



*[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts witty writing information and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content and establish you as a leader in your field.]*

*[I'm your host, Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that and have some fun with Sean Platt today. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat on the website at [CraftYourContent.com/episode11](http://CraftYourContent.com/episode11).]*

**Elisa:** Sean Platt is a bestselling author with over 60 titles to his name on Amazon. Primarily a fiction writer, Sean's world of words has a very entrepreneurial arm. As the founder of multiple imprints and publishing projects including Collective Inkwell, Realm of Sands, and his newest Sterling and Stone, he works with business partners Johnny B. Truant and David Wright to create and put out multiple series of stories in a plethora of genres, from children's books, through to fantasy and full out dark horror.

The voice behind the popular Sterling and Stone Podcast that used to be called The Self Publishing Podcast and website, he offers advice and insights to folks interested in self-publishing to help them set up their own entrepreneurial adventures. He has also penned the go-to guide for self-publishing success, *Write. Publish. Repeat.* in 2013, which continues to shine with over 400 five-star reviews on Amazon.

In 2014, with Johnny B. Truant, he completed and published an entire fiction book in just 30 days with their Fiction Unboxed Kickstarter project. And went for it again in November for NaNoWriMo with their Fiction Unboxed 1.5.

Thank you so much for taking the time out from doing all of that to chat with me today. Is there anything I missed?

**Sean:** Well, no. There's nothing you missed. I would say my partners deserve probably a lot more credit than they got in that intro. Yeah, I have 60 books with my name—or one of my pen names—on there, but, god, they do so much work. Collective Inkwell is me and David Wright. And I'm very proud of the Inkwell, but it only exists because of Dave. So yeah, I'm able to do a lot, but that's because I work with really cool people.

**Elisa:** And I think many people think that writing, and especially writers who self-publish, do this in a very captive, solitary lifestyle. But you're such a great example of the fact that that's not the case at all.

**Sean:** Oh, no. I think I'm kind of squarely and kind of born to do a lot. So I would be writing a lot anyway. I would be publishing several books a year anyway. But there's a difference between several books a year and sixty in three years.

**Elisa:** Just a little bit.

**Sean:** And so I think that's a case of one plus one equals, like, nine. I think when you have the right partners—and I absolutely do—it enables you to do what you're really, really good at and harmonize with what they are really, really good at. And I think all writers—I've certainly had years where I've spent long stretches of time doing, like, dumb things that I should not be doing. And only now, in my sixth year



online since I started all these, am I really spending a majority of time doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And still, I'm weak. Still I answer email too much. Still I agree to too many things. But by and large, I'm much more disciplined about how I spend my time and that means that I produce more in less of it.

**Elisa:** I love talking to people. It's a weird, weird thing, I understand, but talking to people about the dumb stuff that they did when they were starting out writing, because so many of us have an entire skeleton living in a closet—at least one skeleton of all of the things that we did when we were starting out.

**Sean:** Oh, sure. But those mistakes, that's like your "protein powder"—that's what makes you strong. Without all the mistakes—and I've made so many, it's ridiculous—but without those, I'm just the skinny kid in the Atlas ad before he starts doing exercise.

**Elisa:** Well, without giving too much of the mystique away behind the success that you have cultivated for yourself today, what are some of the big, dumb things (we'll call them, that's my new term that I will trademark: "big, dumb things") that you remember really sticking out when you were starting out?

**Sean:** I have no mystique. I think that thinking that I could do it in less time than I could. I definitely overestimated my ability. And yeah, I'm a painfully optimistic guy. One thing, I haven't been writing that long. I've been online trying to do this for six years, which is about a week longer than I've actually done writing. I pretty much immediately started to figure, "Okay, if I can write, I can make a living writing." And I've always seen myself as an entrepreneur. I didn't go to school to write. And in fact, I did not graduate high school. So, it was not my path at all.

My wife, who is the opposite of me, she not only went to school and finished like she was supposed to—she went on to become, I would say, the best teacher I've ever met. And she spend a lot of time writing curriculum for other teachers. And she, from the time we started dating, always tried to get me to write. And I always said, "I'm not a writer!" and she always said, "Well, you're a storyteller and you won't shut up. And you're just able to kind of alchemize the way you speak into copy." Except she didn't call it "copy" because she's not an asshole. She would say, "Just tell your story."

And I finally did. It took me twelve years after meeting her to finally, actually write anything. And once I did, I very quickly wrote a book. It's a terrible book, and it will never ever even be edited. I like the ideas in the book and one day I'll just start over and write it again. It was 600 pages and it took me four months to do. And I knew that if I could do that, I could get better at it and better at it. But the mistake I made was closing the business that we had at the time, thinking I could immediately just recover the money by writing because I was that awesome. And that was just absurd. I started out writing keyword articles for \$5 each.

**Elisa:** We've all been there, man. We've all been there.

**Sean:** Yeah. I'm actually really grateful for that time, because it was just ludicrous. It was so stupid. I lived in Southern California at the time in Long Beach, and there was just no way to cover a Southern California mortgage with keyword articles. That's just impossible. And I would write 20 a day, so \$100 a day. Like, that was pretty good for keyword articles. You know, I was just insane. But I learned to write really fast. Because I had to think fast, I had to write fast. And that skill stayed with me.



And so when later learned to write copy—which was clearly more lucrative. I wrote sales letters and auto responders and things like that. But I still have my speed. And then later, now, I write fiction and I'm still really fast. And it's only because that trial by fire—those keyword articles—they just forced me into it. So yeah, it was terrible—five dollars each—but it was my college.

**Elisa:** And it taught you such a valuable skill. I think so many people—I know I would—I would kill to be able to write as prolifically and well as you do. Reading some of your books, some of your posts and your other things that you're able to put out in such a short amount of time, they are well thought-out and well written and well stated, as opposed to other people who write things really fast and you read them and you are kind of like, “Didn’t wanna tell you this, but I could tell.”

**Sean:** Yeah. I really, really love language. It makes me very, very happy. I like clarity of thought. I like reasoning a really well-structured argument. And even with my job, I mean, part of it is writing and creating new stories, but also at both the Inkwell and Realm and Sands—which are the two primary imprints that I spend most of my time in—my job is post-production. I'll get rough drafts, I make them sound clean, and I just sharpen the language as much as I can. And I really love that. It's just something I really, really love to do.

**Elisa:** So when you were kind of transitioning from your background in owning businesses and doing all of that to keyword articles, to writing to start copy, and finally starting to create your own identity and put your own writing out there, did you ever have any sorts of worries about rejection or judgment? Or was it, “I need to figure out how to pay these mortgage things. I'm just going to write whatever the hell I need to.”

**Sean:** No. I don't care what people think of me, even a tiny bit. I care what my wife thinks about me. I care what my children think about me. And I care what my partners think about me. I don't really care beyond that. Clearly, I want to do the right things. I want my fans to like me. The fan mail I get, it makes me very, very happy. I cry sometimes. It's really awesome. But I don't care about people who aren't inclined to like me or appreciate what I'm doing. So one-star reviews don't upset me. But most of them, if they come from haters—and it's clear that they are from haters because they are not verified purchases and you could tell they didn't really read the book—that doesn't bother me at all because that's just feeding the trolls.

But the ones that do come from fans and I let them down—I hate that. But I don't take it personally. I take it as a learning experience. Criticism is good in that way. But as far as asking for permission, I just don't do that. I did it once. It was when I first, first, first started to write before I registered my first domain name. I've written a collection of about maybe 24 children's rhymes. And the business that we had at the time was a preschool. The average age of our children were three years old. And they knew all of these poems by heart. They didn't have pictures. And they were very sophisticated, the rhymes schemes on these, but they knew them anyway. I wrote them for my kids, primarily, and my kids knew them. So I got an agent. I sent them to a publisher and I was told that my vocabulary was too rich for children.

**Elisa:** Don't make the children think, Sean. That's the worst thing you could ever do to a child.



**Sean:** Right. And I thought, “Okay, that’s the last time I’m ever asking the publisher for anything.” That was a Friday, and the next day I registered my first domain. That was Writer Dad. And I started writing. On July 17, 2008, I published my first. I did use a pen name at the time which was “Writer Dad,” I wrote as “Writer Dad,” and I didn’t claim it as Sean Platt. But that was because I was going to close the preschool, and I didn’t wanna be talking about that online. I was a little bit paranoid that one of our families would see it and freak out. I needed time to like close that box, ethically.

So yeah, I used a pen name at that time, but it wasn’t because I was worried about judgment at all. It was just because I wanna be respectful. And ever since then, it was just a matter of: I would put myself out there. And I think that’s one of the things that help me grow really, really fast as an artist, was writing for that live audience. And I would publish every single day at Writer Dad. In addition to the 20 keyword articles, I would also write a blog post.

**Elisa:** Damn.

**Sean:** And the blog post, I usually didn’t get started until about ten at night. And then I would publish around midnight. They would take me a lot longer because they weren’t about drunk driving in Massachusetts. They were about, like, my wife and my family, and what I felt as an artist at that time. But they were deeply personal, and they were really raw, and they were really honest, which really helped the blog to grow very, very quickly.

I was maybe three weeks into Writer Dad when I was getting in, like, 100 comments a post, which—I didn’t even realize how amazing that was at the time. I just thought, “Oh, blogging is easy. This is cool.” But that was just because the posts were really raw and I think people were attracted to see, “What’s he going to do next?”

The hiccup there was that I made a big mistake. I was a pretty smart business guy before I went online. But going online made me stupid. I thought, “Oh, I’m online now. Everything is magical.” And I thought that 100 comments a post automatically equaled conversion and money—which it totally doesn’t.

**Elisa:** Shockingly, no.

**Sean:** Shockingly, no. It’s so empty. And I didn’t realize that all those digital high fives would amount to nothing more unless I built roads to something else.

**Elisa:** So we’re kind of in 2008, you’ve got Writer Dad up. It’s gaining massive traction. You are at a really sweet spot in blogging. I came on to the scene in 2009 and it was just after, like, the bubble has started kind of bubbling up. What were some of the first roads that you figured from this magical unicorn world of online marketing, to be able to drive Writer Dad in?

**Sean:** Well, Writer Dad never got driven in. I eventually just started writing less and less and less. I went from once a day to once a week, and then from once a week to like, once a month. And then, like, I think there was a year where there was two posts. And then it just stopped. And right now, it redirects to Sterling and Stone. So there you go.

**Elisa:** Perfect.



**Sean:** But what happened is, I realized very quickly by the end of 2008—we had already closed the preschool and there was no way for us to make money except for the keyword articles. And I pretty much vowed, “I’m never going to write a keyword article again because this is not sustainable. And there’s just no way to do it.” And I’d rather be making no money than almost no money. You know, figure out what I’m going to do.

And so I just binged on copywriting books and figured, “You know what, if writing a sales letter is the most I can make per word, then that’s what I’m going to learn.” I basically took a month or so off from writing keyword articles and learned to write copy instead. And then I started the new year, I put a “ghost” in front of Writer Dad. I figured I would piggyback off of what little brand I had and I started a site called Ghost Writer Dad. And it was very SEO-based. You know, I had written enough crap keyword articles.

**Elisa:** You knew exactly where to put what, how, and where.

**Sean:** I knew exactly what to do, and this is years before Panda, so it was relatively easy to get it. And I actually had the number one hit for “ghost writer” in the world until Roman Polanski’s Ghost Rider movie came out. That gave me even more reasons to hate the guy. It was awesome. I immediately got a lot of traffic from that. I used to write regularly on Copyblogger, and that gave me a lot of traffic also.

At the time, I actually wrote everything. I even wrote wedding vows which was really, really cool. I loved writing wedding vows. They went with my poetic style very well. But eventually, I really just started writing. I did a lot of ghost writing for marketers. I wrote a lot of marketing copy.

And then I hooked up with one marketer named Lori Taylor. And it was at a very, very hard time for my family. I had just lost our house. We were in between places. We had just moved to a little tiny two-bedroom on the beach, which is was my way of saying, “I’m sorry, family, that I lost the house. Let’s at least live on the beach in this tiny, tiny little shack.”

And Lori, she saw something that I wrote on Copyblogger and she sent me an email. Well, it was awesome. We had a phone call that lasted three hours. She said, “You’re better than 95% of writers that I’ve ever seen, but that last 4% is where millions of dollars are made. How would you like to work with me?” Which was kind of, you know, the proverbial “offer you can’t refuse.”

**Elisa:** I was going to say, that’s like amazing offer copy right there.

**Sean:** It really is. And she is a genius copywriter. She’s been making over a million dollars a year since she was about twenty-five as a copy writer. So I moved out to Cincinnati to work with her for a couple of years. And I worked with her, side by side, for quite a lot of things, ‘till I just had quite enough. I just wanted to start doing stuff for myself. And I want to write fiction.

So right after, I pulled myself from the drags and found a really, really good gig because to Lori’s credit—if anything, she overpaid me. She very much respected me and valued my time. It was very difficult to leave that position because it was fun. We traveled a lot and I was in cool masterminds and I got smarter faster, working with her. There’s no doubt. And it was secure. It was safe. But it just didn’t speak to my heart.

And I would always rather just do what I want to do. And I wanted to tell stories. I’m a storyteller. I wanna tell stories. I figure if I keep doing what I’m doing, and I’m smart about the way I do it, there is no



shelf life on fiction. Certainly, you have rising and falling stars, but Stephen King still makes money off *Carrie*—like, constantly.

**Elisa:** I hear some people read it every now and again.

**Sean:** Every once in a while. And you know, I wanna make movies someday. There's no medium I don't wanna touch. And so, I have to start by telling my stories. Pretty much as soon as all my debt was paid off from my earlier fiasco, and it was still stupidly dangerous but kind of safe enough to try anyway, I took the leap. And I've been writing fulltime fiction ever since. And that was in 2012.

**Elisa:** And what you did there—I have heard this actually from a number of writers that I talked to both on the show and then just in my world—that for a lot of us, some of the best training that we ever got about how to be in the writing business was kind of sucking it up in a time that we, you know, needed to make money, and taking a job and learning from someone who brilliantly runs a business that is heavily influenced by writing and content and that sort of thing.

**Sean:** Yeah. There's no doubt about it. I love that I got all that marketing experience, because I think that my instincts are really in tune to smart marketing, and I like that. The trinity of Sterling and Stone is me, Jonny Truant, and David Wright. And Dave is just a pure artist. He not only doesn't fancy himself a marketer, he growls at the word. And Johnny and I are very much the opposite. We've strongly feel that smart marketing is just getting people who are naturally inclined to love what you're doing in front of it. We bake marketing into our art. It's part of what we do. That's kind of the "smarter artist" ethos. Like that's what we do.

Because our business model, if you strip it down, it's we make stuff, and we talk about it. That's it. That's our business model. And without that second part, the "talking about it," the first part is somewhat irrelevant. If you got a decent marketer who is a good writer, he's going to outperform the brilliant writer who can't market—100% of the time. And that's important to know. I'd rather constantly work my way towards being a brilliant writer but never, ever forget that second part—the talking about it.

And so, I'm very grateful for that time because the one thing it did more than anything was it got me out of my head. Because without that copywriting experience, I wouldn't be as good a writer because I was always more concerned with how the word sounded than what they said. And there's a really, really big difference there.

If you are a copywriter, your job is to keep people reading. If they leave the page, the page doesn't convert. If the page doesn't convert, you go hungry. You're paid by your skill level. And keeping the person on a page is the best thing you can do as a fiction writer. And it's because you're serving a need. No one stays on a sales page because they like you. They stay on a sales page because you're compelling them. Because they are gripped, because they cannot leave, because you're driving them toward a solution.

And the solutions and fiction are different. I want to make people feel. I want to make them think. I want to make them curious. I want to make them excited. I want to make them aroused. I want to do something. And that means that I'm going to use my words to do whatever it is that I'm going to do. But I didn't know that before I started doing a lot of ghost writing with marketing stuff. I didn't know. I didn't understand that that was the alchemy I'm looking for is making people feel or think.



Before, writing for me was a little too masturbatory. It was like, “Oh, I'm such a fancy writer. Listen to how my words sound.” And those are the writers that don't sell books.

**Elisa:** Or they end up having the “one hit wonder” of books. That somehow it got out and got through, but then everything they write otherwise is just such crap because they just managed to hit one payday.

**Sean:** Yeah. I don't care about lightning in a bottle. I really wanna build a sustainable business that's founded on my word craft.

**Elisa:** And in your business, it is such a—I guess I'm going to use the word “dangerous,” but I'm not sure if it's 100% the right word—there is an extreme saturation that's happening in the self-publishing world, which I'm sure you are well-aware of. I heard you speak of it before. That is really, really intimidating for a lot of people. But I also find it really, really gratifying as well because it's getting to the point that if you do stuff well, you rise way above anything else that anyone else is doing.

**Sean:** It's totally true. And it's fine. I'm willing to play the long game. I don't make any decisions that are based on short term at all. It's very, very, very rare that I will ever go with a short term decision. I'm a very strategic thinker as opposed to a tactical thinker. And I'm always thinking, “Five years, ten years, what kind of business do I wanna build?” And whether the things that I'm doing right now—how are they going to serve that span of time?

So probably the best example is genre hopping, which is absolutely the worst advice. And we're always very clear on the podcast that this is not advice. We're not giving advice. Because if we were to tell authors to genre hop, that is pretty much the worst advice you could possibly give somebody. Genre hopping is very dangerous because most readers, when they encounter a story, they want the same sort of story over and over and over again. And readers have been trained for that.

And I'm just not that interested. I don't want to be a horror writer. I don't wanna be a children's writer. I don't wanna be a Sci-Fi writer. I don't wanna be a fantasy writer. I don't wanna be a non-fiction writer. I wanna be a storyteller. And so it's very important that I lay that foundation now. That's kind of how I wanna walk on. I wanna be known as a story teller and I wanna be known as a thinker. And that means that I don't tell the same sort of story over and over again.

And it's going to take me way longer to build that reputation, but it's important that I do it now before I'm pigeonholed. So I get a lot of pushback from the Self Publishing Podcast audience. Like, “You know you'd be making a lot more money if you just stick with a single genre.” “Yes. Just so we're clear, I know I would be making a lot more money.” I totally understand that, but I'm not driven by money. I'm driven by legacy.

And I also believe that the money is there anyway. I just think that it will take longer to get there. You know, instead of just building one building taller and taller and taller and taller, I'm taking the time to lay the foundation for a city block. And that's just more important to me. I'd rather go wide than tall. And I think that eventually, everything can go tall, but I'll be building up from a city block instead of a single lot.

**Elisa:** Right. You're creating a much larger landscape from which to build an empire as opposed to building out just a small, one-column existence.



**Sean:** That's correct.

**Elisa:** Well, speaking of one columns and making things a lot easier than building out entire city blocks, were going to dial it down a bit ad make it a little bit easier for you. We are going to jump into a fun little game I like to play with folks. Super easy. Super fun. Over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions.

**Sean:** Oh, exciting!

**Elisa:** I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind.

**Sean:** Okay.

**Elisa:** We're going to try to get through as many as we can to get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of your writer's mind. Are you feeling ready?

**Sean:** I am ready.

**Elisa:** All right. Pen or pencil?

**Sean:** Pen.

**Elisa:** Mac or PC?

**Sean:** Mac.

**Elisa:** Coffee or tea?

**Sean:** Coffee.

**Elisa:** Night or morning?

**Sean:** Morning.

**Elisa:** Good writing or correct writing?

**Sean:** Good writing.

**Elisa:** Noise or silence?

**Sean:** Silence.

**Elisa:** Lefty or righty?

**Sean:** Righty.

**Elisa:** Weird or typical?

**Sean:** Weird.

**Elisa:** School or no school?

**Sean:** No school.

**Elisa:** Outside or inside?





**Sean:** Inside.

**Elisa:** Clean or messy?

**Sean:** Clean.

**Elisa:** Teacher or student?

**Sean:** Student.

**Elisa:** Town or city?

**Sean:** City.

**Elisa:** Trains or planes?

**Sean:** Planes.

**Elisa:** Skiing or surfing?

**Sean:** Surfing.

**Elisa:** Fantasy or reality?

**Sean:** Fantasy.

**Elisa:** Love or money?

**Sean:** Love.

**Elisa:** Introvert or extrovert?

**Sean:** Extrovert. Although I will say I'm an atrovert.

**Elisa:** What's an "atrovert?"

**Sean:** It's like I'm not left brained or right brained. I'm both. Same with introvert and extrovert.

**Elisa:** You're almost like an "ambivert."

**Sean:** Yeah, that's the word actually. There you go.

**Elisa:** No, it could be yours as well. I'm just making up words as I go. Good content or good marketing?

**Sean:** Good content.

**Elisa:** Smile or game face.

**Sean:** Smile.

**Elisa:** Call or text.

**Sean:** Text.

**Elisa:** Money or fame?



**Sean:** If you change the word to “legacy,” I’ll go legacy. I don’t need to be famous, but I want to be well-respected and remembered. But if it is fame, I’d go money over fame.

**Elisa:** Older than you are now, or younger than you are now?

**Sean:** Older than I am now.

**Elisa:** Think before you talk, or talk before you think?

**Sean:** Talk before I think.

**Elisa:** Have a dragon or be a dragon?

**Sean:** Have a dragon.

**Elisa:** Bestselling book or million-dollar business?

**Sean:** Million-dollar business.

**Elisa:** And with that, we have hit the two-minute mark. So you got straight right through to the end on that.

**Sean:** Oh, look at that. That’s awesome.

**Elisa:** So I wanna take you again for taking the time to join me today, Sean. Where can folks find your writing and businesses and other things?

**Sean:** [SterlingAndStone.net](http://SterlingAndStone.net)—yes, “dot net.” One day I’ll be able to buy “.com” from the jewelry store. But it’s SterlingAndStone.net. You can find all of our books and all of the stuff we talked about there. If you wanna see me and my partner Johnny write a book live in thirty days—that’s pretty cool—you can see that at FictionInABox.com. Either of those places. The Self Publishing podcast, actually. If you don’t mind a show that is often off topic, sometimes funny, and pretty relevant in the self-publishing space, [The Self Publishing](#) on iTunes or Stitcher or any of those mediums is great.

**Elisa:** Perfect. And do you have any parting thoughts for people? Any things that you think listeners should really know about as they work to build out their businesses through writing?

**Sean:** Yeah. It’s a process, not an event. I think everyone is in a hurry. A lot of writers think, “Oh, when I get that book published that’s the finish line.” And it’s just not. Like, if you’re lucky, that’s the starting date. And you need to think about it that way. It’s not about getting a book done. It’s about, “All right, I got that book down. Now, I can write another one.” Because if you want to make your living with words, then no one book is ever going to do that for you.

You know, there’s may be one in ten thousand authors that that’s true for. It’s just not smart to plan around that. It’s much smarter to plan around the actuality of what the reality of what the publishing landscape is. And that’s kind of the right “publish, repeat” model. You write something, you connect with an audience, you connect with your readers, then you deliver them value over and over again. Whether that’s nonfiction and you’re making solutions that they come to count on you for, or whether it’s fiction and you’re entertaining them with characters and stories, and you’re doing that reliably. Either way, it’s not the one shot is going to kill the bear. You kind of need to empty your gun.



**Elisa:** That's great advice. Thank you very much for joining me.

**Sean:** My pleasure. Any time.

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*Reviews and sharing your favorite episodes help me get the word out, and get more people on the show. Thank you so much for listening to me geek out today about writing with Sean Platt. 'Till I'm in your earbuds next Tuesday—go create your own compelling content and make some words sexy.]*

#### **[Outtake]**

**Sean:** If it sounds good to my ear, then I know it's ready for the editor.

**Elisa:** Right. That's when you're reading the sentence and you start tripping and tumbling and you're like, "Wow. What idiot wrote this?"