



Podcast Episode 174
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“Take a Peek Inside the Writing Process of 21-Time Bestselling Author Jerry Jenkins”

David Loy: Hi and welcome to *In the Loop* with Andy Andrews, I’m your host David Loy. Andy thanks again for joining us.

Andy Andrews: I am glad to be here David Loy. You doing good?

David: I am terrific. And Andy I got to tell you, I’m so excited because of the very special guest that we have here with us today.

Andy: Yeah, I’m excited but I’m intimidated too.

David: Why are you intimidated?

Andy: I am, I mean, this guy’s like a hero of mine. And I can’t believe he’s on with us. And this is like, oh my gosh. Go ahead.

David: Well I don’t know how to, we won’t tease it too long, but I will say, this person has sold over 70 million books. Just published his 186th book. And Andy, everyone in the industry and outside of the industry would agree. This is one of the most prolific writers of all time. Fiction, nonfiction, biographies, bestsellers, 20 New York Times bestsellers, and we are honored to call him a friend and to have him on the show. Jerry Jenkins joins us. Jerry how are you today?

Jerry Jenkins: I am doing great. Great to be with you. And I'm intimidated too, I had no idea who we had.

Andy: I know, isn't it funny. Jerry, sometimes, I'll be standing on the side of the stage and they'll be saying, our guest today is so and so and he has done this and he has done this. And I'll think, now this is me, right? Are they bringing somebody else up here, because this sounds way too good to be me?

David: I can't wait to meet him.

Andy: Man, thank you for being here with us.

Jerry: My pleasure, thanks.

David: Yeah Jerry, thanks for joining us and it's really interesting to put two great writers, great storytellers together. So Andy I wanted to just kick things off with today's episode and ask to both you and Jerry, what are, give us a snapshot, I guess Jerry let's start with you, give us a snapshot of your journey to becoming a writer, where did that start, how did you get into writing initially?

Jerry: With me, it really started in high school. I wanted to be a big league baseball player. And I was a pretty good player, I played on some really good teams, as far as back little league. And I know Andy's got a history in little league as well. I played on a State Championship little league team, back in the state Michigan. In fact, we missed going to a Williamsport for a little league world series by one game. And the team that beat us wound up finishing second in the world that year.

Andy: Of course they finished second, because all those kids from Japan, you know, just like killed them. It's like, everybody gets killed from Japan, the best you can do is second.

Jerry: That's true. Of course back when, in my day, I'm not sure Japan existed, but. In fact, that year they did show a picture, one of the kids that pitched for the winning team, ironically his name was Ted Williams, this was back in '62, so it wasn't The Teddy Williams. But this kid was 6'1, and 2'10 at age 12. And of course they showed one of the Japanese kids who was about 3 feet tall, a hundred pounds or something like that. But it was great fun to show the difference between the size of the kids. But he threw a perfect game in one of the semi final games. Anyway it was, you know, how it goes with little league, you remember every game. I can still remember the scores of all the games. And this has been a lot of years ago. But when I got in high school, I made a mistake of trying to play football too. And I got hurt, in my freshman year of high school. And it really cost me my baseball hopes. My batting average probably would've cost me my dream anyway but I did have that dream. But to stay close to the sports scene, I started sports writing for the school paper to get into the games free and just to stay close to that. And I realized almost immediately that I'd found my niche. And I wasn't good yet but I had a knack for it because I've been reading the sports pages all my life, and reading Sports Illustrated and that type of thing. And I had a journalism teacher that encouraged me and said, he saw a knack for sports writing. And so I just immediately switched my dream and decided I want to be a sports writer. And I started knocking on a door of a local newspaper office. Even before I was old enough to drive, I became stringer for local paper and got paid for covering high school sports. And back then they paid you by the inch. So I literally would get paid a dollar an inch for what came out in the paper. So

Andy: Wow, so you were really good with adjectives.

Jerry: Yeah, I would write so much that no matter how much they edit me, they're still be six or ten or twelve inches that would come out in the paper, and I get my little money. My parents had to drive me to the ball games and drive me to the newspaper office because I was too young to drive. So I've been a professional writer for over 50 years.

David: Amazing.

Andy: How awesome is that?

Jerry: It's good to know what you want to do when you're a kid, it really is a big advantage.

David: Wow.

Andy: I guess.

David: Well I was going to say that, not with writing specifically but you always knew growing up that you want to communicate or be on stage or something?

Andy: I knew I wanted to communicate, but I wasn't as dialed in as Jerry was. You know, I wasn't even the best writer in my senior English class. I look back and whatever it is that I do, it must be a God thing because I never could, in high school, I couldn't diagram the sentences, you know Jerry, in English class, alright, what's the indirect object and the object, and the verb position and the subject and the predicate, and the prepositional phrase. I could not do that. I just, I don't know why, is that a mental block on that. And they said, when you get to college,

you're gonna have a really hard time because it's all composition. Well when I got to college, it was all composition, and I made A, because I could do it. I don't know why, I couldn't tell you why it was right, but I could do it.

Jerry: We're going to be bad examples to want to be writers today, because I still can't do that. And that was always a problem for me too. And they talk about the dangling participles, I thought that was some medical problem.

Andy: Yeah, yeah.

Jerry: But my mother had perfect grammar and she studied Latin in high school, and so, literally the teacher would say, ok, you did that right, now why is that right? I'd say, because that's how my mom would say it.

Andy: That's how my mom would say it, right.

Jerry: That's all I knew. And it's a funny thing when you talk about you know, because I know what a brilliant speaker you are, speaking, if somebody had told me that speaking would be a part of what I do, I would've laughed in their face. Because as late as probably sophomore in high school, I died a thousand deaths when they would say, ok, everybody in the class would have to get up here and speak for two minutes, three minutes. I would pray that I would not be called on. And one year, my prayers were answered. Every day for several days because I'd say, oh, don't let it be me, don't let it be me. I was just terrified. And my prayers were answered. And so they got to the end and go, I guess that's everybody. And I'm like, oh man, it worked. But it was such torture waiting. And then of course she goes, oh we did miss one. And so I had to go up anyway. I wish she just made me go first instead of last.

David: Torture for several days.

Jerry: It was horrible. But I finally discovered humor and I stole some George Carlin routine and did some stuff for our little WFC group. And the laughter was worth the pain. And then I got more comfortable with it. And now, it's just, it comes with the territory, when you write, you have to speak, and I enjoy that part of it. But I just, when I have to think back of what torture that was, I can't believe that I do any speaking today.

Andy: See that's weird to me because I just desperately wanted to be on stage, but I was desperately afraid of it. It was very odd because even when I was starting and was actually somewhat professional, I would remember, like on a Wednesday night, if I was like going to do something on a Saturday, and I could sit down to dinner on Wednesday night and think, oh ok, well Saturday, I'm doing this, and just kind of imagine. And immediately I couldn't eat. This is like days before. And I'm like petrified. And yet I still, that is, the pull of that is very odd to me.

Jerry: That is interesting, because you think that, especially as accomplished as you are, that you couldn't wait, that you want to be out there and doing it. And how is it today, are you at the point, I mean, you do it, it's your life, so I assume you're comfortable with it by now?

Andy: I am comfortable, I enjoy, I actually enjoy being a little bit nervous about things now. And I'm rarely nervous about it. I think because I understand the process well. But it was curious when I used to get really nervous, I would get really sleepy. I mean, I used to work as a comedian and I remember my first times in Las Vegas. You know, those big stages and everything. I'd be back in the dressing room before, and right before I could barely stay awake. It was very odd. But the writing thing fascinates me. And especially, with you, I guess pushing

that, from that point of high school. So did you go to college to write, did you study that?

Jerry: Actually I, my first year of college, I went to Moody Bible Institute, and I studied, you know, the first year, you just study basically Bible and that type of thing. Then I wanted to go to journalism school, but I was a sports editor of a local paper by the time I was 19, and I just, I never did finished college. And people are really stunned by that. But I was just so busy with my career, I wanted to get on with it. And I thought I had reached my career goal but I also felt a call, I'd felt a call as a teenager to full time ministry. And I thought that meant that I'd have to give up my writing and become a pastor or a missionary. And I didn't feel gifted in those areas. But somebody counseled me and it was really interesting. He said, often, God will equip you before he calls you. And he said, don't assume that you have to give up the writing, that may be the vehicle that you use to fulfill your call. And so that was really encouraging. And so I thought, well, I doubt I can fulfill the call as a sports writer but, so I just started to branch out a little bit and write things that were about Christian athletes, about faith, people that were, you know, involved with their faith. And so, then I looked for work in Christian journalism. And that really started me on the path that I am now. And just broaden it. So I've taught writing at the graduate school level, probably five or six semesters of that. And have been involved in Christian journalism, really all my life.

Andy: But you didn't get you college degree.

Jerry: I didn't get a college degree. I did study some in community college, in journalism, and got some good training from really great profs but I never did finish, no.

Andy: I never did either. I didn't either. I don't know if you knew that about my.

Jerry: That's probably why we're never going to make it.

Andy: I guess not. We're still struggling.

David: Guys, I see where I went wrong. I should've quit.

Andy: Tried to tell you.

David: That's funny.

Andy: You know, it is curious to me to look at your life Jerry and look at your career and look at how, now I'm putting words in your mouth, so don't let me do this if this is not accurate. But it seems to me, that, I love what you said about, God sometimes equips us before he calls us. See I feel like that was definitely the case for me. Because I did this and then I did that, and every time I thought, this is kind of, well I'm so stupid, I look back and I realize, I was being trained to do what I do now. It was all a period of being equipped before I was called to help people in a certain way. And so I look at that period, that time of equipping, and correct me if I'm wrong, but do you feel like, for you, writing is more of a discipline because I see you as a very disciplined person, a very disciplined writer. And I've talked to people as I'm sure you do all the time, people say, well I'm going to write a book one day, or I want to write a book or people say I should write a book. And the one thing that I find out that most of those people never do, is like, actually write.

Jerry: Yeah, that's the most common thing I see. People come to writer's conferences year after year and they've got an idea. And as you say, people will say, I've got this great book in me and some day, if I have the time, I'm gonna do it.

Andy: But some day, when I'm inspired.

Jerry: Exactly. They're waiting for something. And I've got this little sign that I'd peek at, and I keep it in a drawer, but it says, the only way to write a book is with seat in a chair. You just have to do it. And you know, I also get a kick out of people that say, they have a writer's block. Because we're the only people in the world, who are allowed to have that kind of worker's block. I mean, if you ever heard somebody that works in a factory or in a business or any other profession, if they call their office and say, I'd love to come into work today but I have workers block. Their boss would say, why don't you just stay home forever then. Because you know, it doesn't cut it here. And I mean, I know the feeling, I know what it means to wake up in the morning and just feel like you don't want to write anything or you don't have it. Well there is always something to do. Sit in the chair, look at the screen, you know, do your research, do something. You have a job. And I always take deadlines, I make them sacred. When I was a publisher, I realized that only about 1 in a 100 writers literally make their deadlines. And so when you hear the odds that it's a 1000 in 1 in getting published, you can cut those odds by 10 simply by making your deadline.

Andy: So wait a minute, wait a minute. Now, I'm assuming that you sat down with Robert Smith before you got on this podcast, and Robert said, I want you to get in there and talk to Andy. I want you to hammer him about this deadline thing. Is that what he did?

Jerry: Yes, I confess.

Andy: I mean, oh my gosh, you say 1 out of a 100 writers make a deadline, I think, oh, that makes me feel better. And when you say deadline here is sacred, yeah, they're sacred to me too. There are always some form of sacrifice, first thing I kill.

I killed the deadline. It's sacred, I sacrificed it. Oh my gosh, I have such a hard time. So now, I felt intimidated before, now I feel totally like bulldozed.

Jerry: That's why your books don't sell, you don't make your deadline.

Andy: Oh my gosh.

David: That's funny. Well you guys, Andy, Jerry has, like you said, has written so many books and is so completely disciplined. Jerry I was gonna ask you, what does that daily process look like? I mean,

Andy: Let me insert something here, before you ask that, one thing I want to our listeners to know. A lot of times, somebody's books get so dadgum famous that it obscures the name of the author. And so, if you are going, Jerry Jenkins, Jerry Jenkins, where have I heard that? Let me just say this, *The Left Behind* series. You got it? You got him now? I mean, listen, *The Left Behind series*, all the athlete biographies, the best once, the Nolan Ryan, Mike Singletary, Joe Gibbs, this is all Jerry Jenkins guys. So I just wanna make sure you know who you're listening to. Alright so David go now.

David: Well I was just gonna bring back up, you said it's discipline, it's, what's the phrase, the writing book is

Jerry: The only way to write a book is with seat in chair.

David: Seat in chair. And I've heard you talk little bit about your daily method but what is, when you're under deadline or when you're, off in your writing place, what does that look like?

Jerry: Yeah, when I go to my writing cave, and I'm on deadline, the work that I do before noon every day is the best work I do. So I get up early.

Andy: Me too, me too.

Jerry: Yeah, and the first thing I do, is I do a heavy edit and rewrite of the pages that I wrote the day before. I'm a fairly fast.

Andy: Me too, me too. I'm with you. Hey, so far I'm good.

Jerry: Good. And I'm fairly fast writer because I got my start in newspaper so we didn't hand write and then look it over, we keyboard it. But I write 10 to 20 pages a day

Andy: Umm, lost me there.

Jerry: Yeah, I lose most people there but the first thing I do is I take those 10 to 20 pages that I wrote the day before, and do a really heavy edit and rewrite. And what that does is, it catapults me into the writing for the current day. And then I try to produce another 10 or 20, usual by noon. But if it takes me till midnight, I'll do it, because I have a daily allotment of number of pages. Some people do it by a number of words, but whatever works for you. I don't want to fall behind because then I have to do too many pages, you know, per day. And so, each day I do that. So I'm backing up 10 or 20 pages, rewriting and then going ahead 10 or 20. And then when I finish, I'm at 400, 450 pages, whatever it is for that particular book, I go back to the beginning and do the whole thing again, just that heavy edit and rewrite till I'm happy with every word. I don't want to transmit to the publisher anything I'm not happy with. That doesn't mean it still doesn't need work, I need that second pair of eyes, I need the editor and all that interaction. But that's my

procedure. And that gives me, in the end, a manuscript that I'm happy with. And I consider that first draft, just a hunk of meat to be carved. I wouldn't show it to my worst enemy. And I just, often times, I'll have a day where I'll produce my 10 or 20 pages in 4 hours and it comes really easy, the writing comes easy. Then the next day when I do heavy edit and rewrite, I find out why it came easy, because it's garbage, you know. And then the day that it takes forever, take me 8 hours or even longer, I'm thinking, why is this so hard, haven't I done this before, and what's the problem? And I do my edit and rewrite the next day, and go, that's why it was so hard, because you know, it took a lot of time, a lot of work, but it reads well and I don't have much work to do on this day. So, the hard work comes sometimes easy and it reads.

Andy: That's good. That explains that for me too. Do you read it to anybody? As you're going along, do you, like your wife, do you say, hey listen to this?

Jerry: Yeah, sometimes I do. Often times if we take, my writing cave is out in the mountains, in central Colorado, and it's about 20 miles to civilization, so if we're going to town to eat or grocery shop, I might take my chapter for that day and read it to Diana. That works too on fiction, often times I'll tell her the story before I write it. I'll say, here's what I'm thinking about. And each time I tell her, it gets embellished a little more. And so I find that the story that sticks with me and gets embellished, is a story that has legs. And one that I forget about or doesn't grow, is one that I should forget and try something else.

Andy: That helps me too, to talk that story. Because the more times I tell that story, the more times I understand it. And you're right, I do embellish it, and had this part, and this is what this goes in. And I think that reading it aloud, that allows me, I'm really a stickler for dialog. I think I do pretty good dialog. And I like great dialog. To me, you know, Nelson DeMille, *General's daughter*, one of

these, I don't know if you've read any, he writes great dialog. And to me, reading it aloud, reading something aloud to somebody, allows me to know if that dialog is right.

Jerry: Yeah, there is nothing that will show clunky dialog more than reading it aloud.

Andy: Yeah. Hey, who do you like to read Jerry?

Jerry: My favorite writer is actually nonfiction writer named Rick Bragg. He did a memoir about growing out in a deep South, with single mom, he and his two brothers, it's called *All over but the Shoutin'*. He was a New York Times columnist, now a freelance writer. He just wrote the biography,

Andy: Jerry Lee Lewis.

Jerry: Yeah, I'm listening to it right now on audiobook.

Andy: I just finished listening to that yesterday.

Jerry: No kidding.

Andy: Yeah.

Jerry: He is absolutely, I think he's the best living writer there is.

Andy: Have you met Rick?

Jerry: I have.

Andy: Yeah, Rick lives near me.

Jerry: No kidding.

Andy: Yeah, he lives near me. And so does Winston Groom, who wrote *Forrest Gump*, and Fannie Flag, all bunch of these guys. Bill Butterworth, who is W.E.B. Griffin, lives over here.

Jerry: You are without excuse.

Andy: Yeah, I know. I tell you what though. That Jerry Lee Lewis biography, maybe I shouldn't say this because he's still alive, but I knew him. You know, I actually did stuff with him years ago. And Polly read it first. She loves Rick Bragg, I do too. And I agree with you, I think that he is just an incredible writer. But she was reading it and she was saying some of the stuff and saying, did you ever know him? And so I googled Jerry Lee Lewis, Andy Andrews and found a picture on the internet, of Jerry Lee and me. And I said, see that coffee cup right there? It's not coffee in there, I'll tell you that. But I listened to that whole thing and I got to tell you man, it's odd to finish a biography of somebody and not be real happy with him when you get through.

Jerry: Yeah.

Andy: I thought Rick Bragg did an amazing job on that, an amazing balancing act of writing the truth about somebody.

Jerry: Yeah, he's a truth teller for sure. And you know, some writers I read, and I aspire to write like them. They really inspire me that way. Other writers, I just surrender and say, I'll never be able to write like this but I just want to read them,

and that's Rick Bragg. I mean, I can't live long enough to write like him but boy I love to read him.

Andy: You know who else I like? I like Bernard Corwell. Ever read any of his stuff?

Jerry: I have not.

Andy: He is historical fiction. I'm into history and historical fiction. And when we get together, you and I are going to get together coming up some time soon, and I wanna show you a couple of his books I think you'll get a kick out of.

Jerry: Love to, yeah. I like Pat Conroy too.

Andy: Yeah, yep, yep, oh yeah.

Jerry: *Prince of Tides*.

David: As a bystander here, on the sidelines of this conversation, it's very unique to me to hear two outstanding writers, outstanding storytellers be so humble and talking about the craft and talking about other people that are very successful. Just as a listener, this is very cool to hear you guys interact and to do so with such humility. So Andy

Andy: I know you're closing up but I wanna make one little comment here David. And that is, because I talk to a lot of people and I know Jerry talks to a way more people who want to write. And one of the things that I think makes a good writer, is a prolific reader. What do you think about that Jerry?

Jerry: Yeah, I have a phrase I use almost every time I teach, I say, writers are readers, great writers are great readers.

Andy: Yeah, I believe that.

David: Wow. And Andy you've been talking about that for a while and Jerry I know that you're talking to the masses about that as well. And that's a great segue. Actually if anyone out there is not connected with Jerry on line, make sure you go to jerryjenkins.com, sign up for the email list. There are some exciting things taking place on Jerry's website. Connect with them on social media, on Facebook and twitter. And stay tuned for some exciting things that Jerry has to announce, in terms of teaching people how to write better. And this is not just, hey go write an amazing novel or an amazing fiction series. This is how to write better, how to communicate better. And Andy I know you agree, but anyone out there that's listening, you could benefit from being on Jerry's email list. So jerryjenkins.com. Sign up for that. I know you will get some great value from it.

Andy: Absolutely. Thank you so much Jerry for being here with us. And I would love, can we record another, I don't know if you have time but can we recorded another podcast, maybe? Can we? Yes?

Jerry: Any time. I'd love it. This has been a great fun.

Andy: Alright, well don't get up. As soon as we say goodbye, we'll start another one.

David: That's fantastic. Ok, Jerry thanks for your time. Andy thank you and we'll talk to you next week.

Andy: Ok guys thanks.

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Would you like to run something by Andy? Contact us and your question might be featured on the show!

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