

Transcript

Wynne Leon

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast where we celebrate authors, storytellers and creators. I'm Wynne Leon and in this exciting episode, Vicki Atkinson and I have the pleasure of chatting with the phenomenal best selling author, Andrew Mayne. Join us as Andrew Mayne takes us on an incredible journey through his captivating career. From mesmerizing audiences as an illusionist on cruise ships, starring in A&E's hit show Don't Trust Andrew Mayne, designing a ground breaking stealth suit for diving with great white sharks on Discovery channel's. Shark Week being a prompt whisperer and science communicator for open AI and now as a celebrated best selling author. In his latest thrilling novel, Mr. Whisper, Andrew masterfully unites his four iconic characters from his previous series. He shares the intriguing challenges he faced in writing from multiple perspectives and how the theory of mind plays a crucial role in his storytelling. And he reveals how he uses virtual reality technology to go on location as he scouts locales for his books. Discover the secrets behind Andrew's bathe success and how his magician skills have influenced his writing style, particularly the art of showing, not telling and crafting edge of your seat thrillers. And. Reveals the powerful feedback loop he employed while writing his first books, and how his dedication led him to write an astonishing 10 books in one year as a practice. Andrew delves into the concept of survivorship by US and its impact on the success stories of those who have made it. We explore why this might not hold true for future generations as the world continues to evolve. This podcast is packed with insights that Vicki and I have pondered long after recording. Andrew's critical thinking skills honing through designing his shock magic illusions are from valuable perspectives for various other pursuits. As a bonus, Andrew shares a fantastic tip on teaching critical thinking to young kids, which I found equally applicable to adults. In this captivating interview, Andrew shares one of my new favorite quotes. When you are OK with being fooled, you unlock a new kind of wonder. Embrace the mystery not just in thrillers, but in life itself. Get ready to be enthralled by the fascinating and thought provoking discussions on magic and writing with the brilliant Andrew Mayne. We know you'll love it. Hi, Andrew.

Andrew Mayne

Hi there.

Wynne Leon

Vicki and I are so excited to talk to you. We love your latest book, Mr. Whisper, as well as so many of your previous ones. So we are just delighted to have the chance just talking to

authors is so much fun. But first of all, we're we're hoping that you give us a little bit of your background because your bio is so interesting from being an illusionist to swimming with great white sharks and being a science communicator for open AI. Just such an interesting bio. Tell us how you became. Did all that and became an author.

Andrew Mayne

One I haven't made-up my mind what I'm going to do when I grow up. And so I think like, a lot of us in the creative spaces we we find ourselves kind of exploring different things so. When I was younger, when I was a kid, I either wanted to be a scientist or a magician, and then my dad worked for the federal government. He was an ATF agent and we moved down to South Florida in the middle of the the drug wars. Lucky, lucky him. And I met magicians who were involved working in the cruise ships and traveled around the world because it was.

Wynne Leon

Like.

Andrew Mayne

A lot of them were kind of home based there and sort of that piqued my interest. So kind of my senior year of high school. I thought I wanted to go to MIT and study physics or robotics or something, but the idea of just performing magic and lounging around on a cruise ship, our resorts sounded kind of fun, and so I said my senior year, like, oh, I think I'll do this for a couple of years, maybe give that a shot. So I built a magic show, traveled with, I toured with it. I also got into creating magic for other people. I worked behind the scenes for other magicians I worked on at David Copperfield special. I helped create magic for Penn, and Teller worked creatively for other people and kind of would either perform or do creative work. And then. Kind of reached the end of that when I was about 22 and decided that I wanted to do something different and my love of science was still there and a mentor of mine, James Randy, had the \$1,000,000 challenge for anybody could. Prove psychic powers. He heard about a project he'd been a friend of. My father's friend of my family, for years, he'd heard about a project I had where I was in high schools, teaching critical thinking, and he wanted to know if we could. Make that part of what his program was doing and also have me administrate the \$1,000,000 change. Which meant, you know, somebody said, oh, I have somebody laboratory that can read with their fingertips, not like Braille, but like just print or whatever could. How would you test this? And I would go there and say this is how you would try to test it using kind of a blend of my love of magic and science and stuff. So I did that for several years and thought, you know, really what I wanted to do was to teach critical thinking and beyond the classroom is try to do that in TV. And so I. Said OK, TV

is the goal and trying to get a TV show on air, that's an education show would be wonderful. So I got an office at Universal Studios in Florida back then it was dirt cheap. So I opened up an office there, told everybody I was a TV producer and pitched everybody I could meet and ended up doing a pilot for Animal Planet about bug bites. And then met with a company that was doing, uh, had an MTV production deal and they said we love this idea. This is great. How about doing this other thing first? I found myself doing a pilot for a magic prank show was actually great.

Speaker

Right.

Andrew Mayne

But not the thing I set out to do. But you know, Hollywood being Hollywood, I'm like, well, this is interesting. Maybe it'll get me to where I want to go. And I spent several years creating shows under development with other other projects and stuff. And Long story short, eventually ended up on A&E with a TV show called Don't Trust. And Jermaine, which is a lot of fun. It was really cool. But it was very far afield from teaching critical thinking or being involved in the sciences. And so at the end of that, I said, you know, I pitched some stuff that was more science related, more of just producing it. And then I just really kind of have a really wasn't into it. I started getting way but more into.

Wynne Leon

Right. Yeah.

Speaker

To.

Andrew Mayne

Code and the technology side AI had started to develop kind of very quickly. If you were paying attention. And so I started teaching myself how to like program small models and to do kind of that and just sort of do did project after project. I want to do something that was sort of blended the 2. So I went to Discovery Channel. And I pitched this idea of. What if I used magic technology to fool a great white shark? And they're like, cool, how would you do this? I said. I think I could build a suit to make myself invisible, and I've been studying some stuff in AI about how vision systems work, and I saw some parallels between that and the way we understood shark vision and so figured out.

Speaker

Hmm.

Andrew Mayne

What I thought was kind of a hack. And did a special for Discovery Channel for Shark Week called Andrew Maine Ghost Diver where I swam with great white sharks in a suit to make myself invisible as one does the the the conversation that yeah, they're like they say that like they're like would you do this are like are you dumb enough to do this? And I'm like I am that dumb. They're like congratulations you're on.

Speaker

Sure.

Andrew Mayne

Start week.

Wynne Leon

Were you a diver before you?

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, I'd, I'd. I'd I'd I'd scuba dive before I grew up in South Florida. Like, if you read my Sloan Pearson books. You like, that's you know, so it's. Yeah. Scuba dive before and then, you know, I went through and, you know, Wasser like trained to do, like, we call a rebreather.

Wynne Leon

Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Which is a closed loop system. To do that you know for the special. But after that I I was just really kind of just full on studying and working in, you know, and developing products for AI. And this was around in 2019 opening. I announced a model called GPT 2 and GPD 2 is sort of the grandfather of the ChatGPT. I was very excited about this because somebody who loves writing and language. It was interesting to see an AI that could start to understand it, not not right like we can, but still understand some basics of it that people thought it couldn't do and I. Said. This is a breakthrough and they had published tons of tons of art simulated text that had written, and I read every single one they published. And so through that I started to get understanding of kind of like.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Speaker

And.

Andrew Mayne

How it worked? And so I talked about it on some podcasts and said, yeah, this is really more interesting. People think. And then next thing you know, open. I reached out to me said we have a thing called PT 3. Do you want to play with this? And so it was under Indy. I said, yeah, let me.

Speaker

With.

Andrew Mayne

It and I ended up writing a lot of the original prompt library for GPD 3. If you go there and you see like try this, try this and and so it was neat because being a person who loves science, love, critical thinking, loved writing, and talking to a language model, I was able to like, you know, be at a very cool opportunity to play with the stuff. So I spent two years doing what we called like those my titles. Of applications and so I worked on like figuring out new things. I was the internal you've heard of prompt engineering or prompt whispering. So I was the first one that openly ever hired explicitly sort of to do that. And so internally it was their prompt whisperer. But their goal was to replace that. They didn't want to make these models so complicated. You had to be thinking, like, all about sort of language to do it. And so two years into that, I was asked to be the science communicator. So then I became the science communicator for opening, and I spent two years doing that. And then.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Andrew Mayne

That was great.

Wynne Leon

Who is your audience for that? I mean, at at that point, were you talking to companies or schools?

Andrew Mayne

That's more like. Media you know, behind the scenes going on background for let's say, you know hypothetically, you know, New York Times, you know, like whatever people they want to know how how I would go explain how the technology worked too. You know somebody before they'd start an article so then when they talk to the researchers and stuff they have a good idea. I'd go to the White House I would explain things there and so like. Basically it was just trying to help figure this out, but also the launch of GPD 4 I worked with Joanna Jang, who's now in charge of like the model personality stuff. We worked on the GP4 launch and I had to figure out how do you communicate to people what this does? How do you find these examples and so? It was a mixture of how you describe it and then playing right here with trying to figure out, OK, how do I give somebody a very clear simple example of how to think smarter than other models.

Vicki Atkinson

And Andrew, was that sort of the the progression then into what people you know are are now really understanding about the large language models that, you know, the LM is that you know, where writers especially are really reacting to that was.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, I mean.

Vicki Atkinson

Is that am I following? I'm not the science person. When is the engineer? Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yes.

Andrew Mayne

So yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, you know, what happened was early on. The models were really good at, you know, a, A GPT 3, you know, could help you fix your grammar in a paragraph or two, you know, could help you do that. And GP4 and ChatGPT from GPD 2 to GPD, 3 GP 3.5 then ChatGPT, which was a very inner GPD.

Wynne Leon

MHM.

Andrew Mayne

3.5 then GPT 4, which became the new version of ChatGPT, and. So as these models progress. They became better. They became able to handle larger amounts of text, et cetera. But if you're a writer, you use them, you know? Yeah, they're good editors, you know, they're good starting points for stuff, and they can actually do pretty good short stories. Now, I'll be honest with you, but. They're still not writing novels.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Gotcha. Wow. I had a funny story where my 9 year.

Vicki Atkinson

Amazing.

Wynne Leon

Was going to write a paper because it was sort of a thank you note sort of paper. Right after I'd thrown her birthday party. And so she gets into word and she sees that the copilot prompt is there and it says, you know, can I help you write? You know, do you want to draft with copilot? And she goes, mom, should I use this? I go well. Does copilot know your mother?

Vicki Atkinson

Right, yeah.

Wynne Leon

It could probably help you draft something, but you know that's exactly exactly right.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, it's, it's, it's. A copilot, not a pilot. Yeah.

Wynne Leon

And.

Vicki Atkinson

But I think it comes through so well in your characters and I'm thinking specifically of, you know, Mr. Whisper about kind of the cohesiveness and the. The cohabitation that these things don't need to be distinct, you can have a little mysticism. You can have science, you can have magic, you can have all of that can kind of work together, but they don't. They don't need to be at odds. And so I think, you know, reading, you know, and and your characters, you know, Theo Cray and Jessica Blackwood, what are so interesting to read

because they they, you know. They're coming from their place of, you know, great expertise, but the bantering that they do with one another and the learning that occurs, you know, as they're bouncing ideas back and forth, it's it's a delight to read.

Andrew Mayne

I I I like. To live in kind of both worlds like. I use chat CPD. I use these tools all day long. I code I do this but also I have behind me a row books all about memory methods and memory palaces and and these aren't new constructions. This used to be the way that we retained information. If you think about how do we have, how do we have epics like the Iliad and Homer and whatnot? How did they exist before writing? It was because people were able to remember these things. And I'm a big fan of critical thinking and problem solving, so I love to spend time with these systems. But then I love to spend time not using anything at all and just trying to, you know, work on my own skills. As you know, somebody trying to be a better critical thinker.

Wynne Leon

Right. Yeah, yeah. And that's and that's the wonderful thread that ties through all of this right through the.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

Being an illusionist and and being a scientist and your character is Jessica Blackwood who comes from that illusionist background and doctor Theo Gray, one of the quotes that I love and this actually comes from the looking glass or or looking glass is doctor.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

Theocracy. Is. This is why I laugh at the notion of reconciling faith and science. Science is based on the premise that logic and reason can tell us the true nature of reality. Religion. Is based on the idea that when logic and reason don't support a predetermined view of reality, they are at fault. The next time you get into a political discussion. Stop and ask yourself what amount of evidence would change your mind. If the answer is none, then realized it's actually a religious discussion. One more zealot arguing with another. Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

And that, yeah, that's a reflection on myself. I think about, like, when I I'm argumentative or I get this thing. I'm like, I know this is true. And then. You know the times where I've been really kind of, you know, cut to my knees has been when I talk to like a really good logical thinker. And if a couple have been like, what is your evidence for that? And then I'm like, well, it just feels right. And then I'm like, OK, I'm a person that likes logical explanations and stuff. And when I start to go into, like, it feels, then, you know, then my. My opinion is no different than anybody. Else's.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah. Right.

Vicki Atkinson

I think one of the things I really appreciate in you know when has read more of your work than I have.

Speaker

Well.

Vicki Atkinson

But I think. The coming together for people around common concerns and issues, and I think you know whether you intended it or not, I think the timeliness of Mr. Whisper, speaking to younger generations in the sense of isolation and seeking out things like ChatGPT and apps and relationships and connection. Through technology is something that I think a lot of people are grappling with. You know, my background is in the social sciences and you know higher Ed. And as a therapist. So I think about that and. The value in what you've written about what's really happening right now, and so how do you when you're you're writing something like Mr. Whisper, how do you you make sure that you're staying on top of things that are actually happening culturally, because I felt like I was reading in real time about things that I'm aware of. That folks are struggling with and whether it's post pandemic or it's just, you know, the battle between in person and and that sense of isolation and the threat that people feel still about technology. If it felt like you were speaking about so many present day concerns.

Andrew Mayne

I you know, certainly. A lot of. The things we've experienced now, there are versions of it. Before you know there, there were. There are things about it before I can remember 20 years ago. Somebody having a conversation with me about how. His neighbor doesn't interact with his family, he just spins all line all this time, like on the Internet. And I

remember 20 years before somebody said about somebody, all they do is watch TV. And as these technologies become better at acquiring our attention and we create a more competitive marketplace for our attention, certainly they're going to just improve. You know their ability to like their stickiness for us. And so I would say that like with Mr. Whisper. I'm a big believer that, like AI is going to be one of the most positive, beneficial things we've ever faced. And I think across the boards, I know people that have been. I had a conversation with a friend yesterday who was in a car accident, talked to Chad CPT after it Chad, CPD calmed him down, got to a place where he would. Relax. Understood it. Then spoke to his therapist the next day, and his therapist was like, yeah, these were all the right steps. And so it was a he used his a compliment. It was. A. Way to say, OK, he couldn't get. You know, he couldn't get the the emotional reach, the connection with somebody he needed. He was able to say. But he also understood what it was. And there's been some really interesting data that shows that. AI models can be extremely good, very patient, very helpful in the role of therapy, but they're in a model and and when you understand that when you understand what you're using versus the the challenge, I go into, Mr. Whisper is that when you're talking to people who are developing, you know, young people, you know, 13 year olds, 14. Year. Olds who haven't even learned how to have human bonds. That and and and just the idea that and I don't really have a strong opinion either way, but I do think that like I think these things are going to be there and I wanted to write like these things are here. They're not gonna go away. We have to be aware of it and we have to understand that. And I kind of wanted to use that as a theme because you know, the theme is about. How easy it is to, you know, manipulate people. We know that through social media and we know that AI Super AI's will. Be. Extremely effective manipulators, and I don't think the answer is there's no way we can stop that progression. The thing that I believe is we have to make people aware, teach young people to understand that maybe build technologies. To act our own behalf, whatever. But it's it's it's it's so as a writer, it just sort of, oh, I want to explore this because I believe in all this positive and. That I also think that I think the answer is for people to learn to use these tools and embrace these tools so you understand them, because if you don't, then you know when you get an e-mail, you know a lot of us. If you use chat CPT or using AI, you get a spam from a chat CPD thing. You can kind of spot it better than to somebody who doesn't use it.

Vicki Atkinson

Right. And I love what you said about the complimentary nature, you know and and being open to it and understanding that vulnerability won't go away. You know that that needs to be addressed. But I think looking at AI as a tool, you know, and and trusting just enough but not making it a sole source.

Wynne Leon

Mm-hmm.

Speaker

Hmm.

Vicki Atkinson

Solution and the exact example you described. Yeah right.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, I I I you know, I work, I'm around the field, I still work in the field and I I I hear like well, you know when when robots do everything I'm like they can't do everything by nature because 1 is a human, 1 is a robot. And what I mean by that is that is that robots might be able to outpace us intellectually, physically, whatever. But because they are able to do that, that means they don't have the same vulnerabilities we have and and that actually vulnerability is a value or strength. You're not. You don't want to go to an AA meeting with a bunch of people. Who've never done drugs, you know. How how are alcohol or whatever you know? Like that's there's not a value to that because there there's no shared experience and you could say well, I could simulate it. Well then everything is going to be acting and then nothing will ever be real. I I bring this up too. It's like you're not going to send your child to a kindergarten run completely by robots. I probably gonna want some robotic nurses, some teachers, aides.

Speaker

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Alright.

Andrew Mayne

You know, maybe, maybe robots to help the special needs kids get even more attention. You know, things that can really assist.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Andrew Mayne

You, buddy. But we want humans in all these things, but we have to think about what makes humans special. And it's not. Not necessarily. Oh, we're the most creative or we're the most adaptable. It is that we're human.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, but I would like can I order a dog from you and a code or a dog robot? Yeah, I'd like a dog.

Speaker

Yeah, so so.

Andrew Mayne

So in in the book I have I have Theo has this tool which is like this quadruped robot called Doug which talks and moves around and does stuff. And it's so funny cause I write this and I'm like man five years ago this would feel like science fiction to people. This would be like a science fiction. But when I put this into a book, now you.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

So yeah, yeah, I you could you? I could see this, you know, and, you know, being on in a video right now and and that that's sort of The funny thing is, is that how quickly things.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Have moved.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. One other writing note, we were sort of talking where we are all located before we started recording and and I asked about.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

Cap Island because it reminds me, you know, it's in the Seattle area as I am and it reminds me of a lot of islands around here. Tell us how you came to.

Speaker

Yes.

Andrew Mayne

Cap island. So when I when I use locations I might take a location, it's kind of like where I want but give it a different name or something because like I'm like like ohh. The mayor is a serial killer. I don't want the. Mayor. Of that actual town to like, have to deal with that.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Vicki Atkinson

Right race.

Andrew Mayne

So what I do is a couple of tools I use. One is I use Google Maps. I I remember going into Google Maps and hovering over the you know, I grew up in Portland OR by the way. And so I remember, you know, some of the islands and stuff there. And so then I went and looked around. In the area and started looking at different islands and just sort of zooming around and thinking what would where would be a couple of feasible locations. I wanted the goal of the book was I wanted to have a location where my characters could be cut off because I realized I've got like I've got.

Speaker

MHM.

Andrew Mayne

An incredibly powerful team of people. I need them put in a situation they're not in control and I thought about, like, well, you know in, you know, an island or something. Like this, you're in a different, you know, kind of area outside of being an urban metropolis where you just call 911 necessarily. So I looked around and I, I I saw, I saw Hat Island. And I'm like, well, that's cool. I'll just change that to cap and I'd have to go look, pull it up. But one of

things I do then is I'll go do the, you know, you drop the little. Person on the ground and you go look around. You do that, but then also I'll go into VR and I remember going into VR and picking an island in that area and looking around. And so the location and the description of everything was based upon a couple of different places. I was actually there and the fun thing about using like a map of VR, a 3D map in VR is that. You don't have to. Like I've done Street View all the time like Street View is great. Like Street View. I've written books like take place and do the streets of Brazil and be like oh, it's so accurate. I'm like I went through several miles of Street View of just finding these things to look into it. But VR is really cool because you sort of stand there and you look around and you go like, what do I notice? Oh, I noticed this over there. I notice there's a boatyard over here, but there's a fence around it.

Wynne Leon

Hmm.

Andrew Mayne

You know, and I noticed. There's. Yeah, the building over here where they're selling the bait is just, you know, really, really old and weather weather beating on one side because of the wind. And you're like, oh, man, like, it's like it's like an actual writer would notice these things.

Vicki Atkinson

Right, right. Yeah. Do you find because you you lived in Florida for a while. Do you find that when you're looking for that location base info to kind of get inspiration? Do you find that even if you've lived in that locale that you need to kind of cross check yourself about memories? Like you put yourself into it just. Like because you might have a faulty memory and there's so much research that goes into all of this, that especially in Mr. Whisper, you're all over the place with the characters. There's, there's a lot of.

Speaker

Yeah, I.

Vicki Atkinson

Traveling.

Andrew Mayne

I have to other people like my dad, wrote a biography, and I've been reading it right now. My dad has this incredible autobiographical memory. I have terrible memory about just my

own personal life and events. I mean, like, I'm like, yeah, that happened or whatever. And so I have to even for places where I grew up because. Like I don't pay attention. You know, I don't pay attention in nearly as well as I should. So yeah, absolutely. I'll go there and then you'll notice like, oh, I didn't know this was next to there. I didn't know that was over there. Yeah. So even places I'm familiar with, I have to do that. Yeah. But I think a fun thing I like to do, too is I've done is where I did this for a book.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

My first novel, Public Enemy 0, where? I took an area that I knew in Fort Lauderdale and I took an area that I knew pretty well in Santa Monica, CA, and it kind of blended the two and I wrote was able to write kind of a pretty descriptive scene of some detectives going door to door and whatnot. And I remember that was my first experience, like, oh, take this from here, put this there. And The funny thing was, was a couple years later, the. The air, the apartment I've been staying at. ***** Bulger. The notorious fugitive had been living 400 feet away and and I wrote a scene of detectives canvassing the house. He would have lived in, but they didn't find anything.

Wynne Leon

Ohh yes yes. Oh.

Speaker

What?

Vicki Atkinson

Wow. Ohh yeah, that is cool. Oh my gosh. Right. But how do you not get lost in the soup of all of that? I'm just always amazed, you know, with people that write thrillers with a high level of detail and technical threads. And, you know, a lot of action. And there's so much of that.

Wynne Leon

Wow, that's so cool. So.

Vicki Atkinson

In this book, how do you how do you avoid getting lost? You know, in your own ideas.

Andrew Mayne

You know. I took. I've only taken a handful of writing classes and I took a writing class years ago and I got really, really great advice and the teacher a a great note and the teacher pointed out, said your world building was great. Your characters are the thing I want. To know more. About and then I realized that what I needed to do was sort of flip the script on that and it was to focus on my characters. First, because the world building would sort itself out because I knew that that was that was going to happen. And that's why most of my books up until the last two have been first person POV and and so Mr. Whispers not but like, but having spent so much time thinking first and foremost in that person's head when I write. I tend to think with kind of like the lens of what they're looking at or what's important to them, and so that helps me understand. And you know, we we talk about, you know, you know we have different writing terms to describe that what it is. But for me it was just helpful to think about, OK, you know Jessica, what is Jessica going to pay attention to in the scene? What does Theo and that also helps me make the. Characters different because.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

For four characters, they're gonna pay attention to four different things.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah.

Wynne Leon

Right. Right, I've lost.

Vicki Atkinson

But it gives the reader some predictability to sorry when. Yeah.

Wynne Leon

That's all right. I love how your personal experiences sort of inform all these these 4 characters. You know, the illusionist behind Jack, Jessica Blackwood, and the science with you know, Doctor Theo Cray and your diving experience with Sam McPherson and and maybe more of your dad's ATF experience.

Vicki Atkinson

Yes.

Speaker

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

That behind you know Brad Trasker. It's just, yeah, awesome how you've taken all those experiences. And then you bring them all together in this book. Was that hard to map well?

Speaker

Right.

Andrew Mayne

Like like what I'll do is like for Jessica. I was a magician who grew up in a family of cops. My dad was ATF, my brother's FBI. My dad did also did Secret Service detail and Sky Marshall stuff. And so, you know, so I just flipped that around. And I go like, OK. That would be like who, who? What is it? You know, if I was writing, you know, for writing a female character, I have to go there. A lot of things I take for granted that you can't, you know, you have to think about, like, when I talk to my female friends and stuff, what's it like for them? And they're like, well, you know, you always feel like you're being your opinions are being judged a little bit more harshly whatever. If you insult somebody or you joke with somebody, if they have a fragile ego, they don't take as well from a guy. And so it's like, oh, yeah, that's interesting. Detail because it's not, it's not my role, but it's a role I have to think about. And so that makes. And when I'm in that scene, I have to think a lot about, like, what is her, her perspective on that. And so it's helpful to certainly use like, yeah, you, you take a little bit of a as a starting point. Everybody's different sort of experiences, but then to really try to understand. How they're different and the argument I kind of make is like I have to be able to. If I sat them all down to the dinner table, you know they would, they would not agree again, I wouldn't really argue, but they would have different takes. And if I took their names off of it and I wrote their dialogue, could I tell you who said what and if I can't, you know, it's not always the case, but if it it's not also helps make sure that I'm not just making them puppets.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

For me, and you know they are, they're again, they're all gonna be, you know, avatars of ourselves to some extent, but different sort like, you know, I take points where I felt insecure or unheard and I can put it in one character. I feel like, you know, Sloan Pearson comes from a point of view of where. He feels always being judged and whatnot, and we all

have that and I tap into that. And so, you know, you take where Brad Trashers a guy that just 0 offs to care about that, you know this guy is, you know, career, career, counter spy, whatever kind of thing and you know, so yeah, it is it is a thing where I think that.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

You know, I I try to take take your both your experience and then you know as humans we have a wealth of emotional experiences and we take that balance and figure it out.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Vicki Atkinson

Ohh, and we would never want to give too much away, but so much of that all kind of crescendos so beautifully at the. End. Yeah, so.

Andrew Mayne

You try, yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

On the edge of my seat. Yeah. And I also wanna say no good things ever happen on an island. I'm just gonna I'm. Just gonna say that.

Andrew Mayne

Ricardo Montalban would disagree.

Wynne Leon

We're all the right age to understand that.

Vicki Atkinson

Joke. Oh my gosh. Yeah. And then some. Yeah. My gosh.

Wynne Leon

So you've gone from an indie author to a top selling published author. I think you have two books coming out this year. What what fuels your creative?

Andrew Mayne

I mean we it's you all have. We all have these things where, like, I wonder what I wonder if I wonder if that, you know, you, you, you kind of think about what would happen with that. And so for me you know I've got a list of things of stories I'd like to explore because I do like to go well, what what would happen if this happened and so. You know and and you just take your interest. It's funny cause a lot of people go like, oh, your books are so researched. You're so smart. I'm, like, literally if you take a line of every little fact I know I just drew a circle around. I just drew a pattern around that. And that was the book. If we went 4° this way, if if they walked into a male room instead of this, you know. Computer, I would not know what to do and you would show like I remember. I remember trying to I was writing a book once. I had an idea kind of a a fun kind of like cool thriller about submarines and stuff. And I knew a little about submarines and I was trying to read some manuals and submarines. I'm like. I ain't Tom Clancy, you know? And so I'm like, I know I know magic. So I'll go right. Anything about AI and magic.

Speaker

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did did you start riding as a kid, I mean.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, I. But like I I would write ideas. I would write ideas and stuff and I could write jokes or little short paragraphs and stuff. I was not a prodigy. I was not this person writing novels at 1516 and and I I I didn't write my first full length novels was 37 and. And I think that a lot of times, you know we're we are. For anybody who's aspiring to ride out there, do it like you know you. You we will hear stories of other people success and their survivorship bias is a big part of it. And I would say that, you know, for me, you know, I had. I hesitated to write because I thought, well, I wasn't. I wasn't Stephen King. You know, I wasn't this journalist that, you know, had experience writing, you know, thousands of. You know pages per, you know, year or whatever. I just I you know, you kind of have to just sort of decide you want to tell a story and figure out how to do it. And so I wrote you know I had ideas always had I was always try to be creative that's why I invented magic tricks. I always did that but you know.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Andrew Mayne

My early attempts were not great.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, you just mentioned survivorship bias. Say more about that, yeah.

Andrew Mayne

So you know when you go. To a conference, let's say a writing conference, and you get a panel of like, great writers up there talking. I remember sitting in the audience and I did see them talk about, like, well, how do you do it? Like, well, write a great book, send it off to the publishers, you know, and then rinse, repeat, you know, and and. I mean, it's cool. I mean that, that that can work. It will work for X number of people per year. But the more people trying to write and fewer publishers publishing and you know, I had a I had a discussion friend who was like who, who, who was a big fan of somebody was giving that advice and pointing. Well, here's this article. This person says this. I'm like that article from 2008. There was no Kindle. Kindle unlimited.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

There were way more publishers actively looking. Publishers did not ask you how many Twitter followers you had in 2008. That is, and I was trying to spend like today because he's like, well, how do you know you have survivorship by us? Like, I'm like, I do. But I'll give you the facts of.

Vicki Atkinson

Right.

Andrew Mayne

The landscape is. That publishing deals are often made by Twitter followers and that. I I think that what happens is that we I you know, I spent half a year in Japan performing magic realized I was done with Magic for that point in my life. I didn't want to do that anymore. I realized I didn't want to stand on stage every night at 2, you know, 9:00 PM on a Tuesday and say the same thing. And I took the money I had and kind of just took a year off and I would go to the I was live in Orlando at that time. I would go to Orlando Public Library and I check out every biography I could. Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, anything and everything. I. Could. And I kept trying to find myself. I kept trying to find a blueprint, kept trying to find a blueprint, you know? For what? What do I need? Who, what? Who do I need to follow?

Speaker

You know.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

And you know, and it's gonna be cliched and, you know, a 12 year old could tell you, guess what? It's not in there. You have to write it yourself. And and that was the truth. And I think that that often we look at successful writers and other people in the pattern they followed and. Say ohh, this is the pattern I have to follow. But it's not, and and even even, even I've. I've looked at other successful people and realize that, like sometimes their patterns look similar. You find out they're very different. I learned this in magic cause I go like, how did David Copperfield become famous versus Doug Henning versus Penn and Teller? Versus David Blaine. And they all have this and and their past were often dependent upon the state-of-the-art of the time. You know David Copperfield. Came up in a time with a TV special, was super Big and Doug Henning, you know, came out first. He did a show, a stage show in Canada. Then he made it way to Broadway back when brought to his super experimental. And he did that. And then that got him a variety show then. That and then you go to David Blaine in the era when people were, like, sensitive to special effects and stuff. So it was, you know, it was kind of like pre but reality TV style and you just sort of see that. And for writers, it's the same thing is that, you know, the next Stephen King isn't going to follow the. Same formula that Stephen King followed.

Vicki Atkinson

Right. Yeah, right. Yeah. Yeah. And I love. And forgive me, Andrew, because I don't know when you wrote this, but you've written two books. The cure for Writers blog, and then how to write a novella in 24 hours. So given what you just said about kind of your writers's journey, where did those pieces land?

Wynne Leon

Good point. So it's nonfiction pieces because, yeah.

Andrew Mayne

So. When I decided, I decided at 37, I decided, OK, I want to be a writer. I want to do this. I had the benefit of that time of benefit of, of being single, having a lot of spare time to be able to do that, a little business that you know was able to support being modestly but kind of keep me going. And I said OK, I'm going to spend the next year. They talk about getting your first million words out. I'm gonna try to write my million words in a year. And I said I'm

gonna write 10 books. I'm gonna just write book after book after book after book. Lock myself up in my condo like a sociopath.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

And and and I would read I would write a book on write. I'd write a book. Then I'd read a book on writing. Then write another book that I read a book because you can't just do a thing without a pattern to make a path to make it better. You know every successful startup. This is from.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

AI. Models everything you need. A feedback would be something in there and that can be and and and and I think that sometimes people can have feedback loops and sometimes like I'm going to do an MFA program like that might be the worst thing possible. You know, it can depend.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

But anyhow I realized for me would just read a book on writing and analyze what I wrote and keep going back and forth on that. And so I'd. Say that I got very lucky and that the first novel I wrote, public name is hero. Did really well. I wrote a novella before that, and I put the Pumpkin Zero. I did it least it myself. Put it on Amazon, the Kindle, the in the the Kindle program, and was able to promote it through my podcast and stuff and get people to read it. And that got me. I was making money. From Hollywood off of options before I was making book deals and it's just how weird the business could be. And so.

Speaker

M.

Andrew Mayne

That just just being a late starter made me very reflective on it, so I started writing. I wrote here for writers block. I forget which one I wrote first. That's how terrible my memory is. But here for writers, block was realizing that there's different ways that when people say they have writers block, there's often they're describing different things sometimes.

Speaker

MHM.

Andrew Mayne

Sometimes it's not that they don't have any ideas. They have a million ideas. They don't know. Which one to choose? Sometimes they just trying to figure out how to go from a blank thing. Sometimes they're trying to figure out a rubric.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

For figuring out. What is a good idea? And sometimes people are trying to figure out, OK, I'm. 40 pages in, but I'm stuck and I find out like you're not stuck. You just wrote a terrible last chapter that put you in this position that you just need to throw out and start over. So that was that and then had to write Novell in 24 hour novella, which I could probably update now. Now, a dictation. I could probably do a novel in 24 hours. It would not be good, but.

Speaker

Right.

Vicki Atkinson

Could it be done? Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

It would be done. I would be able to pat myself on the back and say I wrote a bunch of sequential.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Words. But but but hollow like little little wins like that are good though, because they do show that you can do a thing. But anyhow I wrote that. Because once I understood once I was starting to get, you know, and and and not pushing myself like 24,000 words per day day, you know, you know days and I'm like, OK, why is this working for me and and why do other people struggle? And I looked at that I said let me write about this because I think there's I think a lot of people, you know, we talk about like don't add it as you're right and some people that's fine to do that. But I'm like. And that is, you're right. Have a plan do this. So I said, oh, let me write this because. I I listen to some older writers who are much better writers than me, though we'll talk about like, oh, I just don't. I don't have to plan. I just do it. But I'm like inside. Your head there. Is a heuristic that you know you may not be consciously aware of it, but you know when something's getting.

Wynne Leon

Yep.

Andrew Mayne

Too long.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. Mm-hmm. But it's amazing to me that you know who you are and what you bring and and what you know. About that balancing act between illusion and reality, and how you bring that into your writing, you what you bring comes from such a knowing place about showing, but not over showing and the withholding. And I have to believe that some part of that comes from your craft as a, as an illusionist and a magician that you have to be. Careful about what you allow people to see, what you allow readers to infer. Am I going to an odd place or does that make sense to you?

Andrew Mayne

No, it makes sense. I mean it's it's. You know, I look at when the stuff that I wrote poorly and that stuff, I feel OK about and and the stuff that I feel OK about were things where I gave and it's the same like a magic show is that I gave you enough clues to put the story together. I didn't tell you the story. You put it together and that's it's the show not tell. And that complies to magic.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

And I have a I have a a magic effect that I said it you may have seen it where somebody walks on stage with a paper bag, they shake it upside down like a feather falls out or something like. That and then they shake it again and a bowling ball falls. Right. I came up with this because I was actually trying to think of a really good demonstration for psychology students on how we have indirect evidence, because I never go out there and say, hey, the bag is empty and I never show you the inside of the bag. You just see that the bag is super light because I can flip it around and a feather falls out and that kind of tells a lot to like.

Vicki Atkinson

Mm-hmm.

Andrew Mayne

How? When I feel good about my writing, is generally when I'm like, OK. I've given enough pieces along the way that this is being the story is being assembled in the in the reader's head and and that's that was the problem. Like a lot of these AI writing is you ask AI to write a short story and it just gives you a summary of a story. It tells you, blurts it out, right?

Wynne Leon

Over tells right.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, versus versus understanding, you know, theory of mind is my favorite phrase of all. Like like any the core of any critical thinking course is is understanding theory of mind in my opinion and theory of mind is the understanding that other people perceive from information and can do so differently than you or I do. And we have to be aware of what information they have versus what you. Bad writing, bad movies, bad TV shows. You see, there's a complete lack of theory of mind. There's also what I call sociopathic writing. You know where it's like God, the, the, the good, the good guy to get into the facility has to break the necks of five. People to get. In there like, wait a second, you know, and then they save the life of the of the bad guy. Because I'm not, you know, we don't want to be as bad as him.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Those other people. Were people it? It's that not realizing it. But yeah, theory of mind is like a great thing. And I used to have to do this as a magic Creator cause I would say, OK, if I want to try to come up with a magic effect for penny.

Speaker

Yeah, yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Teller. They have a very different sensibility than my own. How do they see a thing and and as you start to develop characters you think of like, how do they see that? And they start to think about from the point of view of your audience, the tricky part too is that. I know that when I write something that's a mystery, thriller, really experience, mystery, thriller, things are going to pick stuff up right away. Casual readers won't, and that becomes a bit of a challenge.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah, I have to circle back to that one year that you were going to write 10 books. Did you do 10 books?

Vicki Atkinson

OK, let's see that. Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Yeah, someone novellas. So someone novellas so.

Wynne Leon

Right. Still, but ten in a year. That's in phenomenal.

Andrew Mayne

And and the the plan was, I would write some and then if I liked it and put it out, but and the goal was just to to just get the work in and not treat anything as precious.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Right, right. To get some practice. Yeah, that's so vivid.

Vicki Atkinson

Oh. Oh, that's so hard. But also that rhythm that you described about, I'm gonna create it and then I'm. I'm gonna go and learn a little bit more and then revisit. Were you doing that while you were also moving on to like #2 and #3. How were you cycling all of that?

Andrew Mayne

I wasn't revising I'd write it and I'd say what should I have done differently? Then go write a new book, OK. I'm kind of a first draft guy, by the way, like, I'm kind of like that's that's why I kind of I plot. I outlined. I'm a very big outliner, very, very big. I try to solve for. Things and outlines. A pattern I've seen and this this is. I. I gave advice to two young film makers around the same time, both around the same age. 1 is a little young and the other one one came out of film school. One was, you know, from a different background and you know, they both wanted to make their first films and. The film school Kid had made a lot of experience making tons of short films, stuff like this, and you know, he asked me. I didn't really have any advice for him other than I said like, don't go, don't go into debt making your movie because you're going to want to make something else. You're gonna be stuck with this movie for a couple of years, and if you go into debt, you're not gonna do it. I said the same thing the other one. And I also said you need to go make more short films. Because you're not. You don't know what you don't know, and he's like, no, I know what I'm doing. I know. I'm going to be doing. I understand this. I'm like, I can tell you this, and he's like, and I and I appreciate the arrogance cause I've had that. The one that had a pretty good idea. Both of them ended up their final budgets, ended up being way bigger than what they were. But one of them. The budget increased because he did such a great job there. He took it to Hollywood. He had other people wanted to come in and say, hey, let's finish this up, whatever. And he just had a premiere at South by Southwest. He got a wonderful write up and. Ready. This guys trajectory is taking off. The other one who I said you should go make some films before you go short short films before you this because you didn't have the same experience as other filmmaker. You know, his film ballooned in cost to try to get it and. Didn't go out to big festivals, didn't go there because the production was such a production logistical problem. And then I don't know when he's going to be doing his next film because that was such a nightmare to get through with. The other one is now having studios are going to want to offer to pay, to do his next film. And my point, this point to bring

up is like with writing. Is it like. We have an idea. We're in love with and we spend so much time with it, but your goal is to improve. As a writer, you have to get past the sunk cost fallacy. Your goal isn't the fact that you got to 100,000 words. Your goal is to say I am now the person that got to 100,000 words. And if you were passionate about an idea and you want to keep working on absolutely to do that. But if you say no, I want to be a writer. Then write the next book and the goal of all these is to say how quickly can you get to the next work and the next one and the next one. After that. If your goal is to continue to do that, like I said, there's different paths. But my point is like, yeah, like I I knew my I wanted to get to the next lesson.

Speaker

Hmm.

Vicki Atkinson

But when you say you're a first draft guy, I mean, come on. So I get the plotting but it doesn't mean that you allow it to sit and marinate and breathe, and then you come.

Andrew Mayne

I I.

Vicki Atkinson

Back.

Andrew Mayne

No, I I mean unfortunately the way I work now is I think about it for a while. And then I once I have a pretty good idea of my acts or the the the major conflicts and the beats, I figure out the beats. Then I sit down with my note cards and I know my note card it out. I sit down with my note cards and I sit down and then I write it and actually use dictation. How to do it? My newest Mr. Whisper was 80% dictation dictation. The next book coming out is going to be 100% or 9097% whatever, and then I turned it into my editor. Yeah, maybe not for them. Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

For beer? Yeah, for reader, it's it's awesome, loved Mr. Whisper. There's so many things.

Wynne Leon

Love your books. OK, I have a bonus question. That's just for me. I have a 5 year old and a nine year old. Do you ever teach critical thinking to these ages?

Andrew Mayne

Yeah. I mean, the way the the one of the ways you can teach that to them is. You teach them a magic trick, right? You show them a simple magic trick first, right? And then you don't teach it to them yet. You show them the trick, and then you ask them.

Wynne Leon

Hey.

Andrew Mayne

How was how? Was this done? Why do you think it was done this way? Right. And you're getting a 59 is going to be very dance different answers but you ask them to think about why they thought it was done that way. Whatever. OK.

Wynne Leon

Hmm.

Andrew Mayne

And if you can, you get to write it down. I want you to write it down. Say it. I thought it was this way. OK then. Then you show them the trick. Because what will happen is every kid will go. Oh, that's stupid. I knew that.

Speaker

MHM.

Andrew Mayne

But then you say you know you wrote this down, you did it. Your past self didn't. No, you didn't understand this. OK. I have it in writing. You did not know. And then and then that makes them think about. Ohh. Wait, I didn't have that information. Then you teach them the trick.

Wynne Leon

Ohh yeah. Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

They need to have them show it to other. People and observe them and see what it's like to fool an adult or fool another person, because that becomes a really good lesson. But you have to get them to make some marks, some proof, because otherwise we will, we will, we will.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, right.

Andrew Mayne

Reckon our entire history like no, I knew I kind.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah, yeah, right, right, yeah.

Andrew Mayne

Of saw this so I go. Into classrooms, you know, I do that. I went. Go to high school classrooms. I'll go do a magic trick. I'll ask them for all the theories and stuff. And then. And then I explain it and they'll go. And then I point out all the different things they forgot. And that becomes a very helpful reminder of, like, you kind of have to learn how you're fooled. You know, the the people like, oh, I want to know how other people.

Wynne Leon

Mm-hmm.

Andrew Mayne

Are. Fooled. Find out. How you're fooled? Because same as other people.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah, I love that cause the ego, you know, will protect itself. Right? Right. Dare, dare not be shamed. Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

So good.

Speaker

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

And and I think.

Speaker

Fit.

Andrew Mayne

When you are OK with being fooled, you unlock a new kind of wonder. One of my one of my friends, Chris Kenner, is the the the executive producer for David Copperfield Show, and Chris Kinner is one of the finest magicians on the planet. And we're both members of the Magic Castle. It's a magic club in LA. I was just there last week and then saw.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Andrew Mayne

The Harry. Potter play and I love to go there because every now and then you'll get a magician. And there, who's come out from nowhere, or Spain, or somewhere who's been thinking, really, really hard about how to fool the. Magicians, which is not the most useful skill outside of the Magic Castle. It's still pretty cool, and I've been there sometimes with Chris where we sat there and Chris sees everything in the world we've had somebody just fry us just like make a card, vanish right in front of us. His hands are completely clean and and then the magician be like, do. You guys want to see it? Like. No, no, don't tell us this because we love that we don't get that sense of wonder enough, and it's really, really, it's a great thing to feel about. I had a I had a friend that did a trick for Steve Jobs, and it was the same thing. He showed Steve Jobs. Something goes. You want to see how this works. And Steve Jobs said, no, no, I don't want to know. And like Steve Jobs.

Vicki Atkinson

Ah.

Andrew Mayne

This guy, you know, wanted, wanted that wonder, and I appreciate that. And so I think that if you teach somebody say, hey, listen, saying I don't know. And all this unlocks this level of oh wow.

Speaker

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah. And a reminder that mystery matters, right? Mystery matters. Yeah. Wow. And.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Speaker

Right.

Wynne Leon

Ohh thank you so much for your time. We've loved this conversation. Sounds like we need to talk to your dad next maybe.

Andrew Mayne

Ohh he's more interesting, trust me.

Wynne Leon

Well, when is is then we're done. We need to talk to you when it's done.

Speaker

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Absolutely. But thank you so much. This was a treat. Thanks. Thank you.

Andrew Mayne

Thank you.

Wynne Leon

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