

Wynne Leon (00:03)

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast. Join us as we celebrate the brilliance of authors, storytellers, and creators.

Vicki Atkinson (00:06)

Join

Cheers.

Michael Frutig (00:12)

you

Wynne Leon (00:15)

I'm Wynne Leon and in this inspiring episode, co-host Vicki Atkinson and I are talking with talented writer Michael Frutig. Michael shares with us some of his different creative projects and talks about creating in different styles in order to avoid getting into a rut. Michael gives us a peek into how to work in tandem as an author. From vision to research,

and also delivering drafts, he tells us about how he worked collaboratively as a writer on his Lincoln in Chicago project. He tells us that writing just makes him feel better, beautifully said, and in line with so much wisdom about the effectiveness of writing as a tool for living well. We connected with Michael through one of his former teachers, Mark Wukas author of Kiss of the Night.

It's incredible to see how that friendship keeps spurring on both of them. This is a great episode about creativity and the writer's journey. We know you'll love it.

Michael Frutig (01:23)

you

you

Vicki Atkinson (01:36)

Hey there, Michael.

Michael Frutig (01:39)

Hi.

Vicki Atkinson (01:40)

Hi, Wynne and I are, we're good and we're so excited to spend some time with you today. It's not often that we've had the pleasure of meeting with an author who is as diversified and talented as you are. And we just know that our listeners and viewers are going to be really excited to listen and learn from you during our chat with you today. So we welcome you in and we're

excited.

Michael Frutig (02:11)

Well, thank you very much for having me. That was very kind. Thank you.

Wynne Leon (02:15)

He's good with the introductions and she's spot on. ~

Vicki Atkinson (02:19)

Oh,

you know, life is short. Celebrating each other is something that Wynne and I really put a premium on. And it's really the point of this podcast, finding ways to really lift up people that are doing the really hard work of creating, which, you know, we'll talk about that with you, but for us, it's not the easiest thing we do. Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Frutig (02:39)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (02:40)

Well, there's also the act of, you know, writing is one thing, but the act of marketing yourself is so awesome.

Michael Frutig (02:47)

It's tricky. It is very tricky.

Wynne Leon (02:49)

is and it's like it's hard to see ourselves from that perspective and anyway we're happy to come along and the marketing boat for a minute or two

Vicki Atkinson (03:00)

Isn't that the truth? Because it is the writing is such a solitary thing and then having to talk about the writing really pushes us to the outer edge of like my comfort, right? Yeah.

Michael Frutig (03:10)

Mm-hmm.

Yeah, and there's so many places where you could talk and learning about where to promote yourself and how is a whole lot.

Vicki Atkinson (03:23)

Yeah. Well, and one of the things that we love about your story is that, you know, often what we find is even though there are lots of, you know, pundits out there, people that will tell you this is how you do the promotion and you need to have this and that and all the different tools and social media. What we love about your story and the opportunity that we have to talk with you today is that you came to us old school because we've got a shared friend and author, Mark Wukas right?

Michael Frutig (03:53)

Yes, yes. I've known Mark for a long time, probably almost exactly 10 years now, because he was my junior English teacher. I think it was American lit. So that was ages ago. And we sort of kept in contact through the years. And now he lives down the street from me in Chicago.

Wynne Leon (04:13)

Isn't that awesome? He's also a big fan of yours.

Vicki Atkinson (04:15)  
and

Michael Frutig (04:18)  
It's very nice. I am glad that I managed to beat him to the punch in getting published with Lincoln in Chicago. So I think of him as my mentee, but...

Vicki Atkinson (04:28)  
That is so good, right? And what's more old school than that? The student turning the tables with the teacher, right? That's like so, it's so perfect. Well, you you so and we love Mark's book, we talked to him like Wynne said a few weeks ago, The Kiss of Night, which is just wow. So you know, more praise for Mark, but what a wonderful teacher for you to have had in your journey.

Michael Frutig (04:52)  
Yeah, and he was, I mean, he's been working on that book a long time. I think he even mentioned it, you know, back when I was in his class, maybe not under that name, maybe not with those plot points, but you know, he was slowly working on it over the years and to finally have it. It's great. Don't tell him, but I'm only halfway through.

Vicki Atkinson (05:12)  
Shh. Yeah. Well, we won't tell. We promise. We promise.

Wynne Leon (05:16)  
By the time this airs, you'll be long.

Michael Frutig (05:18)  
I'll be done.

Vicki Atkinson (05:19)  
There

you go. I love that. I love that. Well, you just mentioned one of the things that you've done. again, Wynne and I are not just nice people. Mostly we are. But we are so impressed with your catalog of what you've done and the variety. And one of the things you just mentioned, you co-wrote a piece called Lincoln and Chicago. And we'll talk about that too, unless you want to mention it now with a fellow writer, John Toman

Co-writing is not for the faint of heart. you know, of all the things that you've done, do you want to talk about that for a minute?

Michael Frutig (05:55)  
~ that was, probably, it may have been the first book I finished. ~ it was in a more professional setting and I wasn't just writing for me. but so, ~ I got hired. I was brought along as the co-author slash ghostwriter, for John's lifelong project. Like he was an amateur historian, and a florist by trade.

But he had all this material on Abraham Lincoln and Chicago, which he had obsessively collected over the years. And he needed help turning that into a book. So I was brought along. I did some, you know, I read all his notes. I did additional research and then he and I would sit down and it would work out what he, he was fairly, he was old and he would sit down next to me and

I would read out what I was writing and it was this weird collaborative process of we would talk about what would come next. I would type it up and then I would read it out to him and he would add whatever notes he had on that.

Vicki Atkinson (06:54)

Wow. Yeah, I love that as a process. It's, you know, you're seeking clarification, but you're also honoring him. And, know, for all of us, as we get older, sometimes listening to someone read to us is like a big hug. Yeah, it's beautiful.

Michael Frutig (07:13)

and it took us, I think about eight months to write the first draft of it. And then it was editing and looking for an agent and a publisher, that took up a good year and a half. so, yeah, was a big learning process for me too, because I was like right out of college and, that was first book I ever wrote, Lincoln and Chicago.

Wynne Leon (07:38)

That's great.

Vicki Atkinson (07:39)

And how does that, when you think about your background generally as a writer, a professional writer, how does that align with what you do day to day right now in the world of writing? What's your current, what you would describe as your nine to five?

Michael Frutig (07:56)

~ well, yeah. So after, after that book, I sort of got into, ghost writing. so it was very relevant. and, ~ I was doing ghost writing for a long time. ~ just working on other people's projects. ~ so learned a lot, learned a lot of patience because, you know, sometimes,

he would remember these small little nuggets that he had seen or heard ages ago and then he would send me on this chase to find it and put it into his book. So yeah, was a crazy experience but I learned a lot.

Wynne Leon (08:31)

Yeah. Good research skills too.

Michael Frutig (08:35)

Well, the nice thing was he had so many books in his place. So if he read it somewhere, was somewhere in his vast library. I just had to find the right book.

Vicki Atkinson (08:45)

Wow. Wow. And what a statement making thing about trust, right? Because when you met him, he didn't know you, you didn't know him. But it becomes probably a fairly intimate relationship, trying to crawl into his head, anticipate and then follow his lead about what he wants you to do.

Michael Frutig (09:07)

Yeah, yeah. mean, he was very much the guy, he was the, he was the author and I was the co-author. So we had to keep going until the book was just right. And towards the end there, he had a hard time visualizing the book as a whole. So what I did was I installed a program on Microsoft Word that would just read out the whole document and I recorded that for him.

and put it on a CD so he could listen to his whole book however much he wanted.

Wynne Leon (09:35)

That's incredible. That's a nice use of technology.

Michael Frutig (09:39)

It was nice because he was very old, and so he understood the CD part if he didn't know how to read the document on a computer.

Vicki Atkinson (09:49)

Yeah. Is John still alive?

Michael Frutig (09:52)

No, sadly he passed shortly after the book was published. yeah, ~ it was a life's work for him and he put a lot of himself into it.

Wynne Leon (09:57)

It's.

Vicki Atkinson (10:04)

It's we hear that a lot from, you know, fellow authors about what their motivation is to write and tell stories, whether it's the thing that you're most passionate about, like Lincoln's, you know, life and history, or your own personal story, you know, leaning into memoir, but people write so that they can reach into the future. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Frutig (10:27)

Yeah, I mean, this was his life's work and he really put all of himself into it.

Vicki Atkinson (10:34)

Wow. Well, so we have to like now broaden the scope. All right. So this is where you can be embarrassed if you want to be. But when and I when we were learning about all that you've written and the connection that we made with you from Mark. my goodness. Sci fi, fantasy, short stories, novellas, poetry. I mean, is there a genre you haven't judged?

Michael Frutig (10:58)

Nothing contemporary. Not yet. But yeah, I've just been writing, you know, the first thing I did was for myself. The Ring of Dain Thar Duin

was an epic fantasy, epic poem. I don't know why I started writing it. It's not the most modern of styles.

But after that, I just wanted a big change. So the next thing I did was like a sci-fi thing. And then after that, I wanted another change, so a different thing. And just bouncing around genres has been really good for me creatively because it just feels so different each time.

Vicki Atkinson (11:32)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (11:34)

Well, you surely, yeah, you broaden your skills and make sure you don't get stuck in a rut for sure.

Vicki Atkinson (11:40)

Yeah.

Michael Frutig (11:41)

Yeah, and it keeps your creative muscles engaged, I think, to ~ just do different things back to back.

Wynne Leon (11:48)

Right.

Vicki Atkinson (11:49)

ahead, Wynne sorry.

Wynne Leon (11:50)

was going to say that we have a friend who's a playwright who's so many great things and he talks about, you know, like trying to do something in somebody else's style or those things are the things that can get you out of being stuck sometimes is just to adopt just another style or voice or... ~

Michael Frutig (12:09)

Yeah, it gets you out of being in a rut. If you're just writing the same thing all the time, you might run out of things to say in that space.

Wynne Leon (12:17)

Right.

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (12:19)

think that's a great example and I think it's by some of the writers we enjoy the most have a really keen sense of history also of different genres and you know they can kind of pull like when said from different you know facets of things that they've read or experienced.

Michael Frutig (12:35)

Well, nice thing about that too is that, you know, the further back you go, like the more you can take from, cause you know, at this point, like not, you're not going to have the most original idea or, or anything like

that, but having, just going through history and all, everything that everyone else has written, just lets you recontextualize that into, and like put some of yourself into that, to create something new.

from something old.

Vicki Atkinson (13:01)

Yeah. Well, in The Ring of Dain Thar Duin Nailed Did I say that? OK. Is that, is it Gaelic

Michael Frutig (13:12)

I am very much inspired by Gaelic stories. Beowulf, I love Beowulf. I have, I think three, four books on Irish stories and legends. And so just reading those and being like, I want to do something like this. I was writing that story right out of college. And that story taught me a lot about writing too. But,

I was really just working off of things I heard in my classes and just writing them down instead of taking very good notes. I was ~ storyboarding. then out of college, I thought I want to be a writer. I don't know what to write. So I just looked at my notes and was like, all right, I'll write this. And just launched into it, not knowing how long it would take or what it would end up looking like. ~

Vicki Atkinson (13:45)

I love that.

Michael Frutig (14:01)

And yeah, I've learned it so much.

Vicki Atkinson (14:04)

And it's beautiful. We'll include the YouTube clip because it has such a, it's lyrical. It's like music. I'm not sure what words to use to describe it, but it's really beautiful.

Michael Frutig (14:17)

That's the nice thing about epic poetry is, you know, you just put some elbow grease into it and it ends up sounding like that, you know. Yeah, it's so different from what we write these days that, like, doing it feels so freeing.

Vicki Atkinson (14:25)

Yeah.

Yeah.

OK, I'm going to ask you a question. This is going to be like a leap because in my head, I'm connecting two things. And Wynne has to put up with me a lot. They may not belong together, but I'm wondering about something. So we're going to talk about the most amazing character in your quintology series.

is we talk about that a little bit because we love, I mean, it's about a space cowboy who relives everything five times and he's a little

depressed. I love that, right? So good. But is there something from the Ring of Dain Thar Duin that populates there with some of the characters? Because you're so good at dialogue, Michael. But some of the characters, I had to look and look again when they're like, ~

tussling with each other, they say, oy. And I was like, wait a minute, where is that coming from? Am I making a leap?

Michael Frutig (15:31)

I don't know about a strict dialogue connection because in the epic poem I do a lot of, I do big paragraphs of dialogue and it's not short and snappy. But I think there is a connection, you know, in the quintillogy there is, there's an Irish character and so it's some bleed into that, yeah. And.

Wynne Leon (15:50)

You do short and snappy so well. Your sentences, and I'm thinking about the man in blue. Just those sentences, the crispness is just breathtaking. Thank you. Sorry.

Michael Frutig (16:05)

I learned how to do that, but it didn't start off like that.

Vicki Atkinson (16:09)

And those are short stories that you've written a few of them that yeah, Old Man Joe, Warrior, The Man in Blue, Peacock. See, we're just building out our position here that you are an epic writer.

Michael Frutig (16:26)

~ you know, when I was writing The Ring of Dain Thar Duin I would, I learned how to write a lot on that project because I was doing, I was doing like bursts. So I think the first three or four chapters I wrote, I would write the whole thing. I would get into a mood, write it. And then when I finished it, I would take a big break for months and months.

And then I would come back to it and write in big chunks. And I realized if I was going to keep doing it at that pace, it would take me forever to write one book. So I made a decision. And since January 1st, 2019, I have written a page of fiction a day. And that has been my goal. And I've managed to keep it. And so I learned.

I learned that discipline working on the epic poem and it sort of carried through and now I can do so many different things and just, you know, okay, I finished that, let's go to the next thing. Just through the, you know, keeping it going.

Wynne Leon (17:26)

Do you have multiple projects that you're working on? Can you choose for your one page a day? you pick and choose between projects or do you do it sequentially?

Michael Frutig (17:38)



It really depends. Sometimes I do it sequentially because another life goal of mine is to write a book a year, ~ which is, which so far so good. But I have to decide on how much I feel like a novella counts as a book a year. But ~ right now I'm just sort of bouncing between things. You know, I've got

Vicki Atkinson (17:46)  
Thank you.

Michael Frutig (17:58)  
I'm trying to increase my daily writing to maybe like a thousand words a day. So I've got a novella where, you know, if I, if I feel I can hit that target, I work on the novella. If I'm not feeling I can hit that target, maybe I'll write some flash fiction or a short story or something else. But I think in order to make a, to make a book a year, have, I do have to, when I start one, I have to, you know, follow through.

Wynne Leon (18:24)  
Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (18:24)  
How is that when you, you know, we love the peak into your process when, I always love, you know, kind of hearing about that, but you're bringing us something that's a little different than what we hear sometimes about the discipline and setting very specific goals. Is that hard for you to do some days when you have been so in the trenches helping other writers, you know, find their way to high ground, you know, doing a lot of editing, I'm imagining and.

movement of text and reorganizing things, by the time you get to you doing you, do you have to preserve some energy so that you haven't run out of gas entirely?

Michael Frutig (19:03)  
~ yes. it's been a bad habit of mine, but I've been writing it as doing my daily writing as like the last thing I do. So the last thing I do in a day is staring at a computer screen and, it takes me a little time to fall asleep, but, yes. you do, but like, you know, creativity can come like from very small things. and so if I'm just doing.

whatever and I find a little spark that can be enough to get me through my daily writing or you know I'll write it down in like an idea book and keep it for later.

Vicki Atkinson (19:37)  
Mm-hmm. Good.

Wynne Leon (19:40)  
A little inspiration. love that way you call it a spark. know, something that starts the flow, turns the spigot on.

Michael Frutig (19:48)

Yep. And that's all it takes sometimes. I know when I started out, I was waiting for those like big waves of creativity that could sustain me for a long time. But those are few and far between. finding the little ones and sustaining myself on those is that's how I do it.

Wynne Leon (20:04)

That's really good. Reminds me of the quote from Madeline L'Engle yeah. Inspiration usually comes during work, not before it.

Michael Frutig (20:12)

Yeah, that's absolutely true. Yeah. And that's the best part about writing is when you're in a scene and you don't know where it's how you're to get out of it. And then you just get that little idea that gives you two, three paragraphs and you can escape.

Wynne Leon (20:28)

Escape, what a good word for it.

Vicki Atkinson (20:30)

Yeah, right until tomorrow right until the next day, right? Well in thinking about your inspiration where did this idea of Quint who you know is Sort of tortured five times over, you know haven't read all of it but I have to tell you just the the first part of it is just so Enchanting and there's so much originality in it. Is it is that what sustained you because that feels

of all the things that Wynne and I are excited for you about the things that you've done, they're each creative in such distinct ways, but what matters to you most?

Michael Frutig (21:11)

I don't know. I think in each story I tell, I'm exploring like a little aspect of myself or like what I believe in or how I see the world. you know, taking just a small piece of myself, putting it into the book and then like attacking it really, really brings that out. Because it lets me see, you know,

Oh, maybe I don't think this about this. Or you're just seeing me put something on a page about myself helps me figure something out about myself. It's cathartic in that way.

Vicki Atkinson (21:50)

Yeah. Well, you know, lest we do a lousy job of it, can you give us kind of your elevator pitch about how you would synthesize, you know, your space cowboy who's depressed? What would you what part of you is in Quint? How would you describe him in that?

Michael Frutig (22:08)

Quint is depressed. Quint is very isolated. But I think the part of me that's in Quint is the part that's like, I don't know, searching for something. You know, he's looking for any out that he can find. And whether or not he finds it, that's in the series. I won't spoil it.

Vicki Atkinson (22:36)

No, but there are some fabulous lines. So permission to embarrass you with like a quick takes of a few things that were like, Okay, like I'm a notorious annotator and so is when, but there is a sentence that you wrote. This is about being in the bar and they're colonizing, they're terraforming it's in the future. But you wrote as Quint was looking at the

Michael Frutig (22:45)  
Let's go.

Vicki Atkinson (23:02)  
the patrons in the bar, you wrote, they were watching him without looking at him, an old bar skill. And I was like, how'd you do that? That's exactly what happens.

Michael Frutig (23:15)  
Yeah, I honestly didn't remember that line. I'm glad I put it in there for you. I don't know. Sometimes you write a really good line and you're proud of it and it sticks on the page. Sometimes you don't and you get to that through the edit and synthesize it. I don't know. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (23:42)  
It's so good. Yeah, and that's why we love giving feedback because I think that's hard when you're writing. We hear different people say have a specific reader in mind. Do you have a reader in mind when you're writing?

Wynne Leon (23:44)  
to that.

Michael Frutig (23:58)  
~ no, I don't. ~ I mean, I want my books to be liked by my friends and family. ~ so, usually when I finish something, I'll send it off to whoever's interested in reading. but, no, I think it's. I write because I want to write, because it makes me very happy to write. if no one reads my books, but friends and family, so be it.

Vicki Atkinson (24:04)  
Yeah.

Michael Frutig (24:19)  
they'll get to enjoy them.

Vicki Atkinson (24:21)  
So good. Well, I have so many. What do you think, Wynne and Michael? Can I share one more?

Michael Frutig (24:27)  
Go ahead, yeah.

Wynne Leon (24:28)  
Do it.

Vicki Atkinson (24:29)

my gosh, decisions, decisions. my gosh. At one point, Quint, and again, I don't want to give away too much, but he looks at what's going on around him and the people that are supposed to be helping him kind of get out of, we'll call it a sticky situation. And there's a guy named Pete early on that we don't really know who Pete is, but Quint's looking for real support. And Pete, without missing a beat,

when Quint looks at him and says, how will you help? says, moral support. It's just like, so good, right? He's thinking he might be in the fight of his life, know, Quint, but you know, grizzly old Pete's like, yeah, I'm here for moral support, which is, you know, know, something is really good, you know, when we laugh out loud all alone, you know, when we're reading, so good. And then this, I'll share one more that was just sort of poignant.

know, Quinn's looking at what's going on around him and you know, it's just there's so much. So we encourage people to take hold of all the things, you know, that we've talked about, but he writes or he says at one point, you write this mud ball isn't pretty enough for my to be my grave. I was like, yeah. I he really understands he is right on the edge. Yeah. So good. Yeah.

Michael Frutig (25:46)

One of the hardest things to write is humor. Humor is impossible to write. So it does help to have like, you know, just going out with friends and being at a bar at trivia and just talking back and forth and then, you know, stealing some of that and putting it into a book. Because if it made me laugh, it might work on another person.

Vicki Atkinson (26:06)

The moral support line was really good, right? That was so good. But we've talked about several things that you have done. But do you want to tell us a little bit about what you're doing or where you hope people can find you, how we can help spread the good news about what you do?

Michael Frutig (26:23)

Yeah, so the Quintilogy is a series of five novellas up on Kindle right now. You can find it by searching my name. Hopefully you can find it by searching Quintilogy, although I've had mixed success with that. But you can search the first story, Whiskey, and hopefully that'll bring you to the others. I'm also turning

the epic poem, epic fantasy, ~ The Ring of Dain Thar Duin into an audio book. And I think you can in the picture see the closet where I record right in the corner of the picture.

Vicki Atkinson (26:53)

Because writing is really glamorous, right?

Michael Frutig (26:56)

There it is.

I sit in a hot little closet and read something. So that's all on YouTube. You can find it by searching my name, I think. And I aim to release, there are 20 chapters to that poem. And I aim to release one a month recorded. So that's there. And then what I'm working on right now is just I'm working on some novellas.

that are more historically inspired than fantastical. Right now I'm doing one about, it's like an underdog sports team set in Renaissance Italy. It's like a jock's greaser's tail. I'm having a lot of fun with it.

Vicki Atkinson (27:31)

Words I've never heard in combination before, yeah, that's history too. Okay. Yeah.

Michael Frutig (27:40)

It's like a 50s football story set in Renaissance Italy.

Vicki Atkinson (27:46)

Love it. Yes. my goodness.

Wynne Leon (27:47)

great.

Well,

I love, you know, you're one of the lines that came from this podcast. Writing makes, it makes me happy to write. I mean, that's just such a good summation of why we write the benefit of writing. So.

Vicki Atkinson (28:04)

Yeah. That was a gem.

Michael Frutig (28:07)

It just feels good to tell a story just for myself.

Wynne Leon (28:13)

Right?

Vicki Atkinson (28:13)

Well, and I think you also said, you know, creativity comes from small places. And I think you're clearly a keen observer of the human condition and then you everything gets cataloged, right? And never know when it'll appear.

Michael Frutig (28:27)

Right. I mean, that's the thing. Like you read a book and then you set it in the back of your mind and then just let it stew there and let it get muddled until you don't remember where you got it from. And then it's attached to something you never thought it would attach to. And then you pull it out and turn it into a book or a short story or a novella, whatever.

Vicki Atkinson (28:50)

Amazing. Wow. Well, we're so pleased to have spent time with you to learn more about who you are as a writer and all of your creative inspiration. So Michael Frutig, it was a pleasure. Thank you so much.

Wynne Leon (28:51)  
So good.

Michael Frutig (29:02)  
Thank you very much for having me on. a pleasure.

Wynne Leon (29:04)  
Thank you, Michael.

Vicki Atkinson (29:06)  
Thank you.

Wynne Leon (29:12)  
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Michael Frutig (29:28)  
you