

EPISODE 137

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04.1] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach, and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives, are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:35.6] CS: Hello, welcome back to another episode of the Creative Empire Podcast, it's Christina and Reina here and today, we're joined by Bestselling author, Jeff Goins. Jeff, if you don't already know is the author of many books, latest is his book *Real Artists Don't Starve*. It's a title that covers a subject matter that you would probably figure out from taking it up but we're excited to dive in today with Jeff and talk about the nuances of his book, *Real Artists Don't Starve*. Thank you so much for coming today Jeff, it's great to have you.

[0:01:06.3] JG: Thanks for having me Christina and Reina, good to be here.

[0:01:08.6] CS: Yeah, of course. You wrote this book from – you're a writer first of all, right? You are a true creative and what compelled you to write a book like this? What was the poll there, why did you feel like this needed to be a message the world needed to hear?

[0:01:25.8] JG: I've been writing full time for about six years now and I always kind of wondered, like, was this just dumb luck? Because this is something that I heard growing up, you can't be a writer, you can't be a creative, you can't be an artist because you'll starve. Most of my life, I was drawn to the arts. When I was a little kid, I used to draw Garfield cartoons. I drew Garfield and my friend would draw Odie and we'd make this little Garfield comics strips.

That was fun, then when I got a little bit older, my dad was kind of a rocker, you know, played a bunch of bands growing up. He taught me how to play guitar and so I started playing guitar,

writing really bad, sad songs, about girls that wouldn't date me and started a band in high school called Decaf which made sense to us because we had two electric guitars and an electric base and no drums.

We thought, this is what decaffeinated music would be, like percussion less, sad, bad songs. So that was sort of our – that was like teenage years and I always acted in plays in college. I started doing public speeches and debates and I was also in a band in college. I had a double major in Spanish and Religion and sort of stacking the deck in my favor towards a successful career.

And then, I left college, I just kind of took the next logical career step which is I toured the country with my band for a year and we...

[0:02:57.7] CS: Obvious next step.

[0:03:00.3] JG: Yeah, I'm like obviously like making good career choices here, you know I didn't know what I wanted to do or be in so I just knew that making stuff and sharing it with people is really exciting to me. At the same time, I kept hearing that this wouldn't last. So I think there was something really urgent in me that I felt like I had to do this now or I'll never do it. Sure enough, I'm touring with this band, we made about \$8,000 that year, so pretty successful. We were huge in Taiwan, toured there for about a month but in order to keep expenses low, we would stay in people's homes and they'd make us casseroles and send us on to our next gig.

I remember sleeping in like trailer homes and mansions, you know, like we saw all of America like across the whole socioeconomic spectrum. It's really cool, it's really fun but sure enough, every few nights, we'd be staying with some home, some family and the husband or the wife or both would, in like the most well-meaning way possible say, "Hey, it's good that you're doing this while you're young because when you get older, you're going to have to get a real job, you can't make art, you'll starve."

I grew up with this idea. I think a lot of us grow up with which is that, if you're going to do something creative, you can't make money off of that. It's a really nice hobby. I remember

talking to a family member while I was making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year as a full-time writer.

This was years ago and this person said, "When are you going to get a real job?" There's just this idea that it's not real work, it's not a real business and I agreed. I was like, 'Yeah, you're right. After this, I'll go get a real job.'" I quit the band, did it for a year, moved to Nashville which is the opposite order you're supposed to do those things in.

You're supposed to move to Nashville and start a band. I quit a band and I moved in Nashville to chase a girl, married her, got a real job at a call center, hated that. Then got a better job at a non-profit and it eventually became the marketing director there and did that job for about seven years. Towards the end of it, got this itch that I wanted to be writing and like, that voice kept saying, "Well you can't do this, you'll starve." I eventually started learning that there were lots and lots of people –

I know you guys talk to a lot of these people who are doing this, who are making a living blogging, running an Etsy shop, writing, sharing their art with the world, whatever that may be and I began to tell myself a different story. Which is that it is possible to thrive off of your creativity and sure enough, when I started believing that, I started doing it and I eventually started becoming that.

The book came about, in part as a result of this journey that I had. But then, I just started looking around and noticing that there are lots and lots of people who are killing it and they're not like famous or celebrities, they're not outliers. I think now is actually the best time to be creative and do creative work, there's so many opportunities.

Yes, there are a lot of people trying to do it so there's a lot of competition. But the tools, the tools that we're using right now to connect all over the country, we're all in different spots like this makes it almost like offensive.

That if you don't try to make a go at this art of yours, if that's what you really want to do, then like you're doing a huge disservice to yourself and to the world. I wrote the book because I

realized, this, you know, process of not starving, of making a living off of your art is actually what creative geniuses throughout the centuries have always done.

The idea of being a starving artist is mostly a myth and what I mean by that is a myth is a story that when you tell yourself it enough times, it becomes true. Certainly for 27 years, I told myself, you can't make any money off of art and guess what happened? I didn't make any money off of art.

When I started to change the story, when I told myself a new myth, maybe it's possible to do this, you can make a living, you can thrive off of your art. That became possible. So this is a book that my only goal is to prove that if you are a starving artist today, that is a choice, not a necessary condition of doing creative work. That's my argument.

[0:07:41.6] CS: One of the things that holds people back is definitely this mindset but like even in art, myself personally, I find it hard, I'm in it, I've been in it for two years. I still find myself tripping back to that mindset so I think that's where a book like yours is a helpful reminder, not just with fluffy kind of words.

Because it wasn't that kind of book. But with those real-world examples. I mean, that was a lot of research in this book, was that fun for you or did you like doing that research, did you like having a more empirical basis for this book than some of your other writing?

[0:08:18.7] JG: That's a good question. It wasn't hard for me, not because research isn't hard but because this was something that had been sort of stewing in me for a while. I think my opinion is this is not a bad way to write a book, this isn't the way everybody writes books but it's the way I write books which is like it needs to sort of be living in me for a few years and then everything kind of comes together and I go, "I have to write this."

What happened was, the angle says, you have to write the book that wants to be written. I like that it's a little mystical but I dig that and so for me, I had this experience and I kept meeting thriving artist and you know who I'm talking about.

There's this underground movement of creatives who you know, are not like on VH1 Behind The Scenes kind of thing. Do they still do that? They're not rock stars in the sense that they're the top .01% of the population but they're making a living off of their creativity. I just kept running into more and more of these people;

At the same time, I kept occasionally bumping into starving artist here in Nashville, musicians, creative entrepreneurs, writers going, "Well, I love this thing but I can't make any money off of it." It was almost like if you're so passionate about this, this has to be a hobby because there's no way this can be work because work is supposed to be boring.

It just bugged me because my experience was different but I was like, maybe it was dumb luck and it all kind of came to a head when a friend of me sent an article about this story regarding Michael Angelo, the artist. In 2003, there was this art historian named Rab Hatfield who discovered some previously unknown bank accounts belonging to Michael Angelo. In those bank accounts were the equivalent of 50 million dollars which made Michael Angelo the richest artist of the renaissance.

At this point, the richest artist who had ever come along. Meaning, nobody had done what he did. He was the richest artist in his lifetime who had ever lived. What happened afterwards in the renaissance is you had generations of artist who follow in his footsteps who became wealthy as a result of his example.

I thought, what if we're living in a new renaissance today? What if these thriving artist that you know and I know are the Michael Angelo's of today and they are setting a new precedent for what is possible for future generations of creatives. What's more is, what if this idea of the starving artist is not true? It is more the exception than the norm.

What if being a starving artist is the same as being a starving lawyer or starving doctor in the sense that anybody can mess up a career, if they don't follow the basic rules it takes to succeed. That's sort of what I try to persuade the reader to understand that in the book is, all these people that you think starved, Picasso, Van Gogh, Michael Angelo, they didn't. Even Van Gogh who was like this stereotypical starving artist, his brother bank rolled him for a decade.

He had a patron, he adorned his apartment with very nice things, he did not starve in the way that we think an artist has to in order to be a genius. If that's true of somebody like a Van Gogh, then what excuse do we have to not put our art out into the world and try to make a living off of it.

[0:11:39.6] RP: I so appreciate these examples and like reading through your book, it was so clear that we've been fed these lies of you have to starve in order to be an artist and you're like, "Not true, not true, not true." It was just really enlightening to see all of those examples in one place.

I'd love us to explore some of the myths that you talk about in your book if you agree with that because I think it makes sense for us to just showcase that this is not – what I'm trying to point out here is that a lot of the people who might be listening, this might be the reality. The mindset of I can't make money right now or I'm not making money right now.

Can you walk us through some of the myths that are –

[0:12:17.4] JG: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, so the book is broken down into basically 12 rules and so there's this dichotomy of here's what the starving artist believes, here's what the thriving artist believes. What I did is I just looked at these two groups of people and it is possible for you to be a starving artist mind you. It's just a choice.

Basically, everything that the starving artist does is what the thriving artist doesn't do or vice versa, everything that a thriving artist does is what the starving artist actively doesn't do.

[0:12:45.9] RP: Wait, can I pause you for a second because I think that's going to be really triggering to hear you say that a starving artist, it is a choice for them to be a starving artist.

[0:12:55.2] CS: I was just writing that down.

[0:12:56.4] RP: Can you tell us a little bit, tell us what that means.

[0:12:59.7] JG: Yeah, I think the mindset thing is the biggest thing, you know. I agree with you guys about that and I talk to this historian, Rab Hatfield, he is the guy who discovered that Michael Angelo is a millionaire and I skyped with him in his home in Florence Italy, this 80 year old man. I found him on Twitter of all places.

Yeah, we talked for a couple of hours and I said, if this is true that Michael Angelo was rich and I talked to a biographer, a guy named Bill Wallace who said, he changed the game for everybody. Being an artist, after Michael Angelo, in the renaissance was not...

It wasn't a poverty-stricken career, it wasn't a hobby, you're an elite member of society, you're an aristocrat and the whole idea of the starving artist story happens later. Happens in the mid 1800's and the book I go into that. Long story short, in a series of short stories that eventually became the Opera, Rent and even Moulin Rouge. You know, this classic story of the starving artist living in Bohemia, it's a story.

Literally is a story that a writer named Henri Murger told himself when he failed as a writer. So he wrote all these stories sort of glorifying and romanticizing poverty for the artist. It took off as the story then became embedded in our cultural psyche as this is what an artist looks like.

I asked professor Hatfield, I said, "If this is true that you can, if back in the renaissance we made a great – the artist made good living then why do artist starve today?" He told me a story and so the story was this.

He said, in like the 1480's, there's a town in Italy called La Vorno and it's a coastal city where the artist Modigliani is from. Modigliani was this Italian artist who moved to Paris. He was kind of a struggling artist himself and he moved to Paris because he starts practicing sculpture, sculpting in La Vorno.

He's so bad at that time, according to legend that the artist say, "You should throw your statues in the channel in the local canal." Basically kind of chased him out of town, he leaves because he's not making it as an artist, he moves to Paris, kind of gets in with the art scene there and eventually becomes a really good artist.

The story is, he's so bad, throw those statues into these busts, throw them in the canal and the story is he threw them in the canal and then he left. And 80 years later, he is now, like La Vorno is known as the birth place of Modigliani and they're all proud of him, right?

They're having this local festival for the town, it's not doing well, it's supposed to attract a bunch of tourists, it's not doing well. So halfway through, the town council or whatever, gets together and decides, let's find Modigliani's statues. This is a legend in the city.

They drain the canal and sure enough, there were three busts, there were three statues that are carved in the style of Modigliani at the bottom of the canal and of course they freak out. The international art community freaks out, it attracts international attention and media and a bunch of tourist come and so, it works.

Like a week into this, several college students come forward and say, "This is a ruse, this is a prank. We made those statues and we threw them in there as a joke and we didn't know everybody would freak out and I feel bad." And nobody believes them.

They go, "No, they look like the style of Modigliani, they're rough but it looks like him." "No, you don't understand, we did this." They insist that and nobody bellies them. So, on national television, they demonstrate with a black and decker drill how they made these busts and they recreate them and people still won't believe them.

Eventually after several weeks, people come around but Rab Hatfield tells me this story and goes, that's how people are. I think there's some truth to that. In the book I say, sometimes, "It's easier to believe a beautiful lie than it is to accept the difficult truth." Whatever we want to say about the myth of the starving artist, there is something kind of beautiful and romantic about it.

There's something not very romantic about "Hey, you have to market your work and you need to charge what you're worth and you've got to network with people who can help you." That doesn't feel romantic. It feels romantic, it feels beautiful to sit in a cabin in the woods and write the great American novel and just believe that it's going to get discovered.

I would say that if you're doing that, if you're making your art in private and you're thinking that marketing, business, these things are beneath you – that you are actively not doing what many of the great artists throughout history learned to do.

[0:17:57.1] RP: I love that. Thank you so much for answering that question. Yeah, I think, I'll get to the 12 rules that you talk about but really, what you're pointing at, at the very end there was about like, being a business owner and a creative, right? Having both of those hats rather than just focusing on the creative piece.

[0:18:14.6] JG: I would argue that to be an artist is to be an entrepreneur.

[0:18:18.1] RP: Sure.

[0:18:18.2] JG: And the greatest artist thought that way, there wasn't like business mode and creative mode, it was all one and the same. I think the way that we do this is unique to being a creative. You know, jumping in to the rules, like example. One rule is practice in public. It is the way that I think you can do marketing while doing your art.

Austin Cleon calls it showing your work and Picasso did this. Picasso's, you know Spanish artisan moves to Paris and moves this very poor district in Paris where all the other artist are, right by the Moulin Rouge actually. He realizes pretty early on that Gertrude Stein is somebody to know in the Paris art scene in the early 1900's and Gertrude Stein, who eventually become friends with Hemmingway and James Joyce and that whole ex-patriot community in Paris.

She's an art collector, she's got some money and she's a pretty well-known patron, particularly to new up and coming artists. What does Picasso do? Well he volunteers to paint Gertrude Stein for something like 90 times and they do this over the course of several months.

They visit each other and he paints her and he gives her every single painting for free which cost him money, supplies, et cetera. Now, what does he do exactly? He understands that as a new artist, nobody knows who he is and he can do one of three things.

One, he can sit in his studio, do his work and hope somebody will discover him, he knows that's not going to work. Two, he can go totally commercial and start plastering posters around town saying artist for hire or three, he could do what I call practicing in public and what that means is you get to do your art but you do it in a place where people are going to discover it.

Like a street performer. This is what he does, he is putting his art in the right channels where it is most likely to be discovered and it works, it works really well. Because imagine, if you are Gertrude Stein and somebody gives you, over the course of several months, 90 paintings of yourself, what are you going to do with these paintings?

If you like some of them, you're going to hang some of them in your house because you have nowhere else to put them? Her house is always full of art and every week, she would host a salon at her house where she would have people over, the Latin quarter on the left bank.

People would come over, art dealers, artist, authors, there's a very eclectic group of people in the art scene and what do you do when you see a new painting hanging on Gertrude Stein's wall or 90 of them? You know, you go, "Who did that?"

It was a very smart way for Picasso to market his work and he was actually really good at marketing, it was something that he was world class at. By the time he died by the way, he was worth over 500 million dollars. He definitely didn't starve. Picasso once said, "I would like to live like a pauper but with plenty of money." And he did just that, you know?

He lived as a bohemian but I mean, he was really well off. That's one rule you know? It's the idea that art needs an audience and it is our job as creatives to be not working for free but very intentionally sharing our work in the right channels, where it has the greatest likelihood to be discovered. Another artist that I talked to, contemporary is Lisa Congden who is an illustrator and now in fine art and she talked about how for years, something like four years.

Every day, she would take a picture of a work in progress, a painting, hand lettering, whatever she was doing, she would put it on Flickr, today it's Instagram but she would put it on Flickr and she do this every day for several years and a few years in, she got a message randomly from somebody saying, "Hey, I'd like to buy that."

Now, I mean, she's got more work than she can handle. I know another fine artist who does this on Instagram. Posts a painting every single day and doesn't say "Artwork for sale." He's just sharing what he's doing, he's practicing in public and almost every day he gets offers from people to buy those works of art.

The idea here is if you consistently share your work, practicing in public, you will build an audience and over time, that audience, if you're good, they will want what you have and you start to create value and you can eventually start charging for your work as a result of simply sharing what you're doing.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[0:16:55.2] CS: Have you heard about Member Vault? It's a new course delivery platform for online educators that focuses on one thing. Engagement. But, what the heck is engagement you might be asking me and why does it even matter? Well, have you ever purchased an online course and yeah, maybe forgot to finish it?

My hand is raised. This has happened to me definitely more than a few times and guess what? I never purchased from these course creators again, like anything. The courses that I have finished, well, let's just say I'm more than a lifelong fan. I've joined their Masterminds, I bought their coaching programs.

I generally try to support them as much as I can all along the way. If you are looking to fall into the latter camp and you want to create raving fans for your platform, make sure that you go to creativeempire.co/membervault. To get your free 30-day trial of the software.

Not only will you get 30 days free which should be more than enough time to get up even a mini course for you, you'll also receive free access to the course that's going to show you how to do this. This course is called the DIY Roadmap and the folks over at Member Vault have set this up just for you.

It's normally a \$97 course that they're giving away for our listeners for free. All you have to do to get it is go over to creativeempire.co/membervault. This course is going to help you build your own online teaching platform that boost your income and sells itself without you even having to go through a launch.

Again, normally that's \$97 course they sell on its own but they're giving it away to you guys for free along with a 30-day trial. Creativeempire.co/membervault is going to get you all those goodies, go get them today.

Secret tip guys, leaving a rating and review on iTunes lets us see who you are, what you like and what you want more of. It also almost guarantees at some point that we're going to shout you out on this podcast and reveal your business to our audience of thousands and thousands of listeners.

Why don't you leave us a rating and review? This week's comes from Alana Letters and Alana had to say, Reina and Christina truly care about helping young entrepreneurs learn and grow to become successful.

The creatives they bring in to learn from have helped me so much to gain the confidence to be courageous and start my business. Thank you, Reina and Christina. We are so thrilled to hear that you're starting your own business, we don't this show so that we can hear these ratings and reviews, that's not our main reason.

It is to help you, to get you out there, to get you started so it's great to hear that this show is working for you and we would love to hear from you every single rating and review does count. It matters so much to us.

So please take two seconds out of your day to leave us a rating and if you have a little more time, leave us a review. We would love to hear back from you and love to hear what you have to say. Thanks so much.

[CONTINUED]

[0:25:47.7] CS: It's really encouraging that what you're talking about here is consistency and not, you know, the big break, because that's what you hear from the people in our audience is that they're just waiting for that big break.

[0:25:59.3] JG: Right.

[0:26:00.3] CS: Can you talk about how the – I know you've already started to go there but you know, creating this consistent – whether it's content or calligraphy or artwork, it's really hard. What you just said doesn't take a lot of time but it does take some time. I think a lot of people at least, that we've talked to in our audience or who I've left reviews are kind of in the place where they feel like they don't have that time.

They feel like they have to have a family soon or they have to leave this job because it's so awful and waiting two years to discover their blog in an ever more crowded blog sphere is kind of like a very stressful proposition to them.

You know, if you were talking to somebody like that, what are some things that you might tell them or point out from your book?

[0:26:42.7] JG: There's an old story about an actor moving to Hollywood and he meets the actor Walter Mathau at a party and Mathau goes, how's it going kid? The kid goes, "Uh it's going okay, just waiting for my big break."

Mathau laughs and he goes, "Kid, it's not the one break that you need, it's the 50." I think that's true. I've never really had a big break and I get that you know, I understand on the outside looking in, somebody might go, when you met this person, that was your big break or when this thing happened.

I think that's true, it's sort of like the iceberg principle. Here's the 20% that everybody sees and here's the 80% that you see. Yeah, there are inflection points, there are moments when you know, big things happen. I remember blogging six months and having 70 subscribers at the end of six months of blogging.

Every single day, writing 50 guest posts and you know, over 150 post on my blog in addition to that. I play guitar, I quit playing guitar for that year of writing that I was doing. It was everything to me and it wasn't really working. I had a friend who told me.

When I started my blog on day six, I got 6,000 visitors and that's how I knew, this was my calling and I was like, "Well, I had two and a half visitors." You know, my mom and my wife and our dog. No offense to dogs but I think they count as half a person. I am not trying to be anti-canine here. I was discouraging but I just kept doing it and at month six, in a week shot up from 70 subscribers to a thousand and so you could call that a break. You know by the end of the year I had over 10,000 readers and over 50,000 people a month visiting the blog.

But for me it was momentum. I think what happens is growth doesn't always happen linearly and so breaks like your big break is what other people say when they look at your story and sometimes what we say about our own story when we are not being completely honest, change takes time. I was recently speaking at an event and I was talking about writing and somebody said, "What is the difference between people who break through and become professional writers and those who don't?"

And I said, "Well I think the biggest difference is quitting" you know when you quit, it doesn't work out. When you don't quit eventually it often does. But the other difference is I thought about it was you know I teach online courses for writers and creatives and one of the things that I used to think was a good thing and now I think was a bad think which is this: Somebody goes, "If I don't get out of my job by Christmas I don't know what I'll do."

"If this doesn't work in six months, it's over for me." When they put a timeline on it, it actually is a bad idea I think because what happens is Christmas comes and you're not out of that job, it didn't work like it's working but not as well as you thought it would. Six months happened for me and I've got 70 subscribers and we stop when we're five feet from gold so to speak right? And if we would just persevere a little bit more, we would get there.

Jim Collins tells a story in Good to Great about POW, like war camp survivors and the big difference between those who actually live through that traumatic experience of years in captivity, suffering, beatings etcetera are not the ones who said, "I'll get out by Christmas, I'll get

out by Easter.” Those people literally died of despair because Christmas would come, Easter would come, summer would come and they’d still be there and you just give up, you quit, right?

And the people who made it out said, “I’m going to get out of here, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow but someday.” I find the people that succeed, who have their big break, are the ones who say that and it’s not delusional. It is a willingness to pivot and see opportunities as they come but it’s also a willingness to persist when it seems easier for other people. Like “Why did my friend get 6,000 visitors on day six and I had two and a half?”

I don’t know but I do know that after two years of blogging, I had more subscribers than he did and so it’s different. Your journey is not my journey. We need to stop comparing ourselves to each other. But I believe this and I promise this to everybody that I work with, if you do the work you’ll see the results. What are your results versus my results? I don’t know that that’s up to us but if you consistently do the work you will see the results.

I grew up in farm lands so this make sense to me, if you plant enough seeds something is going to grow and so it’s that basic principle of reaping and sowing. The idea of a big break is really a myth and what this is going to take is it’s going to take hard work and it’s going to take time. In the book I talk about another rule, it’s the idea of it’s a rule of recreation which means it’s never too late to change your course, rewrite the story that you’re living.

But the way that we do that is through what I call the baby step strategy. A little bit of effort every single day. So when John Grisham decides that he wants to be writer, he doesn’t actually decide that he wants to be a writer. He says I am a lawyer, I am a dad. I think I’d like to write a novel, can I do this? Do I have what it takes? I meet so many people who go, “I want to be an artist. I want to be an author. I want to be an entrepreneur.” Are you doing this every single day?

Are you practicing this craft? If the answer is no, forget about the hard work it takes to get there if you are not doing it every day, you don’t even know if you would like this and so Grisham goes, “I don’t know if I like this. I am going to try writing a novel. What can I do? I’m a lawyer, I’m a dad, I’m busy. I’m going to get up a little bit early every day and write one page.” He does that for two years and he finishes his first book. He sells it to a small printing press.

A small publishing company, he doesn't do well, he likes it, it was fun, he goes, "I'm going to do it again" starts working on a second novel. During that time he ends up buying a thousand copies of his first novel and going around and try to sell them and market them himself and then finishes his second novel. That is called *The Firm*, he ends up selling that to a major publisher, becomes a mega bestseller and he's an overnight success three, four, almost five years in the making – then he quits his job. More often than not, that's how it's done.

[0:33:05.5] RP: Yeah, I love that point too because what you are saying is you have to have done the 80% for somebody to see the 20% up top, right?

[0:33:13.2] JG: Yeah, that's good.

[0:33:13.9] RP: You can't just pop up above the water and then not expect to have any other content or any other, I don't know, intellectual property or whatever the body of art is to back it up.

[0:33:24.8] JG: You know this is why I don't believe people when I listen to their stories most of the time. Because we all go back and sanitize your stories. We really do and I remember talking to a couple one time who relocated their family to Africa to start a coffee company. Cool right? It's called Long Miles Coffee Company. It's in Burundi, Africa one of the poorest countries in the world and I said, "How did you get here?" They said, "We took a leap."

"So tell me what happened exactly?" I said, "How long did that take?" "Well it took about 10 years." That is not a leap, that's like one of those matrix leaps like words that could slow motion you know? That's a bridge that you build overtime and this is the way that big dreams get built. It's not sexy but the benefit to doing it this way versus taking a leap is that if you do this, if you slowly build momentum overtime, eventually momentum is really hard to slow down.

When I spent two years building a blog, finding out how I could monetize it and turn it into a writing business, really what I was trying to do and I was trying lots of different things. It wasn't like a perfect plan but I knew in my heart that if I was going to quit my job, I wanted to quit my job and not have to look back. I was willing for it to take a little bit more time to do that and I saw so many people maybe who are the same, who were doing something for six months.

Quitting their jobs, doing this for six months and then failing and then going and having to find another job and they are worse off as a result instead of just quietly slowly building this dream on the side and after it takes off, they go “Well this just makes sense.” When I told my boss, I felt like it was time for me to move on. He’s like, “Yeah I know. I have been waiting for this” it’s past due and I was like, “Oh well okay then. Well see you later” you know?

It just made sense and not everybody’s journey is going to be that way. But I just find this is the norm more than it is the exception. Big things take time, persevere and enjoy the process, like I really liked who I was when I was squeezing in 30 minutes of writing every day. It was fun, it was exciting. Elizabeth Gilbert says this which is a little bit crass but she talks about Dick Magic. She’s like, “I am always amazed at how people say I don’t have time for my art but they have time for an affair.”

“They can steal away for two, three, four hours on a Saturday to meet up with their lover but they don’t have time to write a book.” So you know it is sort of like an affair which is a little unsavory but it’s the idea that you have time for this and it should be exciting. It should be something that captures your heart and enjoy that season of hustle and chasing it because it won’t last forever and there’s a lot of good things about it too.

[0:36:11.7] RP: I have a quick question that we don’t talk about often on this podcast but most of our listeners are women and we don’t have a lot of guys on our podcast. So I’d love to hear your perspective in terms of if you see any differences in mindset or in execution or anything like that, between men and women who are in the creative industry?

[0:36:30.6] JG: Yeah, I mean I think there’s layers to this right because you’ve got single women, you’ve got moms, you’ve got single moms, you’ve got married women. I can only speak from my experience but I recognize that and intentionally try to represent a diversity of stories from different ethnic backgrounds and sexes and whatnot. The thing that comes to mind is my wife is in the middle of this right now. I think this is again probably more particular to moms.

There is this guilt, like my wife is building a business right now, and there’s this guilt about it like, “I should be watching my kids. I should be taking care of the house. I should be doing this. I

should be doing that.” I do think culturally there is sort of task of understanding that men should be more ambitious than women. I don’t think it’s a good thing but I think there is this implication in culture that men should go after it and kill it and women maybe not so much.

And you see that everything from average salaries and the causes behind that and all those things. But you know what I’ve realized is we’ve been talking a lot about mindset and I have a lot of women in my community as well and a lot of writers, a lot of creatives and there is this guilt. Typically, they’re kind of early on in their 20’s or 30’s or later on, they’re in 50’s, 60’s, 70’s and it’s either, “If I don’t do this now I don’t know what I’ll do” or it’s “I miss this and I spent 20 years raising kids and that’s great.”

Or chasing a career, supporting my husband, whatever it was but now it’s time for me and either way, there’s always the question like, “Is it too late that I miss it? Is it okay?” and there is this sort of subtle question of, “Am I being selfish here?” My wife struggles with that a lot and I think the best answer to that question in my experience, male or female but I think women may struggle with this more. I am not a woman so I could be wrong about that. But I think the answer to that question is and a woman told me this.

A woman named Jody Noland who started a business just before she turned 60 and she was a widow. She started this really cool business called Leave Nothing Unsaid, which basically helps people write letters to their loved ones letting them know what they think about them before they die. She works with people who have terminal illnesses but also people who just like we’re not good, it not like we’re not good at telling people that we love, how much we actually love them and how proud of them until it’s too late.

And she did this because she had her own experience of a husband who was dying of cancer and she asked him to write some letters to their children and he refused because he thought he was going to live through it and he didn’t. At his funeral, their stepdaughter, the stepdaughter came up to Jody and said, “Did he write me a letter?” and she said, “No.” It’s heartbreaking you know? And so she started this business afterwards teaching people how to do this and I said, “Why did you do that?”

She said, “Because I started to fear what would happen if I didn’t do this. I wasn’t guaranteed success but the fear of not trying, pushed out the fear of failure.” So I think the question is, “Is this selfish? Should I do this?” that sort of thing, I think the bigger question is what happens if you don’t do this if you don’t share your art? What happens inside you? Because I think that’s legitimate and then what happens to the world and do we miss out on this thing that you have to share?”

And when I was writing this book, I talked to the fourth man who walked on the moon, Alan Bean who is now a fine artist and long story short, he quits NASA at 50 years old to become a fulltime artist because he realizes he’s the only person who has walked on the moon who can paint it and I said, “Hey it’s great that you chased your passion of art” he goes, “This was not my passion.” I said, “What do you mean? You love art.” He goes, “Yeah but it wasn’t my passion.”

He goes, “This was bigger than a passion” he said. “The way I see it, I was in the Navy, I was in NASA. I am a man who has always done my duty and when I realized I was the only person who had been to the moon who could paint it and that we had stopped sending missions to the moon I realized this was my duty.” And so my challenge to the listener who is going, “You know I’ve got this hobby and maybe I don’t have to do this because my husband has got a good job and I feel guilty doing this on the side.”

What happens if you don’t do this? Forget about failure and yeah, be thinking about selfishness I think that’s good but ask yourself, “Is this your duty? Is this your calling? Is this something in the words of my friend that you cannot do?” That’s my definition of vocation. It’s in you, you have to do it and you’ve got to find a way. Then find a way because as we said at the beginning whether or not you starve is now a choice. That’s up to you.

[0:41:29.0] RP: Holy cow, goose bumps all over.

[0:41:32.7] CS: Is that Chris?

[0:41:34.5] RP: You’re an incredible storyteller.

[0:41:35.5] CS: Telling you cannot do it, I remember he talked about when you have this idea for a book so like I remember when someone asked Chris Guillebeau like, “How do you write all of these books and blog post all the time?” he’s like, “I can’t not do it.” He’s neurotic about it. He has to get it out or he’ll I don’t know, that was just so poignant and I think that is going to touch a lot of people where they need to hear it and a message that they need to hear.

You know one last thing I want to talk about before we wrap things up, unless Reina has something else she wants to interject here. I think once you get past all of these mindset stuff and you’re book is going to be crazy helpful for the people that are listening and take the initiative to go pick up that book, *Real Artists Don’t Starve*, is the criticism. You know you are asking like, what’s the worst that can happen? I think for a lot of people it is the criticism.

And I don’t know if you read that Amazon reviews or if you ever go down that rabbit hole, how do you deal with people who are critical of your work or in your experience doing all these research. How do you feel that we can use criticism as a good thing and not as a handicap?

[0:42:43.6] JG: How I deal with it is I get used to it. The same thing with fear I mean those are the biggest questions I hear is how do you stop being afraid and I don’t know. The answer is I don’t know. I don’t, every successful person that I know I’ve been surprised by this. I realized that they’re just as afraid as I am. They are just choosing to not stay stuck in the fear and what they’ve learned how to do and Jody Noland, the woman who started Leave Nothing Unsaid taught me this.

They know how to do it afraid. So it wasn’t that Jody was no longer afraid of failure, she was. It was just that she had a bigger fear of not trying that pushed out that smaller fear. So we have to learn how to do things afraid and for me, I am afraid of criticism. I want everybody to like what I’m doing and no cliché makes that fear go away. I am not doing this work for them or don’t listen to your critics or they’re all haters. None of it helps.

It still stings and I read my Amazon reviews. I know you’re not supposed to or whatever but I want to like the whole point of a book is I want to know what did you think, it’s not for me. My journal is for me, my books are for you and yes, I want to write things that I believe in and share them with people in a way that hopefully will make an impact. So I want to know what that

impact looks like and if somebody took the time to buy a book and review it, it's worth 20 seconds of reading a review.

So how I deal with that is I read them, I have my whole world upside down for about two minutes and then I thank them and then I go to a trusted source like my wife or my friends, I have an inner circle of advisers that tell me the truth, even though you don't want to hear it and I say, "Is this true? Am I missing something?" I think this is sort of a lost art, getting feedback from people especially the tough stuff because on one side of the spectrum there's like, "Everybody's a hater and don't listen to anybody."

Well that could lead to a lack of self-awareness and delusional work where you think you're awesome and you're not as awesome as you think you are. There's always room for improvement and on the other hand, we can get so paralyzed by the criticism that we're afraid to take the next step forward. So for me, I listened to the feedback. I never want to have such a big wall around me that people can't hit me. I know that sounds crazy but I want some of the arrows to get through.

I just don't want them to kill me, you know? I read this biography about Elvis and he talked about how at the end of this life like nobody could get into his inner circle and say, "You've got a problem. You're addicted to drugs and it's destroying your life and your health." Because he was surrounded by doctors who would give him medication if he asked for it and he was surrounded by friends who financially relied on him and he gave them cars and houses and Rolexes.

That nobody was willing to tell him the truth. Even when they did, he brushed it off and so it was very hard for somebody to break in and say, "Here's a mirror, here's reality." I never want that to be my reality because it hurts your work, it can hurt your life and it's just not healthy. So there's that part. That's the meat part. I do believe that most critics are not haters and I have lots of firsthand experience with this. Example one, I sent an email newsletter out every week.

People reply to it, almost always somebody says something really nasty and it bothers me. Sometimes it doesn't bother people. I remember early on in my blogging career writing something because every week I'll get all of these replies in my inbox right? I might get

hundreds of them and they're like, "You're great, you're great, you're great, you suck this is horrible." I was skipping trying to find the "You suck" one and I would dwell on that.

I would talk to my wife about it and she's like, "Why are you doing this? Go write another book or something." I would dedicate so much energy to it and then I would follow up with these people and nine times out of ten, I'd say, "Hey I'm so sorry that you didn't like this" and I would write a newsletter with nearly great helpful advice and somebody would be mad about it or whatever and I'd write them a really nice note and they would go, "Oh you read this? I didn't know that. Oh sorry, I was just in a bad mood today."

[0:47:11.6] RP: Right like they weren't expecting you to actually be like a responding human?

[0:47:15.8] JG: Ain't that interesting? They're just venting. Example two, I was on Amazon and I found somebody posted an Amazon review on one of my books and said, "Worst book ever. Hated it. One star. Horrible." I have this policy that if you don't like one of my books I'll just buy it back from you. I don't want you to be out 15 or 20 bucks, you know? That's fine, I will find somebody else who wants it and so I replied to this person at Amazon.

I said, "Hey email me here if you want a refund. I know you bought it from Amazon but I'll PayPal you the money and buy the book off of you." The person emailed me and they said, "Man I had no idea that authors read their own Amazon reviews. I'm so sorry, I would have been much nicer if I knew you were going to read that." I think two things about that. One, you never know when somebody is having a bad day and that doesn't forgive nastiness.

That still bothered me but probably 90% of the critics that I have ever encountered have been like that and there had been that 10% of trolls and haters who are just mean. You need to block and ignore them but most of them are just having a bad day. Or they didn't like it and there's no problem with it but the other thing I think that's troubling about that is the phrase is this, "I would have been nicer if I knew you were reading this." I think the anonymity of the internet is not a good thing.

And what we need more of is we need to not be ignoring people that disagree with us and turning a blind eye to people who disagree with what we're doing. We need to virtually look

them in the eye, or actually look them in the eye, and talk about it and figure it out. I never want to think I'm better than I am and at the same time, I don't want to be stuck believing that I am as bad as somebody believes I am and when they don't have all the information.

So you know I've learned that people have bad days and can vent really easily on the internet and I try to connect with those people without chasing them down or whatever, you know? But I try to be responsive to that and then most importantly I have an inner circle of friends and advisers who tell me the truth even when I don't want to hear it. So that I can be better and do better things.

[0:49:27.0] RP: I love that. I love having that inner circle and just knowing where to listen and to actually be challenged when we need to be challenged. So we've gone on so many different topics and I'm just grateful we got to talk about a lot of different things. If you were to look back on day one Jeff, on starting this writing thing in earnest, whether it's six years ago or before that. What would you say, what would you give yourself advice about to build your Creative Empire?

[0:49:54.4] JG: I mean this maybe sort of antithetical to this show but I would ask myself, do I really want an empire? What? Do I want a castle? Do I want a horse and bucky? What do I want? Because an empire is a really big thing and you don't need an empire to do your job. I think the gift that I wish I could give myself 10 years ago would be the gift of self-awareness.

Which is really just like a check where I go hey, go find a therapist. I mean, that's really, like that is probably the number one piece of advice that may be uncomfortable for some people. I don't know. Go get some self-awareness and step one, go see a therapist, big fan of that.

If you see a doctor for your physical health, you should see a therapist for your mental health. At least just once. Two, find some friends who don't give a rip about who you are, what you've done or what you're going to do and invite them in to your life to tell you hard things.

Then, from there, build the thing that makes sense for you. But don't do what you think you have to do because some rock star in a podcast said you had to do it. The biggest fear that I have is not failure but succeeding at the wrong thing. You know, there's that quote that says.

“Many of us will climb a ladder in life only to realize it’s leaning against the wrong wall.” The way that we understand with the right wall is not getting just better or more skilled or building a network or having better connections or learning how to blog or get on Etsy.

Build an Instagram following. It’s really truly understanding who we are, what we want and what success looks like to us. The cool thing about this is, you get to choose that and then the building part, I promise you. I know it feels like the hardest part, it is the easiest part. The hardest part is knowing what to build and knowing that when you build it, you’re actually going to be happy with the thing you’ve created.

[0:51:55.1] CS: I feel like 22nd and 23rd century philosophy students will be reading your work.

[0:52:02.0] JG: Well, thanks, that’s very nice. I appreciate that.

[0:52:04.0] CS: Where can everybody – speaking of your work, where can everybody find you, where can they pick up a copy of *Real Artists Don’t Starve* and how can they follow along with you? What’s the best way?

[0:52:12.6] JG: Sure thing. This is great guys, this is really fun, I love how you do this and I was honored to be a part of it, thanks Reina, thanks Christina. You can find the book wherever books are sold, Amazon, you can learn more about it at dontstarve.com.

If you pick up a copy of the book, you can get a bunch of bonuses there, dontstarve.com and you could find me at my blog. Goinswriter.com. Every week, I’m practicing in public there. I got a weekly newsletter. If you send me something mean, I might read it and go, “Hey there, did you have a bad day today?”

But yeah, that’s where you can find all my stuff, links to social media and everything is at goinswriter.com.

[0:52:48.9] CS: Awesome. Thank you so much for being here Jeff. Everybody out there, I hope you’ve gotten plenty to take away today and it helps you go build your Creative Empire.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:52:59.0] ANNOUNCER: Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads, and tips on how to do it, head to www.creativeempire.co, where you can find out more about this week's episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own creative empire.

If you enjoyed this week's show, it would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you could take two minutes to go to iTunes and leave a review. It's a little thing that makes a big difference for the show.

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