M = Mark Frauenfelder
J = Jeff Goins

==
J  Mark.
J/M  How are you?
M  I’m doing great.
J  You sound great.
M  Oh, good.
J  Is your hair spiky today?
M  It is.
J  Good. I am not disappointed.
M  Good.
J  Hey, we’re rolling here.
M  OK.
J  How much time do you have?
M  I could have like up to an hour.
J  Good, three hours. Great. No, I’ve got the same slot.
M  OK.
J  So, I would conservatively it would be like 45 minutes.
M  OK.
J  And we’ll make sure to not go over that time.
M  That sounds great.
J  Do you have any questions for me?
M  Yeah, I just have one question.
J  Shoot.
M  I can turn on call recorder and record it on my end and send the file—
J  That’s great.
M  —if you want that.
J  I think that’s great to have a backup—
M  OK.
—I appreciate that. I just want to talk about creativity and business and all the neat things that you do.

Oh, good.

Is there anything that you want to talk about?

Um, let’s see. There’s nothing specifically that I’m pushing at this moment other than maybe a little - my first kind of self-published EBook—

Yeah.

—on how to make trick card decks. That would be kind of fun to talk about the experience and the tools that I used to write the book.

Yeah, let’s do that. That would be great for our audience. We have a lot of writers in our audience. That would be great.

Oh, good. OK.

All right. Well, we’re rolling. So, we’re just going to roll into this. I will count down, and I’ll welcome you to the show. Three, two - welcome to the show, Mark.

Hey, Jeff, how’s it going?

It’s going great. Glad to have you. So, I feel like I’m not overstating this to say that basically you invented the Internet [laughing].

That’s very kind of you.

Well, I’m looking at your bio, and if you go to - how do you say your last name, Mark? I don’t want to mispronounce it.

Frauenfelder.

Frauenfelder. That’s what I would have said. But I studied Spanish. We were exchanging a little bit of Spanish just a minute ago. But that looks like a German name, and I didn’t want to mispronounce it. Is it a German name?

It is German. There’s a village in Switzerland that’s called Frauenfeld, Switzerland. And I’ve been told - I don’t know German, but I’ve been told that frauenfeld means fields of women. Ha, ha.

Which is what I would think of when I think of you.

Yeah, who could argue with that.

So, if you’re from Frauenfeld, you must be a Frauenfelder?

Exactly.

So, if you go to Mark Frauenfelder.com there is this incredible visual biography of some of the things that you have accomplished beginning with a little Website called Wired.com.

Yes.

Tell me about how that came to be in your - and how you were a part of that.
Yes, sure. So, I was publishing Boing Boing as a printzine in the ‘80s with my wife Carla. And we started in Boulder, Colorado. We were really inspired by the whole ‘zine revolution. And things like Mondo 2000 which was kind of a cyberdelic technology magazine in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. And, so, I got a call from these people in San Francisco, and they said they were starting a magazine called Wire and they wanted to talk to me about coming out there to work for them, because they had seen some issues of Boing Boing. So, I went there, and actually just started working there for Wired as an associate editor for the magazine without having any really any journalistic experience other than the zine that my wife and I were publishing. I was actually working as a mechanical engineer in the disc drive industry. So, it was like totally fun to go there and be with all these really creative people, a lot of them who had never really worked in the magazine world before. The creative directors who came up with a beautiful design of Wired, John Plunkett and Barbara Coor were like museum signage designers.

They had never designed a magazine before. And that’s why it kind of looked like nothing you’d ever seen, because they didn’t really know how to design a magazine. They just knew what worked and how to capture people’s attention. And, so, after a while Wired decided to go online. Obviously, was a good move. So, they asked if I would be the editor in chief of Wired.com, kind of the online home of the magazine. So, I did that. And that was a great experience, kind of translating what Wired was doing as a magazine and putting it online. And, then, Wired also started a book imprint. And I became an editor at the book imprint. And that, again, was a ton of fun. One of the things I did was contacted all the old cyber punk authors and talked to them about getting their really early works, most of them were out of print, books by people like Bruce Sterling, and John Shirley, and Charles Platt, and getting their work, Ruddy Rucker, and putting that into a series called The Cortex Series of Science Fiction. That was great. And, then, that book division folded unfortunately. But that was a great time.

So, Boing Boing. I didn’t realize this until I started reading more about you. Boing Boing before it was this super popular Website, full of all kinds of fun things, a directory of wonderful things, it was a print magazine that you and your wife started a long time ago. That was interesting. What was the impetus for starting Boing Boing and when did you take it online?

I first came really across the ideas of ‘zines in 1987 when there was an issue of The Whole Earth Review that was edited by Kevin Kelly.

Yeah.

And it was called The Signal Issue. That was the theme of the issue. And that was like just a mind-blowing copy of the magazine. You can find it online as a .pdf, and you can see how groundbreaking revolutionary it really was. It’s just this one issue of a magazine that kind of pointed to everything we’re doing today. And as it turns out, Kevin became the one of the founding editors of Wired Magazine which launched in ’93. So, this is like - The Signal Issue was already six years old, but it kind of served as a template for Wired. And one of the articles in this 1987 issue of The Whole Earth Review was about the zine revolution. And I wasn’t really aware - I knew that there were small magazines, and I was into things like mini-comics being a comic book reader. But when I saw all these amazing zines that were like specialized subjects that were published by individuals who were taking advantage of inexpensive desktop publishing software in the ubiquitous corner Xerox shop and how anyone
could put together a magazine that was really exciting to me. And, so, Carla, my wife and I, said, “We’ve got to do a zine ourselves. It would be so much fun. So, we said, “What do we want it to be about?” Cyber punk science fiction, we loved that. We loved underground and indie comics. We like things like consciousness, altering technology like brain machines and things like that were popular at the time. Things that Timothy Leary was interested in kind of after he was released from prison. One of his big things was something called SMI²E (pronounced smile). It was an acronym: SMI²E and it stood for space migration, intelligence increase and life extension. And, so, those are like topics that we were interested in at the time, too. So, we worked for a long time putting together the first issue, put it together, Xeroxed it, and I sent it into this kind of metazine called Fact Sheet Five which was like - it was like the Yahoo of zines. It was a guy names Mike Gunderloy who lived in Upstate New York and people would send him their zine, and then he would give it like a two-sentence review and the mailing information. And, so, Fact Sheet Five was like the clearing house for zines. And, so, I sent a copy to Gunderloy at Fact Sheet Five, and he reviewed it. And the people seemed to like the subject matter and the way he reviewed it. It sold out really fast. We only printed 100 copies. And I also got a call from a distributer in New York who wanted to pick it up, too. So, the second issue we went for broke, and we printed 200 copies. And we basically kept on doubling the print run every issue until the final issue was like issue number 15, and the circulation was - it was either 14,500 or 17,500. I can’t remember now. But I know it was one of those two. And that was the final issue before we went online. It just made more economic sense to do that, especially because a couple of the large distributers of zines went bankrupt.

J    Yeah.

M    They left us and a bunch of other large zine publishers holding tens of thousands of dollars of payments due to us from them. So, we just said, “Eh, let’s try it online and turn it into a zine, an online zine.”

J    And what year was that, that Boing Boing went online?

M    I would say that we got it probably online in 1995.

J    Wow.

M    And it was just like, you can go back and look at Archive.org and see what it looked like. It was not a blog. It was pretty crazy. It was like just if you wanted to add something, you would write the html and upload it with an .ftp.

J    Yeah.

M    It was pretty crazy to do it that way. And, then, I discovered Blogger in 1999. And I wrote an article for a magazine called, The Industry Standard. I don’t know if you remember that—

J    Huh-uh (no).

M    —magazine.

J    No.

M    It was a great weekly magazine about the business of the Internet. And it was kind of the Web 1.0 industry magazine. And I think they still hold the record for the most number of ad pages sold in a year. It was like huge boom of magazine. So, I was writing for them, and I
talked to my editor and I said, “I found out about this cool thing called Blogger, and people are making these things called Weblogs.” And at that time there were probably a few 100 blogs at the time. So, I wrote an article about it, and my editor read it. And he said, “You know, there’s probably not enough business interest in blogs. I don’t think it’s kind of a hobby thing. Businesses aren’t going to be interested in it” which is kind of ironic, because the publisher of The Industry Standard, John Batell later started Federated Media which was like the biggest ad broker for blogs for a long time.

J I feel like we could go through project after project and talk about all of these interesting stories, all of these things that you started, which would be fun. But we only have so much time. And I want to pick your brain on some things. What’s so interesting to me about your life and body of work, Mark, is that there is so much diversity to it. There’s so many different things that you’ve done. You’re an artist. You’re an author. You’ve launched several of these publishing projects and companies. Does it feel that way to you? Do you feel like there’s this consistent thread of things that you’ve done, or do you like that variety and diversity of experiences?

M Yeah, you know, I think for better or for worse, I am really interested in a lot of different things, and trying things out myself to see what it’s like to actually experience producing media, or other things, which, you know, the fun thing about that is that it’s always interesting. The negative is that, I think, you tend to get spread out a little too thin and maybe you don’t master certain things as well as other people who are obsessively focused on something.

J Uh-huh (agreeing).

M So, I wouldn’t necessarily like recommend being a jack-of-all-trades. But I think it’s worked for me, and I’m happy kind of living a life of exploring different ways to be creative and try to make a living at the same time.

J So, that’s the word that I think of when I look at all this, and I was curious to understand what moniker you adopt, because you are doing these different things. And creative is the word that stands out to me. Do you think of yourself primarily as a creative?

M Yeah, I think that’s really hard when people ask me what I do to tell them.

J Yeah.

M What I do is just pick one thing, and I’ll say, “I’m a magazine editor,” or “a writer, or a blogger.” So, yeah, I think I’m just generally a person who will do things that require creativity and communication, you know, creative ways to communicate, I think, is what I’ve settled on is kind of the most-focused way I could define myself.

J So, you mentioned just a minute ago, “I try to do lots of different things, and it’s worked out for me being creative and also trying to figure out how to make a living.” To me, that is the thing. I live in Nashville. So, I’m surrounded by musicians, and actually a lot of aspiring authors, lots of artsy-fartsy people, which I am a part of that breed. And for most creative I knows, there’s that tension between I want to make cool stuff. I want to make art. I want to make things that matter to me, and at the same time I want to make a living. Does that - you’ve done a lot of things that have been - at least from the outside looking in - very successful. And I would imagine economically successful, commercial successful. So, does that feel like a tension to you, that art and money conflict that I hear so many artists talking about? Or is that not a thing for you?
M      Luckily, it’s kind of not been a thing.

J      Interesting.

M      Fortunately, I think, for me what’s happened is, things that are meaningful to me, there are enough people out there that those same things are meaningful to me as well. And, so, I can find an audience that can appreciate the kind of stuff that I do. And I think not every artist has that. They can create art that’s very meaningful to them and feels great, but it doesn’t really resonate with other people. That’s too bad for them. It doesn’t mean that the quality of their work is bad or anything. It’s just just their potential audience is just not enough for them to make it. And I’ve never gotten really gone into anything doing something that I am not personally interested in. That was kind of one of the things that everyone at Wired was always saying is like, “We’re our own audience. We create the media that we want to consume.” And I think that’s a really great way to think about your work and pursuing different opportunities is, if it’s something that you’re personally interested in, and it’s meaningful to you, then that’s what you should do. And, hopefully, there will be an audience for that. If not, you can learn from that and move on and find something else to do and give it another try. And I’ve done plenty of things that have not worked out as well, and haven’t been successful.

J      What’s an example of that, Mark, that stands out to you?

M      Um, OK, here’s something that I think that is a good example. Boing Boing started working on podcasts, and we wanted to become a podcast network. And, so, I invited people who were friends of mine and were doing podcasts, or thinking about doing podcasts, and asked if they would like to be part of a Boing, Boing network. And a lot of people said, “Yes.” And, so, we put a lot of work into this, and we featured these podcasts, and it was a ton of work, and we were working with a firm that places ads on the podcasts, but it turns out that the kind of format of these podcasts just couldn’t sustain - it didn’t work with the requirements of the advertiser. These podcasts were getting in the neighborhood of like 5,000 to 15,000 or 20,000 at the maximum downloads per episode. And that’s just - if you want to make money selling advertising on a podcast, that’s really not enough. I think you need about 50,000 really to have a podcast be commercially successful if that’s what you’re doing it for. And that’s what we were doing it for at Boing Boing. So, it just - I think that the format of these podcasts were interview formats. And from my experience - and kind of what I’ve learned since I think that the podcasts that are really successful in many cases are ones that are like comedians doing podcasts that are just like talking and having fun like Mark Maron and other kinds of podcasts, and they can get like upwards to 500,000. And, then, scripted podcasts that are really produced and thought out. And, so, the kind of interview ones maybe with the subject matter that we had, too. We had one about interviews with comic book artists. We had another one about science fiction and fantasy books. We had another one about Game of Thrones, and maybe those were too saturated. Like there were already too many podcasts like that. Maybe there are interview ones that have kind of taken - they were there first, or they were better. But the Boing Boing podcast network did not work out as well as we hoped. And, so, we got rid of most of the podcasts, dropped most of them. We kept them. I’m actually starting to build it back up again with a new kind of crop of shows that I’m hoping are more successful. And we’ll see what happens. But here I am talking to you, and you are running an interview-based podcast, and you’re very successful. So, what do I know?

J      Well, more than I do. That’s for sure. [Laughing] You know, it’s a great point. This is a fun project for me, and I’m sort of dabbling around in it. And I started eight different blogs before I finally found a way to blog in a way that worked for me and what would actually
attract an audience. And podcasting is that way, too, where just constantly sort of poking around trying to figure out what makes sense. But that’s like the thing, right? Like you see somebody doing something, and it looks like an opportunity for you. And you’re like, “I could do that.” And, then, you try it, and you go, “Hey, this is harder,” or, “I’m not that good at this,” or “I don’t like this as much as I thought.” I want to get super personal. Like this is just a selfish question for me. I don’t care about anybody else. As a creative - I identify with that - I think you tend to see things that other people don’t see, to recognize opportunity that other people might not recognize. And there are, I think, entrepreneurial implications and assets to that. I can see an opportunity, and I can go after it. I love starting things. I’m not so fond of like having to continue running things. How have you dealt with that tension in your life and career of being a very creative person, starting lots of amazing things and being a part of a lot of neat, creative, cutting edge media projects, companies, technology, how do you do that? Are you really good at managing things? Do you just keep starting things and moving on? How does that work for you?

M Yeah, you’re right, Jeff. I mean, that is something that I think I struggle with is the tendency to lose interest in something after a while. And I think that’s probably why I wasn’t that great of an engineer.

J Hum.

M The product-development cycle was pretty long for these disc scribe projects. And after a while I just started to lose interest. And I think that’s why journalism was so appealing to me, because you are exploring new ideas like on a daily basis.

J Yeah.

M And, so, I think what’s happened is, I kind of like done things where there is always all these things that I do that is kind of like these novelty generating engines. So, it’s kind of impossible to get bored. You know, we’ve been doing Boing Boing now as a zine, and as a Website for a long time since ’87. So, what is that coming up on 30 years? Oh, my God.

J Wow.

M It’s crazy.

J That’s incredible.

M So, it’s been a long time. I know.

J Yeah.

M And it’s - I’ve never been bored by it, because it’s just what it’s about is novelty. And I think the same thing like with Make Magazine.

J Yep.

M It was the creative things that people were making in their basements. I would never get bored with that. And, so, it was - I guess what I did was I found out the things that I could do where boredom was impossible.

J So, let’s talk about Make, because not too long ago, at least for me, this word kept popping up everywhere: maker. And At Sea was becoming more and more of a thing. People were making millions of dollars a year selling handmade, homemade crafts online. My wife
and I will buy each other gifts off of Etsy for Christmas, or birthday, or whatever, just because it’s so original.

M Uh-huh (yes).

J You can find - I mean there’s like crappy stuff on there. But there’s really neat stuff there that isn’t - that is not in Target or something. And it’s a really fun place. My wife found these vintage pair of really cool dress shoes that I wore for years. People were like, “Where did you get those?” I was like, “You can’t get them. They’re one of a kind.”

M That’s so cool.

J Yeah, exactly! It’s super cool. And, so, Maker Fare is a thing. It’s an event. And Make is this magazine that you helped found as you’re the founding editor and chief for it. Share a little bit about that. You’re a creative. This is intended, as I understand it to engage other creatives. Why was that an attractive project for you?

M Yeah, I was - excuse me - I was living with my family on a little island in the South Pacific called Rarotonga. And—

J Which is how most stories begin.

M Exactly.

J [Laughing]

M Exactly. And, so, we were there and I got an email from Dale Dordy who was a cofounder of O’Reilly Books, and he said that he got my name from I think it was actually from John Batell, the Industry Standard publisher. And he was Wired’s managing editor also. And he said, “I’ve been producing this series of books called, The Hack Series, for O’Reilly. And they were cool books. He had things like Home PC Hacks, Home Security Hacks, Smart Home Hacks, Google Hacks. And, so, they were books that had like how-to projects. And he said, “I would love to do a magazine kind of for the general interest reader about fun technology projects. And John recommended that I talk to you about coming up with how the magazine might look and feel. And, so, we were planning on coming back home anyway. So, a couple of months later when I got to California I flew up and met with Dale, and he told me about the project and asked if I would like to develop a prototype of the magazine, like 30 pages of what the magazine would like. So, I found a designer who I knew, a guy named David Albertson in San Francisco who is like an amazing designer. He does all the stuff for the TED conferences now. And, so, we holed up in his office for probably three weeks and put together our ideas for what this magazine would be like. And Dale would frequently come visit with us, and we didn’t have a name for it yet. And leave it to me it would have had a horrible name like Geek, or Tinker, or something like that. And Dale said, “I think we should call it Make.” And to be honest, I didn’t really think that was like that great of a name, but leave it to Dale. I mean, Dale he’s really a visionary. And I think he nailed it. That was the perfect word. And, also, his idea that Make would be ours. It would be the company’s term. And then the word Maker would be everybody’s term. And anyone could use Maker, but Make would be Make. And, so, I thought that was a really smart way to look at things, too. So, anyway, after we put together this prototype Dale showed it to the folks at O’Reilly, people on the board got the go ahead to publish it, and he asked me if I would just like to stay on and be the editor and chief. And I basically said, “Are you kidding me? I would love to do that.” And, so, for the next 10 years I was the editor and chief for every issue. And loved it the whole time. It’s so cool seeing the evolution of making as well. It was early issues, it was all about people
who were very resourceful and creating things that were unique and meaningful to them and that weren’t available in stores, products that they needed but weren’t available. And, then, they very generously shared how to make them. As time went on, I found out that these makers not only like to make things, but they like to make tools and techniques and systems, and organizations even for other people to become makers. So, you kind of see this new level of making where makers create a 3D printer so other people could become makers. They have created maker spaces. They’ve created the Ardwin so that people can add interactivity to their projects without becoming electrical engineers. So, now there’s like all these amazing tools and, basically, they’ve found out low-cost ways to replace a lot of things that would typically require a large corporation to accomplish. It’s kind of like the end of organizational advantage. If you think of things like prototyping, material sourcing, funding, marketing, design, all those kinds of things, research, all those kinds of things that typically would be at a department of a corporation, there are low-cost DIY alternatives for all of those things that are really powerful and useful, you know, things like crowd funding is a way to fund your project. Or if you design something like a wooden enclosure, you can get Poncho to laser cut it for you inexpensively and make multiple copies. These kinds of things that were unavailable 15 years ago have really made it possible for anyone with kind of an idea to do something, to create something really cool, and not have to depend or join Sony, or some other kind of giant consumer electronic company to have made. You can do it on your own. And that’s why you see this kind of flourishing of small organizations that are making really cool stuff, because they’re taking advantage of all of these other things that makers have made. So, the maker movement, just the way that it is - the trajectory it took is something I never would have imagined or expected. And, I think, we are still in the very early stages of where it’s going to go.

J Hum. Yeah. I agree. It’s interesting. Creativity, creative, is a term that more and more people are ascribing to themselves whereas I feel like 15 years ago that was like - unless you’re in very targeted niches, that was not as widespread of a term. But now you hear CEOs talking about bringing in creativity coaches to their Fortune 500 companies and it’s interesting how abundance this idea of creativity and people understanding that we all have creative abilities and the maker movement is a neat thing. So, did Make coin the term Maker?

M I think that they kind of did. I mean, you can see earlier things like we found an old 1950s U.S. Government propaganda film called American Maker.

J OK.

M But it was really about guys working in factories.

J Yeah.

M Stamping out Chevy fenders or something. But I think Dale didn’t necessarily coin it, but he certainly like brought it to the next level—

J Yeah.

M —and energized it and revitalized that term and got people - now, when you hear the term Maker what you’re thinking of is Dale’s vision.

J Right. Yeah. Yeah. It’s just cool that like track down words that become a thing.

M Yeah.

J So, how many projects are you working on right now?
Oh, let’s see. I mean, the things that I’m actually working on every day are Boing Boing. And, so, that’s like blogging. I still blog every day, and something that I love and would do even if I didn’t get money for it. And for a long time all of the four editors at Boing Boing we were running Boing Boing and blogging it without advertising. And we were all like kicking in about $200 a month each to pay for the bandwidth. So, we were doing it - we were paying to post. So, Boing Boing. Then Cool Tools is a Website that I run with Kevin Kelly who was an old Wired pal of mine. And I mentioned The Whole Earth Review guy. We review a new tool every day, and we do a podcast called The Cool Tool Show. And, then, I am also a research affiliate with Institute for the Future which is a think tank in Palo Alto that was a spinoff of the Rand Corporation and is about almost 50 years old now. And they’re really cool place that is working on doing research on all sorts of things like food, and technology, and health, and work, and the block chain. And, so, I’m helping them do kind of the stuff that I do for everything else that I do, you know, creating some podcasts, doing some writing for them, possibly working on a magazine for them, those kinds of things. So, media based on - they have all this amazing research that they’ve done. Cool findings about the way that people are working now and where it’s headed. But a lot of the stories and things that they’ve discovered have not been told. And, so, how do they tell these stories to a general audience? And, so, that’s what I’m doing, helping them with that. I think those are my three things that I really focus on a lot. And sometimes I work on little side projects, too.

So, you mentioned before you started the interview, running the tape, whatever tape is actually running—

[Both laughing]

— that you were working on a self-published book. Tell me a little bit more about that.

Yeah, I’m sorry. I got cut off for a second there. Yeah, I am working - I just published a book late last year called Trick Decks, How to Hack Cards for Astounding Magic. And it’s something that I’ve been interested in card magic for a couple of years. So, it’s something that I just recently got into. And, hopefully, I won’t get bored with it like I do with a lot of other things. But right now I’m just obsessed with it. And, so, I wrote this book that shows you how to doctor cards like a deck of playing cards simply with using things like glue and cutting cards a little bit here and there, and some other things. And you can make some really card tricks to show people that will definitely blow people’s minds. And, so, I was really careful in finding tricks that I knew had a stunning effect. And I think like the deal with card magic is a lot of it people are turned off to it just because almost everybody knows like bad card tricks to show. You have four piles and, “Point to any two piles. Now point to one.” And it’s just like people have a bad impression. But there is some card magic out there that’s like just amazing. And, and, so, it was really fun to learn these tricks and, then, to write these, to write the tricks, and how to do them. So, I took a lot of photos, and I really was happy to know that a lot of magicians, well-respected magicians, gave it high marks and said that I did great job of explaining how to do the tricks. And I - it was my first attempt at self-published book on Amazon. And I used a program called Velum. Are you familiar with that?

No.

An application called Velum. It’s amazing. It’s such a great - it’s a great app.

Cool.

And it’s free to download and use, and you can lay out - you can actually write the book in Velum if you want.
J Wow.

M Very easy to upload photos. And, then, the cool thing is on the side you have - so, you have your window where you put all your stuff. And, then, on the side you can call up an i-pad or a Kindle, any version of Kindle, or an i-phone, and you’ll see exactly what it will look like—

J Cool.

M —on that device live—

J Wow.

M —as you do it. And it’s just a beautiful interface. And, so, it’s free to use and set everything up. And, then, once you decide to actually produce the file, the .mobi file, it also does Nook and an i-book, too. Then you pay like, I think, it’s $30 to unlock that book which I think is not bad.

J An interesting model.

M Yeah, it is an interesting model. I haven’t seen anything like that before.

J If you want, I think you can pay $200, and you get like unlimited books—

M Oh, cool.

J —if you’re prolific. But I think I don’t know how many books I’ll do. But it’s - I highly recommend it if you are interested in self-publishing e-books. I think Velum is the way to go.

M Yeah, that’s really competitive considering you’re going to pay somebody, I’d say, at least a few hundred dollars to format it well.

J Uh-huh (agreeing).

M And this does it all there for you.

J Yeah.

M Cool.

J And it has like five or six different templates.

M Oh, neat.

J So, that is the thing. You are kind of limited to the templates that they have to offer, but I think they are very elegant.

M Cool.

J And you can’t argue that they’re not really awesome. Can we talk nerdy stuff for a while, sci-fi, comics—

M Sure.

J —that sort of thing?

M Sure.

J Favorite science fiction book?
OK, that would be pretty hard.

But I would say Philip José Farmer's, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*, would be my favorite science fiction book. And it's a book about - it takes place on a planet. Everybody who ever lives on earth sends like the Neanderthals on up, have been reborn on this planet that has a river that serpentina - like corkscrews it's ay around this planet, and everybody lives kind of in the valley of this river. And if you die, you are reborn on a different spot on the planet. And, so, it stars a real-life character, Richard Francis Burton, who was kind of a famous English explorer who - a really interesting fellow. And, then, the real Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* are the main characters in it.

And, then, Mark Twain is kind of the star of the second book in the series. Anyway, that's my favorite science fiction novel.

So, it's a series? How many books are there?

I think there are four or five. And to be honest, like a lot of book series, you know, it kind of drops off the cliff after the second book. It's so sad when that happens.

Yeah. I know.

Like the third one was kind of unreadable.

Ah. Movie, favorite sci-fi movie?

Oh, let's see. That's - does *Back to the Future* count as science fiction?

Yeah.

I think it does.

Yeah. I think so. Yeah.

Yeah, I think *Back to the Future*—

It's a good choice.

And, also, I guess - well, one that I like better, actually, would be *Planet of the Apes*, the original.

The original.

Charleston Hesston.

Yeah.

That's been like rebooted twice, I think.

It has, yeah, by Tim Burton and, then, the other one that has James Franco in it.

Yeah, Mark Walberg was the other one, I think.

Yeah, that's right.

You can't beat Charleston, Charlie.
J Yeah, I know.

J/M [Both laughing].

M He was awesome in it.

J What about comic books?

M Yeah, for comic books I really am not much of a super hero fan. I like - I think that my favorites are ones that, unfortunately, that are like guys who kind of were more famous in the ‘90s and are still doing things like Daniel Clowes, Adrian Tomine. So, Daniel Clowes did *Eight Ball*, *Optic Nerve* by Adrian Tomine. *Frank* by Jim Woodring. Anything by the Hernandez Brothers, the guys who do *Love and Rockets*. A woman named Julie Doucet. A contemporary artist, cartoonist that I really like a lot is a woman named Lucy Kanize who does kind of these travelogues. Her parents were like cooks, and she kind of traveled around with them, and she wrote a great autobiographical comic about going on a cruise trip with her very, very old grandparents. These are like her parents, and aunts, and uncles kind of like pushed her into being their chaperone on this trip, and she had a really hard time but rewarding as well, just dealing with these very old grandparents who - one of them was like - had pretty strong dementia, anyway it was a great - she tells a great story, and I love her art. I’m kind of a fan of the clear line school of drawing, Claire Ligne, I think is kind of the term that they use that was kind of the exemplar of that style is Erge from *Tin-Tin* where it is really nice clean drawings and not a lot of splashy crazy explosive panels and stuff. That’s one problem I find that super hero comics today, a lot of comics, are kind of unreadable where they’re just super busy.

J Yeah.

M I think growing up as a kid reading things like Carl Barks, Donald Ducks, and Little Lulu and—

J Yeah.

M —and Little Archie and those things like that where you had a set number of panels on the page, and you just had these characters talking to each other and the elegant composition of those panels just kind of spoiled me. And, so, a couple of other art - Robert Crum is always going to be probably my favorite. And I also really like Chris Wares as well, acne novelty library creator.

J And you’re an artist. What kind of style do you subscribe to as an artist?

M I really like kind of poppy, flat super colorful art, and I was really influenced by the UPA studio of cartoonists. I think they started in the ‘40s or ‘50s. A bunch of Disney guys who got in a fight with Walt Disney about wanting to unionize and Disney was strongly anti-union. So, they broke off and started their own cartoon studio. Their most-famous creations were Mr. McDoO and Gerald McBoing Boing. And I really like that look of kind of flat, very stylistic images. And, so, that’s kind of - my work has gravitated in that direction. And a lot of people who also like that style.

J So, you’re a writer, a media producer, content creator for lots of different organizations over time. You’re an artist. I would assume the term entrepreneur fits as well. Have you always done all these things, Mark, or did you start out as a kid and you wanted to be an artist, or a writer, or a detective, or?
M [Laughing softly]

J Did you have an idea, A, that you would be doing all these crazy things, or B, that you would be doing any of them?

M I didn’t really know what I was going to do actually. But ever since I was really young I was always drawing my own comics. I had a little comic studio in the basement. And I was putting together self-published mini-comics that I would give to friends in high school.

J How did you bind them?

M Oh, just—

J Because I did a similar thing.

M —a stapler. How did you do it?

J I bound them with twisty ties.

M Oh, cool.

J We were poor. I was using the bread twisty ties [laughing].

M That’s awesome. So, you would punch a hole in the paper and?

J Well, I think I was probably using like three ring binder paper—

M OK.

J —had the holes in it. I was - it was all ruled. I was not professional stuff.

M That’s cool. So, do you still draw now?

J I doodle. Yeah. I’ve never designed a Billy Idol CD cover like someone I know.

M Yeah, that was a fun experience, too.

J That’s crazy.

M Yeah, he just called me on the phone out of the blue. And before I knew it I was like spending probably three months every day at his house working on the cover design and video designs, and I ended up like writing the advertising copy, and he was like very polite and fun to talk to, an interesting person. He told me that about the kind of role playing games manuals he used to like to read when he was younger and stuff.

J Wow.

M Yeah, and very nice and great - it was great talking to him about the early Generation X Punk days. I remember once he telling me when he was younger and he met Patty Smith, and he was just like how he was kind of like shivering being in awe of being in her presence of someone who was so great. It’s like his persona, he’s so much different than what he’s like. He’s putting on a costume when he’s Billy Idol.

J Wow. So, you said he just called you out the blue, but there’s like there’s a few presumptions, presuppositions there. A, Billy Idol knows you, and B, he has your number [laughing].

M It’s funny. I’m not sure - yeah, he bought a copy of Boing Boing—
J Wow.

M —on a new stand. And we may have had our number. I think we might have had our phone number in there for like advertising. And, so, he called and just said, “I love your magazine, and my new album is called out called Cyber Punk, and I’m not happy with the design that the studio is doing, and I was wondering if you could do the design and make it look just like Boing Boing.” And I said, “Yeah, you bet.” And, so, he said, “OK, can you come over tomorrow,” and, “Here’s the number of the art director at EMI Records. So, call him.” So, I called the director. And the art director said, “Do you know how to use Adobe Photoshop?” And I lied, and I said I did. I did everything with Illustrator. I had never really used Photoshop. So, that night I bought a copy of a Photoshop book and read through it. And figured out basically how to use Photoshop so that they next day when I saw Billy Idol and worked on the design I wouldn’t be such an idiot. And, so, the next day I had a motorcycle at the time. I rode my motorcycle over there. And we sat down in front of his computer. And he had some stills from - this was like - what year was this? I’m thinking this is like 1992. And he had a color Macintosh which was like really cool to have at that time. And, so, he had some stills from a video that he had just shot. He said, “Maybe we could use one of these for the cover.” And, so, I was looking through the different stills. And there was one of him like sitting in a hot tub - it was from his house. And, so, I just started pulling down filters at random to do things. And, so, like after a couple of filters it’s like he just turned really purple and kind of like warped in a way. He’s like, “Oh, that’s brilliant mate. That’s it right there,” [imitating his voice]. I’m like, “Really, that’s it?” And he said, “Yes, that’s wonderful.” And, so, that was like the basis for the cover.

J That’s awesome.

M And then it was just a matter of fine tuning it. But we just went with that look for the rest of the stuff that we did.

J Wow. So, I cut you off. I know we need to wrap up in a minute. But you said, “I always loved drawing and making my own comic books,” but you never anticipated doing all this other stuff that you’re doing?

M Oh, yeah. Yeah, I didn’t. I mean, I kind of thought I would probably get into engineering. And, so, I went to school and studied mechanical engineering. But I wasn’t really sure if that’s what I was going to do when I got out. When I - I ended up getting into a band when I was in college. And when I graduated we - the band, we all moved to London. And tried to make it as a band there. And it wasn’t until after I came back that I went to work as an engineer. And I did it off and on for five years with some extended breaks for traveling and stuff with my wife. But I think just creating media has always been something that was important to me personally. And, so, I feel really fortunate that I was able to do that as an adult, and as a career.

J It’s interesting. I mean you do all these desperate things. And I’m speaking about myself now. And I don’t know if you - if you’ve always felt good about that, Mark. I’ve always felt like - for a long time I was like, I wish I could just focus on one thing, because when I was 12 I was going to write comic books. When I was 16 I was going to be a rock star. And when I was 21 I was going to travel the world. And I did all those things. But then when you look back, you start to see a thread, I think. Like the thread for you was media. And I go, yeah, I guess I just always been a creative. I was like making things. And sharing those things with people. But when you’re in the middle of it, or when you’re on like thing one, or two, or three and a half, it can feel sort of disorienting.
M It can. It really can. And that’s why I think it’s important if you do a lot of things to make sure that you give yourself time to like really do deep work. One of the ways, I think, that helps me to do that is I have a spreadsheet that I call my work log. And by doing things for a certain amount of time I like write how long I’ve done it, the time, and then that helps me see where my time is going. And just as soon as you attach some kind of measurable data to anything, it’s much easier to adapt your behavior, I think. So, that really helps me get into something and say, “Man, I’ve worked on this podcast for like 12 minutes, and, then, I did something else for 15.” That’s not a good thing for me—

J Right.

M —to be scattered like that. So, it’s better for me to just like work for like four hours on editing a podcast.

J Yeah.

M And, then, really like accomplish something and move forward, get something done. It’s like an essential thing. And let the non- like just the little crap that you always have to do like it’s OK for that to be late and not worry about it. Just get the deep work done.

J I love that. Yeah, and I feel better when I’ve spent four hours a day writing even if other things have fallen apart—

M Yeah.

J —versus squeezing something in - like the one thing I wanted to do in the last 15 or 30 minutes of the day.

M Yes, that’s so true.

J OK. So, I want to do rapid fire. I want to make sure we get you done on time. You got time for three quick questions with one-answer responses?

M Yeah.

J Let’s do it. Question number one: How has creativity helped you or hindered you in your career?

M And you want like a one-word answer?

J [Laughing] I mean, you’re the guy with the schedule. You do whatever you want.

M So, how has creativity helped me? It’s - it’s given me solutions to problems that otherwise would have stymied me.

J Love it. Question two: Your best creative advice? Your best advice for creative professionals, for people who are wanting to be more creative in their work.

M Try not to fall in love with your first idea. And give yourself time to have a period where you can experiment wildly. And, then, fall in love with something after you’ve really looked at a lot of different possibilities.

J What is one big regret that you have?

M Not taking programming languages when I was in college.

J Interesting. Well, that’s it. Those are my three questions.
M  OK. Great, Jeff. This was fun.
J  This was an honor, Mark. You’re amazing. Thank you.
M  Well, thank you so much, Jeff. I loved it.
J  Great. Well, I’m a big fan of all of the work that you’re doing. Keep doing it. Keep chasing new things. It’s an inspiration to us all.
M  Cool. You, too. Same right back at you.
J  All right. Thanks Mark.