



The Athena Wellness Podcast  
Episode 084 – Ship’s Log as Writing Practice with Paul Trammell  
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00:05

Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I’m your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that’s dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

00:30 Kathy

Hello and welcome to Episode 84. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today I’m joined, once again, by author and sailor Paul Trammell, who shares his writing process that includes his daily ship log and recording voice memos on his phone while at the helm. Paul also shares his thoughts on the importance of writing discipline and self-publishing. And now onto the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

Kathy

Once again, I’m joined by author and sailor Paul Trammell. Welcome back, Paul, thank you for being here.

01:15 Paul

Hi, it’s great to be here. Thank you.

01:18 Kathy

So Paul, I’m fascinated as somebody who has written and published a book as well, I would love to hear a little bit about your writing practice. How did you write your first book and what’s your writing practice like today?

01:33 Paul



The first book, *Alcoholics Not Anonymous, A Modern Way to Quit Drinking*, came about because I was open on Facebook about my journey through sobriety and a lot of people started asking me for advice. Strangers would find me on Facebook Messenger and send me a message and tell me that they wanted to quit drinking but they didn't know how. How do you do it? And how do you deal with this situation and that situation?

I was as helpful as I could be to these people. And some of them I communicated with for a long time, you know, regularly wrote a lot back and forth on Messenger. At some point, I realized if I just went back and wrote down all these messages, all I'd have to do is copy from Messenger and paste in a Word doc, then I'd have all this advice I've given people. Then if I just organized that, I could probably organize it into a book.

And that's what I did. I took all the advice I'd given people, put it into Word, started reading it, writing, you know? I didn't use that directly as the book, I wrote a book, but that's how it started.

It's actually a really easy subject for me to write about because it's me, it's what goes on in my head. And as soon as I started thinking about particular situations that drinkers have to deal with, it's easy for me to come up with stuff to write about. So that's how the first book was written.

The second, third and fourth books were sailing nonfiction and those all come from daily - you know sailors have to keep a daily log. It's actually law, maritime law. We have to keep a daily log when we're sailing, just keeping track of what's going on and what the conditions are and what direction we're going in and what's happening. And those actually end up in court sometimes if there's an accident. So we have to do that.

So I just write more extensively in my log, my daily log. I write about what I'm feeling and what things look like and what interesting things happened and what's going through my head today. I also break out my phone and use the recording feature on the phone to speak right into my phone and look at the stars and talk about it. I look out at the blue ocean and just say whatever comes into my mind.

I learned that from Bernard Moitessier. He kept a tape recorder on his boat and he would talk into his tape recorder and that's one of his methods. So I borrowed that from him.



That's a fairly easy way to write a nonfiction book, just keep a daily log. If you know you're going to go on some cool adventure that can be a book, just keep a daily log and write as much as you can in it. And then when the adventure is over, sit down at the computer and transfer your notebook into Word and then you have a rough draft. I spend the next year reading that and modifying it and editing it and adding to it.

For instance, I might write down something like, "It was a beautiful day. I was happy. The sky was blue." And then I come back and I read that and I'm like, "Okay, what was really beautiful about that day?" Then I write a paragraph about why it was beautiful. Okay, what do I mean when I write, "I was happy?" You can't write "I was happy" in a book, that doesn't work. So you've got to think deeply, "What made me happy on that day?" Well, there's another page.

And that's how the nonfiction books come about. It's a good year of editing and rewriting and explaining and organizing. The fun work happens while the adventure is happening. The rest of the year is work. You got to sit down every day for maybe, I mean, I would, very often a typical day for me writing, for instance, *Journey to the Ragged Islands*, would be I would go, I was working a regular job then.

05:35

So I'd come home from work. I lived at a marina. So I'd come home from work, I would hit the swimming pool, swim some laps, and go up into the clubhouse, where there was air conditioning, break out my computer and spend from like 5pm to 8pm, three hours of writing every day.

And then sometimes, I'd have a couple of days where I'd say I'm just going to treat it like a nine to five job today. I'm going to think of this as my carpentry shop. I can build a house for eight hours, no problem. I do it five days a week, eight hours of work. Is this as hard as that? No, you're sitting down in air conditioning with snacks. (laughter) Like it's not hard. It's just, mentally it's hard. But is it physically hard? No, not even.

So I'd kind of go through that mental process to tell myself, "Just sit here all day today in this comfy chair with this nice view in the air conditioning and work on your book." And so you have to tell yourself, you have to be a self starter, you have to figure out how to



motivate yourself to sit down and do it because it takes a lot of hours as you know. I think it takes somewhere on the order of 1000 hours at the computer to write a book and that's kind of a rough guess that I made during one of my books. I tried to estimate how long one of them took to write and it was somewhere on that order.

So it's a lot of rewriting and then you've got to find people to send it off to, to have them read it and tell you what they think. And then try to find people that can edit it. You can pay for editors, if you want real editing, you can pay people. Or if you get lucky and you know someone who's a good editor, they can. But that needs to happen. Because you can self publish a terrible book on Amazon, you can, there's no gatekeeper. You can self publish a book that's awful. No one's gonna stop you. It's not going to sell though. So what's the point? You need to go that extra step and have other people edit the book for you. And the better the editor, the better your book's gonna be. No doubt about that.

07:47 Kathy

It's quite a leap you made from nonfiction to fiction.

07:52 Paul

Whoa, geez. Yeah. Yeah, those are two completely different genres there, I tell you. It's pretty difficult to write a good fictional book. The first book I wrote, the first fiction novel I wrote, I just winged it. I didn't study fiction writing, I just winged it. And I wrote a book that is loosely based on my band's first tour, very loosely based, (laughs) very much fictional. It's called *Dead Flowers on Wednesday*.

It was very fun to write. It has not sold well. I'm sure I made every mistake in the book, you know, as far as how to actually write a fictional novel, but I had a good time doing it. And some people loved it, you know, some of the reviews on it are great.

I've written another novel that's not quite finished yet called *The Gold Box*. And for this one, I have been studying how to actually write fiction. (laughs) There's quite a bit to learn. And there's some great books about it.

For instance, there's a great one called *How to Write Fiction* and it's basically a textbook. I've read it twice while writing *The Gold Box* and it's extremely helpful. I mean extremely



helpful. There's a lot of rules and tricks and things that you need to know to make your book a lot better than it would be otherwise.

You know, it's a creative process. But just like playing guitar, I practice scales every day. You have to be in the scale. You can't just play random notes and make a song. You have to play a song in a key. There are rules you have to follow. You have to be in time as well. A lot of musicians never learned timing. And they have this huge disadvantage because no one ever taught them what the difference between a 16th note and an eighth note is. They can play it but they don't really know how to count it out. It's just crippling.

It's the same with writing. You can go your life as a writer and never really make it because you never learned something. It's the same as surfing. It's the same with everything. I'm here in Panama trying to learn how to surf barrels, barreling waves. I've been terrible at it my whole life. And I'm coming to realize that nobody ever taught me how and I never studied how. I never watched videos.

There's these little things you have to do. If you don't know to stick your right arm in the wave when you're dropping into a right barrel, you're not going to get barreled. You're going to get hit by the lip, every time. Just one little thing, put your arm here.

The same with writing. You need to know various rules about point of view and about tense. And there's the plot. There's a whole lot to learn. And I'm trying to learn it now. And I'm realizing it's making me a better writer. Writing fiction is a lot more difficult than writing nonfiction to me. Writing nonfiction is just, "I did it. Here's what I did. Here's what I felt like, this is what made me think about and feel." And I try to bring the reader into the scene. It just comes naturally. Fiction is way more difficult, I think, to me.

10:58 Kathy

Yeah, well, you know, Paul, this has been such a lovely conversation because I feel like there's... What I feel so inspired by when I speak to you is this sense of deepening in life, of following your curiosity, of learning. But there's discipline around this as well. And there's a mindfulness around this as well.

People don't have to sell their houses and go buy a sailboat. We can all do this in our lives. And the impact that it has not only in ourselves, but on others, can be tremendous. And I



can't thank you enough for sharing your story. I really think that this is going to be very inspiring to the people who listen to it. And I thank you so much for your time today.

11:43 Paul

Good. Well, thank you and I hope it is inspiring. That's how I want to affect other people, inspire them to get out, chase their dreams, step outside their comfort zone, do new and interesting things, better themselves. Learn. Learn about how to live the best life, your best life. It takes thought, it takes conscious thought. It takes discipline. And it's instantly rewarding.

12:07 Kathy

Yeah, thank you so much for being a model. Appreciate that.

12:10 Paul

You're welcome. Thanks for having me on.

12:13

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!