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Joanna Penn - Text Transcript

Creative Writer Breaks Free From A Job
She Hated, Starts A Blog, And Today
Makes \$100,000+ As A Best Selling Crime
Thriller Author And Mentor To Writers

with **Yaro**

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Hello this is Yaro Starak and welcome to The Entrepreneur's Journey Podcast. Today's guest is Joanna Penn.

Hi thank you for downloading this episode of the EJ podcast. I'm going to press play on Joanna's interview in just a second but first I want to make sure that you're not missing out on these brand new EJ podcasts when I release new interviews, to make sure you get them direct to your email inbox, you need to subscribe to my EJ podcast email newsletter. You can do that by going to interviewsclub.com which will then redirect to my blog, the specific sign up page where you can enter your email and subscribe to the EJ podcast email list. Then you will get the latest interviews and a series of my very best interviews from the archives. That's interviewsclub.com. Now here's Joanna's story.

Hello, this is Yaro Starak and welcome to An Entrepreneur's Journey Podcast with a guest who I think now is a trend that I seem to have subconsciously selected of people who are making a living from fiction writing as well as I guess traditional online business. So my guest today is Joanna Penn, and she's actually someone I connected with many, many years ago as a student of my Blog Master program. Then she interviewed me for her podcast which was I believe about creative writing, if I remember correctly, but in terms of how to use blogging for that world and now my guest Joanna Penn has gone on to create a \$100,000+ a year business with a lovely split between her fiction writing. She has a lot of thriller books I'm seeing pictures of here we will have to talk more about those as well as her more "how to become.." basically how to make a living from your writing materials, which I think is a great combination. So we're going to learn more about how Joanna Penn does all of this and makes a living from her writing in such two different, diverse ways. So, Joanna thank you for joining me.

Joanna: Oh thanks so much for having me on the show, Yaro. Your podcast years ago started me off on this journey, so very exciting to be here.

Yaro: Now, back then you weren't a best-selling author. I think you told me New York, which of the two top lists?

Joanna: New York Times and The USA Today Bestselling thriller author. Yeah back then definitely hadn't even started writing fiction.

Yaro: So how did you get into writing then? I'm trying to connect the dots here.

Joanna: Right, well basically I was a management consultant and people are kind of shrinking into their skin right now. I use to implement account payable into large businesses. That's really how deathly boring my job was, but it was incredibly highly paid. So I was one of those people who had a great corporate career, a golden handcuffs, but was really miserable. Like, I had this, well my creativity had been stunted by years in the corporate world. My language, the way I wrote was very stilted, I just couldn't find meaning in what I did in my job and it was driving me crazy. So I started reading a lot of self-help, I discovered audios, started listening to self-help audios, and decided that I would write a book, a self-help book for people who wanted to change their careers. In the hope that I would change my own life with that book and actually like study the process of how you change career, because how else will you know? Like the Entrepreneur's Journey, you've got to learn from people who have done it. I wrote this book, which at the time was called "How to enjoy your job" or find a new one basically, and I looked briefly for a publisher and just thought the publishing industry was ridiculous and took so long, I self-published. Back then there was no kindle, this was Australia 2007. So no kindle, no e-books, there was no real print on demand. So I had 2,000 books in my house. And I did the PR stuff you're meant to do, I made it on to Australia National TV, and didn't sell a single copy. And at that point decided I needed to learn about sales and marketing and at that point I found you when I searched online for 'How to sell online' or something like that.

Yaro: Okay, I don't want to jump ahead too quickly, there's one thing I want to cover first. So back with this golden handcuff job, I've never heard of a golden handcuff. I've heard of a golden handshake when you leave...

Joanna: Oh, right!

Yaro: I remember it being locked into a good job, that's a good way of putting it. I'm assuming your upbringing was an all-traditional career path that led to that job. Was that in the U.K. or was that in Australia?

Joanna: Yes, I went to Oxford. I actually studied Theology at Oxford. Which is one of the oldest, most traditional degrees you can do in the whole world. And as of that, there's this thing that happens at Oxford, they have this thing called the "Milk Ground" (possibly Round) and I got recruited into Accenture, which is a global management consulting firm, then immediately went on to do that, you know work in corporate places in Europe and Asia Pacific, New Zealand, and then Australia. So, yes

absolutely very traditional job. You know, it was all about getting sort of the stasis job, getting the big salary, doing things like paying your taxes and doing the things that society says you should do. And the golden handcuffs is when they pay you so much that it's very hard to break out. You know, you've got the mortgage and the car and you've got the friends who are in the same job and you feel locked in. And I'm sure some people listening will feel that kind of locked into that life and you feel like you have no choice but of course you do have a choice, you just have to make it.

Yaro: Right. So you were in this job, and you were paid very well. Did you always think writing a book was the ticket out of that world?

Joanna: Well actually I thought that professional speaking would be the ticket out. I'm actually an introvert, as many online people are but I always did quite a lot of speaking. So I thought, okay I need a book and I'll get higher paid speaking jobs. What I discovered is I absolutely loved the writing. I am a quite highly paid professional speaker but it's a very small part of my business and writing is a lot bigger. So I've always written journals. I'm a massive reader, I read sort of 3 to 5 books a week. So, writing a book seemed like something I could do with the aim of getting speaking gigs. I did start doing speaking, but got more into writing and blogging.

Yaro: Okay, so that makes sense now. So you write a book about how to either start enjoying your job or leave it if you don't. You get on national TV in Australia to talk about this book, you don't sell any which is depressing considering that is a lot of coverage and not a single conversion. So you go home probably feeling a little bit down after not selling a book, so you hop on Google and you did a search?

Joanna: Pretty much. I literally did everything you are meant to do around press releases. I don't know if you remember, The Dream Job on the Australian Island? It was off the back of that campaign. It was "if you don't get the dream job, what could you do instead?" And here's Joanna Penn talking about career change. So I was on, I can't remember what it was called, like the 60 minutes type show, after the 7 o'clock news. It was really high profile. Loads of newspapers all across Australia, it was on national radio, and seriously when you are a self-published author especially back then when there were no e-books. Unless you were in the book stores, you didn't sell. So essentially I just said this is crazy, I spent 4 or 5 months pursuing this traditional media to find that it doesn't work. So I think I really did, and I had 2,000 books sitting in my house that I had paid for publishing, I was like how on earth do I ship these? There's got to be a way online. Also, I realized that Australia is a very small market and I needed to hit the U.S. You know there's 280 million I think in the U.S. and 20 million in Australia. So I was like there's got to be a way to do this. I think also I got on Twitter about that time and started discovering a whole load of stuff. And then I really just stumbled upon you and Darren Rowse and the first pro blogger event was in 2010 and Gideon

Shalwick. I just immersed myself into this sort of world that I had never heard of before and it changed my life. It really seriously changed my life.

Yaro: Well, tell us what you did. So, I know you were a part of Blog Masterminds, you were also a part of “Become a Blogger” with Gideon and myself. I don’t know if you did both?

Joanna: I think that was slightly after. When I first found you it was you on your own, and I started listening to your audios. We all believe in modeling, don’t we? It’s not plagiarism. It’s modeling. Now I still have my Author 2.0 blueprint. Which is modeled on your Blog Profits blueprint, so the first thing I did was find and download that. As a part of your Blog Mastermind, I started modeling you as a successful blog. So I was like okay, Yaro’s got a blueprint, I’m going to do a blueprint. What’s so funny, I think I started with like 7 pages back then and now it’s like 92 pages, basically an e-book on how to self-publish. It’s got a video series behind it and it’s basically just been growing for like 6 years. So winding the clock back, what I did first was I started a blog around the first book. And rapidly realized that it bored me silly. So that first blog fell by the wayside quite quickly and I think that’s a good tip for people, if you find yourself not able to make content for your site, then give it up. You have to be enthusiastic about creating content. And my content schedule is now 6 months out, because I have so much to share. It has been going nearly 7 years. Then I started a second blog which again fell by the wayside. Another thing I learned from you is personal branding. Actually having a blog that can grow with you. So, your site Entrepreneur’s Journey can be yours for the rest of your life because it is your journey. When I thought about what I wanted to be, my name is Joanna Penn and I thought well The Creative Penn. It just came to me one day, thecreativepenn.com. Then I can do anything I want and being creative is what I want to do for the rest of my life. So that’s what I started. That personal brand and really looking at a brand that can grow with you over time, the way you were authentically sharing about your journey, that’s essentially what I’ve done on The Creative Penn. Every mistake I make, I share on the site. Everything that works, I share on the site. That kind of authenticity really comes across for people.

Yaro: What was the purpose of it for your audience? It was your journey, but was it your journey to become a published author?

Joanna: Well it really was everything I was learning about. Because back when I started the site, December 2008, the international Kindle was just launching. So Kindle had just started off in America, and I was one of the first people in Australia to get a Kindle. There’s this really amusing video about it. Sort of discovering self-publishing and the radical shift that happened in that year, 2008 and 2009, the world shifted. The publishing ecosystem shifted. I could publish a book in Australia online and I could sell it to people all over the world and print on demand, which people don’t know what it is. Basically you upload the cover file and the interior file of a print book. And then on to

Create Space, which is Amazon's company, the print is book available for sale and then when a customer orders it, one copy is printed and sent to the customer. So you don't need to hold stock anymore and that changes your life, I mean it's just crazy. So when that happened I was just like wow. There's another early video where I talk about how Print on Demand can change your life. I just started sharing everything I was learning and then everything I learned around blogging I was sharing. I started a podcast based on your audios as well because I discovered 2 things. One is you can get people's time without paying them, so you can learn from people. And also the networking was amazing in terms of spending time on the phone with someone. Also promoting their work, they would often share it so I would get incoming traffic. So podcasting is just a no-brainer, and I'm on episode 232 now of my podcast. So, that stuck as well and I just kind of jumped in while I was still doing my job of course and kind of just got on with it.

Yaro: So when did you start making money from all of this?

Joanna: Pretty quickly actually because again I followed your model, I really think you do say something about putting something out for sale quite quickly. So I got the blueprint up, which at the time was one step ahead, because I've actually written a book and published it by that point. So I put the blueprint up and then I started doing courses. I don't think I was even selling e-books, I was selling my books but they were very cheap. So I started doing like mini courses, I was selling my speaking, so I've never had to pitch for speaking, I've always got all of my speaking work from the blog. So that was coming in. So yeah that first year, the first 6 months, you don't get any traffic at all. But after 6 months, I was blogging every 2 days, and after 6 months I started getting some traffic. I paid for things like Chris Garrett, back when he had his own site, he did a review of the blog. I redesigned it, but it was probably a year before I made a couple of thousand dollars.

Yaro: So let me just for the people who love the technical aspect: In the first year you set yourself up with WordPress, you bought a domain name, did you use an A-Webber for your email list? Because you must have been giving away your blueprint to get people onto your email list, right?

Joanna: Yeah, again I followed exactly your blueprint in terms of set up the freebie, I use A-Webber, and I built my own WordPress site. I used a free theme originally and then I moved to premium theme about 2 years in once I had learned about SEO. But essentially I followed exactly what you say in the Blog Mastermind.

Yaro: Did you do that yourself or did you pay someone technical to help you with all of that?

Joanna: I did pretty much everything myself, I've paid some people to help me when some things just haven't worked. But as you know, it was just much more complicated

back then. Now it's just super easy. You know you can build a WordPress site in a few minutes. But yeah I did myself, I kind of figured it out myself.

Yaro: Even the courses? Like, producing a membership area, did you figure all that out?

Joanna: Oh, you're going to laugh at this. Okay so, up until like last year the way I ran my courses, I would literally just have a password protected page on my site and I would sell access with e-junkie. So they paid on e-junkie, they got a PDF with the URL and the password. So it was just a password protected page I didn't do any of that kind of extra membership site stuff for the majority of my courses and it worked.

Yaro: Again, you actually copied me I just had a password protected WordPress blog with one password that everyone received.

Joanna: Oh, brilliant.

Yaro: What you logged into with Blog Mastermind was the same username and password that all the other 400-500 students had. No one knew that of course at the time. It made it really easy to set things up quickly, just installed WordPress, put a password over it, then sent an email to your members when they bought with the password and away you went. No complicated software, really simple.

Joanna: And E-junkie of course, \$10 for unlimited products. So, it's amazing. It's only now that, I just released a course today actually, using one of these hosted platforms of Federal because the quality of courses has gone up so much higher than it was back in like 2009, that you kind of have to have the full on set up now. But yeah I think for smaller things the password protected page is still valid.

Yaro: Yeah, I think for a person new, saying that you have to have something that sort of posh is probably not quite fair. Because I do think people can get away with just a basic to get started. Which I think what you're saying there, I'm surprised you've only done this in 2015, you've been doing this long time. I think I switched about 3 or 4 years ago to something slightly more professional, everyone gets their own password and username. So, take us through year one, so you finished I think you said you were making a couple of thousand dollars a month? I'm not sure what you said there, just total.

Joanna: No, like in a year.

Yaro: for that year. So you hit year two, by then you've got a platform, you've got a blog, you've got a free report, you've got a blueprint, you've got some courses you're selling,

you've got speaking so maybe you're starting to get some bookings with that.... How did this become a full time income? And when did you leave your job?

Joanna: So basically I have been doing the same kind of content marketing since 2008. And this is something else I learned from you around pillar content, I still remember seeing that pillar diagram in your material and I was like oh my gosh I get it! Because I was doing those highlights of the blogger sphere type posts and then going why don't I feel satisfied with this? And then when I discovered the pillar content I understood I had to create content that would resonate for the long term and that would be useful and would get me the SEO traffic for years ahead. And when that penny dropped, it was like okay I've got it now. I don't so much now do text blogging but as I've said I've been podcasting for 6 years, blogging, Twitter, YouTube channel. I pretty much started all of that in 2009 and have done that consistently every week every month since then. So, in 2009 I had done a lot about non-fiction and I had someone on my podcast and I asked him about writer's block and I said "oh, I've never had a writer's block," and he said, "Well why aren't you writing fiction?" and I kind of went "Oh." and it's basically because my blog, it turned out, was because I went to Oxford, because my mom was an English teacher, I was stuck thinking that the only good fiction novel was one that would win the Pulitzer Prize. And as soon as he said that to me, this was 2009, I went, ok I'm going to write a novel. So I joined national novel writing month, which is nanowrimo.org and in that November 2009, I wrote the beginning of what became my first novel, Stone and Fire. And that actually changed the course of things, it was quite funny I would say to people who were listening, "don't do this at home" because those of you who've listened to John Friedman for example, he and I did your course at the same time, Joel just got on his path and just forged ahead. What I did was fall off the path and start writing fiction, which I actually love, but what happened was I then started to learn, you know, 2010 I spent learning how to write fiction and I finally published a first novel in beginning of 2011. But what happened at the same time is I was still blogging, still podcasting, I had more products, so I had products, nonfiction books, professional speaking, still had a full-time job

Yaro: Ok, wow.

Joanna: Yeah I basically cancelled the rest of my life.

Yaro: I bet.

Joanna: because I was, what you had given me... I still remember you sharing some of your income stuff and just realizing that if I could do this, if I could make this work, then I would be able to leave my job, and I totally believed it would work if I just got on with it.

Yaro: Can I ask, given you were in a high paying job and, like you said, "Golden handcuffs" did you sort of feel, I need to make 100,000 a year plus in order to justify

leaving my job? So I need to make that much from my business before I'm going to quit my job, were you that rigid with this decision?

Joanna: Well that's where I started, and then, what had happened, the process of learning from you and others and reading more self-help, you know, you spend a lot of time looking into your own soul, and I basically looked into myself and said, well why do we have a four bedroom house? Why do we have a car and a motorbike, why do we have all of this stuff? Why do I work to pay for the things that we don't need, we have an investment property, all that type of stuff, so my husband, who is actually amazing, who incidentally I've just hired out of his own corporate job, we can come back to that. But, I said to him, "What if we get rid of everything? What if we just downsized everything?" and we did. We got rid of everything, and moved back to the UK and I quit my job September 2011, we moved back to central London, where you'd think it would be more expensive, but Australia is pretty blooming' expensive. So we basically did three things: we downsized, we moved to London, and I also saved six months' worth of income. So when I quit my job I was only making, you know, 1,000a month. But, I was at the breaking point in terms of "if I am to grow this business, I have to leave my job because consulting is a very tiring job, so I had to get out of it. I did move to 4 days a week for those three years, I forgot to mention that, so I went to 4 days a week and then I finally quit with 6 months savings. I think that's very important, so I'm not someone who takes a risk, and we also downsized. So, really just completely changed our lives around making this work.

Yaro: Ok, so how did it work? You've got six months buffer, I'm assuming your husband possibly took a job in the UK when you got back so that's a little bit safer there. Meanwhile, you have a just started fiction-thriller business, I wouldn't call it a business but I mean you're a writer. You're writing books, and you're probably selling a few, but you're not going to live off one fiction book, and then you had a blog with some courses teaching people how to self-publish and how to market themselves and get PR and all that sort of thing. And meanwhile your blog is still journey blogs, you're talking about Wednesday trying to get publicity and then next minute you're talking about how I became a fiction writer, is that kind of correct?

Joanna: Yeah, basically I was all over the place, but what I found with the fiction was I absolutely loved it and with self-publishing what's happened again with self-publishing is as I discovered you back then and people who were making money online, you and Darren and Gideon and people, I then discovered this world of fiction authors and many of my friends are now making seven figures from fiction. And I was like, "what? You can do that with fiction? That's crazy" so what I have now is a balance. So, going back to 2011, I carried on writing fiction so the first one took 14 months, the second one took a year, third one took, like, 9 months, and now I'm at a 4 month fiction writing level.

Yaro: Can you just explain how you released those books? Especially the first couple, because I'm imagining there's not a lot of money selling one book on Amazon to begin with, is that accurate?

Joanna: Yeah, I mean, I would say like any business, like starting a blog, you have to invest to create quality product, in order to then get returns. So, I work with professional editors, professional cover designers, I do my own formatting using Scrivener, which is amazing software, and then you just go to, you can publish on lots of sites, but Amazon. Go to amazon KDP and you basically upload your book and the information and the cover, you put a price on it and there it, you know marketing is another question of it, putting a blog out in the world you have to get traffic to it.

Yaro: I was just going to say, you came from a background of getting traffic and attention for a nonfiction teaching book, and a series of books and courses and you switched to fiction, were you able to just use your same marketing skills or was it completely different?

Joanna: Well, that is a good question, because of course I had this audience by then, and I had the creative pen, I had an audience. But it was funny, only about 5% of my audience from the creative pen, shifted into my fiction.

Yaro: I'm not surprised. It's like if I suddenly wrote a romantic novel and tried to sell them to my entrepreneurs journey audience, I'm not sure many are going to be up for that so.

Joanna: And, I mean, some people might just because they love you and they want to support you, but then they're not going to buy another one. I actually built another site so JFpen.com is my, I publish my fiction under JF pen, F for Francis, because it keeps a separate brand as an author, and also it's gender neutral because I write action/adventure and I have a lot of killing in my books. So I write kind of dark fiction, and my creative pen brand, as you can tell with my voice and my picture I'm very smiley, very happy, that's me. So, these two brands are very different so I created JFpen.com to facilitate that fiction brand, and I give away a free book so people can get day of the Vikings for free. And, so I've started to build that up, but fiction marketing is very, very different than nonfiction marketing. So I would say, for example, that I think guest blogging is completely useless for fiction, whereas having a permanently free book on amazon that you permanently send traffic to, like by paying for promotions or Facebook ads or whatever, is a much better way to do your fiction marketing. Whereas, with nonfiction you can absolutely do a nonfiction book launch by building a platform in the way that you talk about and the way that I've done the creative pen. Guest blogging, podcasting, all of social media, YouTube, etc., works for nonfiction books and nonfiction products, but for fiction, it's very, very different.

Yaro: Do you have an email list for fiction as well?

Joanna: Yes. Absolutely. So that's the day the Vikings eBook, which is the free book on JFpen, that's the email list sort of bribe. Ethical bribe, that's what we call it.

Yaro: Can you sort of break down what it is today. So you have, I'm counting here, 9 fiction/thriller books and it looks like at least 4 nonfiction teaching books, and you've got courses, so can you explain how everything sells and how you make a living today.

Joanna: So, it's funny talking about the courses. So I actually retired all my courses on December 31st of last year, I'm sure you've heard of the EU VAT law that came in that changed the digital sales to the European Union so that was a nightmare. And also my courses were a bit old, and you know this as well, you have to retire courses or update them over time, so I actually retired everything end of last year. I just started another one because I feel the need to teach and I know you're thinking about this as well right now and you do things and you give up stuff and you try other things. I thought last year that I would be a full-time fiction author, and I just missed teaching and helping people and we really are in this revolutionary times with the maker movement, where people are making things instead of just consuming things and the indie movement is part of that. You know, indie film, small batch brewing beer all of the farmers markets, that's what the indie movement is too. So I just want to continue educating people as well, so all that said, I'm now getting back into courses. But I just I do an income report as many bloggers do so last tax year, which ended April, 50% of my income was from book sales, and of that 50%, 60% of that is fiction. So I have 10 novels, novels and novellas, and I have 5 nonfiction books. So that's actually very, very good and many people don't make that much money from books. It just comes mainly from volume, so the people that I know, the friends of mine who make 7 figures/8 figures with books have 40 books, for example. So if you are looking to make a living just with books, it has to be a high volume thing. And then 25% of my income is affiliate sales. So of course Joel Freeland, Joel and I are affiliated with each other and we grew up together in blogging, so we support each other. 10% is professional speaking, 12% was courses, and I expect that to grow this year. And then I also have podcasts once a ship, I have corporate sponsors, I also have patreon from my listeners, which is amazing. So, people who don't know what that is, that's p-a-t-r-e-o-n.com it's a kind of pay-as-you-go for creatives type thing, like a reverse Kickstarter. People pay you for each episode.

Yaro: That's cool. So, where does your audience come from today?

Joanna: Coming back to the pillar content, my highest traffic is organic search.

Yaro: To your blog?

Joanna: Yeah, to the blog, to the creative pen. So, that's very cool. I mean, and that is pillar content for six years that is what that is. I started blogging about self-publishing before it was trendy, and then, of course, it's become trendy. I've definitely noticed an uptake since the stigma disappeared. But also the podcast, I've also found in the last 18 months the podcast has just gone nuts, as audio has gone off in every way. I'm also making money in audiobooks right now, which I wasn't 18 months ago, so that's exciting. JFpen, as I said, the fiction is completely different. Your income comes from Amazon, iBook's, Kobo, and Nook. It doesn't come from a website, it comes from the book retailers. And then I'm very active on twitter @thecreativepen and I'm kind of permanently doing stuff there. And also, I think just because the ecosystem of writing has become very mainstream, a lot of people want to write a book now. So, what I find is the newer blogs kind of come to my site and I do a lot of speaking events and things. A bit like Joel, you're an authority blog when you've been going for nearly seven years.

Yaro: Ok, so I can see there's a combination of just having started a blog and stuck to it for long enough, and having built something there, and then there's the new formats of marketing, the social media, the podcasting and of course the actual marketplaces that exist to support independent authors, now with Kindle and Kobo and I'm assuming Audible, must account for a big chunk of the audiobook sales. So, it sounds almost, I guess from a new person's perspective listening in to this, it's daunting to think, "oh God, I've got to spend six years writing a blog, I've got to write 40 books if I want to make a significant living, and I've got to have an email list, I've got to do podcasting, I've got to do twitter, I've got to speak onstage, I haven't even written my first book, or I haven't started my blog yet." For that person, who's feeling that sense of woe, overwhelm or with the people you teach and have taught in the past, how do you tell them to start at the beginning?

Joanna: Well, I think it's that know yourself aspect, that's spending some time thinking about what your future life should look like, because where I am now, it's crazy. We're talking 2015, and I remember driving down the highway in Brisbane listening to you, like 7 years ago when I had none of this, and I knew the life I wanted was to be location independent, as you are. Was to write, because I wanted to be creative, I just had this desperate need to create something. And on my wall I have a couple of things, one that says have you made art today? So every day I have to create some art, you know have you written 1,000 words on whatever you're doing, have you created something new in the world? And also create a body of work, which I'm proud of. So, my books, and that stems from the decision I made 7 years ago, it was "What does my lifestyle look like," and I actually said 5 years' time, it's taken a little bit longer. But, what does my life look like, and then how do I just take a little step every day towards that? So there's a book called the Compound Effect by Darren Hardy, and it's an excellent book, it's a quite simple concept really, but it's an excellent book. Just doing little things every day, so if the first thing is write 1,000 words on a book, but again a lot of people don't want to write, that's the thing. If you run out of interest in a blog, give it up. If you don't want to,

don't. Do audio. What type of lifestyle do you want, and again I engineered everything around the word "freedom". Tony Robbins does this exercise, decide what the word is that you want to value everything against, and my word is freedom. So, do I, for example, do I hold stock and have books in my house? No I don't, because then I don't have the freedom to just leave. What other decisions do I need to make? So to get started, the very first thing is to decide what life you want to have, and because I decided I wanted to make a living online, then the question became who are the mentors, who are the online mentors who are doing this? And you were obviously one, and, for example, you did the Ad Network and I saw that and I went "I definitely don't want to do an Ad Network, that's not me." I saw other people doing software, and I thought, you know what? That's not me. I discovered writing fiction that is me. That is definitely not for most people because it's crazy different.

Yaro: I do love the fact that you have a series of thriller books about murder and killing people and then you sound like this sweet, little British lady helping people outside. It's like your deep dark side is in there somewhere.

Joanna: And I think that's actually really important because I think, to have a truly creative and whole life you have to acknowledge your shadow, and my shadow side is very dark. That's what she does, the last book I wrote I crucified a nun on the high line in New York. So, you know, got to do that. These are the things that come out of my dark side, but what's amazing is that by making an income online, I can indulge my travel junkie-ness, because all my books are written about the places I go, and I travel. So I designed this future life, and then I did what I needed to do to reach it. But also, I absolutely love it, so what you're hearing from me now is I discovered what I want to do with my life. I love blogging, blogging changed my writing. There's no way I could've written fiction without blogging because it releases that stilted form of writing that you have in a job. So it really released me in so many ways, it created a community, it's enabled me to leave my job, really it's absolutely phenomenal. I realize that some people don't like that. You know, some people don't want to be out there like you and I doing like a personality brand. So you have to decide what you want to create in terms of your lifestyle and then take the steps towards that.

Yaro: Ok, one kind very personal, indulge question here. As a person who took blog mastermind, and clearly you're one of those types of people who like to put out into the world and say, see what can happen when you stick to this, it actually works. What would you say to someone who is considering taking a course, doesn't have to be blog mastermind, but given what you just said about deciding your destiny, or maybe picking your medium, you'll be a writer or you'll be an audio person or you'll be a video person, your art, as you said, and there's an opportunity to invest in these courses now, there's so many today \$1,000 courses, \$2,000 courses. Can you talk about whether you recommend doing that and also, given your experience with blog mastermind, since you obviously have been talking so many wonderful things about how it impacted you, what

you felt it gave you that made such a difference, compared to not, doing it. If you didn't take a course, what would've happened?

Joanna: I think what would've happened is what did happen, which I is headed off down a particular journey, which I'd go "oh I have to sell some books. Oh I know you have to get on TV, that's what you do." If I would've actually spent some time looking for people who were doing it. So this would be my main recommendation is, when you decide on that future life that you want to have, is find the mentors, and when you've found a mentor, so you're a mentor in the blogging space, and I'm a mentor in the creative writing space, and creative online work. Find those mentors, and then model them, so in the same way that I modeled you, people listening should model those who are actually making money in the way that you want to make money. This is very important. There are a lot of websites and courses by people who are not actually making money in that way. So, for example, in the creative writing space there's a lot of people who teach how to write books, who are not making their income writing books. So that's why I like to report that 50% of my 6-figure income is book sales. So you pick people who are actually doing what they say on the box, and then if they have a course, it's just a no-brainer. Everybody spends money on their hobby, so if it's a hobby for you and you're starting out, then brilliant, invest the money in your hobby and model that person and it may well become much more than a hobby. The other thing I would say is, I think this journey is a bit like skiing. You don't go in a straight line down the hill you are skiing because you will kill yourself. You don't just go from top to bottom, so you have to zig-zag along the way, but you actually have to be moving in order to change direction. So when I was like, "ok I'll stop blogging, I started your cause, I started a blog, and I gave up that first blog, it didn't work for me it wasn't what I was passionate about, so I changed direction. Started another one, gave that up. Changed direction, found the creative pen. Changed direction into fiction, I found more, different people to learn from about fiction. So, investing in your education will help you navigate the path to success by modeling the people who have been there before you, and it will shortcut your route to success so fast. Basically, I did your course and then the creative pen, realistically I was getting traffic when I followed your model I say within 6 months. It doesn't sound very much but at the time it wasn't very trendy. Now, looking back, what I've done is follow exactly your model to create a 6 figure income and make a living as a creative. It's super exciting.

Yaro: So what's next for you, given, I'm assuming there's more murders and crimes inside your head somewhere to release, and also you said that you want to teach so you're going back and creating new courses. So is that the short-term future for you?

Joanna: What I've discovered, again another metaphor, is like Plato's chariot. So, people who don't know Plato's chariot there's the old chariot from ancient Greece and there's a black horse and a white horse. And the black horse for me is I love writing the fiction side, I need that. And the white horse is the creative pen, it's this side. So I need

the nonfiction and the blogging as much as I need the darkness. What I have struggled with is which one should dominate, and actually they should both run alongside each other. I've just spent the last six weeks building my creative freedom course. Which is, how to make a living with your writing, it's like your blog mastermind basically. Now, on Monday, since we were speaking on Thursday, on Monday I start my next novel, so for me, I actually diarize. This is a little tip for creatives, I actually put in my diary which name I am that day. So, I think Joanna Penn is retiring on Monday and JF Penn gets the time. I actually switch my head into fiction mode because this world of traffic and split-testing and WordPress and html, this is not the world that creates novels. I actually have to kind of become that different person in order to write the novels. So that's how I split my time. And what I see with fiction, what's so brilliant is nonfiction, as we said, the courses age and you have to retire them. Fiction, I can sell for the rest of my life in 70 years after my death, and I don't have to re-write them, I don't have to retire them, they will continue selling, so that's why fiction is just such an amazing business model, every book you put out, your income ticks up, ticks up, ticks up. It's very, very exciting.

Yaro: I have a personal interest in this, too. Given I would like to also dive in, like you said, maybe not fiction but mixed with reality. Doesn't really matter, it's coming in the future. The concerns I have, which I'm sure are concerns, the irony here is I have my students tell me they have the same concerns about blogging. But I have this concern about being a writer today, and I'm sure a lot of listeners do too. Given this barrier to start has dropped so much, it must be flooding the marketplaces, there must be a lot of people you're up against in your category, for example, as well. I know with fiction writing it's not mutually exclusive. You don't read one book which means you can't read another, so there's overlap in that regard. But how does a new author stand out, especially given the need to rely on Kindle, on Kobo, it's not like you can rely on search engines and pillar content like with blogging, you kind of have to rely on these external marketplaces. That's my perception on it, but anyway is that pretty accurate?

Joanna: Well, there's enough blogs in the world you could say as well, people start them every day. But, what I would say is that, if you think about content marketing, a book is just content marketing. Fiction, every novel, every novella, every short story is more content marketing. So when you say, "what does a new author with their first book do to stand out?" The answer is write another book. Because, and it's the same if someone came to you and asked, "Yaro I've just done 10 blog posts but my blog isn't taking off." You'd be like "yeah give it another 6 months mate."

Yaro: Yeah write another 10, right?

Joanna: Yeah write another 10 and then see what happens. Oh yeah, then write another 10. This is the thing, with books it's exactly the same thing, what's different is in the world of publishing is dominated by a myth of overnight success which is a myth. The people who have a breakout novel with their first book is often like the 10th one

they've written and rejected. Whereas, now with indie publishing you can put your first book out and it probably isn't the best. So, for example, if you want to start reading my books, why don't you start with the most recent one? Everybody gets better, you know it. When somebody reads the first blog post on my site or your site, we are better now. In the same way, you will become a better fiction writer over time, so my recommendation if you want to write books is write more books. By the time you have three, there's actually an uptick. There's very definitely an uptick on three, even if you're just doing things like making the first one a free book, you can pay for some advertising, send some Facebook traffic there, there are things you can do to get things moving, but when you have three books, things get a lot easier. Yeah, one book is hard, but like same with a new podcast or anything, you have to prove your worth. Like any job, how valuable is anyone in their first year of any job? You know, they're not. By year 5 they're actually worth something and by year 10, you're super good, and next year will be my 10-year overnight success is what I like to think.

Yaro: Yes, the 10,000 hours concept. The Seth Godden one, or I can't remember I think that was Seth.

Joanna: It's an old one.

Yaro: Yeah, right. Mastering a subject just requires time.

Joanna: But I would add to that, what do you want to do with your life? I love every day that I do this, I love, love, love writing, so the time flies by when you're doing something you love.

Yaro: Very true. I love talking to people like you, Joanna, so it makes the podcast fun. Alright so where can people go for everything Joanna Penn?

Joanna: Well for how to make a living with your writing and how to self-publish, go to thecreativepenn.com and that's Penn with a double-N and check out the offer 2.0 blueprint offered on Yaro's site. For my fiction, JFPenn.com or you can check out JF Penn on any of online stores, and I'm on twitter @thecreativepenn.

Yaro: Ok, so we'll put all of those links to go with the show notes for this interview. Joanna, thank you for jumping on the call today, thank you being a great graduate of blog mastermind, there's just not enough stories like you and I love hearing them so that's fantastic, and also for showing that you can combine 2 worlds, I think a lot of writers want to be teachers and a lot of teacher want to be writers, and I think internet has allowed us to do that. As you demonstrated you can actually, basically have the same, oh let's not say the same personal brand I guess JF is the dark side and Joanna's the light side, but you've made it work and you're using the internet for both

businesses, which is fantastic. It's great to hear, very inspiring for everyone, so good luck with everything you're doing in the future.

Joanna: Thanks for having me, Yaro, this has been so much fun.

Yaro: Thanks Joanna, and thank you to all the listeners if you want to get the show notes and the transcript to go with this interview with Joanna, you know where to go. You can Google my name Y-A-R-O, or head to entrepreneurs-journey.com and look in the podcast section. Thanks for listening, and I'll talk to you on the next episode. Well, I don't know about you but I'm really feeling the urge now to dive in and write my own fiction book series, as well. Probably not romantic novels, but I'm really inspired by this tandem business that Joanna has with her fiction writing as well as her teaching business, and I would very much like to have some of my own books out there on the top 10 bestseller list, like the New York Times. It would be great to see something there one day, as well. I hope you feel the same and I hope you're motivated to make use of your writing to make a living on the Internet. It could be through fiction books, it could be through how-to teaching books, courses but of course, you need a blog and I encourage you to get out there and start blogging as a great first step for your own writing career. Now don't forget if you'd like to hear more stories of success from people who tap into blogs as a pathway to make money from the Internet, and other amazing online entrepreneurs' stories, then make sure you subscribe to my EJ podcast email newsletter. You can do that by going to interviewsclub.com, enter your email address on that page, then click subscribe and you'll be signed up and receive my latest interviews as soon as I publish them and also get some of my very best interviews from the archives. This podcast has been going for 10 years and there's some incredible stories, and I'll share the best ones with you if you subscribe at interviewsclub.com. That's it for today's episode, my name is Yaro, and I'll talk to you on the next EJ podcast.

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