I was pleasantly surprised to find out what an out sized role it played. And it also ... And what seemed unlikely too, and I guess I love a good mystery. And it was a mystery, why would this city which in mid-18th Century was illiterate and poor and quarrelsome and alcoholic, as one historian described it, why would it go on to be the most intellectual place in all of Europe, in all of the world? And so, it presented surprise and a good mystery for me to tackle.
Jeff Goins: And what were, at least for Scotland, what were the elements that caused it to be such a creative place for that moment in history?

Eric Weiner: I mean, I should preface my comments by saying it remains something of a mystery, even to people who have been studying this all their life. But I think-

Jeff Goins: Yeah, well.

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I mean, but that's okay. It's sort of the like the Loch Ness Monster, you know. But it had that smallness, that density. It had people living cheek by jowl who were not exactly like one another. You would have very rich people and very poor people living in the same building. Now, the rich people lived in a higher up floor to get away from the stench of the streets, but they were often in the same building, in the same neighborhood. So you'd had these interactions, not among like-minded people.

Adam Smith, the founder of modern economics with his famous book “The Wealth of Nations”, he spent time in the library, sure, but he spent at least as much time talking to merchants of Edinburgh and Glasgow. And mixing with them. And they have these clubs that were not really exclusive, they were just kind of weird. There was the Seven Seventeen Club, where there would only met at 7:17 PM for some reason. And the Six Foot Club, where you had to be six feet tall, which was no mean feat back then, when people were shorter.

And my favorite was the Oyster Club, which was founded by Adam Smith, who I mentioned, and his good friend David Hume, the great philosopher. They would get together and they would eat oysters because it was considered, actually, the food of the people back then, not elite food. And drink claret red wine. They drank more than that with scotch, actually, back then. And they would get hammered and they would talk. And there was a great premium placed on conversation that I think was considerably more free wheeling than the kind of conversations we have today.

And I discovered this great Scottish tradition called Flyting. You probably have not heard of it. I certainly hadn't. Flyting. And a Scottish historian defined it for me as, “The ritual humiliation of your opponent through verbal violence.”

Jeff Goins: Fun stuff.

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I said, “It sounds brutal, Tom.” And he said, “Oh, it is”, with a twinkle in his eye. But the key is that you could ritually humiliate your opponent through verbal violence, and he would do the same to you. But afterwards, you'd both head down to the pub for a pint or five, you know? Because there were no hard feelings. And that kind of free discourse and interdisciplinary discourse is hugely important.

All these places ... There are no barriers between disciplines. Very different from today, where we live in the age of specialization and
specialists. People learning more and more about less and less. All these fields were very young in Scotland, with sociology and economics. And so, there were not these barriers. And I think all creativity, ultimately, is about making connections. And in Edinburgh, it was easy to make connections.

Jeff Goins: So, were there general commonalities that you saw amongst all these places? Could you answer the question, what makes a place creative?

Eric Weiner: Well, if I had the absolutely formula, I probably wouldn't be talking to you now. I'd be in my yacht in the Mediterranean, sipping a nice drink. So I want to say that I don't think there's a recipe you can just follow and then you have a creative place. Because, you know, it's like my publisher when they ask to know what makes a best seller. He said, "Well, if we knew that, we'd make every book a best seller." So, you know, it's not that simple. But it's not random, either.

And so, here I think are three of the common elements. I call them the three D's. Diversity, discernment, and disorder. So diversity, I don't mean ethnic diversity. Certainly not that only, but intellectual diversity. An openness to experience. That's the one trait that psychologists say all creative people have. And I think, by extension, all creative places. They are open to the other. And that means being open intellectual to there ideas. It often means being open to the idea of foreigners living amongst you. Athens and Silicon Valley today and Vienna of 1900 had very open immigration policies. Even though, going back to even the ruler Pericles in Ancient Athens 450 BC. In one of his speeches, he basically acknowledged, "This is dangerous. There might be enemies amongst these people we allow in. But it makes us more vibrant." He actually said that.

Jeff Goins: Wow.

Eric Weiner: It's not a big leap from there to our current debate on immigration.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, sure.

Eric Weiner: So there's that openness and that diversity of ideas, number one. Number two, discernment, which gets less attention than openness. And that is, essentially, separating good ideas from bad ideas. And you can't just say, "Well, we're open. Equally open to everything." Las Vegas is a pretty open, tolerant place, but not a lot of geniuses come out of there, you know?

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: So you need to be discerning. And just one brief anecdote is Jonas Salk, who was a two time Nobel Prize winner, was asked by a young student once, "Dr. Salk, how do you come up with so many good ideas?" He said, "It's easy, I come up with lots of ideas. And then I throw away the bad ones." And I think all these places, like Silicon Valley, are good at separating ideas with potential from ideas that are duds.
And the third element, actually, is disorder. This is the kind of churning and turmoil that I talked about that often precedes the golden age. And I think needs to infuse a creative place. You can't just be like Switzerland and be functional and stayed. You need to have some churning of political life, some churning of the world of ideas. You know, studies show this is true on a personal level, too. People who are seated in perfectly clean, pristine office settings come out with fewer creative ideas than those who are put in slightly messy ones, more than slightly.

So, I think those three D's, diversity, discernment, and disorder are sort of the starting points, that you need those. And then, you have other things going on. You have walk-ability, people walking. There's a very clear connection between walking and creative thinking. You have the social element, have a degree of trust, I think, among people. Prisons are very dense, just like cities, but they're not particularly creative. So there has to be ... Actually, the word I use is intimacy. I think these places are intimate. They might be intimate the way boxers are intimate with each other, sometimes. But there is an intimacy.

Jeff Goins: So, as a creative person, as an author, when you were going through this journey and learning these lessons, did you take away practical applications for your own life? I mean, I remember reading in the Scotland chapter, you said, “Maybe I'm not disqualified from being a genius if this is what it takes.” And-

Eric Weiner: Relishing in contradictions, I think was my point there [crosstalk 00:29:15]

Jeff Goins: Oh, that's right.

Eric Weiner: I do relish in contradictions. And the Scots do too. They can hold two ideas in their head simultaneously and not have their head explode. But yes, go ahead.

Jeff Goins: So, were there any takeaways for you where there are ... Are there practices or practical things that you are going to do to ... Create a greater surge of creativity in your own life?

Eric Weiner: Yeah. I mean, in my own life, it's probably too late for me to be a genius. That ship has already sailed. Whatever genius, you know, however you define the term. But it's not too late for me 11 year old daughter, who's downstairs playing Minecraft as we speak since it's a snow day here. And so, if you think about it, we have a certain amount of control over the city we live in. But we have more control as we get more local. And the most local is the family, right?

You know, I can create a little disorder in the household. My wife doesn't always like that [crosstalk 00:30:23]. But I'm not opposed to a little disorder. And if her room's a little messy, well you know, that's okay. And if she's stuck on a homework probably and says she wants to take a break and go for a walk or do the equivalent of walking, which is probably playing Wii or something, then that's okay too. So, I think we, in our home life, can create environments that are more replicate these create places.
And, you know, we can get involved. I'll be honest, I've never been ... I've always been, as a writer, more comfortable observing than doing. But we just ... In my local town here in Maryland, Silver Spring, Maryland. They build a brand new, amazing library space. But no one was having events there. And no author talks or anything. So, I decided to get involved. And to create that venue, that creative space for authors to come together and hold a talk to interested readers. So that's just a small example of something that I probably wouldn't have done before I wrote this book.

Jeff Goins:

Yeah. Very cool. What about the person who reads this book and then go, "Well, it's not ... I'm not in Ancient Athens, or I can't live in Silicon Valley. And I can't go to these great places where amazing things are happening." Which is something I hear a lot about from creative friends, "Well, I can't move to New York City, so I can't be an author. I can't move to Nashville." Which is where I live. "Therefore I can't be a musician." You know, on and on.

I love what you said about the family side of things. How do you respond to that objection? Obviously there are ... What I love about your book is acknowledging that there are special places and special moments and times that genius cluster, creative cluster, that we sometimes read about. What about those people who say, "Well, I can't be creative because I can't go there." Or, "I don't live there. I'm not in this special moment in history"?

Eric Weiner:

Is it absolutely necessary to be living in these places? I don't think so. And I think we're able to create, perhaps, smaller genius clusters today. Partly because of technology. And you never know where the next place might be. As I said, they're often small and often unexpected. So, while you're busy bemoaning that you don't live in Ancient Athens, you might be standing in a place that is the next Ancient Athens. You know? I mean, you could be Leonardo saying, "God, I wish I lived in Athens [crosstalk 00:33:15] Florence." And missing that boat. So that's one danger.

And what I hope people get out of this book, though, is not necessarily that they need to pick up and move to Silicon Valley. I think that could be a mistake. It might work for you, but it might be a mistake. But just to change the way you look at the creative process. To not look at it as something you do in isolation, but something that takes place in a culture, in an environment, and that is really about a relationship between you and the world. Because this myth of the sort of absent minded loner genius is a little bit dangerous. I mean, it can be helpful in that it might motivate you against all odds to do it on your own. But the idea that's a genius, whether it was Einstein or whoever, is sort of disconnected from their world, is actually completely wrong. If anything, they're more engaged with their surroundings than other people.

They might do so selectively. So Einstein didn't particularly care what his hair looked like. But he very much observed his surroundings. And would get his ideas from observing train stations and passing trains, or whatever it is.
So the idea that you just lock yourself in a quiet room and sit there until creative ideas come to you is completely wrong. You know, you should get out and interact with the world.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Didn't Einstein have a peer group when he worked in the patent office where they bounced ideas off of each other?

Eric Weiner: He did. He was also board in the patent office in Switzerland.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Eric Weiner: But he had a group of people. And Freud did too. He had the Wednesday Circle of young, like-minded psychoanalysts, a brand new field at the time. And when you're coming up with a new idea, you need comradery. Freud called them fellow conquistadors because he saw himself as really out there in a limb. And he almost needed some [inaudible 00:35:18], some validation that he wasn't completely crazy.

Jeff Goins: Right.

Eric Weiner: And so, that's why you find people who are out on the edge of their discipline, or embarking on brand new disciplines, they need that Wednesday Circle, or I believe it was the Elizabeth Society in the case of Einstein, that they can have some kindred souls. That's hugely important.

Jeff Goins: One of the things that I thought was interesting about your book is … It's sort of the yeah, but. I remember you talking about the concept of the creative class. And who was that? [crosstalk 00:35:57] Richard Florida. And it seemed to me that you had a deeper, more nuanced argument. You know, “How do we actually create these places?” And, “hat is the nuance that goes into creating a creative place?” And one of the things that I thought was interesting, I think it was a question that you raised, which was, “If you're living in Florence or Scotland or China or Greece or wherever, why wasn't everybody creative? What did Leonardo Da Vinci do that was different from what other people did?”

And so, I like the idea that you could actually be living in one of these places. Because they're unlikely, because they weren't huge, bustling places. Because it wasn't just about density. It was also about intimacy. There are all these factors. And you might be ignoring it.

I'm wondering, was there a difference between the people who recognize the unique moment in time or the advantages of the places in which they lived, and took advantage of them like a Freud or an Einstein or a Michelangelo or whatever? And then the people who didn't?

Eric Weiner: That's a very good question. That's a really good question. You're right. Obviously, not everyone, and not even most people in Renaissance Florence or in Athens or Vienna or any of these places, were geniuses. It's always a small percentage.

You know, ultimately it does come down to a matter of courage, of personal courage. I like to use the analogy of surfing waves. You could
be out there in Hawaii and you can see these huge waves. And most people will sit on the beach and watch the waves. But a few people will go out and surf. Now, they need people to make the surf boards, right? So immediately, they're not doing it on their own. Someone had to manufacture the surf board. And they'll probably need people the spot them. So again, more people involved. And some people will wipe out on the waves. And some people will quit after one or two wipe outs. But a few people will continue and surf until they ride the big one. And I think that is who the geniuses are.

So ultimately, it does come down to risk taking and taking a risk. And taking a big risk at a time when such a risk has at least a chance paying off. I should also add that these geniuses were not perfect fits to their time. It's not like they were completely just happy to be living in Florence or Athens, there was always a kind of friction at the place. Socrates loved Athens. He really just adored that city to death, literally. They put him to death.

Freud was an immigrant to Vienna, came there when he was four years old, with his family. And as an outsider, and immigrant and as a Jew, he never fully fit in. But he fit in enough, right? That his ideas ... As a Jew, he couldn't go into government or the military, but he could go into medicine. And he channeled his creative energies into that. And it was open enough, at the time, talking roughly 1900, that his ideas resonated. So, the genius always is sort of occupying that space, I think, between insider and outsider.

But why Leonardo and not the guy down the road? Hard to say. It's a lot of things. I think that the genius often is someone who has something to prove, has suffered some trauma at a young age, often the death of a parent. A disproportionate number of geniuses lost a parent, usually a father, at a young age. Or, they come from a broken home, an illegitimate family, as Leonardo did. He was born out of wedlock. And so, that stigmatized him, but it also motivated him.

Jeff Goins: Wow. Are there ... Do you have any hypothesis about the next place of genius? Did anything pop in your mind? Because when I was reading this, I thought, "Well, this is so interesting." Because you think about Florence, you know, obviously that was the one that stuck with me. You know, you think about the big, creative hubs, like a Paris or a New York City or whatever. And they're these huge cities today. And what was an interesting takeaway for me, and you talked about his earlier, was these were unlikely places. And they weren't that big at the time. They weren't, typically, the biggest cities in those countries or areas.

And so, are there places right now that have caught your attention that you go, "Wow, there's really interesting stuff happening there."

Eric Weiner: Yeah. Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, I think is interesting and worth watching. We're speaking via Skype. Skype was invented in Estonia.

Jeff Goins: Wow. I didn't know that.
Eric Weiner: There you go. And, you know, later purchased by Microsoft, but invented there. And I think it's an interesting place because it has a free flow of information, very open flow of information, really opened the door from them, this country. Very wired, as well. And geographically, interesting location, sort of between East and West. And a strong culture, one that was ... Though part of the Soviet Union, it was never, really [Russified 00:41:26]. And today, is very much embarking [inaudible 00:41:30] reacquainting itself with its Estonian culture.

And has that chip on their shoulder, if you will. That was true in Silicon Valley, too. People were like, "We're out here in California." Which, you know, in 1920s, 30s, 40s, made a big difference. You were not one of the establishment. You were a long way from the centers of power. But they were determined to prove that they're every bit as good as those East Coast snobs.

And Estonians are determined to prove they're every bit as good as Russians to the East or Europeans to the West. So that's one place I think is worth watching. But it's ... It's sort of like trying to predict the weather two weeks from now, it's very hard to do. And it's not because the weather is random, it's because it's complex. And one variable can have a huge output later on. It's called the Butterfly Effect. But it could be there. It won't be North Korea, I will say that. But why? It's not because they don't work hard or have [crosstalk 00:42:37], it's just not an open system. The basic D, first D.

Jeff Goins: Wow. Fascinating stuff. The book is The Geography of Genius. I loved it. Thanks so much for spending some time with me, Eric.

Eric Weiner: Thanks, Jeff. I hope you're feeling a bit more creative after this.

Jeff Goins: I am.