Jeff Goins: I can hear you okay. Can you hear me?

John Weiss: Yes I can, let me turn my volume down a little bit.

Jeff Goins: Cool. You're looking dapper.

John Weiss: I just have a picture of your face.

Jeff Goins: I'll turn my video on, actually.

John Weiss: There you go.

Jeff Goins: I need a better ... Watch this.

I got this fancy lighting rig.

John Weiss: Are you at a standing desk or a sitting desk?

Jeff Goins: What's that?

John Weiss: Are you at a standing desk or a sitting desk?

Jeff Goins: I'm at a standing desk. What about you?

John Weiss: I had a standing desk but I don't have it now.

Jeff Goins: My legs hurt. I probably should sit down.

John Weiss: Hey it's good to see you man, long time.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, likewise. Are you still good for time? Sorry about the confusion.

John Weiss: No, you're not the one that needs to apologize, I had been sitting at my desk the whole time writing and I don't know how I missed the call.

Jeff Goins: It said you were offline so I called it a little bit after three and just couldn't connect.

John Weiss: I apologize for that.

Jeff Goins: It's okay.

John Weiss: I was just sitting here, I'm not sure what happened.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, it's all right.

John Weiss: But I'm here!

Jeff Goins: Great, so what I want to do is ... it's great that we're using video but I'll probably just use the audio of this. What I want to do is two things: one, I love your story and I think it might be a fun thing to add to the podcast. Two, I'm working on a book about business and creativity. I don't know if I've talked to you about this, I've been thinking about this for about a year now and I keep remembering your story. So, what I'm doing is I'm just sort of hunting down
artists who live in that tension that you and I have talked about before, the
tension between doing creative work and making a living, and the different
choices that people have to manage that tension. I like your approach, I think
it resonates with those of us who are realists. I think it'd be fun for me cause
there's some things about your story that I don't know.

John Weiss: Sure.

Jeff Goins: I just have some questions for you and I just want you to kind of tell your story. Does that sound good?

John Weiss: Yeah, absolutely. I enjoyed all those stories in the art of the works. So to be able to share my experience and my journey would be wonderful.

Jeff Goins: Cool, we'll just jump in then.

So, John, you are a cartooning cop, at least that was a tagline at one point on your website. What does that mean?

John Weiss: My taglines have changed over the years but for a while there, you're right, I was the cartooning cop and that's because all through my youth I used to draw cartoons and draw and that was really my calling, was to be an artist. But like a lot of young people, my dad said, "Have something to fall back on, son." So I started to look at different careers and ended up in law enforcement. My dad was a judge and I thought about going to law school, kind of fell into law enforcement. But I cartooned all through college, grad school. I cartooned in newspapers, and published, and I really loved being a political cartoonist. So that's sort of the back story of how my cartooning started and I've been cartooning ever since. It's been a great pleasure for me and that led to fine art and painting and writing and just creativity in general.

Jeff Goins: So you're one of those guys who's always wanted to be an artist?

John Weiss: Correct.

Jeff Goins: And your dad told you to get a real job and you did. But do you regret that path?

John Weiss: No. You know, that's the one thing, is that ... You know, I have found that my career in law enforcement, and I've been in law enforcement 26 years, the last 10 as a police chief, has really broadened me as a person. I think I wrote about this before, and you've written about how nothing's wasted. All the things I've done in law enforcement have made me better at dealing with people, at how I view the world, it informs my art, my creativity, even my humor with my cartoons. So, it really it sorta compliments my artistry.

Jeff Goins: You told me once that you're not the typical cop or at least the typical stereotype and I have other friends who are police officers and are in law enforcement and when I first met you in person, I think that's true, I don't think your demeanor matches the stereotype that I have in my mind of a cop.

John Weiss: Right.
Jeff Goins: Does that provide any sort of conflict in your job? How does that work? Cause you told me once, you’re known around town. Like you do cartoons in the newspaper and that sort of thing.

John Weiss: Right, right.

Jeff Goins: How does being an artist and being a hard-nosed law enforcer … how does that work?

John Weiss: Yeah, so they seem a bit contradictory.

Jeff Goins: Yeah!

John Weiss: Here's a short story. Several years back when I started getting into fine art and painting and I went to study with a really renowned artist named Scott L. Christensen and when I came back from that couple weeks of painting and learning how to do fine art, I was telling some of the guys at work and one of my Lieutenants said, “Hey, Chief, tell everybody you went to a tactical shooting course in Idaho, don’t tell them you went and water colored or did artwork cause that’s not gonna resonate with the cops on the SWAT team.”

My whole career I’ve been drawing cartoons and having fun with it, but I have not fit your stereotypical model of what you think of as a policeman. It was actually, I think, is a good thing because the model we’re going to in law enforcement is trying to find people with emotional intelligence, people that are well balanced, not sort of this overly officious, old school style of maybe a military background. Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but we want people today that have a lot of different dimensions. I think my creative background helped me in police work.

Jeff Goins: You told me this hilarious story, which I just think is fun, I don’t know if it has anything to do with art or creativity, but it was fun. You were on vacation with your wife and you’re driving across country … and I was telling you about the feeling that you get when a cop pulls behind you and you start to get nervous, and one time I was, when my wife and I were dating and I was driving back to my apartment at like 1 o’clock in the morning. I was totally awake but like at 1 o’clock in the morning I’m driving on this side street and this police car comes behind me and all of a sudden I’m freaking out like, what am I doing wrong, what am I doing wrong? And I crossed the center line because I’m obsessed about this cop behind me. And you told me that that’s pretty common but that that applied to even other police officers, or at least to you. And you told me this funny story that I’d love for you to share if you remember it, about you driving cross country and having a run-in with a police officer yourself.

John Weiss: Yeah, well it’s pretty funny because I think that everyone thinks that “Oh, you know, cops they look after one another” and that’s not always the case. I’ve had other cops give me tickets for speeding in Idaho. The guy said, “You’re from California, here’s your ticket.”

But, I was with my wife, we were on a road trip. I was driving through some state and I went through one of those speed traps where it goes from 45 to like 25 in a blink, and the next thing I know, there’s lights and siren behind me and I’m nervous. And I’m a police officer. I think, “Why am I nervous?” I don’t think I
did anything wrong. But, this big guy comes up and he starts talking to us and he was great, he ended up giving me a warning, but I still felt nervous. So, two states later, my wife's driving and she's snickering at me when I got pulled over. Well, guess what. She gets pulled over and I am laughing my butt off now. The cop's looking at me saying, "Hey buddy, you're not helping your wife out at all." I had to tell him, "Well, look, I got stopped before and she had made fun of me and we're from California."

So, it is interesting when you're in law enforcement and you're in other jurisdictions and you run in to cops. I think it's just a universal thing. When lights and siren are behind you, you get nervous.

Jeff Goins: It's intimidating. So, you were talking about doing this fine art retreat, school thing and you were the Chief then. You can only give the Chief so much hassle, I guess. What about when you weren't top dog and when you were in the academy or whatever and you had this affinity for art, was there ever a point at which being creative hurt or hindered your career as a law enforcement officer?

John Weiss: Absolutely. In fact, it's been a struggle. I like your word tension because my whole career it's been a struggle to reconcile the contradiction between this very linear type job and this very creative backdrop of my personality. There was a period when I was a Sergeant, when I was drawing cartoons for the local county newspaper, editorial cartoons, and I did a cartoon that wasn't very favorable towards the district attorneys' office. There was a lot of infighting going on and I drew this cartoon of an old couple on a park bench and there was these district attorneys walking by and they all had forks and scissors in their backs and the lady's saying, "Don't stare dear, they work at the district attorney's office." [inaudible 00:09:16] from all the backside.

So the police chief gets ahold of this and he calls me into his office, slams the door, and says, "Weiss, you know, you need to make a decision. Either you're going to be a cartoonist or you're gonna be a cop but you're not gonna be both." He said, "Who do you think investigates police-involved shootings it there's a problem? The DA's office. You think it's a good idea to cartoons about the district attorney?" So, I got in trouble and slowly as I went higher up the police department it became obvious that it's very hard to comment about politics when you're in a very public position. So that's really where I started to turn more from cartooning into fine art and become a landscape painter and a writer where I don't get in trouble as much.

Jeff Goins: So now does it conflict at all? Is it ... I get the other side, like you don't have to make money off of your art so you can have this job that pays well and not have to do the starving artist thing. But what about the other side? Does the art make your job better? Does it make it harder at times?

John Weiss: I've come to a point now, Jeff, where it makes it better. And the reason it makes it better is because I do a lot of writing now, you know?

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

John Weiss: From Tribe Writers with you and going down to Franklin and my blog and I'm writing for a fine art magazine online and so my writing has improved. I've been writing for years for local periodicals and for the newspapers on law...
enforcement related issues. Now that's my artistry and my writing has improved to the point where when I write all these articles for the papers on department-related issues and all that, I got a lot of positive feedback on that. In my artwork, too. I think people in my community, we're a small community, they like the idea that their police chief is also a painter and a writer. They know about my blog. They read it. I get lots of great comments from the community. They see me as being well-rounded and in this day and age where there's so much scrutiny of law enforcement and so much concern about the rapport that law enforcement has in their community, to know that your chief or your police officers are artists and that they're writers and that they have this whole other liberal arts life is a good thing. It shows that we think beyond just the boundaries of our work.

Jeff Goins: Has being a creative person ... Do you think it's made you more successful in life in general?

John Weiss: Absolutely. 100%. In fact, there's a guy recently that just wrote an article called Want Your Children to Survive the Future? Send them to Art School. I just read this in [inaudible 00:11:50] and I don't know if you saw it or not. I wrote an article about that too, that's coming out this weekend, but he basically was talking about how ... You wrote about this in your book, too, how the landscape of work is changing. There's a lot of automation, a lot of jobs are going away, and creativity and artfulness is a real skill set that's gonna be needed. [inaudible 00:12:09] wrote in his article that Steve Jobs didn't become a billionaire because he knew how to code, he didn't. He became a billionaire because of his creativity. I think for me and my job, it's been my creativity and my artistry that's really helped me in solving problems at work, at looking at things through a different lens than I would normally. I think there's a great value for me to have this artistic background, but it has been a struggle because I used to wrestle with, "I want to be an artist, not a cop." It's hard sometimes to reconcile those two.

Jeff Goins: Was there an epiphany for you? Was there a moment where you stopped feeling like you had to apologize for being an artist? There's obviously a moment where you stopped doing political cartooning, but was there a moment where you realized, "Hey, maybe this thing isn't a liability. Maybe it can be utilized as an asset." You clearly see it as an asset now and I'm just wondering if there was a moment where the switch flipped for you.

John Weiss: Yeah, there was. I've written about it before. It actually happened as a result of a police shooting. It was earlier in my career where we had a guy in town that went into a gun shop and asked to look at a gun. They handed him the gun, he ran out the front door, loaded it with his own bullets, cranked off a few rounds in town, and we chased this guy into a neighboring jurisdiction where he shot a police dog. The dog survived, thankfully, but it ended up being a lethal incident and the gunman was shot and killed. I walked away from that incident and started thinking really hard about, "Do I want to be in this profession? What about my art?" It was a turning point where I thought, "No, you know what? I need to hang on to my art." It's a huge part of my humanity and it really started pushing me towards embracing it more. Even though I was a cop, I thought there's no reason why I can't have these two different lives. That was the starting point.
The second thing came later on when I first started blogging. I read Michael Hyatt's book Platform. I started reading your blog and started doing the Tribe Writers. Then, what happened was I started realizing this doesn't have to be mutually exclusive. Your whole idea of the portfolio life. I love my police profession. I'm probably gonna retire the end of this year and then I'm gonna dive into writing and painting full-time, but what I found was I can have both. I can have a great profession in law enforcement, but I can also be an artist and a writer and reap the benefits of that, too.

Jeff Goins: I love that, and I agree. I think that the starving artist thing works for some people, I guess, but I was talking to my therapist today and I was talking about, "I'm an entrepreneur and I'm a writer and I feel like all my entrepreneur friends want me to make more money and all my writer friends want me to write more book sand there's tension there." And I said, "But I like it. I like the tension. I don't want to write all day long. I think that would turn me into Jack Nicholson from the Shining. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. I'd go crazy! I write for a couple of hours a day. That's a good writing stint and when I'm finishing up a book, it's more. But I like having other stuff to do throughout the day. It evens me out and it gives me experiences that I can write from. Gosh, being a cop, I can't imagine the kinds of experiences ... I'm sure there's boring stuff and paperwork and whatnot, but it has to give you just a treasure trove of experience to write from and paint from.

John Weiss: That's true. I think you started blogging really seriously, I guess, when you were 30 and turned to that and you've been very successful at it. One of the things that I've found in my law enforcement career, although now my wife says I'm not really a cop because when you're a chief, most of my time I'm at the desk, I'm going to meetings with politicians, but no question the last 26 years ... The stories, the human experiences, the tragedies, the triumphs. All these things inform my writing and my worldview. It's made me a better artist, made me a better writer. I don't regret it for a minute, but I think we all have those struggles. You read a lot today about people talking about the laptop lifestyle. Quit your job, go make money, listen to your podcast with Pat Flynn, and he's just an amazing with what he's accomplished. But you know, not everyone can do that. The single mother whose husband left her and she's got two kids and she needs the medical care for her kids, it may be harder for her to run off and go find herself or self-actualize in France and write.

But I do think it's possible to be what I call a pragmatic juggler where you can have a great career, or maybe not even a career you're thrilled about, but slowly work towards that goal. Think Shawshank Redemption. How many years did that guy dig at that tunnel before he finally escaped?

Jeff Goins: Don't ruin the ending.

John Weiss: Right, I won't ruin the ending.

Jeff Goins: It involves a spoon.

John Weiss: Yes, it does involve a spoon. Sometimes, our work feels like a spoon, like we're [inaudible 00:17:02] little bit at a time. I've had years like that where I felt really frustrated like, "Gosh. When am I gonna get there? When am I gonna start realizing some of my artistic dreams?" But I realized you just have to keep working away and for me, it's consistency, it's being flexible, being willing to
pivot. I think of all the taglines I’ve had over the last two years with my blog from Cop Wisdom to Artist Writer Police Chief, then it was Cartooning Cop, and I finally found my niche was creativity and art. That’s really what my readers are, that’s my tribe in a sense, and so from what I’ve learned from you and from others, I’m now leveraging that and I’m really enjoying it and my police career has, I think, made me a better writer and an artist. So it is possible to juggle both.

Jeff Goins: So, you wrote this blog post, you were serious, I guess, and one of the blog posts about this HBO series went viral, right? It was the ...

John Weiss: Oh, yeah. That’s right.

Jeff Goins: What is that called? Overlander? I don’t know the show. All I keep thinking of is Highlander, that movie from the 80s with Sean Connery.

John Weiss: [inaudible 00:18:05] Love that movie. No, my wife was a big fan of Diana Gabaldon, who wrote the whole Outlander series, a sort of Scottish history fantasy. Then Starz did a big series out of it and it became hugely popular and so I was marooned every night on my couch with her watching this series. It was pretty good, but I wrote on the article, I think it was called Outlander: A Men’s Survival Guide. Tongue-in-cheek, you know, man we have a serious enemy out there, her name is Diana Gabaldon and she’s really smart, she’s a PhD. So I wrote this thing and did a bunch of cartoons and just put it up on my blog and it went mini-viral. Next thing I know, Diana Gabaldon gets it, she posts it on her Facebook page, I got a couple hundred, I must have had four hundred comments on my blog post. For a small town blogger like me, that was unusual.

It was exciting, but I learned a lesson in that, too, and that is that if you’re a blogger and you’re trying to find your voice and trying to find a worldview, maybe once in a while even a broken clock is right. I wrote a piece that really resonated, it was recopied everywhere, I had my fifteen minutes of fame, but a lot of the people that signed up for my email newsletter slowly dropped off because I wasn’t still writing about Diana Gabaldon. That wasn’t my niche. I was just writing a humor article. So that’s where I learned that if I’m going to be serious about writing, I have to think about what the niche is, so if I do write that next viral article, people that come to my site will stay because they like the content and it’s consistent.

Jeff Goins: I love that. You have found, like I have found, that going viral isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, at least if you get attention for something that isn’t really the thing that you want to talk about.

John Weiss: It doesn’t hurt. Any time you get attention. Blogging keeps changing and podcasting’s popular and where I’ve gone with my work lately has been ... I started writing more utilitarian articles. Like everybody else, listicles. The six ways to do this, or the seven ways to do a better painting. Lately I’ve been writing more micro-stories that really touch people more emotionally. I wrote a piece called Roses are Memories in Winter, it’s this fictional story about an old man who’s in a retirement community, kind of loosely based on my mother. Really it was about how his art touches people even after he passes away. I got more comments, Jeff, on that little creative piece and I published it on Fine Art Views and I wasn’t sure if the readers would like it and they loved it. So I’ve learned that the cream rises to the top. If you write well, even in this glutted
market with all these writers out there, if you write well and you're that purple cow. Like Seth Godin says, if you stand out from the rest by writing great work and maybe even creative work, then people are going to see that. Then it's just a matter of leveraging it and getting it out there, I think.

Jeff Goins: What do you hope to do, since you've done such a good job of managing this tension, balancing these two different lives, what do you hope to do when you retire that you aren't able to do now?

John Weiss: I think I've started the groundwork for that next chapter for myself. I started blogging just two years ago and it's changed so much from there. I have more subscribers. My goal, as I retire probably at the end of this year, is to really throw myself full-time into both fine art painting and also blogging. I plan to do some courses online through my website for artists and creatives. I have a couple books I'm working on that I plan to work on and leverage. I'm really excited about that because that's what I've never been able to do full-time. It's really hard when you go to work every day at six thirty and get home at six o'clock at night running a police department and then try to really make a business out of it. You really have to dive in full-time eventually, so that's next for me. I follow all the people in the industry, I love reading your stuff and James Clear, Michael Hyatt, and everybody. I just really want to take it to the next level with my writing and with my painting. That's my niche is art and writing.

Jeff Goins: Cool. What does success meant to you? I've been asking people this question ... I've been asking for stories, like yours and other people's ... How creative people have succeeded in life and in work, and everybody goes, "Well, what does success mean?" I go, "I don't know. What does it mean to you?" What does it mean to you?

John Weiss: I think it changes for everybody because it's just like writing. It's hard to prescribe what makes someone happy. It changes from person to person. For me, whether I'm in Costa Rica with my family on vacation or at home in my library, painting, being creative is success. I get such pleasure out of writing a great piece or doing a great painting, or having a breakthrough in my art, that whether or not I make money at that is secondary. We all want to make money and make a good living, but for me it has to mean something. I have to know that I'm doing stuff that quickens my heart. For me, doing great artwork and writing great pieces quickens my heart. And then if other people resonate with it, then that's the icing on the cake.

Now, I hope to make more money doing that as well, but it has to start there. You have to start with your passion. I've met people that get into blogging and they're not really writing about what they're passionate about. They're trying to make a quick buck. You gotta do what really feeds your soul, and that's what happiness is. You do it whether you make money or not. I know you'd probably still be writing even if you never were successful as a blogger or a writer because that's something that you're passionate about. I think that's happiness, Jeff. I think it's finding that muse inside you and feeding it.

Jeff Goins: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

So, if you die tomorrow, hope that doesn't happen. That would be bad, but it could happen. Will you have any regrets?
John Weiss: No. You know, there was a period where I thought I really needed to transition out of law enforcement and get going on this art thing. One movie I loved, and you talked about it in your book, is Mr. Holland's Opus. Richard Dreyfuss. Such a splendid movie of a man who really wanted to be a composer. It reminded me a little bit earlier in my career of really wanting to be a cartoonist or really wanting to be an artist, but gosh I gotta make a living and I gotta do this cop thing, you know?

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

John Weiss: I kept striving away and then somewhere along the way, I discovered that gosh, I've affected a community, I've had the privilege to work with so many great people and set them on their course, and then the job taught me things I didn't know about myself in law enforcement, and it's sort of like where Richard Dreyfuss discovered that the people in this school he taught were his grand symphony, his opus. Well in a way, my contributions to my community are a part of my creative life, part of my success. And it's gonna help me in my next chapter. That's how I look at it.

Jeff Goins: Love that. This is great, John. Thanks for sharing your story. I know this is gonna inspire and encourage a lot of people. Thank you.

John Weiss: Oh, I appreciate it, being honest, been a pleasure.