

GOING IT ALONE:
HOW NATIONAL MAGAZINE FREELANCERS
STRUCTURE THEIR WORK TO MAKE MONEY,
FIND PURPOSE, AND IMPROVE THEIR LIVES

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by
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	v
Chapter One: Professional component introduction	1
Chapter Two: Field notes	4
Chapter Three: Self evaluation	34
Chapter Four: Physical evidence	38
A. Print story (published)	39
B. Print stories (final drafts, to be published)	41
C. Online stories (published)	51
D. Online stories (final drafts, to be published)	133
E. Killed story	155
Chapter Five: Professional analysis	160
Appendix	
A. Project proposal	180
B. Physical evidence summary	210
C. Professional analysis source overviews	211
D. Interview transcripts	214
a. Ann Friedman	214

b. Eva Holland	224
c. Martin Fritz Huber	233
d. Eric Killelea	238
e. Linsey Knerl	244
f. Amanda Chicago Lewis	251
g. Elizabeth Millard	261
h. Mark Obbie	268
i. Ellen Ryan	273
j. Lauren Steele	280
k. Abe Streep	289
l. Steve Weinberg	293

Abstract

This professional analysis explores the world of freelance magazine journalism, from the perspective of working freelance national magazine writers, including myself. Through interviews with 12 freelancers and notes on a summer spent freelancing, the current state of freelance magazine writing is chronicled and analyzed. What follows is a publishable service article on magazine freelancing, as well as my own published work and notes on that work, which culminates in an attempt at a holistic review of this increasingly relevant area of the magazine workforce.

Keywords: Freelance, magazine, writer, interviews, observations

Chapter One: Professional Component Introduction

Writing for magazines is the reason I came to the Missouri School of Journalism in 2012. I expected to learn how to find stories, report and write them well enough that one day, I'd see my carefully chosen words in the pages of the glossy titles that caught my teenage attention years ago. Until recently, I thought the only way to do that was to get a job at one of those magazines. I'd never spoken with a professional freelancer, nor did I know they even existed among the writing ranks of every level of publishing, daily content producers and award-winning feature writers alike. All I'd heard about freelancing was that it's an unstable, unsustainable pursuit for starving artists not grounded in reality. And so, until recently, I too wrote freelancing off.

Everything changed when I moved to New York City last summer to work at *Men's Health* in the Rodale offices. I was enthralled by the realization that whole chunks of the Rodale print publications and website verticals were written by freelancers. Any time a gap in the print budget materialized, a freelancer was there to fill it, and the rates were higher than I'd expected. As someone who wanted to write, not edit, the discovery that I could become a writer-for-hire who could one day earn a decent living navigating the New York media landscape was as exciting as it was formative.

That notion, coupled with bearing witness to layoffs at major publishers Rodale Inc., Wenner Media, Hearst Magazines, and Condé Nast, pushed me to devote all of my spare time to expanding my network and landing assignments. Briefly, I considered just

staying in New York and going for broke.

In all likelihood, I would've gone broke, and I'm very glad to have stuck with graduate school in retrospect. I'd been bitten by the freelancing bug, though, and I returned to Columbia with a stamina that propelled me to churn out freelance stories between classes and teaching assistant commitments. The momentum I gained from working with national magazine editors each week propelled me to take as many assignments as I could get, and once the checks started coming in, I was certain that this was what I was meant to do.

When it came time to pick a thesis topic, I leapt at the opportunity to interview other freelancers and learn the secrets of the trade. After switching from a thesis to a professional project (for the lack of a theory to explain what I wanted to do), I added the professional component, in which I committed to studying my own freelance career for an eight-week research period between July and September 2017.

As many of the freelancers I interviewed echoed in their own experiences, the jump to working for myself was anxiety-inducing to say the least. I began taking notes on my work at the height of the summer, and after walking away from many of my former editors to finish my second semester of graduate school, the start of my freelance career was slow and not particularly hopeful. However, as the summer progressed, editors returned from vacation and content demands ramped up, and I finished out the research period much more optimistic than I'd started.

Of all the things I learned doing this project, I'm most proud of being able to walk away from my Missouri journalism education with a holistic knowledge of the magazine industry, as a writer and an entrepreneur. Despite the struggles, the professional project

helped me prove to myself that I'm not only able to conceptualize, report, and write national magazine stories—I can run my own business as well.

Chapter Two: Field Notes

Week 1: July 10–16

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?

a. 4

2. How many were for print?

a. 1

3. How many were for web-only?

a. 3

4. Comments:

- a. First week has been a bit slow in terms of content production, mainly because I don't have a steady daily content gig right now. I did get a print story about a collegiate runner for *Outside*, a digital story for Tonic (tonic.vice.com) on exercise and anxiety sensitivity (*author's note: this story was contracted but the draft was ultimately declined, I regained all rights and collected a \$30 kill fee*) a longer digital piece for *Outside* on food marketing tactics and a branded content profile for Spartan Race (life.spartan.com).

Clips:

[5 Food Label Myths, Debunked \(Outside\)](#)

[Karla Leon Is 6 Pounds Away From Her 100-Pound Weight-Loss Goal \(Spartan Race\)](#)

Performance Enhancer: Runner Allie Ostrander (Outside, November 2017)

Exercise/Anxiety Sensitivity: *Story didn't survive the second edit, kill fee of \$30 was collected.*

Work log for week

1. **How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. Approx. 30 (was out of town Thursday and Friday)
2. **How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 15
3. **How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 10
4. **How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 3-4
5. **How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 1-2
6. **How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 0.5
7. **Comments:**
 - a. In the absence of a daily content gig, I spent a lot of time researching pitches and pitching editors I either haven't pitched before or haven't pitched in a while. Especially since a lot of that research went into print content, I haven't gotten much of a return yet, but I'll be following up next week to see if I can push anything through. Summer seems to be a rather dead period, as compared to winter and spring, so it's given me an opportunity to branch out a bit and work on some more lucrative print ideas.

Income for week

1. **How much money did I make this week?**
 - a. \$880 + TK amount for *Outside* print story
2. **How much did I make from print content?**
 - a. TK (see notes)
3. **How much did I make from digital content?**
 - a. \$880
4. **Comments:**
 - a. The TK above is because I got tossed an urgent print assignment for *Outside* from one of my web editors, and he said he'd follow up with the

rate once I'd secured the interview (*author's note: the rate ended up being \$450*). That's obviously not an ideal circumstance, but given that it's a ~300 word piece with one interview required, I was okay with taking a chance on the rate. Apart from that, I billed *VICE* for \$200 for a story that wasn't too labor intensive (*author's note: the kill fee was \$30*), and *Outside* for \$500 for a more reporting-intensive story that required a lot of food research. The story for Spartan Race was a pretty easy profile, so the \$350 payoff there had a nice cost/benefit ratio.

Overall notes for week

1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?

- a. The actual work was great, although I'm realizing that researching pitches all day can make me a bit stir crazy. I'm working on organizing my pitch research by setting up Google alerts for topics of interest and creating a short list and some Twitter lists to make it easier for me to stay on top of my beats, so I'm hoping that'll pay off down the road.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Landing pitches and getting through to editors has been a bit of a struggle. I've not heard back from at least half of the editors I pitched this week, and I've had a couple sets of pitches get rejected without much feedback. The main challenge has actually been learning to work from home, though. I've realized I definitely need to regiment my life a bit more if I'm

going to do this full-time, as it's been odd not necessarily needing to get up at a specific time.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. Organization and regimentation are the only ways to make this self-employment thing work, as I'm not an otherwise organized or regimented person in the absence of a regular job.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. I'm going to work on setting a specific schedule for myself and setting up a to-do list in the morning to accomplish by the end of the day. Even if I'm just waiting to hear back from editors and sources, I'll be a lot more productive if I incorporate pitch research and networking tasks into my daily duties.

Week 2: July 17–23

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?

- a. 1

2. How many were for print?

- a. 0

3. How many were for web-only?

- a. 1

4. Comments:

- a. This week has been especially slow in terms of editors and sources returning emails, so my production has been less than I'd expected. I got a pitch accepted at *Outside* (*author's note: the pitch was originally accepted by a fitness editor but was transferred to an associate editor and put on*

hold when the fitness editor quit; the pitch was re-submit to the associate editor and ultimately declined following a pitch fee. No kill fee collected, attempting to use reporting for a story elsewhere) and a branded content assignment from Spartan Race, but haven't heard back on any of the other pitches I've sent.

Clips:

[How Ali Tucker Rebounded from a Last-Place 5K and Lost 80 Pounds](#) (Spartan Race)

Work log for week

- 1. How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. Approx. 45
- 2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 25
- 3. How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 10
- 4. How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 5
- 5. How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 3
- 6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 1-2
- 7. Comments:**
 - a. July seems to be a slow period, which I hadn't anticipated at the beginning of this project. A few of my editors are out on vacation or simply aren't responding to emails, which has been frustrating since I've spent the majority of my time researching print and digital pitches for no reward (yet). I spent some time reporting and writing the two stories I did get, but I've used the lull to knock out a few interviews with freelancers for my project and arrange a few more.

Income for week**1. How much money did I make this week?**

a. \$400

2. How much did I make from print content?

a. \$0

3. How much did I make from digital content?

a. \$400

4. Comments:

- a. The pieces from this week were pretty straight-forward in terms of pay — my contract with Spartan guarantees \$350 per story, and the Outside story was their standard \$500 for a multi-source ~2,000 word web assignment.

Overall notes for week**1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?**

- a. This week was more stressful than the last, since I spent even more time researching pitches that have yet to pay dividends. I've known that there would be a lot of uncertainty in this type of work, but these dead periods can get tiresome, especially because I'm more invigorated by reporting and writing than I am coming up with ideas all day.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Staying focused and knowing when to change tasks when I'm assessing how to allocate my time. I've had a few editors who have solicited daily news pitches, only to not return a week's worth of pitch emails. Although I've had luck with this type of work before, it's tough to justify two hours of news research each morning if I'm not going to hear back. If anything,

this frustration has shown me that I might be better off cutting my losses and spending my time formulating cold pitches so I can branch out into more titles that will prove more fruitful. I spent some time on a spreadsheet with editor emails and calls for pitches, so I'll be working my way through that in the coming weeks to come up with solid cold pitches for new organizations.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. I'm definitely learning the value of having a small cohort of editors who actually return emails and provide legitimate feedback on why a pitch isn't cutting it. With the amount of time I've spent researching and cold-pitching, I'm thankful to have a few good editors who keep me working on actual assignments. I also realized that I need to do my pitch research when I'm most awake and attentive, since I'm having a hard enough time landing pitches and need to be at my best when I'm trying to be creative. Lastly, in my interview with one magazine writer/content marketer, I learned about a couple sites (Contently and Skyward) where content marketers find freelancers who submit their clips, so I got on those in order to increase my exposure with brands who might want to contract me.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. I thought a lot about this lull over the weekend, and decided I'm going to follow up on my pitches from last week, but hold off on sending more pitches to the editors who haven't gotten back to me. Instead, I'm going to devote more time to landing pitches with the few editors who have been

good to me, and I'll branching out to new titles in hopes of discovering another few good editors. I've had a few pitch ideas for regional mags like *St. Louis Magazine*, so I'll try my luck there as well. The sale of Rodale is another reason for me to branch out, since I've spent a lot of time pitching *Men's Health*, *Bicycling* and *Runner's World*, yet I have no idea what their freelance policy will be or which titles will still exist next month. In summation, I'll be investing in my future by finding new sources of revenue while maintaining the few steady gigs I have now.

Week 3: July 24–30

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?

a. 1

2. How many were for print?

a. 0

3. How many were for web-only?

a. 1

4. Comments:

a. So, there's that. Admittedly, this was a rough week, with a few hopefully fruitful caveats. I was assigned one article from *Outside* on cooking oils for athletes, but I went 0/0 on about 15 pitches. Granted, I did have a few put on hold until staff meetings the following week, which is to say they were good enough to make the meeting, but I got no real bites on anything I pitched. More on that below.

Clips:

[The 5 Biggest Fat Myths \(Outside\)](#)

Work log for week

- 1. How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. 40
- 2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 30
- 3. How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 5
- 4. How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 3
- 5. How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 2
- 6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 0
- 7. Comments:**

- a. I started the week with a round of pitches to *VICE*, *Men's Health*, *Bicycling* and *Outside*. Then, I pitched *VICE*, *Men's Health* and *Outside* again. Then, I spent some time researching the assignment I'd gotten from *Outside*, before working on another round of pitches for the health editor at *Men's Health*. By Friday, with nothing accepted and enough pitches without responses to keep me from wanting to pitch anymore, I spent some time applying to content marketing firms like RootsRated Media, a company that contracts outdoor-oriented articles for outdoor brands such as Marmot. I've yet to hear back on those applications as of Monday night, but given that many of their writers are also freelancers who write for *Outside* and *Runner's World*, I'm cautiously optimistic on getting on as a contributor there.

Income for week

1. **How much money did I make this week?**
 - a. \$400
2. **How much did I make from print content?**
 - a. 0
3. **How much did I make from digital content?**
 - a. \$400
4. **Comments:**
 - a. This is the second article I've done for *Outside's* Performance Plate vertical, and it seems these pieces run for a steady \$400, so I'm glad to have discovered an area and editor who seem to want to contract out one of these each week. Other than that, the income was obviously subpar.

Overall notes for week

1. **How much did I enjoy my work this week?**
 - a. I went into the week refreshed and ready to research pitches all day, but I steadily became demoralized by the lack of reception. Psychologically, it's almost like a pitcher getting a case of the yips, except this isn't the New York Yankees and you're not making rent if you strike out (okay, it's not that dire, but the persistent uncertainty can get to you).
2. **What challenged me this week?**
 - a. Persistently feeling like I was getting further off course on my story ideas. The longer the period of time since my last successful pitch, the more I feel like I must be straying further from the formula of a successful pitch, and that makes me question the entire process in this entirely too-meta way that ultimately gets me nowhere.
3. **What did I learn this week?**

- a. Spending time researching the content marketing firms and their writers made me think about how I'm coming up with my pitches. I studied the writers who did equal parts content marketing and editorial work to try to understand why they appeared to be quite successful. More often than not, the topic they wrote on — trail running, for example — also populated their social media feeds. If these people wrote about trail running, they more than likely posted personal photos from trail running adventures to their social media accounts, and occasionally, they wrote about those adventures after the fact as well. These people seem to realize that branding themselves as the things they want to write about gets them enough work to sustain themselves, whilst doing all those activities they wanted to do in the first place. Makes me think about what I want to brand myself as, and how that's a key for getting to do what I want outside of work as well.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. At the risk of sounding like an insufferable hippie, I'm thinking the key to great pitches is to get out of the home or office and go do something outside. I do predominately write about outdoor topics after all, so I might as well budget some time to brainstorm in the areas I report on. That's not to say that I'm going on a vacation, but there's plenty of informal brainstorming I can get done outside of work as well. I'd been looking at these types of story ideas as things I can sell because I have the running resume and that's convincing enough, but I'm going to test the hypothesis

that I'll be a better reporter on outdoorsy things if I try not being full of shit for once.

Week 4: July 31–6

Content filed for week

- 1. How many total articles did I file this week?**
 - a. 6
- 2. How many were for print?**
 - a. 0
- 3. How many were for web-only?**
 - a. 6
- 4. Comments:**
 - a. Steady improvement over last week. I got my daily content job at *Men's Health* up and running again, and although the rate has been slashed repeatedly over the past 8 months, the work still constitutes a much-needed reliable source of revenue. I ended up writing five daily content posts for *Men's Health*, plus another profile for Spartan Race.

Clips:

[After a Brush with Death, Nick O'Sullivan Found Sobriety through Spartan \(Spartan Race\)](#)

[Hugh Jackman Crushes Deadlifts and Hits the Sand for Summer Workout](#) (Men's Health)

[Sofia Vergara Poses Naked, Reveals "Gigantic Boobs" Prevent Pushups](#) (Men's Health)

[Would You Go on a Giant Sex Party Cruise?](#) (Men's Health)

[The World's Most Popular Beer Is Basically Water](#) (Men's Health)

[The Earlier Guys Watch Porn, the More Likely They Desire Power Over Women](#) (Men's Health)

Work log for week

- 1. How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. 40
- 2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 10
- 3. How many hours were spent reporting?**

- a. 10
- 4. How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 7-8
- 5. How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 10
- 6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 2
- 7. Comments:**
 - a. I spent a lot more time reporting, editing and writing than in past weeks, which was a welcome change. My print piece for *Outside* is almost through top-edit and it required a couple follow-up interviews with the source, which tied me up a bit. I also had to go back to a source for a previous Spartan profile, so I'm realizing my interviewing skills may need some work. That being said, I enjoyed the fact that I was doing actual work and communicating with editors on a daily basis, which I haven't been doing for the past week. The pitch research from this week was a bit more fruitful, in that I got a couple pitches waitlisted and one print pitch at *Men's Health* accepted, which I'm reporting out now. Lastly, I'm working remote from the Bahamas next week (starting August 13), so I updated my books and filed the appropriate invoices to make sure I'm caught up on billing.

Income for week

- 1. How much money did I make this week?**
 - a. \$600
- 2. How much did I make from print content?**
 - a. 0
- 3. How much did I make from digital content?**
 - a. \$600

4. Comments:

- a. As previously stated, the *Men's Health* rates aren't what they used to be, so what would have made me \$750 to \$1,000 in December 2016 only made me \$250 now. Still, although \$600 is less than what I'd prefer, I'm glad to see that my July slump seems to be ending. And although I've yet to receive a rate on the *Men's Health* pitch I got accepted, I'm hoping it'll pay at least \$500, which was the rate on a sidebar I wrote for them a few months ago.

Overall notes for week**1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?**

- a. A lot more than last week, at least. The simple interaction with editors who had previously been offline inspires hope, and the pitches I have sent have been well-received, so I'm optimistic that some will yield assignments in the near future. Also, I realized I missed the scrutiny and adrenaline of hitting a print deadline, so the print editing process for *Outside* has been fun because I sense an opportunity to prove myself as a young freelancer who's dependable enough to receive more print work. Lastly, I had a chance encounter with the CEO of local marketing firm Lift Division. He asked to meet up for coffee to discuss the possibility of contracting me for content marketing work, which would be a welcome addition to my clientele.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Prioritizing work for different editors. Because this week involved a lot of editing work for editors who wanted to either push my assignments through top edit or publish them online, I found myself juggling commitments and making considerations about which editors would be more understanding of a delay. There's some actuarial work involved in evaluating the risk of disappointing any given editor—I've realized my younger editors tend to be more empathetic of my workload, but they also tend to assign me the most work, so I need to keep them as happy as I keep the seasoned print editors. Thankfully, I'm quickly realizing that the print editors just want to be updated every day and, as long as I'm diligent with my reporting and editing, they're not so imposing after all.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. Persistence pays off. Although having a week without getting any pitches accepted isn't ideal, the work I put in last week is beginning to pay off this week as people appear to be returning to work. I'm in talks with two editors about assignments that I didn't actually pitch, and even though neither had accepted any of my recent pitches, it proved fruitful to get on their radar.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. Focus on being as efficient as possible with longer term assignments. I say that because the reason I've been juggling a handful of stories for various editors is that I'm interrupting my reporting and first-draft writing with edits that need to go back ASAP. I realize it's easy to become comfortable

when a deadline is a week away and there's plenty of time to report and write, but given the latest series of urgent edits, I now know that I need to be knocking out assignments early whenever possible so I can be ready to work on edits as soon as they come in.

Week 5: Aug. 7–13

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?

a. 6

2. How many were for print?

a. 0

3. How many were for web-only?

a. 6

4. Comments:

- a. Another week on an upswing, with more steady digital work from *Men's Health*, plus a print story about visually impaired sex for *MH* (*author's note: this story was put on hold as I couldn't make the reporting materialize as needed to get the story, I've agreed to revisit it once the sourcing is finished*) and a digital piece on bike shop etiquette for *Bicycling*. The print story was an especially happy surprise, as they accepted a pitch that *VICE* had rejected without much retooling required on my end. I've gotten the turnaround time on the daily content stories down to one hour, so I've been able to focus on the pieces that require a bit more reporting while churning out the daily stuff.

Clips:

[8 Ways to Be the Best Bike Shop Customer—and 3 Ways to Drive Your Mechanic Nuts \(Bicycling\)](#)

[Instagram Model Explains How She Went From Working Three Jobs to Making Six Figures \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Violent, Aggressive Video Games Like ‘Call of Duty’ May Be Damaging Your Brain \(Men’s Health\)](#)

[A Surprising Number of Men Prefer Small Boobs, According to Pornhub Data \(Men’s Health\)](#)

[Watch Tom Cruise Majorly Fail on High-Flying Stunt for Latest Mission Impossible \(Men’s Health\)](#)

[We’re Calling It—This Is The Best Tinder Photo Of All Time \(Men’s Health\)](#)

Work log for week

1. **How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. 40
2. **How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 10
3. **How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 20
4. **How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 7-8
5. **How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 10
6. **How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 2
7. **Comments:**
 - a. The print story for *Men’s Health* and the piece for *Bicycling* required a hefty bit of reporting, which was welcome work compared to the heavy pitch research I’ve been doing this summer. I still spent some time researching pitches, and as I’ve just sent first drafts for the aforementioned stories, I’m expecting to spend some time with edits next week.

Income for week

1. **How much money did I make this week?**
 - a. \$500
2. **How much did I make from print content?**
 - a. 0
3. **How much did I make from digital content?**
 - a. \$500
4. **Comments:**

- a. Six daily content posts for *Men's Health* added \$300, with the *Bicycling* story coming in at \$200. This week is on par with what I'd want to be making as a freelancer, so I'm hopeful that the trend will continue into the latter half of Q3 and Q4, especially since I've been told that I'll be receiving more branded content work as the holidays approach.

Overall notes for week

1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?

- a. This week was refreshingly fun, as I was relieved to get some pitches accepted and glad to get working on something I knew would actually pay off. The majority of the pitch research I did was to ensure that I'd have some work for the following week in the Bahamas, and I was accepted into a cohort of writers for RootsRated Media, a content marketing firm who coordinates projects for brands like Marmot, so I've been told I should begin receiving work from them shortly. Overall, things are trending up.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Planning ahead for my week out of Missouri, I'd been pressing myself to get a round of pitches in so I'd have some work while away, but I also needed to make sure I filed all of my drafts before I left, so it was a bit of a hustle to get everything done.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. I've profited from following up with editors and following my pitches between various editors. I just my primary editor at *Outside* put in his two-weeks notice, and the editor who I originally sent my print pitch to at *Men's Health* has just quit as well, but I've still been able to get stories accepted by directing my pitches to new editors. It also appears that editors are returning to work, as I've just now heard back from people I emailed a month ago, so keeping a spreadsheet with the date I pitched an idea and the status of each pitch has gone a long way toward making my pitch research pay off.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. In the fray of struggling to get pitches accepted until now, I haven't spent much time on stories I actually want to report and write—I think it's been easy to fixate on the things I think will sell when I'm struggling to find work. Now that I'm clawing back some regular work, though, I want to work on devoting my intermittent bits of free time to researching some longer ideas I've been wanting to do for a while.

Week 6: Aug. 14–20

Content filed for week

- 1. How many total articles did I file this week?**
 - a. 8
- 2. How many were for print?**
 - a. 4
- 3. How many were for web-only?**
 - a. 4
- 4. Comments:**

- a. I'd been at a wedding for the beginning of the week, so I didn't really get to work until Tuesday afternoon. I filed my daily posts for *Men's Health* throughout the week, and toward the end, I received four 150-word print blurbs on miscellaneous reader curiosities for the *Men's Health* front of book, which rounded out my work for the week.

Clips:

[New Survey Reveals Just How Stressful the American Workplace Can Be \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Instagram Fitness Model Amanda Lee Tells Us How She Went From 0 to 10 Million Followers \(Men's Health\)](#)

[5 Guys Reveal Their Most NSFW Manscaping Horror Stories \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Floyd Mayweather Is Abstaining From Sex Before His Mega-Bout With Conor McGregor \(Men's Health\)](#)

MH Exchange: Are browser plugins that automatically find you promo codes safe? (Men's Health, December 2017)

MH Exchange: What's the best way to master chopsticks? (Men's Health, December 2017)

MH Exchange: AM I DYING: Why do I get hard nodules near my collarbone after lifting? (Men's Health, December 2017)

MH Exchange: CINEMA VERITE: Elaine on Seinfeld asks: "Can you die from an odor? I mean if you were locked in a vomitorium for two weeks, could you die from the odor?" (Men's Health, December 2017)

Work log for week

- 1. How many total hours did I work this week?**
 - a. 25
- 2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 0
- 3. How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 20
- 4. How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 5
- 5. How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 0
- 6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 0

7. Comments:

- a. Being on the road made this work week a bit lighter than previous ones, so I didn't devote any time to coming up with pitches as I had assignments that kept me occupied throughout the week. That was actually a very nice change, since all I did was report and write—I assume I'll receive edits for the print stories next week, but this week was entirely devoted to content creation.

Income for week**1. How much money did I make this week?**

- a. \$1,000

2. How much did I make from print content?

- a. \$800

3. How much did I make from digital content?

- a. \$200

4. Comments:

- a. The four print stories for *Men's Health* made up the bulk of my income this week, as each came in at \$150. The daily content rounded me up to \$1,000, which was a nice haul considering that I didn't pitch any of the eight stories I wrote.

Overall notes for week**1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?**

- a. This week was pretty low-key, as I really only had time to do the work I'd been given and some general housekeeping for other things I've been pitching. None of the stuff I did was particularly riveting, but it was pleasant not to worry about the business end for once and just do my job.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Apart from the work I did, I've been trying to re-sell a story that got killed and finding it difficult to market a finished draft. It was a piece for *VICE* that I filed at the beginning of the summer, and after not hearing much about it for a while, my editor finally came online to tell me he'd been swamped and won't have time to touch it for a while, so I took a \$30 kill fee and started marketing it elsewhere. However, the *VICE* voice and editorial direction differs much from *Outside* and *Men's Health*, so I've been struggling to find a home for a story that required a lot of reporting and editing.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. I'm still learning the power of persistence, as I'm sure my failed efforts to get work earlier in the summer resulted in profitable assignments from editors who knew I was available for work. Apart from that, I learned that the next time my story gets killed, I'm probably better off pitching the reporting I've done rather than the story itself, as I've gotten the impression that editors would rather receive freshly written copy and not have to wrangle with repurposing an 870-word story for their publication.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. My schedule will return to normal next week, and I've gotten a few calls for pitches that I want to respond to, so I'll be diving into those to keep the momentum going. And regarding those pitches, I was told by one freelancer I interviewed that she confirms all the potential sources for her

stories before she ever sends a pitch, and although that sounds like a lot of work for no guaranteed reward, I'm going to focus on improving my pre-reporting in order to land a pitch with the new senior editor at *Runner's World*.

Week 7: Aug 21–27

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?

a. 5

2. How many were for print?

a. 2

3. How many were for web-only?

a. 3

4. Comments:

- a. Last week was fortuitous in my freelance world, as I had two senior editors approach me for print work. I had an editor with whom I'd worked at *Bicycling* reach out soliciting personal essays and she immediately commissioned a pitch I sent (author's note: this story was contracted for print but pulled from the November issue for spacing reasons, the print fee was still collected), and the new deputy editor at *Runner's World* found me through a recommendation from another editor for a two-page piece on a new study about strength training and recovery. My daily content gig with *Men's Health* rounded out the week with three quick web-only pieces.

Clips:

[Watch Britney Spears Get a Killer Triceps Workout in New Exercise Video \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Mayweather-McGregor By The Numbers: From Fighting Stats to Strip Club Staff, Everything You Need to Know \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Watch These Activists Fight to Free the Nipple at an NSFW Topless March \(Men's Health\)](#)

[8 Ways to Help Someone Start Riding a Bike \(Bicycling, November 2017\)](#)

[Stronger And Faster, Now In Harmony \(Runner's World, January 2017\)](#)

Work log for week

1. How many total hours did I work this week?

a. 35

2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?

a. 5

3. How many hours were spent reporting?

a. 20

4. How many were spent writing?

a. 10

5. How many were spent editing?

a. 0

6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?

a. 0

7. Comments:

a. The two print pieces kept me plenty occupied with reporting and writing, and I spent a bit of time researching pitches I have in the pipeline— basically the exact opposite of my routine earlier this summer. I like it this way a lot better, although I could probably stand to schedule a certain amount of time for pitch research each week to make sure I always have a next assignment.

Income for week

1. How much money did I make this week?

a. \$1,300

2. How much did I make from print content?

a. \$1,150

3. How much did I make from digital content?

a. \$150

4. Comments:

- a. The print assignment for *Runner's World* came in at \$750 for about 500 words, and the *Bicycling* editor offered \$400 for 400 words in print. After that, each of the three *Men's Health* daily articles are \$50, which brings my weekly total up to the highest this summer. I'm still not sure what "normal" looks like since my income has varied a lot lately, but I'd like to string together a few more weeks like this while the work is plentiful.

Overall notes for week

1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?

- a. This week felt really easy, even while I predictably obsessed over the draft for the new *Runner's World* editor who I'd like to impress. I think it comes down to having work and knowing there's more work coming, which helps the general anxiety of an unpredictable income subside for a bit. I felt like for once I was just doing my job of getting assignments and turning them around, which hasn't felt like the main definition of my job in a while.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. Remaining focused on the work I'll want to be doing in a few weeks has been difficult, mainly because I'm inclined to get the current stuff off my plate as fast as possible. Fighter pilots call it "target fixation"—where you're so fixated on the object of your immediate interest that your lack of peripheral vision leads you to make avoidable mistakes. When I quit

thinking of myself as a writer and consider that I'm a business, I realize that I need to keep everything rolling all the time.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. Not that I didn't realize this before, but I'm perpetually grateful for the editors who recommend me for work or reach out even when we've only collaborated once or twice. I have no illusions about being a mid-pack writer for hire (at best), so I tend to internalize a really heavy print edit as a sign that I'm turning in subpar work. However, both of this week's print assignments have come from editors who have given me the heaviest edits and scrutinized my work the most, and yet they're still willing to open the door for me to get more work. That exchange has been equal parts unexpected and reassuring.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. As noted above, I'll work on budgeting a certain amount of time each week to researching and filing new pitches to make sure I can maintain this level of work. And, in another fortuitous turn, I was contacted by a fitness app who offered to pay \$200 per fitness blog post, so I'll start pitching and writing one or two of those each week as well.

Week 8: Aug. 28–Sept. 3

Content filed for week

- 1. How many total articles did I file this week?**
 - a. 12
- 2. How many were for print?**

- a. 1
- 3. How many were for web-only?**
 - a. 11
- 4. Comments:**
 - a. And on the eighth week, the floodgates opened. September is a good month, as a couple other freelancers have told me as well. I got another quick reader question FOB assignment for *Men's Health* and did five daily content posts for the magazine as well. I picked up a news story for *Bicycling* that I saw on Reddit, and my editor from Spartan Race returned from vacation to offer me three stories for the site. I rounded out the week with content for the Aaptiv fitness blog and RootsRated Media, a content marketing agency that assigned me a story on winter running to live on Superfeet's website.

Clips:

[How Long Can Sperm Live Outside the Body? This Viral Tweet Has Everyone Wondering \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Guy Brings a Gun to an MMA Fight, Leaves Bloody and Handcuffed \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Sarah Hyland's Butt Tattoo Makes Its Official Instagram Debut \(Men's Health\)](#)

[MMA Fighters Like Conor McGregor Could Be At Risk For Brain Injury \(Men's Health\)](#)

[LeBron James and Dwyane Wade Reunited For an Offseason Workout, and They Look Ready to Win Another Title \(Men's Health\)](#)

[Watch in Terror as This Black Bear Blocks a Mountain Biker's Trail \(Bicycling\)](#)

[The Ultimate Guide To At-Home Lower Body Recovery \(Aaptiv\)](#)

How to Not Freeze While Running This Winter (RootsRated)

[What the Pima Indians Can Teach Us about VO2 Max \(Spartan Race\)](#)

Introducing The Ultimate Spartan Spotify Training Playlist (Spartan Race)

What Ancient Spartans Can Teach Us About Lifelong Fitness (Spartan Race)

MH Exchange: My son's headed back to college after winter break and I keep hearing horror stories about campus rapes. How do I talk to him about sexual assault? (Men's Health, January 2017)

Work log for week

- 1. How many total hours did I work this week?**

- a. 45
- 2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?**
 - a. 5
- 3. How many hours were spent reporting?**
 - a. 20
- 4. How many were spent writing?**
 - a. 15
- 5. How many were spent editing?**
 - a. 5
- 6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?**
 - a. 0
- 7. Comments:**
 - a. This week was an absolute hustle to get a lot of reporting done and write everything up on deadline. Given the feast or famine nature of this thing, I didn't want to turn everything down, so I told myself I'd make it work and knocked it all out. I spent a bit of time editing some print stuff from *Men's Health* that I filed last week, and I spent some time researching a pitch for *417 Magazine* on Ozark-area preppers, which I'm discussing with them over the phone early next week.

Income for week

- 1. How much money did I make this week?**
 - a. \$1,850
- 2. How much did I make from print content?**
 - a. \$150
- 3. How much did I make from digital content?**
 - a. \$1,700
- 4. Comments:**
 - a. Getting three Spartan Race assignments was huge at \$1,100 between the three, thanks to the good people who pay money to run through barbed wire and jump over fire. The *Men's Health* print assignment was \$150 for 150 words, and the five daily news posts came in at 50 a piece. Each

Aaptiv blog post is \$200, and RootsRated did \$150 for this week's post. I haven't factored in the *Bicycling* web story here because I haven't gotten an assigning order yet, but I'm assuming it'll come in at \$75–100.

Overall notes for week

1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?

- a. This week was pretty exhilarating. My email notifications were nonstop, I was juggling a bunch of sources to schedule interviews and I was constantly pulling myself off reporting one story to hurry up and write another. It felt like a well-oiled machine and I think I work best under pressure, so the adrenaline of taking on a ton of work and knocking out assignments one by one was really fun. It felt like a real job, in the best way possible.

2. What challenged me this week?

- a. The work itself, really. I just counted and I ended up filing stories to six different editors this week, so communication itself took up a lot of time. I have a couple new editors who are really into instant messaging on Google Hangouts, which is an adjustment because they have this habit of asking me if I died when I don't respond in five minutes. I tend to shut out the outside world when I'm on deadline, so keeping everyone happy while spending an entire week on deadline was pretty stressful. I inherently prefer to wait on replying to editors until I have something to give them, because to me, it seems like replying with nothing new isn't a good look.

However, I'm realizing that some editors just want constant updates regardless of whether I have anything new, so I've been working on being more communicative even when I'm doing a bunch of other things.

3. What did I learn this week?

- a. If anything, I surprised myself by how much I was able to get done when I've got a ton on my plate. As a serial procrastinator, it actually helps me to have a lot to do because there's a sense of urgency that doesn't come naturally. Although there's a fine line between being really productive and overbooking myself into failure, I think I'll become more comfortable exploring the limits of that line if I push myself like this more often. And then I remember that newspaper reporters do this literally every day and I don't feel so anxious about it.

4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

- a. This week concludes the research portion of my professional project. I've had some good luck lately, so I'm planning on dialing back the freelance work a bit so I can focus on getting my project written up. I've really enjoyed putting in a full work week lately, so I'm shooting for 20 hours a week of freelance work and 20 hours a week of professional project work for the foreseeable future.

Chapter Three: Self Evaluation

I've never been what you might call a "try-hard," but when my fellow graduate students began conversing about thesis topics of interest the moment first semester orientation let out, I certainly felt out-of-place. But then, this was a diverse cohort of eager students, all of them older than me, many of whom uprooted their lives, quit jobs, and moved across the country to attend this program. I, on the other hand, just sort of stumbled back into Lee Hills Hall three months after finishing my undergraduate degree. Bill Murray, if you're reading this, I appreciate *Groundhog Day* that much more now.

To my surprise, I ended up thoroughly enjoying Mass Media Seminar that semester, in which we learned to scrutinize other people's research and eventually conduct it ourselves. I also just liked the way "thesis" sounded, so when the time came to pick between a professional project and a thesis, the choice was clear: I would write my thesis, stock up on elbow-padded tweed sport jackets, and prepare for the eventual slide into academia I figured I'd initiate around age 50.

The topic of the thesis, at the time, felt less important than the sheer act of writing one. I spoke with John Fennell, then my graduate advisor, on how I would cleverly use the thesis to report out a long form story—I never had a decent idea as to what I'd even cover—and publish it for a fee. I saw an academic excuse to write something, pitch it to a publication, and ultimately collect a fee to attend graduate school.

John saw right through my feigned interest in the fleeting thesis ideas I'd

proposed and got to the crux of the issue: What I wanted to do, after all, was freelance. So why not write my thesis on that? The proposition was so obvious and sensible that it actually baffled me when I heard it. “You can *do* that?” I recall thinking to myself. And suddenly, the thesis I’d previously viewed as a necessary requirement for graduation became a personal interest, something less conceptual and more tangible that I’d use to prepare myself for the industry I was about to enter. You know, how higher education is supposed to work.

Right, there was one minor issue. I had no theory. At first, I assumed I’d find a way to make Gatekeeping Theory work, as Gatekeeping Theory is the Honda Accord of theories, but it was impossible. Then, I fell back on my undergraduate economics classes and tried to use Diffusions of Innovations Theory to explain how publishers used freelancers as a source of innovation in their labor markets, which sounded like a theory to me, until I explained my plan to a graduate school alumni in a bar in New York City in February 2017. He questioned my application of the theory and asked if I’d read *Diffusions of Innovations Theory*, the book. I wasn’t aware there was a book, and quietly went into full-blown panic mode.

Sitting in thesis seminar in March and thoroughly out of theory options to explain the freelancer interviews I wanted to do, Debra Mason asked why I didn’t just apply for a summer internship and switch to a professional project. I explained that I didn’t want a job, as I’d yet to experience hardship as a freelancer and rode high on a wave of self-righteous self-employment. “That’s a shame,” Debra said, “because a working at a company would have solved all your problems.”

A “company.” Lightbulb. I’d been running a side hustle-turned-personal business

for months, who's to say I'm not a company? No one, apparently, because as John explained later that morning, there's no rule against being your own company. And thus began my professional project.

I explain this hectic process because until the week of July 10, when my research began, I hadn't fully grasped that I'd be learning how to do all this quite publicly. My heart sank when I realized how many of my old editors had quit or changed positions, and the first few weeks of thrusting innumerable pitches into the void made me wish I'd done the research at a magazine internship, where at least I'd have something to show for my time. My professional and academic lives were fused—hence “professional project,” a term I hadn't fully parsed until it was laughing in my face. By August, Dan Roe LLC was as solvent as Lehman Brothers, its sole employee surviving on instant noodles and fading hope.

As you've read by now in my field notes, things got better, but I'm grateful for the hardship in retrospect. I'm appreciative of simultaneously getting my copy torn apart by scrupulous editors and having my livelihood threatened by the tumult in publishing; both will serve to make me stronger. I suppose the goal of all this is to learn something, and what better way to learn than with your back against a wall. Until I began my research, freelancing had been easy, almost too easy to be real, and I'm glad I learned that “steady gigs” are in fact damned dirty lies before I had a chance to do something stupid with the money I'd made.

They say there's no such thing as a happy ending, it's only where you end the story, and I suppose that's a fitting way to end my commentary on the project. I've learned that the only guarantee in freelancing is the effort I put in, and sometimes that

effort isn't reflected in the work. I plan to continue freelancing for the foreseeable future, and I expect hardships like the ones I documented in my research. Forcing myself to do the work in public, and reflect on it with the honesty of a poker player whose mediocre hand is on the table for all to see, was good for me. I hope it serves to show future students with similar inclinations what it's really like to go it alone.

Chapter Four: Physical Evidence

During the 8-week research period, I wrote 43 stories: 32 published online stories, three soon-to-be published online stories, one published print story, six soon-to-be published print stories, and one story that was killed. The published stories and final drafts of the soon-to-be published stories and killed story are as follows.

Print story (published)

This Q&A with NCAA runner Allie Ostrander appeared in the November issue of

Outside.

PERFORMANCE
ENHANCER

Runner Allie Ostrander

OSTRANDER IS a chameleon. The 20-year-old Boise State University standout is a cross-country tactician in the fall, an aggressive steeplechaser during track season, and a sure-footed trail runner in summer. This July, she won Alaska's infamous Mount Marathon race, a roughly 3.1-mile trail run where competitors scramble up about 3,000 feet before hurtling back down. She notched the second-fastest women's time ever—and did it just one month after winning the NCAA title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. Ostrander also finished eighth last year in the 5,000 meters at the Olympic Trials. We asked her how she manages to perform at her peak year-round in a sport plagued by burnout. —DAN ROT

"Comparing myself to others is pretty detrimental to my own training, and it's never really done me much good. I try to stay off FloTrack, LetsRun, all those websites."

"I always have a really big snack before bed. It's almost like a fourth meal, around 9 or 9:30 p.m. Otherwise I'll wake up hungry in the middle of the night. I don't usually eat much before I go run in the morning, so that snack carries me over."

"I've moved some of my mileage to the underwater treadmill—between 18 and 19 miles per week."

"Before I start any training block, I build up really slowly and make sure that my body can handle it. Mainly for injury prevention, but it's also mental: I want to know that when I do eventually jump into a workout, it'll build my confidence instead of tearing me down."

"A lot of athletes, myself included, judge their self-worth based on how well they're performing. It's hard to remember that you're still a valuable person whether you're competing or not. Your sport isn't who you are, it's just a part of what you do."

"I am a sleep fiend. I have a really incredible capacity to sleep. I have slept 15 hours consecutively, and I'm generally in bed by 10:30."

"On my easy days, I slow down and really let myself recover. That's usually somewhere around a 7-to-7.5-minute-mile pace. If I want to have consistent training, I need to hold myself back from doing too much."

"My coaches require my team and me to get our blood tested and to supplement accordingly. So I take liquid iron every day, usually right after I run. Your body typically absorbs liquid iron more easily than a pill, so it's fast-acting."

"Twice a week I train in the gym. I do light weights, focusing on hips, hamstrings, quads, and calves. I'm trying to make sure that all my stabilizer muscles are strong."

"It's important for me to think back to all the times when I was injured and would've given anything to be able to run. It helps me appreciate the times when I can consistently perform and enjoy the whole process."



Print stories (unpublished)

I wrote five MH Exchange stories that will appear in the December issue of Men's Health, and one story for the January/February issue of Runner's World. The final edits of each story appear below.

MH Exchange, December 2017

HED: My son's headed back to college after winter break, and I keep hearing horror stories about campus rapes. How do I talk to him about sexual assault? — Roger, San Antonio, TX

First off, good on you for bringing it up with your boy. In 2015, the Association of American Universities published a climate survey of 27 large U.S. schools; among the worst schools, one in five students would become victims at some point. You can actually see the rates of reported sexual assault (integral word: reported, as many assaults aren't) for any accredited university on ope.ed.gov/campussafety. Now, the talk: You can talk honestly about body parts as early as kindergarten, which sexual violence prevention expert Kate Rohdenburg says helps kids learn about having agency over their own bodies. But high school isn't too late, and because it's a tricky subject, Rohdenburg says you can use topics in the media, events in the community, or other conversation starters to begin the talk about the dialogue your son needs to have with any potential partner. "Some people think sex means we're going to be boyfriend and girlfriend," Rohdenburg says. "You're having these conversations in advance, trying to work through their value system." After that, Rohdenburg advises parents to run through some hypothetical night-out situations to make sure your son can act on his own, as tight-knit social groups like sports teams and fraternities can normalize bad behavior. "If sexualized behavior is part of being in this group, you're less likely to recognize it as harmful rather than just ritual," she says. Finally, pediatric psychologist Carl Pickhardt instructs parents to hammer home the exact litmus test for consent, and note that an affirmative answer can only be given

while sober and can also be withdrawn at any time. “There’s a very simple question you ask,” Pickhardt says. “Is this something you really want to do? Real simple.”

MH Exchange, December 2017

HED: AM I DYING: Why do I get hard nodules near my collarbone after lifting?

Getting inflammation on the collarbone after lifting heavy weights isn’t uncommon, and any exercise that puts weight on the clavicle can cause inflammation, says Mike Reinold, P.T., C.S.C.S. “There isn’t a lot of padding between the skin and the collarbone, so that area can get irritated easily,” Reinold says. And although the bumps should go away naturally, Reinold recommends adjusting your bar placement and padding the area while you lift—aim to put it on the deltoid, close to the throat, which Reinold says places it off the clavicle to avoid aggravating it. See a physician if the nodules persist after you’ve nailed the placement, and Reinold recommends consulting a strength coach to work with you on personalized bar placement to avoid future nodules. “After that, you could try to pad the area, They have shirts and pads for the bar that may help.” Snag a barbell pad on Amazon and a padded collarbone compression shirt if you think you need the extra padding and get back out there.

MH Exchange, December 2017

HED: CINEMA VERITE: Elaine on Seinfeld asks: “Can you die from an odor? I mean, like if you were locked in a vomitorium for two weeks, can you actually die from an odor?”

Sorry to be that guy, Elaine, but vomitoriums weren't places where people vomited food together. Roman historian Jeffrey Allen Stevens says they were actually "passageways that afforded rapid exit to 'spew forth' or 'vomit out' spectators from amphitheatres." Still, the contents of a horrific odor could kill you, but the odor itself has nothing to do with it. "Things that you breath in that are toxic are killing you because they're poisonous, not because they smell bad," says olfaction expert Casey Trimmer. "Someone with no sense of smell would still be affected by toxic gas, for example." So what's in a bad smell, if not lethal gases? Trimmer says our perception is determined by what we think the source smells like, how strong or pleasant the odor is, genetics, past experiences with the odor and evolution, which is why we know to avoid rotting food. At the same time, those bad smells may be the least deadly, says world-renowned biophysicist and perfume savant Luca Turin. "Many gases can kill you, some fast, some slow, some odorless, some pleasant-smelling, some repulsive. The latter are the least dangerous because you run from them."

MH Exchange, December 2017

HED: What's the best way to master chopsticks?

Take up the top chopstick two-thirds of the way up the stick and hold it between your thumb and index finger like a pencil, and place the bottom chopstick on your ring finger so it rests along the crease of your thumb. Move only the top chopstick up and down to pinch. Chopstick expert Edward Wang says masters may hold chopsticks closer to the

top, whereas beginners might hold them halfway down; if you're still learning, you can choke up on the sticks because dropping food is a major cultural faux pas, as is gesturing with your chopsticks, using them to spear meat, and sticking them point-down into a bowl of rice—which symbolizes death. To shovel a heaping bowl of rice down the gullet, hold the bowl up to your lower lip, press the chopsticks together and push the contents into your mouth in a circular motion. A chopstick's size and shape indicates its cultural origin, Wang says; Chinese chopsticks are squared off and longer because Chinese culture values eating from communal plates in the middle of the table, whereas Japanese chopsticks are round-tipped and shorter to reflect a preference for personal plates.

MH Exchange, December 2017

HED: Are browser plug-ins that automatically find you promo codes safe?

“Honey is legit, no question about that. This is not a scam in any way and it works effectively,” says internet security expert Steve Weisman, who says users main concern should be how much data they're comfortable with giving away (and yes, that means actually reading the user agreement). Verified extensions such as those on the Chrome Web Store are a good place to start, says Cisco Security Outreach Manager Craig Williams, who advises people to keep their most important personal data off their plugin-using browsers. “If you're using a browser for online banking, do not use plug-ins,” Williams says. “These type of plug-ins monitor browser habits and do targeted ads, and others can install adware.” Use ad blockers in conjunction with promo code-finding browser extensions such as Honey and Coupons at Checkout, or use verified rebate- and

refund-finders like Ibotta and Earny, because malvertising—when you interact with an ad designed to give you malware—can come from compromised plug-ins. And although uncommon, malware companies have been known to acquire browser extension companies like Feedly, whose users got malware after the app's clandestine buyers acquired their data. Follow these tips and you're probably safe, but you can also get deals on sites like Ebates that give you cashback from retailers without living inside your browser.

Runner's World, January/February 2017

[HED OPTIONS]

Stronger And Faster, Now In Harmony

The Last Word On Leg Day

Of Lunges And Long Runs

Don't Squander Your Squats

[DEK OPTION 1]

Strength training can lead to huge gains...and completely deplete you. Here's how to make sure you schedule it right so it doesn't hamper your next run.

[DEK OPTION 2]

There's a fine line between strength gains and excessive aches and pains. Here's how to schedule your resistance sessions around your hardest runs to maximize the benefit.

By Dan Roe

You already know that lower body exercises can make you faster, but damn if a squat rack session doesn't trash your legs for tomorrow's tempo run. If you've ever rationalized your way through skipping leg day to prep for the next day's mileage, you're not alone—and you've actually got a point. Because according to a recent review of 132 psychological studies, it takes your body a hell of a lot longer to recover from resistance training than it does any high-intensity run.

After his review, study author Kenji Doma, PhD, a sport and exercise scientist at James Cook University in Queensland, Australia, concluded that while your body is able to fully recover from a run in 24 hours, strength training requires 48 to 72 hours of rest. That's important for runners to know for two reasons. First, running hard on too little recovery can ruin your workout and get you injured, Doma says. Second, research shows that properly scheduling resistance training can lop seconds—even minutes—off your current PR. To get it right, you have to first understand how your body responds to moving heavy stuff.

Picture yourself pushing a hand truck 50 feet across a smooth hardwood floor. Pretty easy, right? That's running, and your body is the hand truck—it's meant to move its own weight rather effortlessly. Now imagine sliding the hand truck under a refrigerator, tilting it back, and pushing the whole thing just five feet across the room. It's a lot more difficult because you're moving the hand truck itself, plus something much heavier. That's called

mechanical loading, a component of resistance training, and it's the reason why 10 heavy squats hurt more than 1,000 foot strikes.

But integrating resistance training into your running routine can make you faster because it decreases the amount of energy required to hit a certain pace. It's not necessarily that your muscles get bigger or stronger (though that does happen), Doma says, but rather your brain alters its neural recruitment pattern, calling up the most fatigue-resistant muscle fibers to get the job done so you exert less energy overall.

The key is in the timing of your resistance training. You don't want to run at 80 to 90 percent of your maximum effort right after hitting the squat rack because, simply put, your muscles are going to be too tired. "If you're lifting double your bodyweight, that's a lot more mechanical load being applied to your neuromuscular system, so you'll fatigue your muscles much more than you would in a typical running session—your body won't be ready to perform at the same level if you run the next day," says Doma.

His colleague, Dean Burt, PhD, an exercise physiologist at Staffordshire University in Stoke-on-trent, England, even found proof: He put runners who were experiencing delayed-onset muscle soreness (DOMS) after resistance training on a three-kilometer time trial, and found that, on average, they ran nine percent slower than those who weren't experiencing DOMS. They were also at a greater risk of injury, thanks to muscle fatigue leading to poor running form.

So, how do you set up your resistance training schedule correctly? Start your week with lower weights and less intensity to avoid shocking your body, and opt for upper body work versus lower when you have a hard running effort on tap the next day. “Upper body resistance training doesn’t appear to impact running economy,” Doma says of a study he conducted where athletes who did a whole-body resistance routine ran just as fast in a time trial as those who only lifted legs.

Next, prioritize. Doma says that if running is your top priority, it’s best to cap resistance training at two sessions a week to ensure full recovery. And although his review specifies 48 to 72 hours of recovery between resistance training and hard running workouts, he says that’s more of a beginner guideline—recovery time drops significantly after just three resistance sessions, and once you’re past that point your body only needs about 24 to 36 hours of rest, he says.

Finally, realize it’s okay to run on sore legs—just not too fast. Doma says going at about 70 percent of your maximum effort or less is best. How do you know what that is? Use a heart rate monitor. Doma says to record your beats per minute during a recovery run, before starting a strength training schedule. Then, when you’re out running easy post-lift, don’t exceed that number.

Want to put all of that into a real-life training week? Your wish is our command, per Doma’s suggestions:

[CHART]

Day 1: Off

Day 2: Tempo run

Day 3: Light resistance train (morning), easy run (afternoon)

Day 4: Easy run

Day 5: Interval run

Day 6: Easy run, resistance train

Day 7: Long run

Online stories (published)

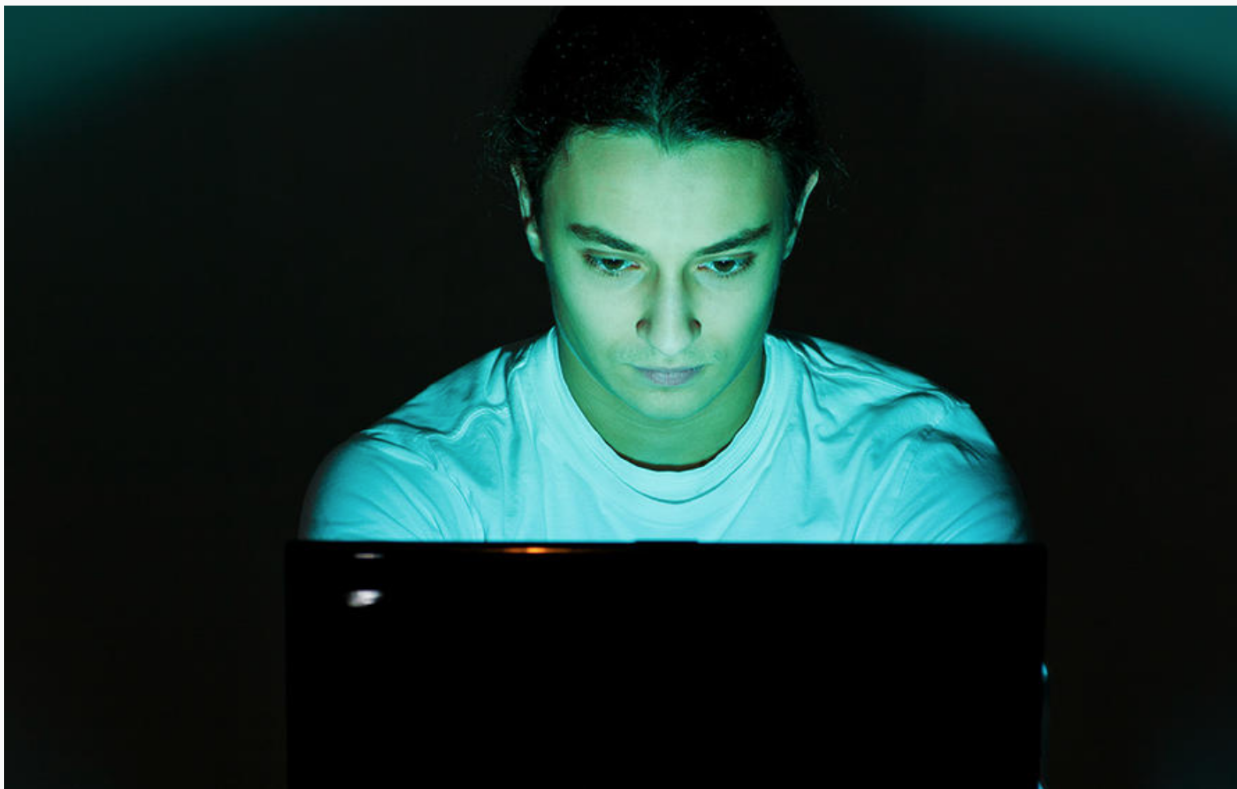
The following are the 32 published online-only stories I wrote during the research period:

22 for Men's Health, two for Outside, four for Spartan Race, two for Bicycling, and one for Aaptiv.

Men's Health

The Earlier Guys Watch Porn, the More Likely They Desire Power Over Women

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 4, 2017



getty images

Kids these days have a problem completely foreign to older generations: There's too much damn porn. Sex, everywhere! Gone are the days of sneaking into a friend's attic and swiping a dog-eared *Hustler* for an impromptu anatomy lesson, and according to the American Psychological Association, that's a problem. "We found that the younger a man was when he first viewed pornography, the more likely he was to want power over women," says [study](#) co-author Alyssa Bischmann in a press release, which followed Bischmann's presentation to the APA at the organization's annual conference this week.

Bischmann's study surveyed 330 undergraduate guys and found that the average scholar saw their first porn at age 13. The researchers also found that men who discovered porn later in life were more likely to pursue the promiscuous playboy lifestyle—Hugh Hefner would have to agree—but men who saw porn earlier in life were more prone to answering questions on masculinity that indicated an inclination to assert themselves over women. The researchers are hopeful that the findings can inform sexual assault prevention efforts, especially in a youth generation with the World Wide Web at their fingertips.

There's a ton of data on porn viewership (find out: [What Type of Porn User Are You?](#)), but if you have a young son, this research makes one thing clear: Set up those parental controls and, when the time comes, inform him that Pornhub isn't real life. (Keep the teens out of trouble with the [9 Accessories You Need to Throw the Most Epic Pool Party Ever](#)).

Are you worried that porn is hurting your sex life? In May, [MH broke down the latest research](#) to find out.

The World's Most Popular Beer Is Basically Water

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 4, 2017



Archfans.com

Despite how many cans of Budweiser you've seen your uncle slam, it turns out the U.S. isn't the world's biggest beer market: China is, according to the [National Beer Wholesalers Association](#). About a quarter of the Chinese market drinks a "Euro Pale Lager" called Snow, and if you listen to the armchair cicerones at [BeerAdvocate.com](#), you might as well drink actual snow. We're not supporting beer-jingoism here, especially when American guys have been pounding Heineken and Newcastle for decades (Budweiser actually ranks lower on the site), but the [reviews](#) of China Resources' mass offering speak for themselves. A few gems:

"Good for washing down the food."

“Faint whiffs of vegetables and... soap again? What flavors are present are less than pleasant: cooked veggies, grass and a lingering aftertaste... I want to say ‘soap’ again.”

“Like the bottle says: Relax, it’s fine.”

“Overall, a very poor beer that accomplishes the purpose if you want to drink something that isn’t water but tastes like water.”

If there’s one silver lining, Snow’s 120 calories won’t hurt your physique as much as an IPA. But thankfully, the [Men’s Health Low-Calorie Beer Awards](#) is here to make your low-cal happy hour a lot tastier.

Would You Go on a Giant Sex Party Cruise?

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 4, 2017



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

When it comes to picking the perfect ocean getaway, you have two options: There's the Alaskan cruise you begrudgingly take with your in-laws—pretending to marvel at icebergs between designated mealtimes and lackluster entertainment—and then there's the sex cruise. Yes, you read that right: **The Couples Cruise** is an NC-17 voyage that departs from Los Angeles on October 3, sails to Ensenada, Mexico and returns to L.A. five days later. Think of it as a regular cruise, but sexier. You'll dance the night away during Mardi Gras and PJ Party theme nights, and sight-see exotic Mexican locales like the Bufadora blowhole—no, that's not a euphemism, although it might help you set the mood.

Sexpert husband and wife team Bob and Tess Hannaford have been helping couples plan risqué getaways for nearly two decades, starting with the inaugural Naughty in N’awlins trip in 1999. The L.A. cruise launched in 2004, and the Hannafords have gotten over 1,000 couples into the seaworthy sack every year since. Bob Hannaford says passengers are open-minded liberals and conservatives alike, with an average age of 46.

“Couples have told us that our Couples Cruises rekindle their passions,” company president Bob Hannaford tells *Men’s Health*. “They come off the cruise feeling more in love and more connected than they were when they boarded.” (If your sex life has died down, start with the [5 main reasons couples stop having sex.](#))

Need an excuse to cut loose and explore some new positions—geographic, of course—with your hubby? Scope out the five reasons why the Couples Cruise is the vacation you never knew you needed.



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

THE TANTRA CENTER

“Our Tantra Center is beautiful, sensual and inviting,” Bob Hannaford says. “We bring in a lot of amazing teachers and instructors to help couples learn and bond with each other.” (Try our [5 off-beat sex trends](#) to expand your horizons before leaving port.)



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

THE MARDI GRAS THEME PARTY

Nowhere outside of the French Quarter is it socially acceptable to don a masquerade mask sans clothing, and that's exactly why you should do it.



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

CLOTHING-OPTIONAL POOL DECKS

Clothing-optional pool decks. Just look at how much fun all those semi-naked people are having! Although you should note: You've got to get a room to get it on.

"Our cruises are not sex cruises," Bob Hannaford says. "They are sexy cruises."



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

THE "PERFECT PLAYROOM"

Show up in just a robe and shut the curtains on a boudoir designed to bring out the sexy in your relationship. Or, ya know, leave the curtains open and put on a clinic—the choice is yours.

Related: [The 5 Craziest New Sex Toys You Have to See to Believe](#)



Photograph courtesy of Couples Cruise

NAKED SPEED DATING

Ditch the threads and meet like-minded couples in a stripped-down setting. Into BDSM? Prefer to sneak Spanish or French? No problem. There's a sexy meet and greet for everyone.

Sofia Vergara Poses Naked, Reveals “Gigantic Boobs” Prevent Pushups

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 2, 2017

Women's Health

Strong.

Sexy.



Women's Health

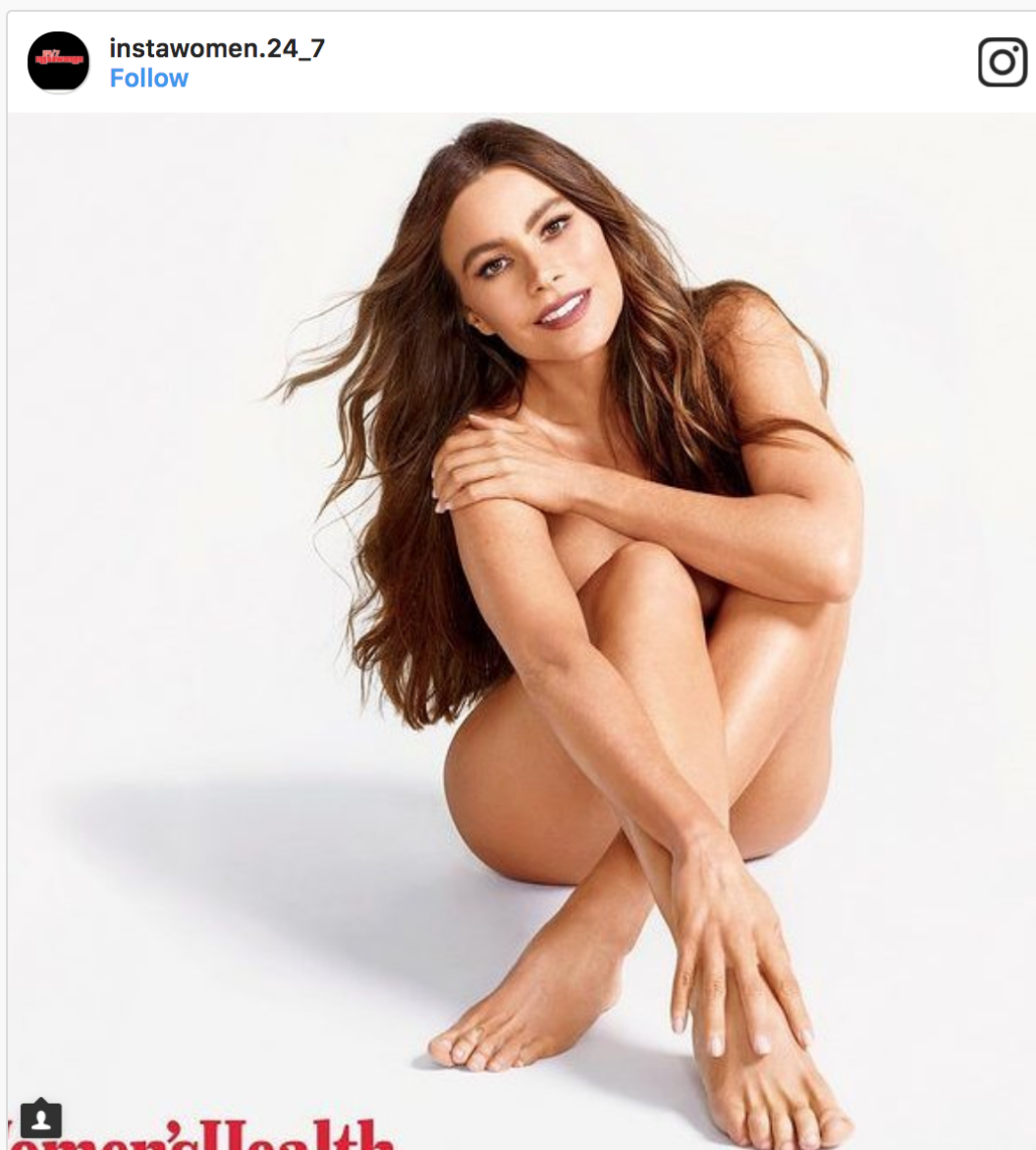
The world's highest paid television actress has a dirty little secret: She hates working out. That's what Sofia Vergara, the Colombian-American *Modern Family* star and four-time Emmy- and Golden Globe-nominee told *Women's Health* in an exclusive interview after Vergara's first naked cover shoot.

"I'm a morning person, so if I don't do it in the morning, then working out for me becomes...I find any excuse not to do it," Vergara told *WH*. And the actress, who had never posed naked until age 44, was hardly hitting the gym or starving herself before the international exhibition: While filming for her upcoming movie *Bent* in Rome, Vergara was gleefully indulging in the capital city's cuisine.

"How can you not eat in Rome?" Vergara says. "I ate like an animal!"

In a separate feature for the magazine, Vergara also discussed the limitations of her own body, including those that come with her "gigantic boobs."

"I don't know if I'm very strong," she says. "I have bad knees and very thin bones; I can barely do a pushup. I wish could be a little bit more athletic, but when you're born with these gigantic boobs..."



Vergara works out, to be sure, but her key is finding something she likes. A personal trainer puts her through three or four sessions each week on a **Megaformer** total body fitness machine, which is one of her least favorite activities. "It's like torture to me," Vergara says. "I'm in a bad mood two hours before, I'm in a bad mood while I'm doing it, I'm in a bad mood at the end because I have to schedule the next class." She says she doesn't have a six pack because she doesn't "need to be like a fit model with a perfect body. That would take too much effort!"

Hugh Jackman Crushes Deadlifts and Hits the Sand For Summer Workout

BY DAN ROE JULY 31, 2017



20th Century Fox

Bodybuilding forums call him Huge Jacked Man for good reason: At nearly 50 years old, Hugh Jackman is still in superhero form. Photos surfaced from a **gym session** near Bondi Beach, Australia, where Jackman strapped on a lifting belt and started crushing deadlifts like they were Magneto's face aboard the space station Avalon. After what we imagine was a series of musclebound grunts and supersets, Jackman and personal trainer Michael Ryan **took the workout to the beach**, where you can't help but notice the lack of flab on the actor's trained torso.

You can't believe the post-lift sprint through the surf was particularly pleasant, and although the photos show Jackman wearing the strain on his face, the brutal session is yet another chapter in Jackman's documented history of superhuman workout routines. We've seen him **row for 2,000 meters in just 7 minutes**—a routine he says “strips fat” and “uses every single muscle”—and **get recovered using the latest in cryotherapy technology**.



Want to unlock the keys to a crucial beach workout to get those **Baywatch-quality cuts**? You'll start with wax-on wax-off pushups to wake up your pecs, followed by burpees in the sand and tucking planks to shred those abdominals. (Check out the rest of our **12-step beach workout** to make the surf your new favorite gym.)

Before you go, you'll want to **snag a stylish swimsuit** to pull the oceanside aesthetic together, and a dermatologist-recommended sunscreen to keep the rays from damaging your skin. (We recommend **Neutrogena's Ultra Sheer Dry-Touch** sunscreen to keep the session from turning into an oily, sweaty mess).

Instagram Model Explains How She Went From Working Three Jobs to Making Six Figures

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 7, 2017



instagram/abigailratchford

Social media approval **produces dopamine**—which is why you fiendishly check your notifications in the minutes after posting a totally relatable #ThrowbackThursday. But what if more likes and followers also deposited money into your bank account? It can happen, and for Instagram bikini model Abigail Ratchford it's resulted in earnings of up to \$170,000 per year, as reported by the *New York Post*. The paper noted that in 2013, Ratchford was working three jobs in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and making less than \$2,400 each month—that is, until she modeled swimsuits for a professional photographer, who posted the photos online and inadvertently kickstarted Ratchford's lucrative social media career.

According to the *Post*, real financial success came after Ratchford posted a **video** to her Instagram starring herself bouncing about in lingerie. By the time TMZ and the young male blogosphere had shared and re-shared the post, **Ratchford's page** shot past 1 million followers, which translates to serious cash flow: “For every million [followers], you can charge up to \$1,500 a post,” Ratchford told the *Post*.

And although Ratchford's exorbitant earnings make her an outlier among users who didn't start out as celebs, her account isn't the first we've seen turn a hefty profit. See Jack Morris and Lauren Bullen, for instance: **The couple make \$3,000 to \$9,000 per post traveling the world** (and looking super hot together). Other Instagram goals include accounts like **@wheresmyofficenow**, which **chronicles the #vanlife of VW van-travelers Emily King and Corey Smith**.

Thinking about quitting your job to start your own Instagram-fueled adventure? Start with a go-anywhere camera like the **GoPro Hero5 Session**, which is key for documenting an impulse kayaking trip or capturing the coveted underwater selfie. And, to quote king of self-absorption Derek Zoolander, it doesn't hurt to be "really, really, really ridiculously good-looking."

Violent, Aggressive Video Games Like ‘Call of Duty’ May Be Damaging Your Brain

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 9, 2017



Getty

That insane kill-to-death ratio you’ve racked up on *Call of Duty* could be turning your brain to mush, new research suggests. Psychologists at the University of Montreal have discovered that action video games can cause the grey matter in your hippocampus to atrophy—the neurological version of going catabolic—and that doesn’t bode well for the millions of joystick junkies who justify **unemployed eight-hour zombie-killing sessions** with the predominant excuse: “Well, uh, science says there are cognitive benefits to this sick KDR!”

Okay, so before the comments section degrades into a foul-mouthed Xbox Live chatroom, we’ll note that video games do have some cognitive enhancement value. A **body of research** links video games to enhanced perceptual and cognitive skills, with applications in education and rehabilitation—we even use them to train endoscopic surgeons and military pilots. (**Find out which video game boosts your brain power.**)

The problem, according to the researchers, is that we're using the hippocampus less than we otherwise would when we're gaming because the persistent rewards we get from video games activate the "reward center" of the brain, the caudate nucleus, more heavily. A depleted hippocampus **can lead to Alzheimer's**, depression, schizophrenia and more, says the *Molecular Psychiatry* report.

Researchers rounded up 51 men and 46 women to play *Call of Duty*, *Killzone*, and *Borderlands 2*, plus a few *Super Mario* 3D games, for a combined total of 90 gaming hours. They used a virtual maze to distinguish the spatial learners—those gamers who relied on the hippocampus' spatial memory—from response learners, who played using the reward center (the study cites previous research that shows 85 percent of gamers fall into the latter category).

By observing each gamer while he or she navigated a virtual maze, they noted that spatial learners found their way by identifying landmarks in the maze, while response learners used a sequence of left and right turns, similar to the way you'd memorize the maps within a game like *Overwatch* and transport yourself to the payload on mental autopilot.

After identifying the spatial learners from the response learners, researchers monitored brain images of each gamer while they played action video games and 3D games. When the response learners played action video games, their hippocampi atrophied; but when both types of gamers played 3D games, hippocampal grey matter increased in everyone.

Yet, there's still hope for action video games, if we're willing to rework them to be less rote memorization and more challenging to navigate.

"It remains possible that response learners could be encouraged to use spatial strategies to counteract negative effects on the hippocampal system," says the study.

Our advice? Replace some of your gaming time with gym sessions, and bring recovery tools like the **Reehut 2-in-1 Foam Roller and Triggerpoint Massage Ball** to the man cave for inter-gaming recovery, because mowing down enemies and myofascial release could be the best mind-body therapy there is.

A Surprising Number of Men Prefer Small Boobs, According to Pornhub Data

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 11, 2017



Getty

Pornhub Insights is the site that's brought us vital data on Fidget Spinner and VR porn searches. Now, it's back with a new report on how the world searches for boob-related porn. The website analyzed global user data and concluded that **Pornhub searches for small breasts are on the rise**, while searches for large breasts have declined over the past 12 months.

That's not to say that large breasts have totally fallen out of favor: according to the Pornhub data, which was released in collaboration with Mashable, "big tits," "big boobs," and "large breasts" are still the most popular boob-related search terms. Yet searches for small breasts have been steadily on the rise over the past few years, practically doubling since January 2013.

Perhaps this trend is a reflection of cultural preferences in breast size. In December, the Plastic Surgery Group surveyed U.S. and British plastic surgeons and found that the **average breast augmentation sizes** are now C and D cups, as compared to DD and E cups several years ago. The trend could also be inspired by the rise of **smaller-breasted sex symbols like Kendall Jenner and Taylor Swift**, who are gracing runways and magazine covers across the globe.

(Read the [4 Women-Approved Secrets About Breasts](#) if any of this is confusing.)

In addition to the insights about small vs. large breasts references, Pornhub has also revealed the most popular boob-related search terms by gender and even state. According to the data, natural breasts are still more popular than fake ones, and your polite auntie and uncle from Minnesota are super interested in breast-related searches, as are most northerners and westerners. (Meanwhile, Mississippians could care less.)

Internationally, Fins are almost equally interested in small and large breasts, as are Americans, Britons, Danes, and others. Colombians are the least interested in small breasts. (If you saw [Women's Health cover model Sofia Vergara's latest photoshoot](#), you'd understand why.)

The most amusing bit of data? The fifth-most popular search term is just plain "boobs." You've got to feel like there's enough boobs on the internet, but apparently, some guys **just can't get enough**.

Watch Tom Cruise Majorly Fail on High-Flying Stunt for Latest Mission Impossible

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 14, 2017

If you buy something through our links, we may receive a commission.



Paramount Pictures

Tom Cruise, the man who once prompted the sale of those tacky [“I Do All My Own Stunts” t-shirts](#), has been injured doing his own stunt. A video surfaced Sunday that showed Cruise coming up short on a leap between two buildings while filming *Mission Impossible 6*, slamming his chest into the lip of a cement rooftop before limping off the set. That looked like it hurt, [but as TMZ pointed out](#), a second video shows Cruise trying the stunt *again*, this time bouncing off the rooftop with a forceful “clang” audible from ground level.

You can't knock Cruise's persistence, especially considering his pedigree with the series (like that insane **hang off the side of a moving Airbus** in *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation*). However, we can't help but wonder whether Cruise would have cleared the gap had he been coached on the proper way to jump long distances—you'll note that world class long jumpers **aren't flailing their legs while they're trying to land**.

At publication, Cruise's representation haven't responded to media inquires on the status of his injuries. Albeit bruised and beat-up, the actor's physique has hung tough through a stunt career that most actors leave to the pros.

You don't need a Hollywood personal trainer to look like Cruise at 55: We've got the tips to help you **keep your joints healthy, pack on muscle mass, avoid heart disease** and more, plus the threads to make people wonder whether you're **a stylish regular guy or a seasoned international spy**.



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And if you're needing some fit-spiration after receiving an AARP card in the mail, check out these **10 Incredibly Fit Guys over Age 50** who haven't missed a beat since stepping over the hill.

We're Calling It—This Is The Best Tinder Photo Of All Time

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 14, 2017



Today in outside-the-box thinkers, we bring you a man who won at Tinder by proving that the only thing better than finding love is finding monetary compensation. A screengrab of what is arguably **the best Tinder profile photo ever** surfaced on /r/tinder earlier this week. The hot tub casanova is a young man wearing a button-down, tie and sunglasses, reclining in a frothy hot tub with a Pabst Blue Ribbon in hand. Superimposed over the photo is a Google Ads-esque banner informing lucky users that they've been awarded a prize for being the millionth viewer of his profile, plus some fighting words about people who don't share his taste in juice boxes in the bio.

Honestly, is this not the most available guy you've ever seen? The wrinkled dress shirt and plain black tie shout to the world, "I have at least enough money to shop at Kohl's," and in addition to letting us know he can provide, he's wearing blacked-out Wayfarers that show off his edgy side. This whirlpool treasure will submerge three-quarters of his body for you, and that's pretty hot.

We can't imagine he's running low on matches—and [Reddit users are eating him up](#).

"Hoping this guy is my future husband," says Kessie03, while another user chimes in: "Be my husband please."

The actual value of the prize itself is unclear. Still, we appreciate the ingenuity of any guy who beats dating apps at their own game, like this [entrepreneur who created a dating app where he's the only guy available](#).

If this brilliant bachelor has anything to teach us, it's the power of a killer profile picture. If you've been rocking some scruff in your photo, try this [Braun 7-in-1 hair trimmer and Gillette body razor grooming kit](#) to get your beard in tip-top shape.

So, here's to you, mid-20's mystery prize hot tub guy. Hope you've found love, or at least a dry pair of slacks.

New Survey Reveals Just How Stressful the American Workplace Can Be

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 15, 2017



Getty

If you're reading this at work, make sure your boss isn't looking over your shoulder because we have some news: Your job might suck. That's according to new data from the RAND Corporation, which **surveyed 2,066 working Americans** to find out what their jobs were like. It's not all bad—especially when you recall that the average manufacturing employee from the year 1890 **worked 100-hour weeks**—but the latest stats indicate that Americans are prone to working after hours, under tight deadlines, and in potentially hazardous conditions. Initial takeaways include:

- More than a third of working Americans have no control over their schedules
- One in five experience a hostile or threatening work environment
- 62 percent say jobs are usually monotonous
- More than half report hazardous or unpleasant working conditions
- 26 percent of employers don't offer health insurance

Most important, the data allows us to drill down to the specifics of working conditions based on age, gender, and education. In doing so, we find even more telling descriptions of our working conditions:

- \$8,000—that’s how much more the average full-time college-educated man makes than his female counterpart
- 66 percent of college-educated men say they worked in their free time last month; 29 percent said they’d worked outside of the office once or twice a week
- 28 percent of non-college-educated men under 35 report verbal abuse or threats at work, 16 percent of their female counterparts also reported abuse
- 52 percent of workers over 50 say they have a supportive boss, while 65 percent of workers under 35 say the same
- 47 percent of non-college-educated men indicate not having enough time to do their job

Other data suggests that **workplace burnout accounts for 50 percent of employee attrition**, so perhaps it’s time to reflect on your own job, as workplace stress **can lead to brain damage and heart disease**.

If you’re feeling constrained by your current gig, consider a change like that of Gideon Akande—the one-time financier is **now a fitness trainer**—or Mike Lee, the pro boxer who **turned down a career on Wall Street** to follow his dreams in the ring.

(Or, show the man who’s boss with these **five bold socks sure to upgrade your workplace style**.)

In the meantime, consider the **6 hacks that will boost your creativity and brain power**, because a short break and a walk might just make it easier to get through another Monday on the job.

Instagram Fitness Model Amanda Lee Tells Us How She Went From 0 to 10 Million Followers

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 15, 2017



[Instagram.com/AmandaLee](https://www.instagram.com/AmandaLee)

Last week, Instagram fitness model Amanda Lee surpassed a milestone that, like her profile itself, didn't exist a decade ago: 10 million followers. But it's not all glitz and glam. A Los Angeles-based personal trainer, Lee knows how to conquer the grueling workouts that have given her such a photogenic physique.

Part pumping iron, part showbiz, **Lee's niche has yielded an illustrious career** inside and outside the gym, authoring step-by-step "booty workout plans" and designing a soon-to-be-released sportswear line. *Men's Health* caught up with Lee for an exclusive interview on her story, her routine, and the secrets to sculpting a fit body and brand.

How did you get started as a fitness model?

I had no modeling experience whatsoever. I was a personal trainer when three years ago I started training this girl, Michelle Game, who was a hip-hop video model. She had 80,000 followers at the time, and one day she asked to take a selfie together. (Flex on your own 'Gram with footage [from the GoPro Hero5 Session.](#)) She posted it and tagged me and my page blew up, and people were asking for my workouts, to purchase workouts, stuff like that. I decided to go with it and change my page to a more fitness-type page and it started growing really fast from there.

What makes an Amanda Lee photo?

I really like the full aesthetic of the photo to go well—the background, the lighting, the outfit. I just like to create an overall aesthetic that I think my followers will like. And, of course, I like to get the right angles to make my butt look bigger. (Glute strength isn't just for gals—try these [11 exercises to build stronger glutes.](#))

What's your workout routine?

I do leg days two to three times a week. I prefer heavy weights because my goal is to get stronger and build thighs. I do a combination of squats, walking lunges, leg press, Romanian deadlifts, step-ups, plyometrics, donkey kicks—basically every single type of lower body exercise—and box jumps.

What's your favorite exercise?

My favorite single exercise would probably be walking lunges, because I feel like I always feel them the next day.

Least favorite?

I'm going to have to go with squats [*laughs*]. I know they're necessary, I just find them a bit boring. Having said that, I do them; I don't like them but I make myself do them.

What do you eat to build muscle and stay lean?

I've never dieted; I don't really believe in dieting. In terms of being healthy and living a healthy lifestyle, I make sure I get enough protein with every meal. I eat probably five times a day to keep my metabolism going, and I limit anything white—white sugar, white bread—and stay hydrated throughout the day. [I drink] protein shakes as well to make sure I'm getting that protein to build muscle. (Lost in a sea of fad diets? [Try the MH Beginner's Guide to Meal Prep.](#))

What are your fitness goals?

I don't have a body type that builds muscle naturally. I have a soft, curvier physique, so in the gym I always try to push myself with weights to get stronger and build more muscle.

5 Guys Reveal Their Most NSFW Manscaping Horror Stories

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 16, 2017



Getty Images

Like putting together IKEA furniture or changing our transmission fluid, manscaping is something most guys learn through the process of trial and error—and there's a lot of error, according to a new study in *JAMA Dermatology*. Researchers surveyed 4,198 men to discover the prevalence of subterranean grooming-related injuries and found that 24 percent of men who groomed had injured themselves doing so, with lacerations accounting for 61 percent of those injuries. (Worried you're in danger of doing the same? Read the [5 awful grooming mistakes you should avoid](#).) Younger groomers and those who had manscaped at least 11 times in their lives injured themselves most often, although thankfully, only 1.4 percent required medical attention.

We only tend to hear about the ones that ended in an ambulance ride, though, so we scoured the web to find five of the worst stories about dudes who had no idea what they were doing when they were trying to manscape down there. (By the way, there's a right way and a wrong way to do this. [Here's the right way](#).)

"1ST DEGREE BURNS EVERYWHERE."

As a young man in college, [this Redditor tried using Nair](#) for the first time. Based on his story, it seems safe to assume that it was also the last time.

"I'm in the shower, having enjoyed some marijuana before hand, and rubbed the lotion all over my junk," he said. "It was a great shower, good steam, and I had a shower beer with me..."

Here comes the ending that, at this point, you're probably expecting.

"Lost track of time, and left the hair remover on for 20 minutes," he said. "Had some 1st degree burns every where. Not so great."

"A BARBED WIRE WEDGIE."

An Amazon user named A. Chappell posted a lengthy five-star review of Veet for Men Hair Removal Gel Creme—and although he apparently enjoyed the cream, he soon felt “an intense burning and a feeling I can only describe as being given a barbed wire wedgie by two people intent on hitting the ceiling with my head.”

In [the rest of his cringeworthy review](#), he explains how the gel tortured his "meat and two veg," as well as his anus, eventually forcing him to stick frozen vegetables between his butt cheeks in order to soothe the pain.

"To sum it up Veet removes hair, dignity, and self respect," he said.

"THERE WAS A TON OF BLOOD."

[One Redditor shared the story](#) of an acquaintance who suffered the misfortune of having one of his testicles removed due to a shaving incident gone terribly wrong.

"So, he was shaving his balls in the mirror," the commenter explained. "He had one leg up on the sink and was shaving. Somehow, his leg slipped and he really f—ed himself up. He said instantly there was a ton of blood. Since his parents weren't home, and he knew he f—ed up badly, he needed to get to the hospital."

The man ended up driving himself to the hospital but, alas, the damage had already been done. The man's testicle had officially gone solo.

"I CAN BARELY WALK AND CANNOT SLEEP."

A teenage Redditor [posted his horror story](#) after shaving his pubes down to “sharp stubble” that was “extremely uncomfortable and so much so that I can barely walk and I cannot sleep.”

“I’m not sure if hurt is the right word,” he said, revealing the limits of our language in translating his pain. Hopefully, he learned from the errors of his ways.

"THE SHIP MOVED SUDDENLY."

We'll end this gruesome list with one that's short, sweet, and, thankfully, not too graphic.

"So I was in the shower on a cruise ship shaving my balls," [this Redditor wrote](#). "The ship moved suddenly. I think you can guess what happened."

We're not going to ask much about the "how" or the "why" here, because not much more needs to be said, does it?

Floyd Mayweather Is Abstaining From Sex Before His Mega-Bout With Conor McGregor

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 18, 2017



Mike Lawrie / Getty

Boxing's 49-0 megastar will be shut out from bedroom until he fights Conor McGregor on August 26. TMZ Sports caught up with Floyd Mayweather on Wednesday to inquire about his pre-fight sex life—when asked whether he'd abstain from sex before the match, **Mayweather confidently replied**, "Absolutely."

Perhaps Mayweather is just paying homage to Mickey Goldmill, the greatest fictional boxing trainer of all time, who **famously told Rocky Balboa** that "women weaken legs" in *Rocky*. If Mayweather has dedicated himself to a week of cold showers, he'll **be at odds with challenger McGregor**, who **told Conan O'Brien** that he tries to "definitely have as much sex as possible" before fights. (**Find out who Mike Tyson is taking in the fight.**)

The notion that sex ruins athletic prowess has **existed since ancient Greece**, when trainers of Olympic athletes would require abstinence because they thought ejaculation meant testosterone leaving the body. Such universal abstinence has left the modern games, as the 2016 Olympic village supplied athletes with 450,000 condoms, also known as 300,000 more condoms than the 2012 games in London, also known as a *ton of sex*.

However, what do we actually know about sex and athletic performance? The research is sparse, but a 2016 review in *Frontiers in Physiology* looked at nine studies on sex and athletics and found no evidence to support the idea that pre-competition sex weakens legs, or the rest of the body.

And that's good news for the viewers at home, because in the fray of **grill-out armchair sports analysis**, at least we won't need to talk about Mayweather and McGregor's sex lives as they're beating the living crap out of each other.

Watch Britney Spears Get a Killer Triceps Workout in New Exercise Video

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 23, 2017



[Instagram.com/Britney Spears](https://www.instagram.com/BritneySpears)

Front raises, then tricep pushdowns, then backflips—you call it a superset, Britney Spears says, “Hit me, baby, one more time.” The pop sensation posted an Instagram video of her first workout since “a couple weeks off,” and with nearly 3 million views, the clip reveals to millions of fans that keeping a cut and toned physique ain’t easy.

The singer and dancer combines free weights, gymnastics, cable machines, and yoga for a killer session that’s probably a lot harder than Spears makes it look. From what we can tell, she’s focusing on dynamic movements like step-ups to overhead presses and handstands, and the full-body engagement is clearly paying dividends. ([Try your own mobile workout with these \\$19 resistance bands.](#))

Spears is no stranger to outdoor workouts, as she posted another [workout video on Monday](#) showing a sun-kissed patio routine with more free weights and yoga. With the hills of Malibu as her backdrop, Spears hits curls, kettlebell front raises, downward-facing dogs and more; another [clip from June](#) shows Spears on the road, hitting planks, stability ball sit-ups and a cable routine in a hotel gym. (Got 12 minutes while you're on the road? Try the [Do-Anywhere Zero-Excuse Bodyweight Burner](#) to stay anabolic while you're away from home.) With such dedication to consistency, it's no surprise the entrepreneur is looking fit as ever in photos for her fragrance line.

If Spears versatile routine and toned body prove anything, it's that you don't need a gym to get in a really solid session. And if you're looking for a workout you can do anywhere, [Men's Health's Get Back in Shape program](#) is for you. Skip the expensive gym membership and do these moves anywhere to start your total-body transformation.

Mayweather-McGregor By The Numbers: From Fighting Stats to Strip Club Staff, Everything You Need to Know

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 25, 2017



Brandon Magnus / Getty Images

By week's end, millions of Americans will have quit what they're doing to watch an event that drowns out the sun—we're talking about **Mayweather vs. McGregor on Saturday night, of course**. Whether you're looking at pay-per-view sales, million-dollar wages, the size of the purse, or the influx of extra dancers to staff Las Vegas' packed strip clubs, the fight is gargantuan in every regard. We've got the figures to put it all into perspective, and maybe make you feel a bit better about shelling out \$100 to watch it yourself.

9 p.m. ET, 8/26: The time and date these two will touch gloves for their long-awaited bout.

90 percent: Portion of **bets taken on McGregor**, which is why sports books still need Mayweather to win, **according to the Las Vegas Courier Journal**. But, **76 percent** of the money for all bets is on Mayweather.

\$1.2 million: The largest wager placed on the fight—someone at William Hill Nevada sportsbook **put it all on Mayweather**.

2/9: The **current betting odds** for a Mayweather win.

5/1: The **current betting odds** that McGregor will get DQ'd for an illegal MMA move.

(Work on **your boxing-legal punches with this \$25 speed bag**.)

21-3: That's McGregor's MMA record. Mayweather, at 49-0, **came out of retirement to fight McGregor and prove he's the greatest ever**.

\$1 million: The **price** to slap your logo on Mayweather's walk-out robe; also the price for sponsoring his weigh-in trunks and victory cap.

74 inches: McGregor's reach—he'll need it to connect with Mayweather, who's **evaded 81 percent of opponent's punches** in his last 40 fights. In the same time period, Mayweather's landed 43 percent of his swings.

(See what **ringside doctors are saying about McGregor's chances of survival**.)

\$80 million: The **projected live ticket sales** at T-Mobile Arena—although **the venue may not even sell out**.

\$80,200: The **most expensive ticket** available on StubHub, for ringside seats.

2 or 3: The multiple by which Las Vegas gentlemen's club Crazy Horse 3 expects to increase the number of dancers for fight night—that means doubling or tripling the 200 to 300 dancers already working a normal Saturday night, says Director of Brand Marketing Lindsay Feldman.

\$300 million: The **projected purse** for the bout, as pay-per-view sales are projected to total \$700 million.

70-30: The **rumored split** for the fight, in Mayweather's favor.

\$212: The **average bet** taken on McGregor—the working man's champion, it would seem, as the average Mayweather bet comes in at \$8,036.

\$75,000: The price of the most expensive bottle at Crazy Horse 3. The Armand de Brignac Ace of Spades Rose comes with \$20,000 in Diamond Dollars to blow at the club—but doesn't include tax. If you happen to win big tomorrow night, perhaps consider popping that off to celebrate.

Watch These Activists Fight to Free the Nipple at an NSFW Topless March

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 28, 2017



Instagram/viverenewyork/aguasali

Here's a demonstration we can all get behind: Topless equality for all. That was the cause for Saturday's Go Topless Day march through Midtown Manhattan, which featured a drum line led by topless women and approximately 200 others, **as reported by the New York Post**. Cities across the globe—including Montreal, Paris, Geneva, and **plenty more**—disrobed for the common purpose of freeing the female nipple and granting it the same public rights as those of males.

The event has strutted through the world's cities since 2007, and according to **GoTopless.org**, the August 26 march date was designated to coincide with the August 26 adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. And we've got the (NSFW) photos, so take in the best shots from the march and, if you feel like it, **trim up and pop that shirt off in solidarity**. Just not in the office. That would be all on you, man.

How Long Can Sperm Live Outside The Body? This Viral Tweet Has Everyone Wondering

BY DAN ROE AUGUST 30, 2017



Getty

As anyone in a pregnancy scare has probably wanted to know, **errant sperm** can live inside the body for three to five days—provided the cells are in a warm, protective environment, like the uterus or cervix. But what about inside the mouth? Twitter user [@_MariahV_](#) answered the question of **oral sperm lifespan** that most of us never knew we had:



Mariah
[@_MariahV_](#)



So today in lab we swabbed inside our mouth to see bacteria under a microscope and a girl had a **WHOLE LIVE SPERM** in her microscope slide

10:54 AM - Aug 28, 2017

2,057 112,454 483,323



Men's Health attempted to contact Mariah via Twitter, and at publication time received no response, so sadly we can't verify whether this hilarious thread is true. In it, she describes how a swab of a medical school classmate's mouth showed that **sperm was living inside her oral cavity**. According to Mariah's professor, this wasn't the first time a discovery of this kind had been made, either. (However, it's worth noting that a nearly identical story **has been circulated as an urban legend over the years**.)

In the interest of providing sound medical advice on whether the story *could* be true, though, we reached out to Brian Steixner, M.D., a urologist and director of the Institute of Men's Health at Jersey Urology Group.

"It's interesting to think about," Steixner says. "The important point is that most sperm will die pretty rapidly if they're not in an environment that's conducive to living. Sperm outside the body, on the coffee table, or wherever you decide to put them, they're only going to live about 15 to 30 minutes."

However, Steixner notes that hypothetically, **the properties of the mouth** could be conducive to harboring live sperm cells.

"If you're talking about the science behind it, the temperature of the mouth is warmer than outside the body, it's a mucosal substance with gums, nooks and crannies," Steixner says. "In theory, it's 100 percent reasonable that a sperm from oral sex in someone's mouth could be alive the day after, assuming it's Monday, or two days later." Steixner also notes that such a situation is highly improbable, but concedes that yes, the remnants of Saturday oral sex could stay with a person until Tuesday.

(Want to learn all about the dos and don'ts of oral sex? The *Men's Health* **guide to pleasuring a woman** will teach you every secret to sexual satisfaction.)

So, although **male sperm counts are declining**, be aware that sperm can live inside other areas of your partner longer than you might think.

Guy Brings a Gun to an MMA Fight, Leaves Bloody and Handcuffed

BY DAN ROE SEPTEMBER 1, 2017



Getty

On Tuesday night, mixed martial arts instructor Jacobe Powell was teaching a class, when a man walked into his Burbank, California, studio with a suspicious, black messenger bag. Powell saw 30-year-old Matthew Lloyd reach inside the bag for what Powell thought to be a gun, and in that instant, his student got to see what Powell, a 34-year-old amateur lightweight fighter for Bas Rutten's Elite MMA, could really do. Here's how he described stripping the loaded handgun from Lloyd to KTTV.

(Pump up your arms and get stronger all over with the *Men's Health Ultimate Upper Body training guide*.)

"My instincts kicked in, I used my judo training to go ahead and subdue him, got the weapon away from him before the cops arrived," Powell told KTTV. "One of my guys here who was training called the police and I just subdued him until the police showed up."

The news clip shows Lloyd sitting on the curb outside the gym, disoriented, face fully bloodied—as one tends to be after putting himself on the wrong end of a trained mixed martial artist. The gym owner later told reporters that Lloyd is a war veteran who was struggling psychologically and had met Powell for martial arts training; Powell says he doesn't wish to press charges and hopes Lloyd gets help. ([Learn about the MMA "Fight Club" helping veterans cope with PTSD.](#))

As of early Wednesday morning, KTTV reported that Powell was in custody on attempted armed robbery charges—after a trip to the hospital, that is.

As for the heroic MMA fighter, Powell **had some advice for the public**. “If you get a chance to take martial arts or learn judo or jiu-jitsu or any type of self-defense, it could save your life,” Powell said. “You might only need it once, but that one time you need it might save your life.”

Sarah Hyland's Butt Tattoo Makes Its Official Instagram Debut

BY DAN ROE SEPTEMBER 6, 2017



[Instagram.com/@therealsarahhyland](https://www.instagram.com/@therealsarahhyland)

There are tattoos you get to make a statement—like a pterodactyl across your shoulders or even something simple like "Mom" scrawled inside a heart. And there are tattoos you get because the statement is, "I don't give a s—t." Sarah Hyland went the latter route over the weekend, as [the *Modern Family* star posted a photo to Instagram](#) showing herself and bestie Katie Welch flaunting fresh, matching dinosaur tattoos. The caption reads, "We believe in dinosaurs #dinobootybabies."

The important thing here isn't whether the tattoos are temporary, [as some outlets have speculated](#), but the fact the butt tat used to be something you grew out of when you graduated college. If you didn't have an obscure cartoon character printed on your cheeks by commencement, it was too late for you. Now, though, the butt tattoo is in vogue. Singer [Teyana Taylor has the Rolling Stones' logo](#) tatted on her butt; R&B artist SZA has [something that looks like a panda bear](#) on her buns; reality TV mogul [Kylie Jenner has "sanity"](#) tattooed just above her ass—you get the picture.

If you're thinking about a butt tattoo, there are a few things to consider: In May, **the FDA released a statement on the dangers of tattoos**. Of the 29 percent of Americans who have at least one tattoo, some recipients are prone to allergic reactions and scarring; the **risk is highly dependent on where you get tatted**, so be sure to do your homework before scheduling an appointment.

(Want some killer arms to complement your bicep tat? Start the *Men's Health Ultimate Upper Body workout* today.)

However, if you're squeamish about the potential sting of getting inked, we will point out that the butt is fatty enough to be a less painful option than some other trendy locations, like the **#armpittattoo**. And should you pull the trigger, reward your booty for toughing it out with the **life-changing underwear** that you'll only want to take off when you're showing off the new ink.

MMA Fighters Like Conor McGregor Could Be At Risk For Brain Injury

BY DAN ROE SEPTEMBER 8, 2017



Jeff Bottari/ Getty

If you watched the Mayweather vs. McGregor fight or saw the technical knockout online, you probably noticed a weary, not-entirely-conscious Conor McGregor stumbling around the ring as Mayweather continued to pummel him. Yet despite the global spectacle, neurologists say something grim could be going on in the brains of fighters like McGregor. According to a study presented at an American Academy of Neurology conference, blood samples from 291 current **professional fighters showed indications of brain injury.**

“Our study looked at data over a five-year period and found elevated levels of two brain injury markers in the blood,” lead author Charles Bernick said in a press release. “Now the question is whether they may signify permanent traumatic brain injury with long-term consequences.” The indicators in question are neurofilament light chain and tau; these biomarkers only appear in the blood of **fighters and NFL players when they’ve been injured**. Their presence can indicate the future development of neurodegenerative diseases, such as **dementia** and **Huntington’s disease**.

Among their findings, Bernick’s team discovered that neurofilament light chain (Nfl) levels were “40 percent higher in active boxers than non-fighters.” Sparring within two weeks of the blood sample also elevated NfL, and fighters with heightened NfL scored worse on computerized cognition tests.

Although the July study focused on active fighters, the prognosis for retirees isn’t good: A 2014 **study in *Alzheimer’s & Dementia*** tested the brains of 13 retired boxers and one MMA fighter and found serious cognitive impairments with reaction time, processing speed, and memory. The problem of neurodegenerative diseases in high-impact sports has become so evident that **30 former NFL players are donating their brains to science**.

The fighters in the latter study averaged 45.2 professional fights over 14.3 years. McGregor’s only had 25 pro fights, including the bout with Mayweather, but as more research emerges about the effects of trauma on the brain, it doesn't bode well for the future health of pro fighters.

LeBron James and Dwyane Wade Reunited For an Offseason Workout, and They Look Ready to Win Another Title

BY DAN ROE SEPTEMBER 13, 2017



David Sherman / Getty

Seven years have elapsed since “The Decision,” in which LeBron James signed with the Miami Heat, fused his talents to Dwyane Wade’s, and won NBA championships in 2012 and 2013 (**there was a raptor with a helluva jumper there, too**). Now 32 and 35 respectively, James and Wade were seen **running drills together** at the UCLA training complex; by the looks of their buttery smooth step-back jump shots from the top of the key, someone should remind the All-Star duo that it’s only September.

King James has never been one to bask in offseason lethargy—not with arch-nemesis Steph Curry **trolling his workout routine**—and he’s been known to incorporate serious cardio into on-court sessions. In another post, **James sprints laps** between baselines and dunks at each basket, which is probably how he became **one of the most feared chase down shot blockers** in the league.

Off the court, James focuses on functional movement and core stability, **kneeling on a physio ball** while moving a Bodyblade for a dynamic balancing act that looks like it hurts as much as it helps. James' posture on the ball is impeccable, and you can use **stability ball posture exercises** to improve your own stature. (Use **these recovery** tools if you're brave enough to attempt James' ludicrous balance routine.)

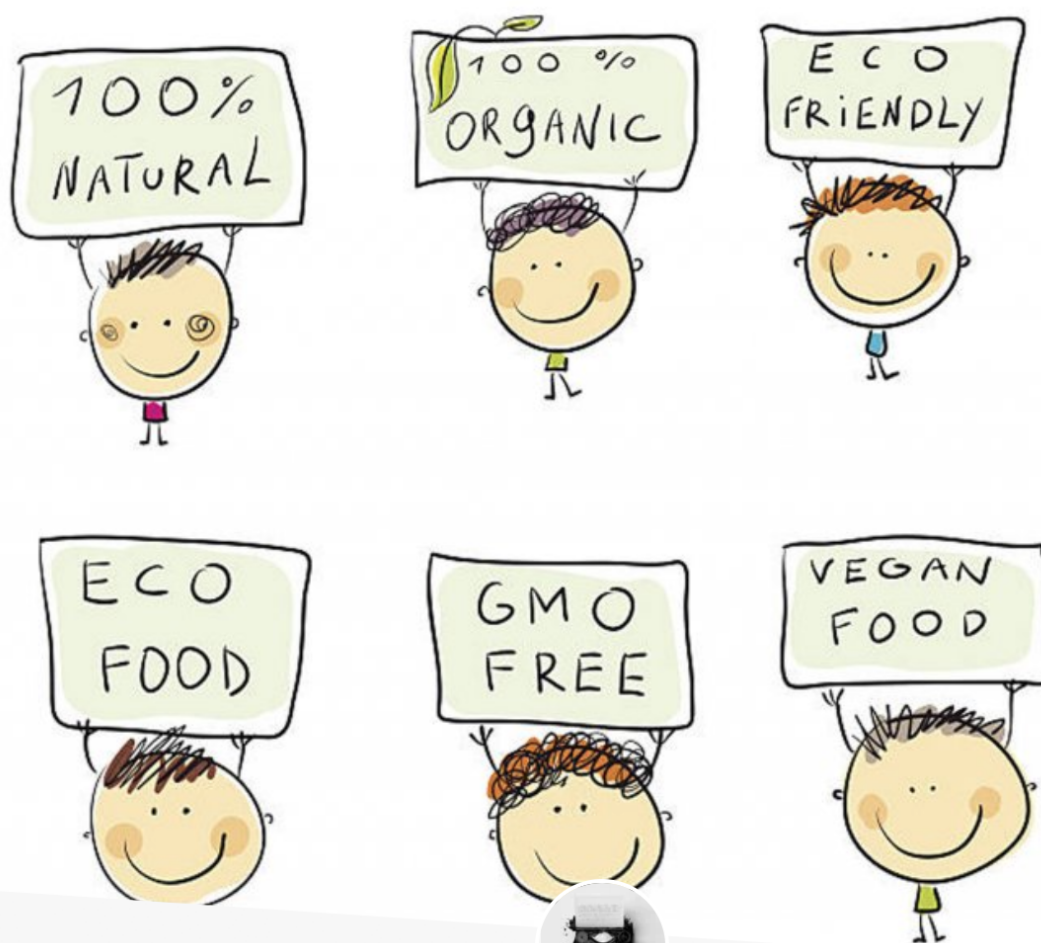
Oh, and in case you thought Wade was slouching in the midst of LeBron's killer workouts, the three-time league champ is all about explosive exercises like med ball slams, box jumps, and footwork ladders to inject some quickness into that killer eurostep. Think you could hang with one of the greats? Find out what happened when **we sent one *Runner's World* intern to survive Wade's mid-season workout.**

Food is fuel

PERFORMANCE PLATE

5 Food Label Myths, Debunked

Thanks to a shrewd food marketing industry and slick packaging schemes, we're overpaying for products that make major health claims with little real nutritional payoff



Dan Roe

Jul 14, 2017

In May, the International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC) released survey data that revealed a harsh revelation about us typical grocery shoppers: We're pretty much clueless. Whether it's about what's healthy, what's safe, or what's better for the planet, our decisions are largely guided by complicated nutrition advice and a savvy food marketing industry rather than recommendations grounded in science. All this confusion means we're spending way too much money on things we think are good for us but in reality offer negligible benefits.

We looked at the results of the IFIC survey to see which nutrition labels are influencing our perceptions—and to offer advice for not falling prey to them.

LOW-FAT

The Perception: Something that's lower fat has fewer calories, so you can eat your favorite foods—like yogurt or cheese—with less risk of weight gain.

The Reality: Low-fat doesn't necessarily mean fewer calories. In fact, you'll likely end up eating more than you would with the full-fat alternative simply because you think you're making the smarter choice and because fat leaves you feeling fuller longer, so it takes less of it to satisfy your hunger. Any calories that you are in fact saving are likely just added back in as sugar, which helps to salvage the taste and mouthfeel of whatever's left once you remove the fat.

The Verdict: If you're about to buy something because it's labeled as low-fat, read the nutrition facts and ingredient list to determine what's making it palatable.

ALL-NATURAL

The Perception: Foods with this label are better for you and the environment. It's basically like eating organic without the hefty price tag.

The Reality: All-natural labels try to capture the crowd who aren't quite willing to make the jump to pay for organic but still want to feel like they're putting something good into their bodies. But all-natural is not the same as organic. The Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulate organic foods and have strict guidelines on what qualifies as such. All-natural foods, however, remain unregulated, so there's no guarantee that the product actually has fewer modified ingredients or cleaner production practices than a conventional option.

The Verdict: Either buy organic—preferably locally sourced—or save your money and buy foods made with healthy, whole ingredients and without any fancy labeling.

VITAMIN-FORTIFIED

The Perception: Vitamin-fortified foods are healthy because they provide essential vitamins without the need for a supplement.

The Reality: Many brands add vitamins to foods that are inherently unhealthy—cookies, candies, chips, and other snacks foods—and call them nutritious. This vitamin craze has affected purchasing behavior: A study of more than 5,000 grocery shoppers showed that when presented with two snack options—one healthier, whole-food-based option and one vitamin-fortified option—consumers were more likely to buy the latter, without scrutinizing the ingredient list. This is a problem because those added vitamins don't make up for the empty calories, sugar, and unhealthy fats acting as their vessel.

The Verdict: Get your vitamins in foods that *should* have them, like fruits and vegetables.

GMOs

The Perception: They're not good for you. So you shop at natural-food stores and always buy the foods labeled as “non-GMO” at regular supermarkets.

The Reality: The GMO battle rages on, with farmers, industry giants, and agricultural biotech firms all making their case either for or against GMOs. But the science remains murky: There's no definitive take on what GMOs are actually doing to the body and the environment. Some people argue that foods that are genetically modified in any way often last longer, have higher levels of antioxidants or vitamins, and might even taste a bit better. Research shows that consumers who don't know much about the GMO debate will actually pay an upcharge for products that boast these qualities. It's only when they're introduced to the controversy—typically through some sort of marketing or PR campaign—that they balk at buying foods with modified ingredients.

The Verdict: We're all still pretty confused. Try to pay less attention to any sweeping generalizations in either camp. Instead, focus on looking at a food holistically for its health benefits rather than fixating on one item from the label.

ORGANIC

The Perception: Organic foods are healthier, safer, and better for the environment.

The Reality: The USDA gives its stamp of organic approval to products that “rely on natural substances and physical, mechanical, or biologically based farming methods to the fullest extent possible.” For produce, that means the soil has to be pesticide-free for three years; meats must be antibiotic- and hormone-free and raised in conditions that emulate their natural environments; and 70 percent of the ingredients in processed, packaged goods must adhere to these parameters. Organic foods enjoy tremendous popularity among the health-conscious crowd with more disposable income to spend on their food. The most recent USDA data values the industry at \$5.5 billion, with sales up 72 percent since 2008. Consumers believe that just being labeled as organic implies a slew of health and environmental benefits—most of which can't actually be guaranteed. Even when the first national standards for the organic label were issued by then Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, he made it clear that “the organic label is a marketing tool, not a statement about food safety or a value judgment about nutrition or quality.” The label remains marred in conflict over how it may alienate smaller farmers who practice many organic methods but can't afford to keep up with industrial agriculture, how it does or doesn't adapt to new farming approaches like hydroponic growth, and how it suggests these foods are healthier and safer than conventional alternatives without definitive evidence to support such claims.

The Verdict: This isn't to say that there's no value in buying organic. But you shouldn't make it your go-to based on assumptions that it's unequivocally better for you, safer, and more eco-friendly. If you want to go organic, stick with local farmer's markets and community gardens to support your local economy and small-scale farmers and to cut down on transportation pollution.

Filed To: Science / Environment / Nutrition / Fitness

Food is fuel

PERFORMANCE PLATE

The 5 Biggest Fat Myths

Your nutrition is just as important as your training. Don't take bad advice on how to perfect it.



Dan Roe

Sep 11, 2017

Fat has a complicated past. It went from being viewed as the fast track to weight gain to a surefire way for endurance athletes to teach their body to burn slower for longer. We looked at some of the most common misconceptions ideas behind the macronutrient—one of three nutritional components (fat, protein, and carbohydrates) required by humans to function—and stacked them up against the latest peer-reviewed literature and

MYTH: Cut fat from your diet to lose weight during training.

REALITY: For starters, you probably shouldn't be trying to lose weight during training. If you have a few pounds to lose, do it ahead of time so you can fuel your body with enough calories to function and perform during intense training blocks.

Even when weight loss isn't on the mind, "many athletes incorrectly believe that a low-fat diet is good for them," says Bill Campbell, an exercise physiologist at the [University of South Florida](#). That assumption is misguided. Not having enough fat in your body suppresses normal testosterone production in males, which can have negative implications for performance, he says. The U.S. Olympic Committee's [Weight Loss Fact Sheet](#), created specifically for athletes looking to lean out, recommends adding, not removing, fatty foods like nuts, seeds, and avocados to keep you satisfied for longer and to give your body fuel it can actually burn.

In your hardest periods of work, you shouldn't skimp on the fats; rather, you should load up on them to power your efforts. "In a very heavy training phase, the required fat intake might be double the amount of the rest and recovery phase," says Trent Stellingwerff, director of performance solutions at [Canadian Sport Institute Pacific](#).

THE MYTH: High-fat diets help endurance athletes go harder for longer periods of time.

THE REALITY: Ketogenic diets are having a moment. Adherents swear by a life of foods like sardines, macadamia nuts, and fatty fish, saying the diet key to their endurance performance. But their views aren't without controversy. Many scientists in the field take a more cautious stance. Louise Mary Burke, head of nutrition at the [Australian Institute of Sport](#), has focused much of her research on how high-fat diets affect endurance athletes and recently [called for a reexamination](#) of the trend's popularity and legitimacy, suggesting the scientific and endurance community claimed to have found the secret to high-mileage invincibility all too soon.

Part of the trouble in assuming high-fat diets work for everyone, researchers say, is in the difference between effort intensity across different types of sports, such as a marathon versus an ultra-distance race. With successful fat loading, athletes can store enough fat-derived energy—and still be lean—to power them through 50- and 100-mile races easily, says Stellingwerff. But it's important to have at least *some* carbs to fuel a shorter race at a higher intensity or even to pick up the pace during the last ten miles of an ultra or tackle an exceptionally difficult stretch of the course. For a marathon distance or shorter, or any other endeavor where you're more likely to be [pushing the top of your aerobic capacity](#), it's important to incorporate quickly digested, easy-access carbs like the classic gel mid-race or even a responsible carbo load a few days before the race.

THE MYTH: Medium-chain triglycerides (MCT), best known for their presence in coconut oil, break down like carbohydrates, so you can eat them as an easy-to-digest energy source prior to exercise rather than traditional carbs.

THE REALITY: “On paper, it would seem as though MCTs ingested prior to endurance exercise would be beneficial for performance,” says Campbell. All fat molecules are composed of long strands of fatty acids, some longer than others. MCTs are composed of fewer of these fatty acids, so their chains are shorter, allowing the body to break down the molecules much faster and absorb them as energy.

“However, nearly all of the research that exists on MCTs suggests that it does not improve endurance performance,” says Campbell. Recent [research](#) found that cyclists who used MCTs had worse sprint performance and reported gastrointestinal upset during intense exercise. In short: Keep it simple and stick to carbs before your workouts.

THE MYTH: All fats fall into the same macronutrient bucket, so I can eat any type—handfuls of almonds or slabs of ribeye—as long as I hit the right ratio of fat-to-protein-to-carb by day’s end.

THE REALITY: A recent and exhaustive [study](#) looked at more than 130,000 people in 18 countries and determined that those who had greater fat intake were more likely to live longer. But the perennial debate about which *type* of fat to eat rages on. Stellingwerff recommends that athletes avoid [trans fats](#), like fried foods, desserts, and even crackers, and shoot for monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which come in plenty of vegetarian- and vegan-friendly sources like olive oil and avocados. “I recommend athletes ingest one-third of their fat from [monounsaturated sources](#) like olive oil and nut butter, one-third from polyunsaturated sources like walnuts and fatty fish, and one-third from saturated fats like dairy products and red meat,” says Campbell.

Filed To: [Nutrition](#) / [Diet](#) / [Food and Drink](#) / [Fitness](#)

Karla Leon Is 6 Pounds Away from Her 100-Pound Weight-Loss Goal



by Dan Roe · 4 months ago



Anthony Sanchez's hurdle form wasn't perfect. As he leapt over the the finish-line flames at the 2015 Las Vegas Super, his arms were out and his legs tucked beneath him, like the yellow Batman logo on his black tee. Still, the 28-year-old cleared the fire line, and his mom was about to follow his lead. But as she planted her right foot in the Nevada sand just short of the fire, her right hamstring cramped.

The 44-year-old tried to lift her left leg over the flames, but the gap was too wide for her 4-foot-11 frame. With a still-seizing hammie, 167 pounds of Karla Leon tumbled onto the fire.

Anthony spun back and rushed to pull his mom from the flames. Then a paramedic arrived, but Karla waved him off. The ambulance could wait; despite the wipeout, she hadn't been this ambulatory in years.

Karla had second-degree burns to her left leg, hand, arm, and back. She wore them like battle scars from a hard-won scuffle with her former self, the one who ate too much, drank to excess, and weighed 219 pounds at her heaviest. By the time she ran her first Spartan race, just three months before the fire incident, she had managed to drop down to 190 pounds. But her battle was still heating up. “My first race ... that made me stronger,” Karla says. “I didn’t want to give people an excuse. I could’ve given up, I was nowhere near my weight-loss goal. I thought this is not going to stop me; this is going to make me stronger.”

Four years earlier, the SoCal eye-care specialist decided she had to make a change. She watched her mom and other people around her get sick from being heavy, and Karla herself started to realize that she was folding inward. She was avoiding social engagements or any place that risked a surprise photo opportunity. She was ashamed of letting herself go.

She tried slimming down on meal replacement shakes for two years, and by the end of 2015, she was at 190 pounds. But she still didn’t feel like her best self. She needed a goal, so she decided to aim for 119 pounds—a full 100 pounds below her 219 peak, and a realistic number for her frame. After that, everything else has purpose. Karla quit drinking—sometimes circling the L.A. suburbs to avoid sitting at home where she’d be tempted—and started meeting with a series of personal trainers.

It was one of her trainers who introduced Karla to Spartan, which she countered with cautious skepticism. “I was really scared,” she says. “There’s *fire* ... and why do we need to take headlamps?” Fortunately, she had the perfect helper. Her son Anthony runs an obstacle training program called OCRLiveFit, and she recruited him to race with her. The pair did the Vegas Super together, and Karla was still recovering from her burns when she set out to earn her first Trifecta. By the end of the year, she’d conquered that, too.

Karla earned her second Trifecta in 2016, and today she’s down to 125 pounds—just 6 pounds shy of her goal of 119. She’s already completed four races this year, and she’s training harder than ever with a combination of OCRLiveFit sessions, SGX workouts, HIIT classes, and 3-mile trail runs on the daily. Even lunch breaks are training opportunities: She leaves her office to run the bleachers at Pasadena City College or to meet up with Anthony for a midday workout.

Karla turned 45 in 2015, and on her birthday, she felt compelled to give back to the Spartan community that gave her a new life. She began recruiting for team Teach Them Young, a free Wednesday obstacle-racing class she still coaches. It keeps kids and teens outside and active. Her young team has 30 members, and parents are trickling in, too. "They don't care if it's cold or hot or anything," says Karla, chuckling. "They never cancel."

They don't know it, but the Spartan kids give something back to Karla, too. In 2015, she told herself she wouldn't drink for a month, and she hit 30 months sober in July. "That's what keeps me accountable," Karla says. "My kids that I train ... you have to be the example. Somebody that someone looks up to."

2 Keys to Karla's Transformation

Karla Leon flipped the switch on her lifestyle and never looked back. Use her experience to guide your own transformation.

1. Embrace the hard way

"Life happens, believe me. During my journey, my wife had spinal surgery and I had to take care of her for a year. Currently, I'm taking care of my mom, who started dialysis. Hard is what makes it great. You can't buy the feeling you have after a workout or a Spartan race. It's something that's earned."

__2. Eat real food __

"I do a carb cycle. I have a high-protein diet, so I do protein on certain days and carbs three times a week, along with fruits and veggies. Proper nutrition is healthy meats, fruits, veggies, and healthy carbs. Never eliminate all carbs."

How Ali Tucker Rebounded from a Last-Place 5K and Lost 80 Pounds



by Dan Roe · 4 months ago



In 1927, a landslide in Vermont's Green Mountains shaved off a slope of Mount Ascutney, exposing a brand new bluff that overlooks the Connecticut River. Upon discovering it, a youth named Huntington Hoisington took his axe to the rock, meaning to carve his name into it. Hoisington's axe slipped and sliced his hand, dripping blood onto the stone—the bluff became known as the Blood Rock.

Almost a century later, en route to the Blood Rock Trail, Ali Tucker had a decision to make. She had just broken her ankle. It was 4 p.m., and a misplaced step in the Appalachian drizzle sent her tumbling to the forest floor with a fractured lower tibia. Then, the 33-year-old former army medic did something unfathomable: She wrapped her swollen, throbbing ankle in a bandage and rejoined the group.



Tucker hiked on the fracture for six full hours before succumbing to the injury. As it turns out, she had her own axe to grind. After leaving the army in 2009, Tucker ballooned to 260 pounds; then, she started racing Spartan and dropped more than 80 pounds to finish the grueling China Agoge and become one of the five women in Spartan history to earn the coveted Delta.

To understand the accomplishment, you must first understand where Tucker started.

In 2006, Tucker enlisted in the army. She was 24 years old, and she wanted to help people. Her brother has muscular dystrophy, and when Tucker was 2 years old, her mom had a surgery for upper arm dystrophy that left her bedridden for Tucker's entire childhood. Her father was in the Navy's experimental diving unit, so Tucker viewed the military as a natural step toward service.

She had to lose weight to enlist, but after she started basic training at Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina, Tucker found that she enjoyed physical challenges. She relished the early morning workouts and PT after breakfast.

After basic, Tucker became a combat medic. But with no group training to keep her motivated, she began to struggle. "I wasn't the best soldier," Tucker says. "I didn't really like working out on my own." She was never deployed, so she skipped the assigned PT sessions. By the time she left the military in 2009, she'd begun putting on weight. Two years later, when she graduated nursing school in Lexington, South Carolina, she topped 260 pounds.

Life started giving her subtle hints. She struggled to find clothes that fit, and she'd grow winded walking up the stairs at the movie theater. Then there were the not-so-subtle hints, like one hurtful episode at her accountant's office. It was tax time in 2012, and a random lady approached her, rested her hand on Tucker's stomach and asked, "How far along are you?"

"I'm not pregnant," Tucker replied.

The stranger replied, matter-of-factly: "You're pregnant."

"It was that awful," Tucker says now. "Someone thinks I'm pregnant."

The embarrassment motivated her to get a gym membership and begin bootcamp classes with plyometrics, TRX programs, and weightlifting. It was like basic all over again—complete with camaraderie and group suffering. In August 2013, the girls at her gym convinced Tucker to run her first 5K. She finished dead last, but felt great. So three months later, she ran a half-marathon.

It was around that time that another friend invited Tucker to volunteer at Spartan's Carolina Beast. Tucker agreed, and it was an eye-opening experience.

"When I saw guys with no legs crawling across the fire, I'm going, 'What's my excuse?'" Tucker says. Another lady, overweight and clearly suffering from health issues, was racing with a O2 tank. "It was inspiring," says Tucker. By overcoming life obstacles, the people she was trained to help were helping her instead. Through their actions, they were offering motivation. And she could repay the favor by answering their call.

When the Beast came back around the following year, she enrolled.

Tucker became a full-blown Spartan warrior. She's one of the only women to finish the grueling China Agoge, she earned her Delta, and she did the Nashville 12 Hour Hurricane Heat just two months after breaking her ankle in Vermont.

What started as a simple effort to lose weight turned into a celebration of her body's hidden power. "I'm addicted to being crazy," she says. She's no longer the woman who finishes last. She's a fighter, and she's training to become faster at the Agoge events while simultaneously learning to survive in the wilderness as a supplement to her strength and cardio fitness.

She's down to 179 pounds, and learning to love her new muscle definition. "I have great biceps," she says. "When I was younger, I didn't want arms like that. But I like seeing the cuts in my arms, showing me all the work that I've done."

If you ask her how she shed the weight and became a Spartan success, she'll tell you it's just like the feeling she had while volunteering at the Carolina Beast in 2013, watching the men with no legs crawl across the fire. Only now, she knows what it feels like herself.

"When you're carrying two 50-pound sandbags up the Great Wall of China and you think you can't do this, you really can," Tucker says. "You can go so much further."

After a Brush with Death, Nick O'Sullivan Found Sobriety through Spartan



by Dan Roe · 3 months ago



At age 22, Nick O'Sullivan had two options: Sober up, or continue a lifestyle that would likely kill him. That's what his mom and pastor told him during an intervention last September. Fortunately, O'Sullivan was listening.

The former collegiate football player's alcohol abuse had gone too far. And it started years ago, with his first drink.

"I was probably in seventh grade," he says. "I was 12 or 13. Ever since the first time I had alcohol, I had a love for it." Growing up in Loomis, California—just outside Sacramento—O'Sullivan was a standout running back and outside linebacker in high school. When he graduated in 2012, he went north to play safety for Oregon's Linfield College, a team brimming with running back talent.



It was a wonderful opportunity, but O'Sullivan's picture of college was more *Blue Mountain State* than *Friday Night Lights*. He began partying with some other teammates, and soon drinking took precedent over everything else. "We'd be hungover on game day and play through it," he says. He was staying up late to get drunk, starting fights at bars, and coming up with excuses to retake tests—a strategy that worked well enough to earn him Bs and Cs but didn't let him live up to his potential.

The summer before his sophomore year, O'Sullivan did a backflip off of a raft and landed in shallow water. He was drunk, and he broke his foot. The injury relegated him to special teams for the fall season, and he responded by drinking even more heavily. "My schedule most days was: Wake up, work out, go to class, meetings, practice, then drink," he says. "I was always looking for an excuse to drink even if I had to make them up in my head. I got a black eye and a concussion during a bar fight and had to play the next day."

Things weren't going well, so he quit the team and moved back to California to enroll at Cuesta College, a community college in San Luis Obispo. "I let my love for alcohol ruin my chance of playing football for one of the best programs in the country, simply because I wanted to drink more than I wanted to play football."

He found an apartment on Craigslist, got a job bussing tables, and kept himself drunk. "Looking back, I was kind of drinking to ... not compete with myself, but I was missing something, and I think there are a lot of people who might be like me with the addictive personality," he says. "I mean, I feel like I never really had it under control, to be honest."

In spring of 2016, O'Sullivan realized how bad his addiction was. He'd moved back home with his mom, but managed to get accepted into Sacramento State University to study economics. He thought it might help to sober up for a bit, but after trying and failing multiple times, he started to realize the depth of his addiction. "I'd clean up for a week or a month, and then think, 'Well, if I'm just gonna clean it up for a month, then one beer isn't going to hurt,'" he says. "And then, one beer is never enough." Instead of quitting like he'd planned, he wound up dabbling with cocaine so he could stay up longer and drink more.

On September 16, 2016, O'Sullivan and a friend went to a concert. They tailgated, and after the show, drove to a bar for more drinks. "I was hammered," he says. "I decided to get back in my car and drive home, only to end up rolling my truck. God can only tell you how I was able to walk out of that crash, and why my friend decided to stay at the bar and not come with me."

The intervention with his mom and pastor followed the crash, and in the days afterward, O'Sullivan sulked about the house, taking life slowly and struggling not to fixate on the emptiness he felt in the wake of nearly killing himself. Then one night, while watching *American Ninja Warrior* at home with his mom, she said, "You've got to do something like that."

It could have been an offhanded comment. But O'Sullivan considered it seriously. He had heard a friend rave about a Spartan Race, and something seemed to fall into place. He looked up the next race in his area and signed up. He had a new target. "That would be the way to keep my mind off drinking," he says.

O'Sullivan dove deep into training. He was competing against himself again—but this time, it was it was a race to the top instead of the bottom. He'd run trails through the foothills below the Sierra Nevadas, and he recruited friends to join him at the Sacramento Super in November. On race day, surrounded by friends and with his father in attendance, O'Sullivan blitzed the course with the tenacity of an NCAA safety, and he finished with a sense of accomplishment that felt better than any night out.

"The feeling that you get is a hundred times better than any drunk or any high," he says. Today, O'Sullivan is stronger and more cut than he's ever been, having integrated running into the intense lifting routines of his football days. And now, he has a new goal: He's aiming to make the Spartan Pro Team after he graduates college in December. He's also inspired his father, a former Cal Poly football player, to get back into fitness. The father-son team finished a triathlon together in July.

O'Sullivan's journey through addiction isn't without temptation. "It's really not easy to quit cold turkey," he says. "It's going to be an everyday battle." Still, for personalities like his, the key to staying sober could be getting hooked on something else. "I just decided to crave training and preparing for Spartan races rather than craving for that next drink," he says. "It's a lot more fun to do this than a night of partying."

What the Pima Indians Can Teach Us about VO2 Max



by Dan Roe · 2 weeks ago



DTK541 Pima Indians, Ho-Dutch and his wife, in front of their native dwelling, or 'Kan', Pima, Arizona, ca.1900

Here's a case study for you: Two hundred years ago, the Pima Indians of Mexico lived on the beans, corn, and squash they grew themselves in the Gila River valley. Their farmer lifestyles were active and healthy, and it's likely that they had killer VO2 max scores, indicating that their body's utilized oxygen efficiently.

Then in 1853, the United States acquired some of the Pima land through the Gadsden Purchase, and the tribe was split on the U.S.-Mexico border, putting half of the Pimas in what is now southeastern Arizona. The two Pima worlds diverged as white settlers diverted water away from the American Pimas' land, and soon their farming lifestyle gave way to more sedentary practices. By 1959, the Arizona's Pimas were living on a reservation, eating the same fat-filled diets as their new neighbors.

It's easy to recognize the Pima's loss in this situation. But as a lesson in human health, the tragedy offers a critical lesson on the broad impact of lifestyle. By studying the Arizona Pimas, researchers have come to understand that general activity—or more specifically, VO₂ max, which measures how well your body processes O₂ during maximal exercise—can have a huge impact on your ability to fight off disease as you grow older. By using exercise to keep your VO₂ max high, you can dramatically increase your “healthspan,” or the number of healthy years you have on this planet.

The Pima Tribe and Diabetes

In 1904, there was only one documented case of diabetes among the entire tribe of Pimas. In 1937, there were 21, and by 1965, with their previously active farming lifestyles fully eroded, the Pimas had developed the highest rate of type 2 diabetes *ever recorded*: Half of adults over 35 had developed the disease.

This is a canary in the coal mine for global public health, says Frank Booth, Ph.D., a University of Missouri biomedical researcher. “What is happening en masse is people are getting overweight and physically inactive, and that leads to all types of inactivity-related chronic diseases,” he says. “About 1 percent of the [American] population had type 2 diabetes in 1970; now we're approaching 10 percent.” According to the CDC, if something doesn't change, one in three Americans will acquire the disease by 2050.

And diabetes isn't the only rising health concern. Not by a long shot. By looking at previously unanalyzed epidemiological data dating back to the 1970s, Booth discovered strong associations between inactivity and the early onset of 35 chronic conditions—including depression, anxiety, and hypertension. And VO2 max turns out to be the critical link. In the most simple terms, this means that the more oxygen you can pump through your muscles, the likelier you are to grow old without the burden of a chronic disease.

Why VO2 max? “No one knows,” Booth says. It's complicated, because analyzing maximal oxygen consumption means following the oxygen through the mouth, throat, lungs, blood-brain barrier, pulmonary circulation, skeletal muscle, and so on. But suffice it to say that when VO2 max drops below 43 milligrams (mg) per kilogram (kg) in men and 35 in women, the hardware inside your body starts to break down from lack of oxygen.

How to Test Your VO2 Max

A proper VO2 max test involves running on a treadmill to the point of exhaustion with what looks like a gas mask strapped to you face. Some high-end gyms offer the service, but it can cost \$100 to \$250. Alternately, fitness tracking devices from Garmin, Fitbit, and Jabra are starting to put VO2 max algorithms in their devices, which allow you to periodically test your body's ability to process oxygen so you can track changes over time.

For an alternate method, you can also use an [online calculator](#) that approximates your VO2 max based on your run time. To reach the optimal level (again—43 mg/kg for men and 35 mg/kg in women), men should aim to hit a one-mile run time of 6:40, and women should aim for 8:01.

If you're not currently able to hit those times, here are two pieces of good news: One, you can get there by working out, and two, it's never too late to start.

How to Increase Your VO2 Max

The trick is to add more cardio, and ideally, hard cardio, into your weekly routine. “You want to be above your aerobic threshold, or 60 to 70 percent of your VO2 max [or maximal effort],” Booth says. Thanks to what we know about high-intensity interval training (HIIT), a daily hardcore sweat session (like a [Spartan WOD](#) workout) of just 16 minutes can significantly raise VO2 max. And as you age and your ability to hit high-intensity workouts declines, you can add more time to maintain your VO2 max.



While intense cardio is the most efficient method, even a brisk walk can yield significant benefits: Copenhagen researchers found that decreasing someone's daily step count from 10,501 to 1,344 each day decreased VO2 max by 7 percent. Reverse those step-count numbers, and you should see a dramatic improvement in VO2 max.

The Power to Change

Researchers re-ran the Pima Indians study in 2006, this time including the Mexican Pima, who hadn't given up their daily farming rituals or their fruit-and-vegetable-based diets. The results were predictable: The Mexican Pima had a mere 6.9 percent rate of type 2 diabetes, while their American counterparts had a 38 percent rate. The difference was more than five-fold.

The Arizona Pima were forced into confines that fundamentally shortened their lifespans and led to an earlier onset of chronic disease. Is that just? Not at all. But we can all learn from what happens when regular movement falls out of the daily routine.

8 Ways to Be the Best Bike Shop Customer—and 3 Ways to Drive Your Mechanic Nuts

OCTOBER 12, 2017 BY DAN ROE



PEOPLEIMAGES

Local **bike shops** do a lot more than sell and service bikes. Many organize community rides, help with outreach programs to get kids on bikes, and even offer an oasis within the concrete jungle for weary cyclists in search of a drivetrain rebuild and some good conversation.

Most bike shops also operate on thin profit margins and have lost significant sales to online shopping—which is why they love repeat and friendly customers. If you can become one of those customers, there are plenty of potential perks beyond just knowing you've helped the store: discounted service, the “friend” price on retail goods, and most importantly, the hard-won status of becoming part of the shop itself.

To find out how you can get the most out of your shop, we asked bike shop owners, **bike mechanics**, and sales associates at shops across the country what makes a great customer—and what you should never, ever do. (*Want to stay on top of the latest cycling news? Subscribe to [our newsletter!](#)*)

Here's what the best bike shop customers do:

Listen to the mechanic.

“A good customer is somebody who enjoys riding their bike and cares about it, but also will take recommendations, and is aware there may be things they don't know about their bike.”

Robin Graven-Milme, Brand New Bikes, Brooklyn, New York

And maybe even do a little research first.

“People who research ahead of time, and who come into the shop knowing some things about the model they want and what kind of riding they want to do, are better to work with. Our customers are always surprising us with how much they know about bikes.”

Joe Doebele, Joe Bike, Portland, Oregon

RELATED: [6 Things Bike Mechanics Wish You'd Do to Your Bike](#)

Show interest by asking questions.

“My favorite customers are ones who aren't afraid to ask the dumb questions and want to listen to what I have to say even when they already know what the answer is.”

Nathan Hake, Beer City Bicycles, Woodfin, North Carolina

Stay open-minded.

“A good customer comes in with an open mind and understands we're trying to work with them to put them on a bike, so they can have a great day.”

Jordan Cullen, Bicycle Chain, Roseville, Minnesota

Provide occasional refreshment—like Mark!

“Great customers are the ones who bring us food and beer. For real: Mark is a guy who comes in every Friday and drops off 24 beers, every Friday afternoon. Good dude, never asks for a discount, always drops off beer. We have other regulars who bring coffee or doughnuts, so I have to say ‘people who bring food!’ Those are our favorites.”

John Wilkinson. CYCLEX. Columbia. Missouri

Value the shop's role in the community.

“We appreciate people who understand how the bike shop is part of the community. I think the best customers go to the best shops because they understand the relationship between the shop and the neighborhood.”

Seamus M. O'Neill, Seamus Bike Shop, San Diego, California

Respect the calendar.

“If you don't shop immediately at opening time and don't show up immediately before close and remember the bike shop is open year-round, you'll get fantastic service in January and December. Spreading out your bike needs all year is critical for us; we don't depend on roadies during the summer but we do depend on commuters through the winter.”

Luke Allumbaugh, JRA Bike Shop, Seattle, Washington

Just come in at all!

“What makes a really great customer is—even if they don't come in and drop several grand—just seeing someone progress in the sport. They come in wanting to do a charity ride or start riding to work. Then you see them six months later and down 15 pounds, and they're saying, ‘What's the next step? What's the next bicycle?’”

Jim Kersten, Edgebrook Cycle, Chicago, Illinois

And what they'd love you to cut out:

Zero trust in the mechanic's expertise.

“The hardest customers are the ones that think they know everything and argue with me about stuff, whether it's a repair or buying a bike.”

Nathan Hake, Beer City Bicycles, Woodfin, North Carolina

“I don't like when someone second-guesses something I'm telling them because they read something on a forum.”

Jim Kersten, Edgebrook Cycle, Chicago, Illinois

Come in with no patience.

“The biggest problem customers are people that are relatively aggressive on time frames. If you're backed up a week, they think they're the most important person in the world (and should be prioritized).”

Nathan Phelps, Peddler Bike Shop, Southaven, Mississippi

“It's frustrating when someone comes in with a maintenance thing as if they want a whole new bike even if it's a really small fix. It's like they're talking to us and not hearing what we can do to help.”

Jennifer Quijada, Single Track Bikes, Flagstaff, Arizona

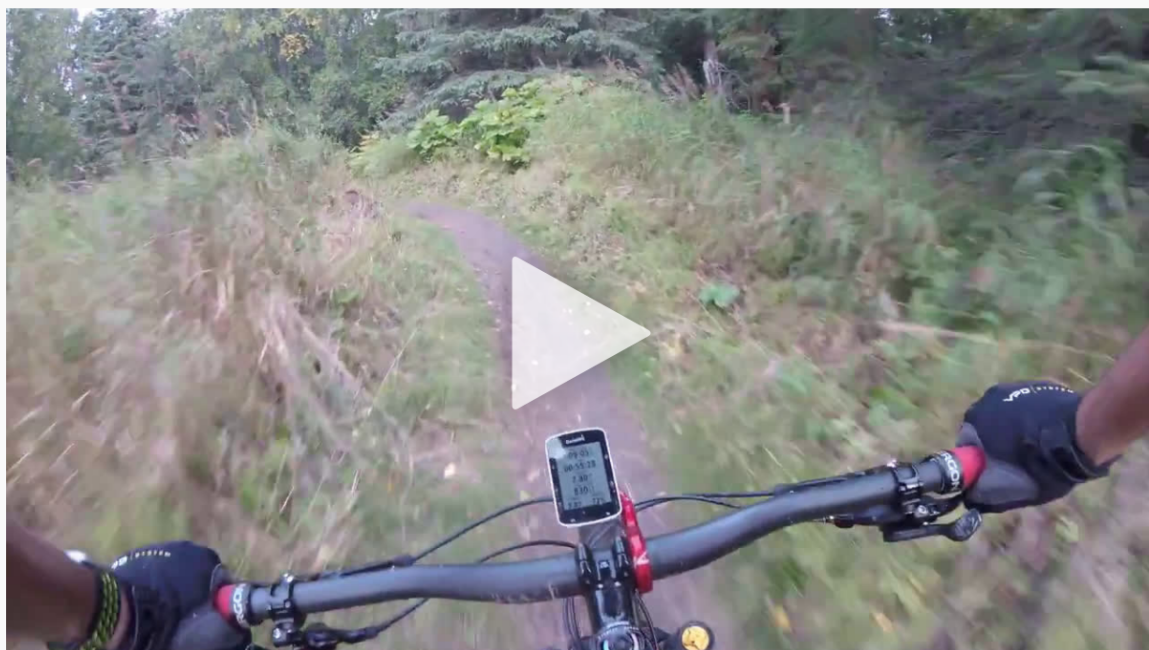
And the worst—expect hours of help and advice, only to buy online.

“If a customer comes in and all they do is fish for information for hours and they're only doing it to buy the stuff online, we tend to not give as good of service because we feel like they're just abusing us by scanning the QR code on their phone and not coming back to buy anything.”

Warren Janzen, Cookeville Bicycles, Cookeville, Tennessee

Watch in Terror as This Black Bear Blocks a Mountain Biker's Trail

SEPTEMBER 14, 2017 BY DAN ROE



Black bears aren't really up to speed on mountain bike etiquette. [One Reddit user](#) found that out the hard way when he rolled around a blind corner to find a lone black bear sitting in the middle of a trail in Kincaid Park, Alaska.

The video, posted Tuesday, shows the surprised rider locking up the brakes of his [Specialized S-Works Stumpjumper](#) and dumping the bike into the brush. A [second video](#) from the same chest-mounted GoPro shows the rider regaining his footing, slowly backing away from the bear, and finally remounting, uttering “fuck a duck” as he leaves the bear’s unexpected company.

“Dragged my bike backwards while watching the bear,” the cyclist wrote in his post. “Got around the corner and sprinted. It couldn’t have cared less about me. I’ve never felt so insignificant and been glad about it.”

RELATED: Pro Cyclist Crashes into Bear on Training Ride

Black bear encounters are a growing concern in Alaska as more singletrack trails open in public parks, according to a [column in the *Alaska Dispatch News*](#). The creatures are generally less aggressive than brown bears, but because of Kincaid Park’s high black bear population, encounters and attacks have become more common.

Alaska saw two fatal black bear maulings within 48 hours of each other this summer, and a cyclist survived a brown bear mauling in Eagle River in June. The problem, according to Alaska Department of Fish and Game Information Officer Riley Woodford, is that mountain bikers move fast and make very little noise, which the bears don’t appreciate.

“Bears hate surprise,” Woodford says. “The vast majority of bear attacks are because somebody surprised a bear and it responded in a defensive matter.” As trails encroach on bear territory—between dens and salmon-spawning rivers, for instance—Woodford says the risk of an encounter only increases. (*Sun is also a risk when riding outdoors. Pick up some [All Good Sunscreen](#) from Rodale to keep yourself protected.*)

So how do mountain bikers, who move way faster than hikers or horseback riders, avoid an unwanted rendezvous? Follow the signs posted by fish and game departments that alert trail users to nearby bear populations, Woodford says. Don’t charge around blind corners, [ride in a group](#), and know that bear encounters are more likely at dawn and dusk than at midday.

Woodford also advises cyclists to carry bear spray on their person, not their bike, so it's readily available if a confrontation occurs. "Make noise in the woods," Woodford says. The man in the video said he was carrying a bear bell, but noted that the smooth trail surface rendered it ineffective.

One final survival tip: Make sure the bear knows you're not food.

"If all of the sudden you hit the brakes and you're very close to a bear that's looking at you, you should back away and talk to the bear," Woodford says. "The human voice is very distinct. You want the bear to know you're a person, you're not going to hurt it, and you're leaving. Walk backwards talking to the bear. Say, 'Hey bear, we're all good here'"

The Ultimate Guide To At-Home Lower Body Recovery

Four effective and affordable ways to heal those legs and get back out there.



Published on September 23, 2017

Written by Dan Roe

There's no way around it: If you're really getting after your workouts, you're going to be sore. And that's okay. [New research](#) indicates that you can hit two to three lower body resistance training sessions within a week of daily running, provided you space them out and allow adequate recovery between each. Finding time for lower body recovery (i.e. sit there and exist) can be difficult, though. And chances are you're not able to shell out money for bi-weekly massages.

Fortunately, you can adequately recover from the comfort of your own home. We tapped Daniel Giordano, a New York-based physical therapist, and Kyle Stull, a physical therapist at the National Academy of Sports Medicine, to learn effective and affordable ways to approach lower body recovery.

Foam rolling

Invest in a foam roller. Foam rolling stands as the most effective DIY method of myofascial release you can do. Fascia are a web of connective tissues which surround muscle and bone. They tend to adhere to one another when stressed. And the resulting fascial knots are painful.

“What foam rolling does is increase blood flow back to the sore area,” Giordano says. “If increasing and promoting oxygen and blood flow speed up recovery, it also helps break up any adhesions.”

But how do you get the most benefit out of your foam roller? For lower body recovery, Stull recommends rollers with grid-like patterns to help channel bloodflow to the area. “Hold pressure to reduce tension in a muscle, whenever you’re rolling and it hurts, stop and hold pressure on the painful spot for 30 to 60 seconds,” Stull says.

Then, you can slowly roll along the muscle fiber lines (up and down the quadricep, for instance), rolling up and down at approximately one inch per second. Last, Stull says you can switch direction to roll perpendicular to the fibers (i.e. across the quadricep) to break up the adhesions across the sliding surfaces of the muscle.

Cold immersion

Also known as ice bathing, this arguably masochistic experience involves submerging yourself in a 40-degree cold tub for 20 minutes. Not convinced? You’re not alone; the benefits of this high school track coach favorite have been disputed for some time, but that doesn’t mean it can’t work for you.

“Cold immersion stops the recovery process by cooling down your core body temperature, and you can do it post-workout to cut down on swelling,” Giordano says. “Ideally you’d foam roll prior and then jump in.”

Stull is equally agnostic on cold immersion, although he cautions that it can do more harm than good if done incorrectly. "More than 20 minutes may lead to nerve damage," he says. "If it's something mentally that an athlete identifies with, I wouldn't tell someone who loves an ice bath to stop ice bathing, nor would I make somebody who hates it take an ice bath."

If you're super sore and hankering to try it for yourself, fill your bathtub with a three to five pound bag of ice and cold water. Then, lower yourself in. Kudos if you make it the full 20 minutes.

Compression clothing

Similar to ice bathing, the research on compression is positive yet dubious. Stull recognizes compression socks and sleeves as "pretty valuable in the realm of helping speed up circulation after exercise," which he says is key to optimal recovery. "If that's all they have access to and there's no time to foam roll, it's better than nothing," Stull says.

If you're going out shopping for compression calf sleeves or socks, make sure they're not too tight and cutting off circulation. That would be equal parts dangerous and counterintuitive to your lower body recovery. Giordano recommends the two finger rule: If you can't fit two fingers between the sleeve or sock and your skin, it's too tight.

Elevation

This one is painfully simple and, best of all, completely free. Put a mat down so the long end is up against a wall and lie down on your back. Then pivot 90 degrees so your legs are straight up against the wall.

"Elevate your legs above your heart and gravity will help decrease any swelling," Giordano says. "Gravity also helps blood flow. So if your legs really hurt, go lie down with your feet in the air."

Giordano offers one word of caution, though. Don't get up too fast. "There's a thing called orthostatic hypotension. That basically means dropping your blood pressure post-exercise after standing up too fast." So take it easy on the way up, Giordano says. You'll feel better in no time.

Online stories (soon-to-be published)

The following are three soon-to-be-published online-only stories I wrote during the research period: two for Spartan Race, and one for RootsRated.

Spartan Race

Hed: Introducing The Ultimate Spartan Spotify Training Playlist

Dek: These 100 songs are getting Spartans everywhere amped to crush their workouts

There's something rhythmic about a really good workout. The kick-drum staccato of an explosive set of burpees; the deep squats that feel like heavy bass beats; the post-workout stretches that seem as if your muscles are crying tears of happiness (*"Everybody hurts....sometimes"*).

For most of us, music is an integral component of the Spartan training session, and tangled headphones are staples in our always-ready gym bags. And why not? [Research indicates](#) that although we may go into an intense workout with the best intentions, our attitude toward the activity improves with musical motivation, which increases our likelihood of grinding out a tough training regime.

So what makes the ultimate Spartan playlist? To democratize the lineup, we asked the folks at Spotify to tally up the top 100 songs in user-generated playlists with "Spartan" in the title. What follows are the beats bumping in the headphones of America's Spartan racers, ranked in order of streams. Queue up this badass playlist to get strong in Spartan company.

1. Logic - 1-800-273-8255
2. Lil Uzi Vert - XO TOUR Llif3

3. Post Malone - Congratulations
4. Imagine Dragons - Believer
5. 21 Savage - Bank Account
6. Travis Scott - Butterfly Effect
7. Kendrick Lamar - HUMBLE.
8. Kendrick Lamar - DNA.
9. António Santos - Gwiyomi
10. Sin Shake Sin - Can't Go to Hell
11. Post Malone - Go Flex
12. Juhn - Ahora Me Llama (Remix) [feat. Bryant Myers, Anonimus, Noriel, Brytiago & MikyWoodz]
13. Future - Mask Off
14. Ariana Grande - One Last Time
15. Willy William, J Balvin - Mi Gente
16. XXXTENTACION - Look At Me!
17. Ed Sheeran - Shape of You
18. French Montana - Unforgettable
19. Khalid - Location
20. Travis Scott - goosebumps
21. Daddy Yankee,Luis Fonsi - Despacito - Remix
22. Eminem - 'Till I Collapse
23. Migos - Slippery (feat. Gucci Mane)
24. Troy,Gabriella - Gotta Go My Own Way - From "High School Musical 2"

25. Imagine Dragons - Thunder
26. Charlie Puth - Attention
27. Childish Gambino - Redbone
28. Eminem - Lose Yourself - Soundtrack Version
29. Kyle - iSpy (feat. Lil Yachty)
30. Imagine Dragons - Radioactive
31. The White Stripes - Seven Nation Army
32. Linkin Park - In The End
33. Tee Grizzley - First Day Out
34. Macklemore - Glorious (feat. Skylar Grey)
35. Playboi Carti - Magnolia
36. Three Days Grace - Animal I Have Become
37. Khalid - Young Dumb & Broke
38. Farruko - Krippy Kush
39. Calvin Harris - Feels
40. A Boogie Wit da Hoodie, Kodak Black - Drowning (feat. Kodak Black)
41. Fall Out Boy - Centuries
42. Lil Uzi Vert - Erase Your Social
43. Marshmello - Silence
44. Eminem - Rap God
45. Metallica - Enter Sandman
46. DJ Khaled - I'm the One
47. DJ Khaled, Rihanna - Wild Thoughts

48. Post Malone - White Iverson
49. The Weeknd - Starboy
50. Linkin Park - What I've Done
51. Twenty One Pilots - Heathens
52. Papa Roach - Last Resort
53. Revol,Ozuna,Cosculluela - Me Ama Me Odia
54. Imagine Dragons - Warriors
55. Bad Bunny - Soy Peor
56. Liam Payne - Strip That Down
57. Rae Sremmurd - Swang
58. The Chainsmokers,Coldplay - Something Just Like This
59. Bruno Mars - That's What I Like
60. Eurythmics - Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) - Remastered
61. Justin Quiles - Si Ella Quisiera
62. Imagine Dragons - Demons
63. Migos - Bad and Boujee (feat. Lil Uzi Vert)
64. Big Sean - Bounce Back
65. Kid Cudi - Pursuit Of Happiness (nightmare)
66. System Of A Down - Chop Suey!
67. Twenty One Pilots - Stressed Out
68. Cosculluela - Manicomio
69. Linkin Park - Numb
70. Ozuna,Chris Jeday,J Balvin - Ahora Dice

71. DMX - X Gon' Give It To Ya
72. Rvssian - Privado
73. Marco Beltrami - Old Man Logan
74. Kanye West - Stronger
75. 2 Chainz - 0.166666666666667
76. Marco Beltrami - Goodnight Moon
77. Marco Beltrami - Don't Be What They Made You
78. Farruko,Bad Bunny,Ozuna - Diles (feat. Arcangel, Nengo Flow, Dj Luian & Mambo Kings)
79. AC/DC - Back In Black
80. Migos - T-Shirt
81. Mueka - DM - Remix
82. Lil Uzi Vert - You Was Right
83. Maluma - Cuatro Babys
84. GoldLink - Crew
85. Skillet - Feel Invincible
86. Lil Uzi Vert - Money Longer
87. Linkin Park - Faint
88. Childish Gambino - IV. Sweatpants
89. Jowell & Randy,J Balvin - Bonita
90. The Chainsmokers - Closer
91. OneRepublic - Counting Stars
92. The Weeknd - I Feel It Coming

93. AC/DC, Oz Rocks - Highway to Hell
94. Skillet - Monster
95. Three Days Grace - Riot
96. Fort Minor - Remember The Name (feat. Styles Of Beyond)
97. Kodak Black - Tunnel Vision
98. Guns N' Roses - Welcome To The Jungle
99. Drake - Portland
100. Drake - Passionfruit

Spartan

Hed: What Ancient Spartans Can Teach Us About Lifelong Fitness

Dek: Do these six things with the conviction of a Spartan warrior to get old testament fit

You've done the Spartan Race, you've shouted the "Aroo!" chant, but how much do you know about the ancient Greek warriors for whom this obstacle course race owes its namesake?

The original Spartans were a highly organized ancient Greek city-state in which all men trained for and served in the military for the entirety of their able-bodied lives. An egalitarian ethic united the small and potent fighting force which, with the help of the Athenian navy, staved off an onslaught from the Persian empire and saved an empire from collapse.

To train and live as a Spartan was unforgiving, but we combed the literature and talked to historians to find the six ways you can implement the Spartan lifestyle in your training and daily routine to become fitter and more disciplined than ever.

Compete

Ancient Spartans played no games about the games they played; Spartiates (male Spartans) dominated the Olympic Games for more than 100 years, winning 33 of 66 recorded events between 776 and 680 B.C., according to historical record. And Kyniska, a Spartan woman, was the first female victor at Olympia in the marquee four-horse chariot race, which she won in 396 and 392 B.C. But the most ferocious competition occurred amongst the Spartans themselves, who used sport to condition their minds and bodies for battle.

There was Sphairomachia, or “battle ball,” an epic game of keepaway during which two teams of 15 lined up facing a ball and, upon the starter’s signal, sprinted toward the ball in a full-contact, no-holds-barred frenzy that ended when time was called. No goals, no fouls, just keep the ball at all costs. Imagine an referee-less NFL where the ball gets loose every play and you get the gist.

If sphairomachia doesn’t sound brutalist enough, enter Platanistas (“plane-tree grove,” literally translated). The game is basically sumo wrestling with no rules: Two teams cross bridges on opposite sides of a small island and try to shove each other into the water. Of

the tactics, the ancient Greek geographer Pausanias wrote, “In fighting they strike, and kick, and bite, and gouge each other’s eyes out. Thus they fight man against man.”

We’re not suggesting you rearrange your neighbor’s face in the interest of sport, but challenging your training partner to a friendly burpee competition could inject some intensity into your workout. If you’re a lone wolf, try something like the [Bring Sally Up push-up challenge](#) for an added stimulus.

Keep Good Company

The Spartan poet Tyrtaeus famously said that speed, strength and agility were all less important than stamina, grit, endurance, and courage. More Spartans died in retreat—of their own hand, due to the shame and exile associated with cowardice—than in battle, according to the ancient Greek philosopher and historian Xenophon. The movie *300* is accurate in depicting Spartans as more willing to fight to the death than the soldiers of other Greek city-states, although in real life, the Spartan messenger who King Leonidas sent back to Sparta later killed himself over the implication that anyone who survived the Battle of Thermopylae had retreated rather than fought, historian Paul A. Rahe wrote in *The Spartan Regime*.

“After a defeat in battle, the Spartans were more likely to mourn the living than the dead,” Rahe wrote. Thus anyone who survived a defeat, among other public embarrassments, was not allowed to exercise with the rest of the Spartans.

For the most explosive gains, make like King Leonidas and surround yourself with workout partners who are just as committed as you.

Eat simple

Less austere city-states such as Athens ate any and every delicacy they could get their hands on. “We know that they’d have all sorts of crazy delicacies,” says Spartan historian James Lloyd. “They’d have wine from foreign places which they’d shipped in, they’d have eals and these sorts of things.”

Not in Sparta. The “Spartan breakfast,” Lloyd says, was a piece of bread dipped in wine. We’re not sure whether they even had a lunch, and for dinner, they dined in communal mess halls, in part because Lycurgus—the Spartan leader responsible for instituting strict social policies—thought food intake should be regulated to keep warriors lean, and also because anyone who drank too much wine at dinner would have to stumble home in the dark and be shamed for getting drunk.

Nor was the fare particularly decadent. About the grain-based diet, non-Spartan Greeks would joke, “I can see why they’re so willing to die, given what sort of food they have to eat,” notes University of Cambridge professor of Greek culture Paul Cartledge. Lloyd says they’d start with bread or a “Spartan broth,” which Athenians said was horrible, and Cartledge notes the presence of a bloody pork dish called haimatia. They’d also cook

wheat flour in oil and eat it in a bay leaf, Lloyd says. There were no seconds; as with all aspects of Spartan society, everyone was on equal footing.

None of this is to say you should hate the food you eat, but keeping a simple and consistent diet will go a long way toward achieving your fitness goals.

Dance

Song and dance permeated Spartan culture, and the choral dances were rigorous and loud. “It’s not just the same as running and jumping; dancing was a key form of exercise in the Greek world as well,” Lloyd says.

The Pyrrhic Dance was a traditional Greek war dance that simulated combat conditions by requiring two dancers to mimic battle maneuvers like “retreating, springing up, crouching, attacking, thrusting the lance and shooting the arrow,” according to [Cambridge historian H. Michell](#). During the first phase of the agoge, which began at age seven, Spartan boys learned to dance with shield and spear to become acquainted with their weapons.

Many of the principles of [Pyrrhic Dance](#) apply to plyometrics—quick steps, staying light on one’s feet—so getting good with a jump rope would have a similar effect, minus the 15-pound shield and spear.

Find Comfort In Discomfort

People say uncomfortable shoes are the worst. Those people weren't ancient Spartans, because ancient Spartans prohibited young boys from wearing shoes; Lycurgus thought it would condition their feet to sprint up and down the mountains of Laconia.

Xenophon wrote that during the agoge, Spartan boys received just one cloak to wear year-round, because Lycurgus thought shivering through the winter would train their bodies to regulate temperature more effectively. And in their free time, it was encouraged for adults to hunt wild boars in the Taygetos mountains, "a quite terrifying prey which was hunted with spears on foot," Cartledge says.

Such seemingly unnecessary hardships were seen as necessary to be successful in battle, so don't sweat the next time a workout or Spartan Race thrusts you out of your comfort zone; think like a Spartan and let the pain make you stronger.

Never quit

Spartan men began training for military service at age 7 and retired at 60, assuming they lived that long (Spartan women didn't go to war, but maintained meticulous fitness regimes of running and wrestling to bear stronger offspring). Training and fitness was an unquestionable constant, even near the bitter end.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote that during the Battle of Thermopylae, a Persian spy observed King Leonidas and his men exercising and combing their hair the day before the final fight, when King Xerxes' Persian hordes overran and killed every Spartan warrior. Leonidas knew his fate, and thus Herodotus writes that the Persian spy became confused; why would a dead man care to continue exercise and maintenance of his body?

“It captures something very Spartan,” Lloyd says. “It’s a very Spartan attitude to war—that even then, the correct thing to be doing was exercising the body, and that was the continual concern for a Spartan.”

To live like a true Spartan is to train not for a single race or competition, but to train always, to be prepared for any and every circumstance in which sound mind and body are required.

RootsRated

How to Not Freeze While Running This Winter



[Caption: Don't let a little cold and snowy weather stop you from running during the winter.]

When the first winter snow blankets your city, there's a short list of things you may feel inclined to do: brew hot cocoa, bake cookies, make a fire, or otherwise embrace the great (and heated) indoors. But what about a run? Just because it's winter doesn't mean all of your hard work over the summer has to go to waste.

Hear us out. The once-bustling sidewalks, parkways, and multi-use trails of our Northern cities tend to fall silent when snow, wind, and freezing temperatures blow into town. This leaves the intrepid all-weather runner with a tranquil urban playground ripe for boundless exploration and enjoyment.

Ready to ditch the treadmill this winter and take back your favorite routes? Good! We talked to winter running experts from three insanely chilly cities to find out how anyone can thrive in cold.

1. Dress for the Weather



[Caption: If you properly layer your clothing, you won't have to worry about being cold.]

You're not going to have any fun if you're freezing the whole time. Apparel is crucial (or at least the ability to adjust your clothing to the condition). Jonathan Griffiths is the owner of Rochester Running Company in Rochester, New York, and an outfitter of the city's unwavering winter running crowd.

“Running in Rochester in the wintertime is a different experience because of the amount of snow we get each year,” Griffiths says. (In case you were wondering, it's about [99 inches, on average](#).) “The best way to start is layering because you can always remove clothes if you wear too much.”

Griffiths recommends starting with a solid base layer to be worn under everything else, so make sure the material feels comfortable up against your skin. Wool is a common base layer fabric for its ability to keep you warm dry or wet, and don a set of base layer tights under your normal tights or pants on the coldest of days.

Next, scope out an outer shell jacket and a pair of shield pants or tights, which sales associate Megan Dederling of Minneapolis' Mill City Running says is imperative in regulating your body temperature in the cold. “The most important thing is probably having a good tight or shield pant that blocks the wind,” she says. “A lot of times those will be loose enough to where you can wear a pair of regular running tights. Same thing with a jacket that cuts the wind.”

If conditions are dry and cool but not freezing, Griffiths says runners can swap an outer shell for a long-sleeved shirt to wear over the base layer.

With the torso and extremities covered, you'll want to make sure your feet are up for the task. Dederling recommends wool socks that are thicker than traditional running socks and excel at wicking moisture while keeping your toes cozy. And if your fingers get cold before the rest of your body, go with mittens over gloves. "Mittens are better because you can keep your fingers together," Dederling says. "A lot of running mittens will have a shield to be wind-resistant—in the winter, that can make a huge difference."

And, like mother always told you, you lose a lot of body heat through your head, so make sure you've got a warm hat that covers your ears. In fact, if you're going to run all winter, Griffiths says you should be prepared to cover all of the skin on your body. "Wearing something that goes over your wrist and ankles and having some kind of head wear is really important," he says. "Something scarf-like around your neck is usually advantageous if you're trying to keep warm."

2. Gear Up



[Caption: Add a few key pieces of gear to your routine to have many successful winter runs.]

Warm clothes can keep you going, but you'll be flailing about in the dark if you don't make some simple yet crucial adjustments to your gear.

“We sell a lot of Yaktrax - you can put them on the bottom of any shoe. Those help with running in the snow and ice because they have spikes and wire coils for traction,”

Dedering says. Some winter-specific running shoes have extra sticky outsoles to keep you upright on the slick spots. “The material acts as a putty once it hits an ice patch,”

Dedering says of the shoe.

You can't avoid what you can't see, which is why Griffiths recommends wearing a headlamp over your hat if you're going out in the dark. And as sundown creeps earlier and earlier, being seen by drivers is super important.

“More and more clothing is having reflective elements built in,” Griffiths says, adding that having reflective tights, pants, or shoes increase your chances of being seen by showing drivers you're a bipedal moving object

3. Get Hyped



[Caption: Winter running can be a lot of fun!]

The difference between a frozen-over nightmare and a winter wonderland is all about perspective, and if you've got the right mindset, the cold and snow can actually enhance the experience. "I personally enjoy winter running just because it almost turns your city into a bit of a trail without going too far," Griffiths says. "It makes the terrain a lot more complex when you have snow on the ground."

Brian Croci leads a Tuesday night running group from Hansons Running Shop in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, near Detroit. He says there's strength in numbers. "Our group is pretty good," Croci says. "If it's in the 20s and it's still decent out and there's no terrible windchill, we still get a good little turnout."

Croci says his wife has a proven trick to make it out the door each day. "She tells herself, 'I'm only going to go out and run 10 minutes,' and once she's out and going for a few minutes, she's going to keep going," he says.

Save some personal motivators, like your favorite pump-up song or a running movie, for the worst days. Springsteen's *Born to Run* coupled with running flick *Chariots of Fire* should do the trick.

4. Your Running Form



[Caption: No more excuses - get out there!]

You're standing at the door sweating through all these layers, physically and mentally primed to lay down a PR in six inches of snow. Before you go, remember the rules of running in the dark, snow, and ice.

“Take shorter strides if you can't see, especially if you're running over sidewalk and it's dark out,” Croci says. “Exaggerate your leg lift so you're not catching a little patch of concrete, and obviously, bring lights, headlamps, or anything for you to be seen as well as allowing you to see.”

Is there ever a situation when you absolutely shouldn't run outside? Of course - be smart about the weather and don't let yourself get caught out in a dangerous situation. Croci says that runners who are looking to complete high-quality aerobic and anaerobic workouts might be better off on a treadmill or indoor track, as poor conditions could hamstring your workout (and because flat-out sprinting over ice is never a good idea).

Otherwise, lace up and get out there!

Killed story

This is the draft of a story that went through two edits with Tonic, but was ultimately killed because the editor was too busy to continue working on it at the time.

*Tonic***Hed: Being Afraid Of Your Body's Fight-Or-Flight Stress Response Is Making You Anxious**

Dek: Running can help you form a positive association with the anxiety symptoms you tend to avoid

In the US alone, nearly [one in five adults](#) report having some sort of anxiety disorder, and we filled 48.5 million Xanax prescriptions in 2013 alone, according to [PsychCentral](#). And although benzodiazepines like Xanax can insulate us from the stressors that exacerbate anxiety disorders, [drug misuse research](#) indicates that people are taking the nation's most popular psychotropic for less severe bouts of anxiety that don't actually require medication. For them, there may be good reason to explore more natural methods of lowering anxiety. A growing body of research indicates that running can treat anxiety symptoms just as effectively by improving our relationship with our evolutionary fight-or-flight stress response.

The body's fight-or-flight response provided our ancestors with the evolutionary advantage of evading predators by preparing us for danger when we got stressed. A modern person's fear of public speaking, for instance, might trigger the same fight-or-

flight symptoms — rapid heart rate, heavy breathing and a faint or dizzy feeling — but University of Texas Clinical Psychologist Jasper Smits notes that people with high anxiety sensitivity can associate a variety of intense bodily sensations brought on by fight-or-flight with a fear of bodily harm.

“It can be anything,” Smits says. “Some people are more sensitive to cardiovascular symptoms such as racing heart, physical exercise, walking up the stairs, and other people are more sensitive to feelings of dizziness.”

For instance, the withdrawal symptoms of quitting smoking can feel like fight-or-flight, but [2015 research](#) shows that people with high anxiety symptoms are the least likely to quit for good. In a [2016 study](#), Smits hypothesized that bouts of vigorous running could help anxiety-sensitive smokers quit by training them to reassociate the symptoms of withdrawal with safety rather than fear. To find the people with the highest anxiety sensitivity, Smits used a 16-item questionnaire called the Anxiety Sensitivity Index, which measures the degree to which participants fear anxiety symptoms and their perceived negative consequences.

His hypothesis was correct: Of the previously inactive, high-anxiety smokers, twice as many were able to quit at six weeks after they began running thrice-weekly for 25 minutes at 77 to 85 percent of maximum heart rate, as compared with a control group that received thrice-weekly wellness education sessions instead.

“We find that running in place is effective at inducing the fear of anxiety symptoms for people who are afraid of negative physical outcomes, such as having a heart attack,” Smits says. In a similar 2011 study, Smits and his team had participants inhale CO₂ — a method proven to [simulate the fight-or-flight sensation of a panic attack](#) — and used the Anxiety Sensitivity Index and a pre-experiment survey to record the anxiety sensitivity and physical activity levels of each participant.

When the team asked participants to state their level of fear during the CO₂ challenge, they found that anxiety-sensitive participants with high levels of physical activity were significantly less fearful of the simulated panic attack than those who were equally anxiety-sensitive but less active.

Can exercise prevent us from developing a disorder altogether? Smits says the evidence is promising. He references a 2007 [study that was completed in Germany](#) where researchers studied 2,500 Germans aged 14 to 24 for four years and found a strong association: Adolescents who reported no physical activity were twice as likely to develop an anxiety disorder than regular exercisers. In 2006, a similar longitudinal [study](#) in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* discovered that high anxiety sensitivity is a predictor of spontaneous panic attacks and the development of future anxiety disorders.

A fearful response to fight-or-flight could be doing a number on your heart as well.

According to research published in March in [Autonomic Neuroscience](#), cardiovascular

reactions to exaggerated or prolonged stressors can change our cardiovascular physiology and increase our risk of cardiovascular disease.

As compared to a benzodiazepine treatment like Xanax, Smits says we don't have the research to make a serious comparison with an exercise-based treatment program, although he does note that he's seen Xanax users' symptoms return rather quickly if they stop taking the pills too abruptly.

Southern Methodist University psychologist David Rosenfield, a co-author on both Smits studies, says he's found that the people who stand to gain the most from an exercise treatment tend to be the first to quit when the fight-or-flight symptoms hit because they immediately associate them with fear.

So what does a workout within a sustainable exercise treatment program look like? It should last longer than 10 minutes and be intense enough to trigger fight-or-flight sensations, Smits says, because the idea is to persist long enough to realize you're not in trouble. For instance, Smits says that a runner who used to run 8-minute miles before developing a panic disorder might run 12-minute miles to keep the intense fight-or-flight sensations at a reasonable level. Running works, as does cycling, swimming, or any sustained activity that causes the symptoms of your anxiety.

"It's not the exercise per se that is protective," Smits says. "It's really how you approach the symptoms of exercise, and if you do it in a way that signals 'I'm safe, I can tolerate

these experiences, they're not going to harm me,' that's when exercise can be protective and that's how it can reduce anxiety sensitivity.”

Chapter Five: Professional Analysis

Hed: The 10 Commandments Of Magazine Freelancing

Dek: Twelve seasoned pros and green freelancers alike share the keys to making it on your own.

I don't do well in offices. At my desk I get jittery, then disinterested. I run out the clock surfing the internet until quitting time, then go home and do the work I was supposed to be doing at "work" because my brain turns on at 6 p.m. (Former bosses, if you're reading this, I'm sorry—it's not you, it's me.)

I just turned 23, and the prospect of doing *that* for the rest of my life is horrifying.

It scares me less than everything that's terrifying about going freelance, which is why I chose to study other freelancers: I wanted to know everything about how they worked, the nitty gritty of all aspects of their lives, professional and personal.

I'm intrigued by the profession itself as the act of rejecting a reliable salary and employer-provided healthcare for a life of solitude and sporadic paychecks seems more like a calling than a job. Indeed, the writers in this story got into freelancing for a multitude of reasons: Some were laid off from staff jobs and took the plunge right away; others job-searched for years before realizing an increasingly volatile publishing industry provided even less security. Some wanted to report and write for a personal cause, and others' personal blogs became full-time jobs.

Some invest and reinvest in their personal brands with the fervor of venture capitalists but still treat their work as their art. Some write three stories a day and tweet hundreds of times a month; others keep their heads down for months at a time, surfacing only to publish a high-profile investigation that's talked about long after they've moved onto the next adventure.

All rant about declining rates, kvetch over greedy copyright stipulations, and feel a very human twinge of anxiety when the work dries up from time to time. But it's that shared human experience that interests me most. That a tight-knit cohort of writers who reckon with rejection and fear on a daily basis is out there, thriving on a currency of life experiences that no one with a day job could hope to deal in, is invigorating.

I originally wanted to make their knowledge my knowledge for the thoroughly selfish reason of finding a way to navigate a world of shrinking magazine staffs and make it work for me, the would-be magazine writer. Along the way, I realized that there must be other panicky 23-year-olds, or 33-year-old laid-off editors, or 43-year-old career-changers, who could benefit from my findings.

What follows is the combined insight of 12 working independent writers, 20-somethings and retirees alike, with freelance tenures of 10 months to 40 years. They're predominately sourced from my own health- and fitness-oriented professional circle, which explains why you'll see a rather homogenous lineup publications throughout. I know I learned something, and with any luck, you will, too.

1: Attack your freelancing fears

Going freelance typically means quitting a job, and the prospect of deliberately walking away from a source of stability (and healthcare) is presumably what keeps plenty of capable staff writers and editors from making the jump. And for those who end up freelancing after being laid off, the jolt of losing a job and taking on personal business responsibilities could be burdensome. Instead, these freelancers embraced the first-year frenzy to build solid foundations for their independent careers.

Eva Holland is a Yukon territory-based freelancer who quit her historical researcher job in 2013 to pursue a career writing magazine features, at a time when her existing freelance income was sparse. “I was making under a thousand dollars a month from writing when I quit my day job,” Holland says. “I gave up my apartment and lived out of a suitcase for a year and a half.”

Two LA-based freelance magazine writers, marijuana reporter Amanda Chicago Lewis and pop culture and gender writer Ann Friedman, entered the freelance world after being laid off from their jobs (Lewis from BuzzFeed in 2016, Friedman from *GOOD Magazine* in 2012). Both women immediately found ways to monetize things they’d already been working on to support themselves in the transition.

Friedman’s first freelance checks came from \$50 pie charts she made sporadically for *The Hairpin*, which she ramped up after being laid off from *GOOD Magazine* in June 2012. “When I was laid off, I was like ‘Okay, what do I have that I can monetize here?’ And I went back to *The Hairpin* and said, ‘Do you want me to make one of these per week and will you pay me something?’”

Lewis, who had been covering marijuana legalization for BuzzFeed at the time of her layoff, used a trip to a Las Vegas weed conference (which BuzzFeed had already paid

for) to look for story ideas. What resulted was a 5,000-word feature in *GQ*, which she published 10 months later. After the initial panic, she recalls the energy derived from a modest chip on one's shoulder.

“There's this slight momentum or buzz when you leave somewhere and you can capitalize on that,” says former BuzzFeed News reporter Amanda Chicago Lewis, who left the company's LA bureau in November 2016. “I was just spurred to action in a really intense way. I met with a lot of editors and talked to a lot of people in the month and a half after I left BuzzFeed.”

2: Pitch with a (business) plan

Time is money when you're running your own business. For freelance magazine writers, that means maintaining a ratio of accepted pitches versus time spent researching that keeps the solo enterprise in the black.

I asked every freelancer in this story how she manages the risk of researching pitches that may or may not land, naively expecting each to rattle off a number that reflected their own golden ratio. I was, of course, frustrated by their answers—there is no golden ratio because there's too much subjectivity, intuition, skill, and luck involved to quantify a research/reward strategy (before factoring in assignments they'd received unsolicited, of course). They're writers, after all, not risk-pedaling financiers.

But then I said to heck with it, let's quantify it anyway because any outside observer can see the economics at work from a perspective of abstraction. Not including assignments provided by editors, the formula to estimate revenue earned from any given pitch is this:

(Sum of projected fees from getting a pitch accepted at each publication pitched)
Total outlets pitched

X

Pitching success rate

A freelancer's success rate is like a baseball player's batting average: It means nothing to the individual pitch, but the aggregate means everything. And, understandably, discussions about rates tend to be privileged within writing circles, so we'll operate within the realm of realistic hypotheticals for this section. To explain the formula, let's apply it to Eva Holland's pitching strategy.

Holland writes features exclusively, so she publishes about six stories a year and estimates her pitching success rate to be about 1 in 5, or 0.20. When researching a pitch, she maintains a shortlist of three or four outlets that seem like the best fit. "After that, I work down the list," she says. "If it's a story I'm really attached to, I'll go to a lower paying outlet."

For this example, let's say Holland's top three outlets will pay \$5,000 for a research-intensive feature pitch, and the next two offer \$3,000. Here's the math:

$$\frac{(\$5,000 + \$5,000 + \$5,000 + \$3,000 + \$3,000 = \$21,000)}{5 \text{ outlets}}$$

X

0.20 success rate

In this hypothetical scenario, Holland's attempt earns her \$840 on average. But if Holland makes the attempt five times, pitching all five outlets, her average earning becomes \$4,200.

It's safe to say these freelancers aren't running this calculation each time they send a pitch, but when you ask them how they manage the risk of pitch research, the logic is there. When researching pitches, Friedman keeps in mind "a small group of editors who I've written for repeatedly, and if it's relevant to them, I'll come up with some ideas about how it might fit for my top choice," Friedman says. "If they don't seem interested, then I go down the list."

Each time freelancers like Friedman and Holland go down the list, they spend more time retooling the pitch for each subsequent outlet. Years of assessing this risk provides freelancers with the discretion to intuitively know whether a tip or fleeting idea is worth exploring, based on the potential payouts and chance of success. That, plus the projected revenue from assignments he or she didn't have to pitch, is a freelancer's business model.

Experienced feature writers like Holland and Friedman can gamble on longer pre-reporting periods, then, because they know their chance of reaping a high-paying assignment is good enough to be sustainable. Green freelancers, by contrast, are more inclined to play small ball.

New Mexico-based freelancer Eric Killelea went full-time freelance in February 2017, and he estimates his pitching success rate to be between 1-in-8 and 1-in-10, or 0.125 to 0.10. As such, he relies on steady assignments, such as a monthly column with *Rolling Stone*, to finance the gambles he makes on feature assignments. He says he'd like

to be a full-time freelance feature writer someday, and although he's currently researching a feature pitch on an Alaskan whale poaching, he's judicious with his time. "I'm not digging through FOIA files right now because I haven't gotten any sort of green light," he says.

There's nothing wrong with swinging for the fences, but until you become the Hank Aaron of freelance magazine writing, make sure you have enough base hits to stay in the league.

3: Travel on the cheap

It's no secret that magazine expense budgets are shrinking, and as many of the freelancers in this story told me, that means reporting trips are getting shorter and tougher to justify. The reality is that if you want to travel to report and find new stories (as these freelancers wish they could do more often), you may have to do it on spec, but that doesn't mean you have to lose money on the deal. It just means you have to get creative.

On two separate occasions since 2015, New York City-based freelance outdoor writer and content creator Lauren Steele has pitched feature stories that required reporting in foreign countries. In 2016, she pitched *Rolling Stone* a story on being in Havana, Cuba for President Donald Trump's inauguration. "I said I was going to Cuba, and *Rolling Stone* said, 'Awesome, we want the story,'" Steele says. The problem was, Steele didn't have a plane ticket to Cuba, or the money to spec the entire trip.

"Oh shit, I've got to get a ticket to Cuba!" she recalls thinking when the pitch was accepted. So she reached out to a Cuban tourism bureau she'd interviewed for previous stories and set up an exchange: While on the ground in Cuba, Steele promised to source

five blog posts for the tourism agency and have her photographer shoot image assets, which she'd combine into five short tourism blogs when she returned to New York City. In return, the Cubans hooked her up with plane tickets and lodging for her and her photographer, which allowed her to travel on assignment for *Rolling Stone* without asking the publication to cover her expenses.

Steele ran a similar play in 2015. While trolling an Italian soccer internet forum, she discovered a once-brilliant Chilean soccer team staffed by miners, the same miners from the 2010 Copiapó mining accident that made global headlines. This time, she hadn't even gotten a pitch accepted, but she knew she wanted the story, so contacted another local tourism department and asked for help. The tourism department, eager to get the miners' story to American audiences, covered airfare and lodging for Steele and her photographer, provided a translator, and brought her to the remote town of El Salvador to cover the team. After pitching a series of outlets, Steele eventually got the story published with *VICE*, collecting her fee without incurring any travel cost.

"It's about putting your tail between your legs and realizing the world is so big," Steele says. "You've got to make people bet on you."

And if you are putting the trip on spec, remember to pack a lunch. "Raisin Bran is a secret," Lewis says. "I'm not joking, like bringing Raisin Bran saves me so much money when I go to Vegas for work."

4: Find stability in tumult

When starting out as a freelancer, it's important to remind yourself that it's all going to be okay. The sentiment is just as important to seasoned freelancers, who grow thick skin

to weather the tumult of rising and falling fortunes. When shit hits the fan, breathe and learn from your mistakes, then move on.

Minnesota-based health and wellness freelancer Elizabeth Millard has weathered two periods of economic hardship since becoming fully independent in 2001. At first, she hit the ground sprinting as a tech writer covering the Dot Com boom. Millard remembers being up to her elbows in 5,000-word feature assignments at \$1 and \$2 per word, feeling on top of the world. Then the bubble burst.

“Almost overnight, they’re like ‘everything is closing down; there’s no money, bye.’” Millard says. “So when that happened, you’re kind of left scrambling. And that was early in my freelancing career as well, so I felt really panicky because I had made the unfortunate mistake of having just a few clients.”

Millard recovered from the bust and by the time the Great Recession hit in 2008, she was writing for a diverse clientele of editorial and corporate clients, covering a gamut of topics including health and identity theft, and she fared much better because she’d been there before. Looking back at her annual earnings since she started freelancing, Millard sees the spikes and dips average each other out.

“I think early on in my career I thought that if I don’t really ramp up and make a lot of money, then I’m going to be out on the street or I’m going to be sitting in a cubicle somewhere,” Millard says. “Don’t freak out about the rise and fall of your fortune. It’ll be okay, it all evens out.”

Killelea is learning that lesson in the first year of his career. After finishing an editorial fellowship at *Outside* in March 2017, Killelea opted to stay in Santa Fe with his girlfriend and try freelancing instead of searching for a job, a decision he knew meant

less stability. He makes just enough money to get by, and in exchange for having the time and flexibility to travel the American West to report longform stories on energy and public lands, the green freelancer is just fine with that.

“If everything goes according to plan, I’m just going to keep going at it and see what happens,” Killelea says. “Don’t freak out, and have a savings account. Create your own cushion, because some people won’t pay you for like six months.”

5: Pretend you’re the editor

The freelancers I interviewed agree that freelance writers who were once editors have a distinct advantage over those without editing experience as former editors can recall the components of a pitch they would have instantly green-lighted, and the shortcomings of a pitch that would have gone straight to the trash. Editor or not, though, all freelancers can benefit from reverse-engineering their pitches from the perspective of the editor on the receiving end.

Martin Fritz Huber was an *Outside* editorial fellow in 2014; he’s since moved to Brooklyn and writes about all things running. When researching a magazine story, he thinks back to the pitch meetings he’d attended as a fellow years ago. “Seeing the editors converse with one another and seeing how stories were either enthusiastically received, or they’d say ‘No, why would anyone want to read that,’ that was very eye-opening,” Huber says. He realized in those meetings that getting a pitch accepted ultimately meant passing the scrutiny of the magazine’s senior editors.

Abe Streep, a Santa Fe, New Mexico-based longform writer, was one such *Outside* senior editor who quit his job in 2014 to devote his full attention to writing. The

itches Streep would approve as a senior editor and the pitches Huber strives to formulate as a freelancer share a major characteristic: They're departures from what everyone else is writing about.

"Try as much as possible to cut out the noise and not run toward what is popular, or of the moment, but to focus on subject matter that you know and care about and actually have something to say about," Streep says. For Streep, that means exploring the outdoors to find places and people that aren't being written about but are being effected by larger political and economic forces. In his running commentary, Huber cuts out the noise by identifying the prevailing wisdom of the sport and challenging it.

Mirroring Streep's instruction, Huber works to write commentaries that cut through the noise in U.S. running culture. In a July 2017 *Outside* post, Huber wrote the headline, "A Fast Mile Is More Impressive Than A Slow Marathon." As most readers are marathoners and not milers, the story still solicits hundreds of angry Facebook comments from marathoners who are accustomed to being applauded for running far, just as Huber intended—he knows the self-righteous noise of the marathoning crowd and finds a way to strike a nerve.

Holland, who was an associate editor at Yukon-based publication *Up Here* before going full-time freelance, says the experience of editing helped her refine the aspects of a winning feature pitch. "It has to have an actual narrative arc and some heft to it. The ideal magazine feature is one that pairs an individual story with a larger issue," Holland says. And to sell the individual story upon which the feature hinges, Holland is sure to nail down the details before sending the pitch. "Ideally, I don't bring a pitch to an editor until I have the character or characters in mind and access to them lined up," she says.

6: Protect ya' neck

The Wu-Tang Clan coined that phrase—referring to the self-preservation instincts required to survive the slums of 1980s Staten Island, New York—but you’ve got to be just as street smart when it comes to your intellectual property and personal liability. Every contract has three points of negotiation: the rate, the copyright, and indemnification (whether the publication will defend you in a lawsuit). As freelancers rarely get their way with all three, it’s crucial to establish a hierarchy of what’s important to you in a contract, based on your desired rate, your personal goals for the work (whether you plan to re-publish or anthologize the story) and your vulnerability to a lawsuit.

Washington D.C.-based freelancer and former *Washingtonian* managing editor Ellen Ryan advises writers to look for First North American Serial Rights, she says, which either cover online or print publication, but not both. “If they wanted First North American Serial Rights, they would have to pay for web, or of course change the contract,” she says.

Ryan acknowledges that First North American Serial Rights have become harder to get throughout her career, starting in 2001 with the Supreme Court case *New York Times Co. v. Tasini*, when the *Times* lost a copyright infringement lawsuit to a freelancer whose work was republished in the LexisNexis database.

“We won the battle and lost the war because contracts got really, really bad after that,” Ryan says. “A lot of publishers have negotiated for all rights or rolled back liability

clauses. People have even given up on first rights because they're worried about liability clauses.”

Unless a writer successfully negotiates, major publishers like Rodale retain all rights—meaning your work can be used in print, online, or in Rodale books—and even retain reporting notes for three years after a story's publication (according to a November 2017 Rodale contract). But before you use your bargaining chip to negotiate from all rights to first rights, for instance, make sure you're not overlooking a missing indemnification clause that could leave you vulnerable to a lawsuit.

Lewis ran into that problem while reporting a story on marijuana industry firms in California. She met with her editor and the publication's attorney after she began receiving legal threats from a company she'd planned to include in an upcoming story. The indemnification clause on the contract was murky, so she asked the editor and attorney about it directly.

“I said, we are not publishing this unless you guarantee in writing that I am indemnified,” Lewis says. “And they said, ‘You're not 100 percent indemnified.’” So Lewis pulled the story, and walked away from months of reporting to avoid being sued, which would have been far more costly in the long run.

7: Define your ethics

Freelancers will always interact with brands, whether it's for a press trip, a sample product, or content creation. The rules of the exchange depend on whom you talk to, but defining and sticking to a clear code of ethics goes a long way to maintaining credibility as a journalist.

Nebraska-based freelancer Linsey Knerl was in the right place at the right time. The mother of six was blogging about personal finance and frugal family living when the Great Recession hit in 2008. “It was really strange because the way I’ve always lived was now fashionable,” Knerl says. She began attending conferences and pitching her financial tips to magazine editors, and the subsequent editorial exposure caught the attention of brands like Walmart; the company wanted her thrifty expertise for its Walmart World blog. Knerl accepted the offer to create Walmart’s content, and with it, a code of ethics that defines the line she walks today between editorial and sponsored content.

“I always have to ask, ‘Who’s paying for this?’” Knerl says. “And how do I make sure I’m disclosing everything and separating myself when I’m doing a magazine article from when I’m being approached by Walmart?” Editorial freedom is important to Knerl as she wants to maintain the authority she has within her blogging platform, so she exclusively works with brands that allow her to publish what she otherwise would as a journalist. Conagra Brands, for instance, paid her and a couple other bloggers to cover its child hunger campaign and asked that Knerl write the post for her own blog “We had the creative freedom to cover it any way we wanted to,” Knerl says. “We didn’t have to seek approval; we could write that we thought it was great, or if we thought it wasn’t.” She doesn’t solicit branded assignments, though. “They always reach out to us,” she says.

The corporate work has helped Knerl become the breadwinner of her family, but other freelancers, like gun violence and criminal justice writer Mark Obbie of Canandaigua, New York, have shunned brand partnerships and sponsored content altogether. Obbie’s interest in hard news began when he was a reporter for the Warren, Ohio *Tribune-Chronicle* in 1982, and he’s covered courts and crime for newspapers and

law journals throughout his career. A full-time freelancer since quitting his journalism teaching job at Syracuse University in 2012, Obbie's personal constitution has no amendments for corporate work, no matter the fee.

"I haven't done any corporate work," Obbie says. "I've had opportunities to do corporate content, sponsored content, and other sorts of PR and whatnot. I just refuse to do anything that isn't pure journalism. It's not why I became a journalist."

Each freelancer must define the clientele he or she is comfortable with, but Knerl and Obbie have avoided trouble in their own areas by staying true to their ethics of working with brands.

8: Diversify your clientele

Just like diversifying an investment portfolio, diversifying your clientele as a freelancer can insulate your business from recessions and changes in the publishing landscape. The strategy can also free up some time to work on longer projects, and open you up to audiences on a variety of platforms.

Missouri-based freelancer Steve Weinberg is the author of nine books and countless magazine features, but he always had a way to generate fast cash to support his penchant for time-consuming investigative work: book reviews. "I got to a point where I could get assignments any time from most of my editors, reviewing for 20 different places at one time," he says.

Weinberg hasn't strayed from editorial work since he started freelancing full-time in 1978, but he's maintained a broad clientele of national titles, city and regional magazines, trade publications, law and literary journals alike. He credits his longevity

with maintaining a balance between sure-thing book reviews and Hail Mary cold feature pitches. “Book reviewing was on autopilot for a long time,” Weinberg says. “Everything else is hard-won, you don’t just snap your fingers and get major magazine assignments.”

Friedman learned the benefits of a diverse clientele when she was laid off from *GOOD Magazine* in 2012. She throttled up her exposure by writing on the “content hamster wheel” as she calls it, filing stories for *New York’s The Cut*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *The Hairpin*, and one random publication each week. “I didn’t expect anyone to read me in all of those places, but if an editor runs across your name in one of those places two weeks in a row, it has a little more sticking power,” Friedman says.

Five years later, the plan has paid dividends. Friedman’s cutting analysis of pop culture and gender issues has earned her a respectable following (she has 70,100 Twitter followers as of this writing), and she’s cultivated her brand to expand into new platforms. Each week, Friedman publishes an email newsletter, records a podcast, provides editorial consulting and appears at public speaking engagements, all while reporting and writing national magazine stories. “You collapse the wall between business and editorial because you are a business, you’re a one-person editorial business,” Friedman says. “Writing remains the most fulfilling and probably the most financially important thing that I do, but frankly, it’s one of like six irons in the fire.”

9: Find out how you work best

When your home is your office and your break room has Netflix and beer, you’ve got to have an honest conversation with yourself about how and when you’re going to get down to business. Some freelancers can work in their bunny slippers; others need to get out of

the house to get anything done. And when you have no “boss” but 12 editors demanding your time at once, striking a balance between workday productivity and knowing when to log off is imperative to making the lifestyle work for you.

Millard lives on a farm in northern Minnesota and momentarily paused during our phone interview to wrangle an errant pig. She writes health and wellness stories for national titles like *Men’s Health*, *SELF*, and *Prevention* and works 25 hours a week; she used to work twice as much, but got burnt out after five years of collecting copious fees but feeling chained to her laptop. Millard has learned to optimize her working time by compartmentalizing her day with the Pomodoro Technique, in which she sets daily deadlines to stay on-task. “I’ll say, ‘I think this article should take an hour and a half to write,’ and magically, I get it done in an hour and 29 minutes,” Millard says.

We may not be our most creative selves while shackled to a desk, so Millard walks her dogs when she’s devoid of pitch ideas. “I think of like three stories by the time I’m done,” she says. “If you can physically move, it usually helps you to unstick your brain.”

Ryan went freelance in 2012, and despite her decades of magazine experience, she feels the all-too-common anxiety over declining assignments. “I feel like if I leave, they’ll find somebody else,” Ryan says. “It’s not just me, obviously. Everyone has the same fear.” Like Millard, Ryan knows being on constant alert is an unsustainable way to live, so she sets boundaries to limit herself from instinctively replying to emails 24-7. “You can’t be at their beck and call, you can’t constantly have this pressure all the time,” she says. Ironically, instilling a 9-to-5 sensibility about your work/life balance could be the key to staying sane.

10: Remember why you started freelancing in the first place

Every freelancer I interviewed had different reasons for going independent—autonomy, adventure, being laid off and realizing she was better off—but two common threads emerged that underscore the career trajectories of these writers: the satisfaction derived from getting to write on topics of personal importance for a living, and the sometimes masochistic, sometimes euphoric endeavor of running one's own business.

Streep left *Outside* because he knew he wanted to write, and eventually, scratching the itch helped him overcome the fear. “My experience was that to be a really great editor, your energy has to be focused on the writer and the resulting story. And that doesn't bring a lot of ego with it,” Streep says. “I had an awesome job, but at a certain point, I had to pursue it.” Comfortable in his teaching job at Syracuse University, perhaps *too* comfortable, Obbie realized he was nearing the twilight of his career without totally committing himself to the meaningful crime reporting that got him into journalism decades ago. “I felt like I didn't get to stretch my legs as a reporter and a writer as much as I assumed I would,” he says.

As far back as she can remember, Eva Holland was a model employee. She sliced bagels in a deli, waited tables, and shoveled snow to get her freelancing career off the ground. Over the years, she realized that the publishers to whom she had given her dogged reporting and carefully chosen words would never love her back, so she stopped considering the prospect of working for them. “For me, it's almost better to be self-employed, because I was giving myself fully to some dumb job that was never going to

reward me for it,” she says. “Now, if I want to be a total workaholic, I’m the only one who gets the benefits.”

Steele moved to New York City at age 22 with no job and no money because she says she’s always been paranoid by the idea of having her location, her schedule, and her life defined by a job. “As long as the highs continue to be as good as they are, I don’t think I’ll ever not be able to tolerate the lows because I know that this too shall pass,” she says. “I literally have to tell myself, ‘But Lauren, did you die?’ And that’s a crazy relationship to have with your profession, but that’s the thing: Freelancing is not a profession, freelancing is a lifestyle.”

Epilogue

Being afforded the privilege of speaking with 12 successful freelancers—at length, too—about their livelihoods is equal parts humbling and invigorating. The only nugget of insight I can add to follow up these commandments is that strangely, I got the sense that I shared something in common with each of them (and not just the weed thing with Amanda Chicago Lewis). To note, this isn’t something physical, as they’re all plainly better than I at every part of this game. What surprised me is that they’re all perfectly human, and no shot of adrenaline from nailing a story or cashing a check seems to last long enough to overshadow the anxiety, which becomes acceptance, over the fact that this is an inherently unstable life choice.

When I used to run competitively, it was only after the best races, the ones when I’d really turned myself inside out and passed out at the finish line, that I’d get this sinking feeling. It feels like fear, it is fear; fear from the discovery that in order to best

that effort, you're going to have to inflict even more pain upon yourself, and the only way you got through the most recent ordeal was telling yourself it was the last time. We bargain with ourselves in times of suffering, we tell ourselves we'll take a break when we're done, that we'll find a healthier balance with our work, but we know we probably won't. I sensed that sentiment with my sources, especially from the feature writers in this story, and now that I'm in the throws of my first freelance feature I'm beginning to feel it again myself. Fear that I won't be able to deliver, that the opportunity cost of a big assignment will bankrupt me, that I won't be willing to write myself unconscious when the time comes.

Like it did with running, though, the adrenaline found in reckoning with that fear is what keeps me, and perhaps everyone else, coming back for more.

Appendix A: Project proposal

Professional skills component

I began writing freelance editorial and branded content in July 2016, just after completing a bachelor of journalism at the University of Missouri. I was an intern at *Men's Health*, working in Manhattan and living in a friend's basement in Queens, when the idea took hold that I would become a self-employed journalist. I had just taken my first paid assignment for a Columbia-based publication, *ZouNation*, and it paid \$0.15 cents per word. Yet, I had a plan: I'd spend the summer schmoozing New York City magazine editors and content strategists into giving me work. I'd cut out of my internship at 5 p.m., hop on my bike and race down Fifth Avenue to a bar in SoHo, pay way too much for beers to entertain the people who I hoped would assign me work, and then get back on my bike and deliver food and parcels for UberEats until midnight to make ends meet. Then, I'd ride 10 miles back to Queens and do it again the next day. It was an unhealthy, unsustainable way to live, and I did it knowing that the hustle wouldn't pay dividends for months. I was eating \$1 pizza and putting most meals on credit, scrounging as much cash as I could to make the Big Apple work for me.

In short, the hustle paid off. I had already filed about 50 invoices by the time I decided I wanted to dedicate my professional project to studying other freelancers. Between August 2016 and April 2017, I've written more than 150 paid articles since leaving New York City. The hustle landed me editorial gigs with *Men's Health*, *Runner's World*, *Bicycling*, *Outside* and *VICE*, and branded content jobs with Mashable and Spartan Race.

I've had fellow students and multiple MU professors tell me I'm crazy for going

freelance. One professor asked me about my (non-existent) trust fund, which I would apparently need to support myself as a freelancer. To that, I say this: Hearst Magazines — publisher of sought-after titles *Cosmopolitan* and *Esquire* — pays their editorial assistants about \$34,000 per year, according to employee reports on Glassdoor. As a part-time freelance journalist, I'd estimate I work approximately 15 hours each week. I've made \$34,435 in the past eight months. When I was able to work 20-25 hours per week over the holidays, I made \$7,050 in December alone. None of this is meant to say that money is all that matters to my career plans; rather, I only note my earnings to say that in this journalism school, freelancing seems to be an underappreciated career path. It's based on this confidence that I plan to pursue a career as a full-time freelance magazine writer, and therefore I'm dedicating my professional skills component of my professional project to analyze my own work in order to become the best freelance magazine writer I can be.

The period of time for which I'll be analyzing my own work will occur during summer 2017, between May 22 and August 11. During this time period, I will incorporate myself into an LLC, research pitches, take assignments, report and file those assignments, and file the subsequent invoices and contracts for those assignments. I aim to file between five and 10 articles each week for print and digital publication, and I'll be taking notes to reflect on my work, such as recording the proportion of pitches that were accepted versus rejected, the amount of time dedicated to reporting and writing each piece, the reception of each piece on social media, comments by assigning editors, the pay rate for each article, and personal thoughts on the degree of satisfaction gained by each assignment. I will also conduct end-of-week reflections on Sundays to analyze my

general observations and thoughts on my successes and failures that week. These reflections will be included in a status update that my committee will receive each Sunday between July 16 and September 3. At the eight-week research term, I will revisit these notes and incorporate a reflection on my progression throughout the summer into my final professional analysis. (See Appendix A for a full list of field notes.)

The framework of this project is based on personal experience freelancing for the aforementioned publications and brands. Because I began freelancing at the beginning of the fall 2016 semester, I have been doing all of my work while in graduate school, which involved splitting time between freelance commitments and a graduate assistantship as deputy editor at *Vox Magazine*, where I oversaw weekly feature article production and managed a staff of student-editors, as well as commitments for graduate-level courses. Despite this, I wrote upward of 30 articles in December and January, and more than 20 articles in November and February. Mounting commitments with my graduate assistantship and graduate-level courses caused me to scale back my work for March and April, but I still maintained a steady workflow without needing to pitch any stories. The majority of these assignments have been for web, with more lucrative print pieces interspersed throughout. In the month of December, when the winter break period and publications' increased demand for content allowed for my most productive month to date, I averaged approximately \$250 per article.

At the end of the summer, I will be able to reflect on my life as a full-time freelance magazine writer, which will signify a change from my current life as a graduate student and part-time freelance magazine writer. It will also serve as a test run for my post-graduate career plan, and the analysis will aid me in streamlining my personal

business and identifying areas of improvement. I will incorporate myself into an LLC before the beginning of the period, which will allow me to further consider myself as a business that must maintain a steady rate of production and compensation to succeed, rather than an individual who simply takes freelance work.

Regarding my goals with this project, I'm not solely aiming to maximize profit, nor am I looking to gain the most personal satisfaction from my work individually. I believe these things are not mutually exclusive, and therefore I'll aim to earn a livable wage while maintaining enjoyment in my work. I will also aim to work approximately 40 hours per week, to simulate my planned career as a full-time freelancer, so I'll adjust my workload accordingly to meet that criteria. I'll continue to live in Columbia for the duration of the research. I hope that publishing a reflection of my work in my analysis will not only cause a productive self-reflection, but that it will also provide a platform for fellow young journalists to better understand the life of a full-time freelancer.

Professional analysis component

It's no secret that media, especially magazines, are changing. Falling rate bases and newsstand sales, coupled with competition from digital-native organizations, are causing print magazine brands to change the way they generate and publish content. And in the cases of major publishing houses such as Rodale Inc, Condé Nast and Wenner Media, the changes have meant major layoffs for editorial staff. Meanwhile, digital-native organizations maintain a steady demand for daily content. In light of the success of digital natives such as BuzzFeed and Mashable, print titles such as those at Rodale Inc have adopted digital initiatives to get in on the profits from the daily content machine.

These changes have affected the labor market within magazine journalism and digital-oriented organizations, such as VICE Media, which publish magazine-style content. According to Hearst Magazines executive Eliot Kaplan (E. Kaplan, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2017), Hearst Magazines are now accepting less freelance content in favor of in-house production, yet brands such as *Men's Health* have just one staff writer for the entire print product. In the absence of empirical data that would indicate the specifics of the shift, it's not possible to say whether the demand for freelance content has increased or decreased. However, given the layoffs and changes at individual publishing houses and brands, it is possible to say that the freelance climate is certainly changing.

Research topic and questions

The strategies of freelance magazine journalists represents an understudied area of media research. To find out how freelancers are negotiating this changing market, I will conduct semi-structured interviews with the freelancers themselves. The whole of my research will hinge on the following query:

RQ: How do freelance magazine writers manage their pitches to make a satisfactory wage and enjoy their work?

To answer this question, I'll pose a variety of relevant questions to nine freelancers with varying levels of experience. I'll ask them to explain the rationale behind their distribution of print and digital work, and why they may choose to work for certain

publications more frequently than others. I'll inquire about their pitch research process, and what they've learned about getting pitches accepted over time. I'll also ask about how they strategize a balance of assignments to continue enjoying their work. Through the answers to these questions, I hope to glean original information that will inform a report on the status of U.S. freelance magazine writers in 2017.

Relevance to field

Despite their changing role in the industry, little has been studied on the current sentiments of the freelancers themselves, who are inherently affected by evolving market forces. For starters, there may be an influx of freelancers into the media labor market. To study a similar market with available data, the U.S. newspaper workforce dropped from 54,100 workers in 2005 to 32,900 in 2015 (Doctor, 2015). For reporters, correspondents and broadcast news analysts, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates a 9 percent decline in employment for 2014 to 2024 (BLS, 2015). Those who decline to move to a different industry or retire altogether may go freelance, by no choice of their own.

These market forces not only dictate the number of freelance workers, but their job descriptions as well. The number of public relations specialists to journalists is now 5:1 (Williams, 2016) — how many freelance journalists work in PR as well? How many branded content? Without discrediting the skillset provided by freelance journalists, the fact that organizations as large as the *Huffington Post* (Welton, 2011) and Bleacher Report (Bilton, 2014) have been able to solicit quality articles without pay speaks to the discrepancy between the number of freelance journalists looking for work, and the number who get their fill. In the absence of an influential labor union (the Society of

Professional Journalists and National Writers Union represent the industry's labor unions "although they don't facilitate collective bargaining), freelancers must persistently look out for their best interests, perhaps more aggressively than a salaried employee. To make any projection on the future of magazine journalism, one must first understand how the freelancer fits into the equation.

Literature review

Changing landscape of national magazines

In 1974, 52 percent of magazine editors surveyed said they frequently bought and published freelance material. During that time period, the editor of *Seventeen* cited the highest circulation in the history of the publication. The editor of *Harpers* said publishing was a healthy field for any organization able to provide new and useful information. Such editors noted that freelancers were "essentially members of staff," because they typically worked with only one publication and were guaranteed steady work (McGuire and Kelley, 1974). That same decade, surveys indicated that freelancers were primarily used by newspaper-sponsored magazines, or Sunday magazines, because the sponsoring newspapers preferred to employ the independent contractors in lieu of devoting valuable staff resources. Every Sunday magazine with a circulation greater than 1 million employed freelancers, and 85 percent of Sunday magazines with circulations between 500,001 and 1 million used the contractors (Hayes, 1979).

The new millennium represents a bleaker outlook for print magazine journalism. In September 2016, major publishing house Wenner Media executed staff layoffs and

sold 49 percent of its flagship brand, *Rolling Stone* (McIntyre, 2016). In November 2015, Condé Nast shuttered *Details* and *Glam Belleza Latina*, cutting more than 55 editorial and advertising sales employees in the process (Reed, 2015). Pennsylvania-based publishing house Rodale Inc (publisher of *Men's Health* and *Prevention*) cut 40 jobs in January 2016, in part due to an unprecedented ad-free revenue model for *Prevention*, which allowed the company to lay off the magazine's advertising sales representatives (Salamone, 2016). And in March 2017, *Us Weekly* cut 40 employees within the estimated 115-worker title (Bloomgarden-Smoke, 2017). In 2008, more than one quarter of major national magazines failed to hit their rate bases, or the guaranteed audiences on which advertising rates are negotiated. This failure creates a downward spiral where publications must pay back advertisers for lost audiences, while still losing more readers and making persistently less money from print ad sales (Abernethy, Lancaster, Lancaster, Padgett, 2008). And newspapers, which also rely primarily on print advertising sales, were hit hardest: Lost ad revenue coupled with the expiration of joint operating agreements meant the failure of the *Rocky Mountain News* and the bankruptcies of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* (Compton and Benedetti, 2010). And the presence of cash may not always be best for the journalistic integrity of an organization, or the staffers that work there: When Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes bought *The New Republic* in 2012, he promised to “break shit.” The Silicon Valley term for disruption meant the mass exodus of decades of editorial talent, in favor of web-savvy producers (Creech, 2016).

In the wake of financial turmoil, print magazines and newspapers are frantic to find ways to connect with digital audiences while fighting for audience attention against

news aggregation sites, bloggers, and citizen journalists. Although organizations such as the *Huffington Post* rely on unpaid bloggers to generate content, media researchers believe the user-generated content model is unsustainable because unpaid writers produce far less original reporting, and end up relying on the work of paid reporters (Compton and Benedetti, 2010). Without the ability to pay salaried staffers, yet still reliant on high-quality reporting, legacy print organizations must fill the content void if they are to muscle their way into the new media landscape.

Individualization in global economics

Specialization — the medieval idea that honing the skills of individual laborers to excel at one task would make the economy more efficient — takes a new role in the 21st century: Individualization. The movement of salaried journalists toward independent contracting work reflects this global economic trend, in which enhanced communication allows workers to shed the constraints of an organization and provide a good or service on their own (Beck, 2002). This trend is omnipresent in the United States. Even before the Great Recession, more than 30 percent of the American workforce was non-standard, contracted employment (Ross et al. 2010). Creatives, as defined by Marx laborers who value expression over capital, are highly prone to individualization. This “strongly integrative phenomenon” serves to be the collective experience of a young generation who values passion over pay, in that individualized laborers share a common set of joys and tribulations due to the nature of their circumstances. These workers are characterized by speed, eagerness to collaborate and an underlying desire to be self-reliant (McGuigan, 2010). Journalists, by nature, must also be quick workers, who are able to coordinate with

one another, and are prone to questioning authority. That the trend of individualization would produce independent journalistic laborers is hardly serendipitous.

Freelancers adjust to industry changes

This recent combination of legacy media organizations, in this case national magazines, which require high-quality reported content, and a global economic trend toward individualization has given rise to changes in the livelihoods of freelance journalists. Curiously, a survey of Swedish freelance journalists found that the freelancers were more educated than their salaried peers, implying that journalists with the option of a salaried career (with benefits) are deciding to become independent contractors anyway, a reversal of the traditional hierarchy of roles in media (Edstrom and Ladendorf, 2012). And many are well compensated, too. A 2008 survey of New Zealand freelancers stated an average annual salary of \$42,000 — which is higher than most entry-level magazine jobs in the U.S. (Hannis, 2008). These men and women fit the description of Beck's individualization theory: Half of the freelance journalists in one survey were between the ages of 26 and 35. They reported that they were eager to learn new media skills and desired to work across all established and emerging media formats. These contractors aren't exclusively interested in words, either: Of the print journalists surveyed, more than 36 percent reported that they were interested in improving their multimedia skills, which indicates a desire to better align themselves with the demands of the industry. Nor are they necessarily renegades: One freelancer working in Istanbul graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism and cited her university-born connections as a main reason for her success in selling her work to major media organizations (Solomon, 2015).

And intermediary groups, such as Germany's Associated Reporters Abroad, have sprung up in the midst of freelance proliferation to help match the independent contractors with wire organizations that require their services. There have even been industry-sponsored support efforts targeted at displaced journalists in specific. In the wake of widespread northeastern layoffs, Montclair State University partnered with the Knight Foundation and Poynter to provide free job training to help journalists who lost their jobs begin to build their own brands and make it on their own (Murray, 2017). In such ways, freelance journalists are filling the roles that were cut during economic strife, such as roles of foreign correspondents (Hicks, 2014).

Freelancers bring print to the digital age

Because of the aforementioned desire of many freelancers to broaden their skillset in order to attract more potential employers, many magazine editors and professors now look to freelancers to help their brands relocate their audiences on digital platforms. Audiences now demand that a “magazine” no longer be a singular, inanimate print object — but rather a dynamic, multi-platform organization with which they can interact and engage. Magazines have remained behind the digital curve for the primary reason a majority of revenue still comes from print advertisement, which makes it difficult to justify unproven digital innovations. For this reason, editors are under increasing pressure to come up with ways to engage these emerging platforms with the current staff resources available to them (Johinke, 2015). However, these print journalists, whom editors and publishers ought to be on the cutting edge of digital audience engagement while maintaining all of their previous roles, aren't considerate enough of audiences on social

media. Many legacy media reporters may use Twitter, for instance, to reach out to sources and interact with other journalists, but fail to see the worth of engaging audiences directly on the site. This gap between social media expectations and practices for legacy media reporters opens the door for anyone willing to innovate on a shoestring budget (Lee, 2015).

Freelancers, by contrast, are much more likely to be savvy audience engagers. For one, as previously cited, they're relatively young — between 26 and 35 — meaning the newer platforms are more second-nature for them. But, as they act as their own businesses, these freelancers understand personal marketing and branding on social media better than their newsroom counterparts, whose livelihoods don't depend on audience engagement to the same degree. They believe that sharing their personal lives, as well as their professional work, is a key ingredient to staying employed because it allows them to connect with audiences on multiple levels, simultaneously. These traits make freelancers terrific brand ambassadors for organizations that are looking to create a more “organic” image, rather than an obviously commercialized outward presentation. In turn, editors interested in educating their newsrooms on these branding protocols use freelancers as exemplars for their salaried employees (Holton, 2016). The freelancers are also used as positive examples in academic settings — major journalism institutions such as the University of Missouri, New York University and Columbia University bring in freelance journalists to discuss their networking and personal branding tactics (Solomon, 2015).

The new foreign correspondents

While editors remain vital cogs of the news production machine, other staffers haven't been so lucky in the new media transition. Foreign correspondents, for instance, were some of the first reporters to be cut as their services are costly and not completely necessary on a consistent basis. Freelancers again stepped up to fill the role.

The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that 61 journalists were killed in 2014. Of those, 26 were killed in direct response to the work they were doing — seven of them were freelancers (CPJ, 2015). An estimated 80 percent of journalists working in Syria in 2012 were freelancers. If they were paid more (while more than half of American expat freelancers surveyed in one study reported attaining a graduate degree, more than half also made less than \$20,000 per year), they would quite literally be mercenaries — trading a life of stability for adventure and danger. The Syrian journalists, in some instances, were kidnapped in the presence of armed guards, and most had a personal connection to a reporter who had been killed (Solomon, 2015). Yet, the freelancers continue to line up for the dangerous work. One former BBC foreign reporter quit his job to start NewsFixed, an outfit that connects freelancers to media organizations which increasingly desire their reporting in a globalizing world. The site now connects more than 1,000 journalists with editors at Al Jazeera and *The Economist*, for whom they file stories in Aleppo, Syria and other major war zones. And sites like NewsFixed help freelancers by distinguishing who has copy ready to file and bumping them to the top of the list so that editors can distinguish the news that's ready to publish (Hicks, 2014). Similarly, multimedia-oriented quasi-magazines, such as *VICE*, actively seek out foreign freelancers and videographers themselves when news erupts in another corner of the world. They routinely employ “fixers,” or producers on the ground at the site of the news

that put them in contact with the proper journalists (Schwartz, 2016).

Exploitation concerns

The second half of the aforementioned *VICE* anecdote is that many foreign journalists, such as one French journalist in Paris during the *Charlie Hebdo* bombings, are approached by *VICE* and similar organizations with the request that they file immediate pre-reporting. The organization cites the urgency of the news as a reason to forgo a contractual agreement. In the case of this French journalist, and many others who came forward about their exploitation, the *VICE* editors become unreachable as soon as the “pre-reporting” is filed. Only after the story is no longer newsworthy do they emerge, offering a small percentage of the original rate agreement because the news is no longer as valuable to them (Schwartz, 2016).

This is only one way freelance journalists can be exploited, and cases such as these are prominent enough that Schwartz’ article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* persuaded *VICE* to make a public apology, vowing to overhaul its freelance relationship standards (Schwartz, 2016).

The globalization of media also affects the copyright protections of freelance journalists. Anglo-American copyright law, since the 18th century, has been grounded in public policy, with the notion that public policy restricts monopolistic practices and maximizes positive externalities. However, as multinational media companies acquire national media companies and merge with one another, the copyright protections of an individual’s work become privatized by the larger corporation. This intellectual ownership grab means individual freelancers, who can hardly afford to defend themselves

against multinational corporations, are typically bullied into giving up their intellectual property for mass dissemination — making no additional profit, no matter how many millions of people consume their content, as was detailed in *New York Times vs. Tasini* (Matt, 2002). In 2001, six *New York Times* freelancers filed a lawsuit against the *Times* for selling their copyrighted content to a secondary electronic database without their expressed written consent. Traditionally, freelancers only sell “first North American serial rights,” meaning they consent to their material being published only once. Because of lawsuits such as *New York Times v. Tasini*, media organizations are adapting their contracts to coerce freelancers to give up republication rights for an infinite amount of adaptations (Freeman, 2001). To combat digital copyright infringements, the Society of Professional Journalists recommends that freelancers review their contracts carefully and retain copyright whenever possible, and advises freelancers to consult an attorney if a publisher is unwilling to them to retain copyright (Suleiman, 2016).

In other, more simple transgressions, editors may solicit pitches from freelancers only to turn them over to staff writers, never notifying the freelancer of the status of the pitch (Suleiman, 2016). The pitch becomes a published story, and the freelancer spent time researching the pitch for no return (and less intellectual knowledge than they started). To combat this, the SPJ recommends freelancers include non-disclosure agreements with their pitches, so that editors must enter a legal contract that bars them from disclosing the contents of a pitch before viewing it (Suleiman, 2016). These shady business practices against freelancers may explain why Canadian freelance journalists in one survey reported an average annual income of \$24,000 (Cohen, 2012).

In some instances, freelancers aren't as happy with their work than their salaried

peers. Flemish freelancers reported a 50 percent job satisfaction rate, as opposed to a 93 percent job satisfaction rate among salaried journalists in the region. Even worse, some freelancers become independent contractors for lack of more advantageous journalism jobs: 69 percent of Belgian freelancers surveyed say they chose to freelance because there were no available salaried jobs (Cock and Smaele, 2016).

Many freelance foreign correspondents fall victim to physical exploitation as well. Whereas salaried workers — whether in war zone journalism, heavy industry, transportation, or any other dangerous line of work — are guaranteed healthcare and worker's compensation when they are injured on the job, freelance foreign correspondents who are hurt in the field receive no compensation from the organizations of their temporary employment (Hicks, 2014). In 2014, freelance journalist Peter Curtis was released from Al Qaeda capture following negotiation by neighboring Qatar. Curtis had been held for two years. Fellow freelancer James Foley was captured in Syria in 2011 and decapitated on film in 2014 by the Islamic State, which distributed the video to western media outlets (Callimachi, 2014). *Newsweek* later reported that Foley's client, GlobalPost, was aware of threats on his life, but sent him anyway (Westcott, 2014).

Ethical concerns for freelancers

Questions of role identity and autonomy exist for freelance journalists, although the contractors themselves may not agree. One group of Swedish freelancers surveyed said they didn't think it was possible for them to survive on purely editorial contracts, and so they supplemented their income with public relations work. When asked about the potential for bias in their journalistic work, especially while reporting on the entities for

which they serve in a public relations context, the freelancers said they simply established their own ethical boundaries between public relations and editorial content (Ladendorf, 2012). German freelancers who engaged in PR work said the role identity didn't create a conflict because they were less enthusiastic about PR, which, in their minds, allowed them to retain their journalistic integrity (Koch and Obermaier, 2014). However, these role identities conflicts may create subconscious stress within the freelancers, which could be an explanatory factor in the low job satisfaction that some freelancers report (Frohlich, Koch and Obermaier, 2013).

Innovative revenue models such as crowdfunding — while exciting to the industry — invite a brand new host of ethical quandaries. One NPR-affiliated journalist, for instance, received \$100,000 of private monies to report on Washington D.C. politics. Journalists who employ crowdfunding to inform their journalism view their work as more autonomous than journalists who work for constraining organizations. Journalists may be more prone to crowdfund their reporting because of a natural aversion to market themselves — which runs contrary to other studies on marketing-savvy freelancers, but makes sense when comparing freelancers to marketing professionals (Hunter, 2016). When asked about the potential for bias when investigating the interests of their donors, these freelancers cite a personal devotion to maintain objective in the face of coercion (Hunter, 2014).

While freelancers may be less exposed to the ethical concerns of a salaried employee, they must negotiate an entirely different set of situations that arise from conflicts between personal and organizational ethics. Freelance journalists in Sydney reported frustration when publications and editors infringed on their editorial autonomy,

yet they still believed their freelance status made them more autonomous and credible than their salaried peers, and the majority believed their work was beneficial to the public interest. Yet, while some said they rejected pressure from major organizations to write stories of perceived questionable integrity, they did state that the job had given them a notion of “what to write, and what not to write.” These instances of powerlessness run contrary to the prevailing attitude among freelancers that they’re completely autonomous (Das, 2007). Yet, researchers note that freelancers may have more job satisfaction, which is partially attributed to their autonomy and ability to drop assignments with which they don’t feel comfortable (Ryan, 2009).

A study of U.S. freelancers found that individuals were content to rely on the ethics of an organization when making ethical decisions, under the assumption that editors and fact-checkers would correct any ethical shortcomings (Jenkins, 2017). When *Rolling Stone* freelancer Sabrina Erdely wrongfully accused multiple University of Virginia fraternity members of rape, the organization blamed the damaging error on Erdely herself, due to her questionable ethics in using unverified anonymous sources. While public backlash eventually caused the publication to admit responsibility, a lower profile scenario may have insulated *Rolling Stone* and Wenner Media, passing all of the ethical blame onto Erdley (Coronel, Coll and Kravitz, 2015). For these reasons, freelancers must maintain a high ethical standard for themselves, if only for the purpose of self-preservation.

Innovative revenue models

In order to grow their personal brand and garner more lucrative and interesting

assignments, freelancers employ marketing strategies that may be foreign to large media organizations. Such strategies include cultivating a social media brand, sharing one's personal interests in a forum of like-minded people and employing other engagement techniques to increase one's exposure. These skills are being recognized by magazine editors who wish to increase the engagement and brand awareness of their publication. In this way, freelance magazine journalists are becoming "intrapreneurial informants" for editors who recognize their social personas as a means to bring new readers to the publication (Holton, 2016).

Crowdfunding is another growing revenue model for freelancers as individuals. One NPR journalist, for instance, earned \$100,000 to report on Washington, D.C. politics through a crowdfunding campaign. Freelance journalists are also less likely to be comfortable marketing themselves than many entrepreneurs and communication professionals, so the ability to generate capital while solely needing to market the crowdfunding campaign is especially pertinent (Hunter, 2016).

Autonomy and freedom are indirect revenue models for freelancers, which may grow as the vocation expands in media. Provided they have the means to do so, freelancers can abscond to the site of a war zone, epidemic or any global crisis and get the valuable scoop — which they can in turn sell to publications for a premium while empowering their brand and future negotiating power (Astrid, 2005).

Methodology

In order to determine the strategies and attitudes of national freelance magazine writers, I will conduct semi-structured interviews with the national magazine freelancers.

A preliminary questioning structure provided a degree of uniformity throughout, while allowing me to retain the ability to ask follow-up questions and allow the interviewee to extrapolate on the details he or she sees fit. Semi-structured interviews are advantageous to surveys, in this context, because they grant the opportunity for clarification and individualized data collection. Once interview data is collected, a grounded theory approach will be used to analyze the data and develop a theory that matches the results of the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews

The bulk of the research will involve conducting and interpreting the empirical data from nine semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews ensure that a researcher covers all absolutely necessary topics by means of following an interview guide, while also allowing the researcher to change the order of questions and pursue topics brought up by the interviewee (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Because my sample is tied to the objective of my research, I'll use a purposive sampling method (Palys, 2008) to find nine national magazine freelancers who fit the following criteria: Three freelancers who have been freelancing full-time for less than five years, three freelancers who have been freelancing between five and 10 years, and three freelancers who have been freelancing for more than a decade. To qualify for the sample, each magazine freelancer must make a majority of this income from national magazine brands.

The rationale behind this sample is to stratify the sample to determine how magazine freelancers might develop and adapt their strategies and attitudes toward their work throughout their careers, and to uncover differences in strategies and attitudes

between newer and more experienced freelancers. National magazine freelancers were chosen in favor of city and regional magazine freelancers because national magazines are more subject to market forces, and therefore will be more indicative of the status of the industry — picking national magazines also excludes variances that may develop from geographically-based wages. These interviews will be conducted either over the phone or Skype, and the audio will be recorded for later transcription. The topics of each interview will include background information such as how and why each freelancer opted to become an independent contractor rather than a salaried employee, what each freelancer has learned over their time in the profession, how they structure their workload to maximize revenue and job satisfaction, and other related inquiries. Refer to Appendix A for a full list of questions.

Grounded theory

A grounded theory method will be used to analyze the contents of the interviews. The grounded theory method is defined as a “qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It was originally presented by Glaser and Strauss in their 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, in order to “close the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The gap in question was the space between two prevailing approaches of qualitative data analysis: Either analysts code all data first before analyzing it to test a provisional hypothesis, or — in the pursuit of generating theory — the analyst “inspects his data for new properties of his theoretical categories, and writes memos on these properties”

(Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Within the context of these semi-structured interviews, grounded theory is most applicable because, given the inductive nature of the research, the opportunity exists to develop a theory that explains the data (rather than merely forcing the research to fit an existing theory that may not adequately explain a phenomenon yet to be determined).

The constant comparative method of analysis will be used to analyze the interview data, which means data will be first organized into codes, which represent the brief descriptors found within interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Codes that share a common theme are subsequently grouped into concepts, and concepts are then grouped into categories, which represent the largest themes of the research and provide a basis for inducting a theory (Allan, 2003). The researcher may not advance from codes to concepts, or from concepts to categories, without reaching a saturation of data, at which point he or she can reasonably assume that further analysis will yield similar results (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, given the finite nature of the semi-structured interviews, saturation will be less relevant, as the researcher will analyze a set amount of text during each step. Once categories are developed, the researcher may propose plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts. “Theoretical conceptualization means that grounded theory researchers are interested in *patterns* of interaction between and among various types of social unite (i.e., ‘actors’)” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Thus, the grounded theory approach will allow for an analysis of patterns of interaction between freelancers and editors, and the development of theory based on that analysis.

Publishing

The results of my professional analysis will be written into a service article for freelance journalists. The headline may read, “5 Tips for Freelance Success in Magazines, as Told by Successful Freelancers.” The article will repurpose the categories defined within the constant comparative analysis as sections of the article that serve to inform readers on the tips they need to know to be successful freelancers, as detailed by the freelancers within my study. For instance, if “supplementing income with non-editorial work” emerges as a category, the corresponding sub-headline within the article would be “Tip 1: Supplement your income with non-editorial work.” In this way, the findings of my constant comparative analysis would evolve into service journalism that serves to benefit other freelancers, media professionals and students.

This service-oriented freelancer analysis would be ideal for either *Folio* or *Writer*. The former title is a magazine about the magazine industry, and the latter is a publication for professional writers of all disciplines. *Folio* has covered freelance topics such as writer’s guild boycotts of the *Huffington Post* and the evolution of freelance contracts. However, the publication tends to focus on straight news that involves freelancers, rather than assessments and reader service on freelancing. For this reason, my pitch to *Folio* would highlight the fact that my research would provide them with content they’re currently lacking. I’d presume this to be a successful strategy, under the condition that I can prove why freelancers are relevant to their publication, which I can prove with the contents of my literature review. *Writer*, although not magazine-specific with all of its content, has published a series of articles on freelance journalism. Topics include getting pitches accepted, landing repeat assignments, pleasing editors, query letters and more.

With plenty of freelance-oriented service content, *Writer* may be an ideal publication for my article as well. Lastly, *Mediabistro* offers a variety of service-oriented content for media professionals, so they may be a valid outlet as well.

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Appendix A

The following is a listing of the specific field notes I'll be filing to my committee each Sunday during my professional skills component. Each set of weekly field notes will assess work filed to editors between Monday morning and Sunday afternoon, for an eight-week period of Sundays between July 16 and September. 3.

Content filed for week

1. How many total articles did I file this week?
2. How many were for print?
3. How many were for web-only?
4. Comments:

Work log for week

1. How many total hours did I work this week?
2. How many hours were spent researching pitches?
3. How many hours were spent reporting?
4. How many were spent writing?
5. How many were spent editing?
6. How many were spent filing invoices and contracts?
7. Comments:

Income for week

1. How much money did I make this week?

2. How much did I make from print content?
3. How much did I make from digital content?
4. Comments:

Overall notes for week

1. How much did I enjoy my work this week?
2. What challenged me this week?
3. What did I learn this week?
4. What, if anything, will I do differently next week?

Appendix B: Semi-structured interviews

I will conduct interviews with freelance magazine journalists between July 10 and September 3. These are the questions I will ask.

General questions for freelance magazine journalists

1. Can you give me an overview of your work week?
2. How do you structure your work make the desired amount of money?
3. Would that structure change if all assignments paid equally? If so, how?
4. How do you negotiate the relationship between taking the most pleasurable work and the most profitable work?

Career evolution:

1. When did you go freelance full-time? Why did you make that decision?
2. What sort of work were you taking when you started out freelancing?
3. How have your assignments changed over the years?

Assignment specifics:

1. What proportion of your work is for print? How much of it is for digital?
2. What are the pros and cons to taking print work? What about digital?
3. How has your distribution of print versus digital work evolved over the years?
4. How have changes in publishing affected your work? Are you planning ahead for potential changes?
5. What have you learned about strategizing your work while traveling?

Appendix B: Physical evidence summary

Below is a summary of the stories I wrote, the hours I worked, and the money I earned during the 8-week research period.

- Total stories filed: 43.
 - Online stories published: 32;
 - Online stories soon-to-be published: 3;
 - Print stories published: 1;
 - Print stories soon-to-be published: 6;
 - Stories killed: 1;
 - Weekly average: 5.6;
- Total working hours: 300.
 - Weekly average: 37.5.
- Total income: \$6,980.
 - Weekly average: \$872;
 - Hourly wage (function of average weekly income/average work week):
\$23;
 - Annual earnings projection: \$45,370.

Appendix C: Professional analysis source overviews

The following are brief biographies of the 12 freelancers in the professional analysis.

- Ann Friedman is an LA-based freelancer who writes about gender, technology, culture, and media. She graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism in 2004, and was laid off from *GOOD Magazine* in 2012. She's been a full-time freelancer ever since, as well as a podcast host and public speaker, and has appeared in a host of national consumer magazines.
- Eva Holland is a Yukon territory-based freelancer who quit her research job in 2013 to write magazine features. Find her work in *Outside*, *Pacific Standard*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *AFAR*, and *Grantland*.
- Martin Fritz Huber was an *Outside* editorial assistant in 2014; he's since moved to Brooklyn and writes freelance about all things running. Catch up with his takes in *Outside Online*'s "In-Stride" column.
- New Mexico-based freelancer Eric Killelea went full-time freelance in February 2017, after a stint as an editorial fellow at *Outside* and years of newspaper experience throughout the American West.
- Amanda Chicago Lewis is an LA-based freelancer and an eminent cannabis reporter who reported briefly for BuzzFeed, before returning to freelance in

November 2016. Her biggest feature to date, *The Great Pot Monopoly Mystery*, appeared in the September 2017 issue of *GQ*.

- Linsey Knerl is a Nebraska-based freelancer who started out blogging about personal finance and frugality. Since going freelance in 2008, she's become the breadwinner of her household, and juggles her work with raising five sons and a daughter.
- Elizabeth Millard is a Minnesota-based freelance health and fitness writer, who's been a full-time freelancer since 2001. She's endured the Dot Com bust and the great recession, and now lives on a farm where she has 80 mouths to feed.
- Mark Obbie is a gun violence and criminal justice writer living in Canandaigua, New York. He began as a reporter for the Warren, Ohio *Tribune-Chronicle* in 1982, and he's covered courts and crime for newspapers and law journals throughout his career. He quit his teaching job at Syracuse University in 2012 to freelance full-time with *The Trace* and work on a book.
- Ellen Ryan is a Washington D.C.-based freelancer and the former *Washingtonian* managing editor. She's written for a handful of regional publications in the D.C. area since going freelance in 2012.

- Lauren Steele is a New York City-based freelance outdoor writer and content creator, and a former Columbia Sportswear Director of Toughness. She graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism in 2014.
- Abe Strep is a Santa Fe, New Mexico-based longform writer and former senior editor of *Outside*, a job he quit in 2014 to focus on telling impactful stories about places and people in the American West.
- Steve Weinberg is a Missouri-based freelancer and the author of nine books and countless magazine features. He graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism in 1970, returned for an MA, joined the faculty in 1978, and taught magazine journalism students until 2009.

Appendix D: Interview transcripts

*Interview with Ann Friedman, Los Angeles-based pop culture, gender, and politics writer
Friday, August 25 at 2 p.m., 48 min.*

Dan: So you graduated Mizzou in 2004, and you were just at a regular job for a year before starting at *Mother Jones*?

Ann: That's right. The *Mother Jones* thing was really like a low stipend internship and I lived off savings, but yes, a low-paid fellowship at *Mother Jones* was technically like my first professional newsroom/magazine experience. are you using.

Dan: And you said on your website that you applied to a bunch of different places before that and couldn't find a job, so even back then, it was still pretty hard?

Ann: Yeah I mean I couldn't afford to take something unpaid. I mean that has always been the case with magazine internships or most magazine internships, and the paying newspaper internships that I applied for I didn't get, and I didn't really want a newspaper job. So we can argue about whether that was coming through in my cover letter or whatever. I definitely tried to get an entry level journalism job that was that would pay me something and was not successful.

Dan: And then after your year *Mother Jones*, did you go right the *GOOD Magazine* or was there something in between?

Ann: Oh many years in between; so I worked out of *Mother Jones* at a website called Alternet, which at the time, they were basically in the business of taking print articles from like left leaning-media and digitizing them and putting them on their website. This is before, this is like a media early days of internet story where a lot of them didn't have the resources to really keep up with the website and it was like *The Nation* and like you know the *American Prospect* where I would go on to work. And like you know more alt places like *Bitch Magazine* or whatever. My job was essentially finding good articles that were languishing on these other web sites or in print and getting them to agree to let us publish them on Alternet. So funny that like thinking about that and how you think about that sometimes people are up in arms about Facebook muscling in on some publisher's profit. I'm like you it was pretty bad from the beginning, anyway. So I had that job which didn't last very long. I mean it was terrible. And then I got a job at a magazine called *The American Prospect* in D.C. where I started as an assistant editor and then I was the web editor and then I was the deputy editor. Pretty much editing print features as it was 10 issues a year. So I was there for like four and a half years and then quit because I didn't want to live in D.C. anymore. I hate it so much. And then was I was unemployed for a spell and doing freelance editing for like a month or two and then got the job at *GOOD* in spring of 2011. I think I interviewed in February 2011.

Dan: Remind me, did the magazine fold or was it just that they fired everyone?

Ann: Yeah. The millionaire who owns it decided it was sexier to have a social network than a magazine and fired off the magazine staff because he wanted to do kind like exclusively crowdsourced stuff and then they went back to being a magazine, it's whenever, there's been iterations, we were all we were... it wasn't like the magazine couldn't make any kind of lay-offs. It was a you know it was it was a pivot, I mean it was they had pivoted from film company to magazine and this is like pivot from magazine to social network and then they've pivoted back to magazine I think. I don't know. Anyway. Yes. So like I am I was fired from that job in June of 2012. And so I've been a freelancer for five and a half years.

Dan: And were you in L.A. by then are still on the East Coast?

Ann: Yeah. *GOOD* is in L.A. so I moved to L.A. to take the job. Beginning of 2011.

Dan: So I mean what was that like when the rug got swept out from under you; did you know enough people at the time to be able to just start talking to friends and whatnot or what was that like?

Ann: Well I knew certainly more people than when I was starting my career. Not like it was like making major news headlines. But like within communities of journalists who would be in a position to help me find work, it was pretty well-known that we had all been fired. And we made, the editorial team that I was fired with, we did a Kickstarter and made a single issue of another magazine. So essentially we could like follow through on some of the assignments we'd made and like you know have it function like a sort of like a resume like a work sample for all of us. And so that process was like a way to kind of be on the radar of other editors and writers. So I don't know. You know there's a combination of things like I did know more people because I've been working for a while and that we did have this little bit of like publicity within our journalism circles, the fact that like we were all free agents you know. And I did interview for a couple of editing jobs but I really didn't want to move to New York. I really like don't work very well in New York. I find it really stressful to be in cities where there are a lot of other journalists doing what I do you know. Anyway there's a lot of reasons why I didn't want to. And so I had a series where I was maybe going to do some freelance writing while I figured out what kind of job I was going to take next. And it probably took me a full year of doing that before I was telling people yes, I'm a freelance writer, as opposed to, well I was out of there and then I got laid off.

Dan: Were you doing the pie charts at that point?.

Ann: I made the first pie chart when I was still employed at the *Prospect* and sent it into *The Hairpin*. And you know I made them occasionally on and off, that short period between when I left my job at the *Prospect* before I got the job at *GOOD*, I was just kind of making them, and I would make them you know on and off in my spare time or whatever it was. But it wasn't like a regular thing and then when I was laid off and I was like okay listen what do I have that I can monetize here. I went back to *The Hairpin* and said do you want me to make you one of these per week you pay me something? And

they were like yeah we'll give you 50 bucks. It was seriously something like that. And I was like great. I'm doing one a week. It was really just like every little like you know thing I could scrap together. So I had been making them for a couple of years already but I had not been making them like on a schedule or trying to get paid for them.

Dan: Right. And so then once you started up I mean what sorts of things were you covering? I know that you have a really defined thing now, but did it take you some time to get to that direction?

Ann: Well I one things, you know actually, probably the primary reason I was able to even attempt freelancing is that *The Cut* which is New York magazine sort of women's section was in the midst of doing like a redesign right at the time I was laid off. And so they asked me if I wanted to be a columnist. And offered me like more money than I thought I would ever get for like a piece of web writing and they wanted me to do it once a week and I was like okay well this suddenly seems doable. This is like the backbone of my finances and of my you know week and so naturally that's the sort of scope of what *The Cut* covers is like gender as it intersects with politics and culture and you know relationships and whatever and so that was the purview of my column. I mean it was pretty much like the weekly news, with whatever take I wanted to have, usually with like a phone call or two of reporting but like nothing too intense. And so that really has changed. I mean like I said it was it was for many years the backbone of my work. The main financial, you know, saying that I did it and so I think that shaped, that definitely shaped like what I'm known for doing and it they just happened to be, like I mean I am interested in like gender, politics, and culture but it just happened to be that like the most important piece of recurring work that came to me first was in that area and so that's why that's why I do what I do. I mean if some tech website was like we need tech columnists and it offered me that much money maybe you'd be talking to me as like a tech reporter. You know I mean part of it was like, I am interested in all those things great like I am interested in gender I'm interested in tech, there's other stuff, but it's just sort of, I mean there's a lot of things in my career but particularly my freelance career is like following the money or following the opportunity.

Dan: And then after you had done a year or so with *The Cut*, obviously with the exposure that New York brings, did you start getting assignments from other places and that vein of reporting or were still hustling outside of work to get pitches accepted yourself?

Ann: It's always a combination. I mean I think the thing is about being a freelancer in L.A. people always there's always like I'm like a dumb celebrity interview that needs to be done. And so you know I mean I find it a really nice backstop where I'm not going to necessarily put it on my website because who cares. Like I mean like I feel like 85 percent of the celebrities who get interviewed are totally boring. But you know like there's work like that would come to me naturally because I mean at that point, you know, Brooklyn had yet to become interested in Los Angeles as a viable place to live. It's changed now. All of my editors in New York, when I would go to New York, would be like so what's going on in California? And it's just like what? What do you mean? How do I tell you like what's going on at a state or a whole city. You know they would just like

it felt a little more disconnected than it does now. And so I think some work came to me because of where I was. Some came to me because of you know my being at *The Cut* every week and then I also wrote a *Columbia Journalism Review* column every week, which is helpful to write for a publication that editors read, I think that did some good. During that early period of freelancing, I was writing...I mean I was probably in about four places per week: *The Cut*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, the pie chart in *The Hairpin*, and typically at least one other thing. And so there is just a sense of like, I don't expect anyone to read me and all of this places. But you know an editor runs across your name and one of those places two weeks in a row it has a little bit more of a sticking power. So I was just much more when I started out on like the content hamster wheel. Just simply getting it done every week.

Dan: Do you think it helps you in terms of exposure that you're not just writing for *New York* and such, but you're also Ann Friedman, the columnist?

Ann: Maybe. I mean I think it helps. Like you know I often think about the fact that if I were on staff somewhere I can't say no if my editor is like no you are going to spend the next week working on this feature even if like I think it's dumb. You know I always have control over the things that I spend my time on and, you know, I've had this situation before, not so much with *New York*, but like other places would say oh we can't publish your critical take on this thing because so and so is an advertiser or something like that. And then I can just take it somewhere else, there's a little bit of a freedom to being not exclusively tied to one publication. And part of that you're right, if I were a staff writer in New York my work would only appear in *New York*. And like you know being in more places I think is a net good, both in terms of like people who like my work but also in terms of like editors knowing it. I'm not totally sure I would like the opinion piece of it, although I think that that's some of it. I mean doing an opinion column every week like you know the heart of it is like the angle you can't just be like here's a person doing an interesting thing you have to connect the dots to something bigger or more editorially meaningful. And I do think that that's a skillset that is one that editors look for. You know I mean like you can send anyone to come back from an event with quotes, but are they going to make it relevant to our audience or are they going to have a point of view on it is not always a given. And it's funny, it's like that's a skill set that I feel; I mean I feel great about my education at Mizzou in a lot of ways. But the idea that like your personal point of view on something is a hugely important skill that you can cultivate. And like it's actually very useful outside the realm of a newspaper news section and anywhere else is going to want you to have a personal point of view on something, I feel like that is just the very opposite of what I was trained to do in most of my j-school classes, you know I think there is something about that like being able to be myself and not be exclusively in the voice of a magazine that I think is an advantage.

Dan: So if not at Mizzou, how did you cultivate that skill?

Ann: Because when I couldn't find any jobs coming out of college the place where I did find work was in like the communications department of a nonprofit. And through that job I met some women who were starting a blog and were like do you want to write for

our blog? And I was like well yeah no one else is asking me to write anything. Sure. And so like, the answer is blogging when I had no magazine that would employ me, which is an opinion-based media, basically like being a critical reader. Things that are already out in the world and take your perspective and it's not totally dissimilar from what I would go on to do for the paid column. And when I was in j-school, no one was like yes, blogs are the future. They are not terms of like you know like them still being like a thing. But in terms of foundational for the kind of internet journalism, or digital journalism, that happens now was definitely important in 2004. It would have been good to know about that you know?

Dan: Yeah. So how much reporting do you do now where you're not putting yourself into the story?

Ann: Most of the time when it's not really about me and I only show up it's like, I met someone so and so at this place kind of thing. I write for every issue of this British magazine called *The Gentlewoman*, which are mostly profiles. You know that's not really a part of that. Or like my point of view is not as obvious. It's not like column-based. There are a few things that I've done for *The Cut*, both in that column context and outside of it, that are definitely not driven by, "here's what I think about the world," that are more driven by a question I have about it and I'm going to report my way to an answer, as opposed to you know finding reporting to support a point of view, which I think is the opposite tactic. But I definitely do things that are that I would say are primarily reported without a strong opinion component and without a real "I" in them at all.

Dan: Do you get to do much in-person reporting in LA?

Ann: Yeah, I do quite a bit of that, I travel to do it as well. And that's something about New York was less about me thinking there aren't good stories in New York and more a commentary on, I find that like personally psychologically quite difficult to spend my weekends at parties where everyone else is a journalist. I think that that creates ideas that aren't that interesting or like, I don't know there's just there's something about like there's like the time in my life I spent all of my social time was drinking with other political journalists and my ideas have never been more boring. I really I think it's really good to hang out and spend time with people who are not full time journalists and like listen to what they're struggling with and what they're interested in reading about and you very quickly realize that like journalists' concept of what is a played out idea or what is the article everyone talking about or like not, like that's only true within the bubble of editors and writers. That's not true in terms of maybe the people you want to really be reading your work. You know I mean every time I'm on the plane back from New York to L.A. I'm like I have no good ideas. I've never had a good idea. No one has any good ideas. Everything's played out. It's very, like I don't know. Probably both in terms of like not wanting to live in that city, but there is something about the hive mind of it. And at least for me that has never been very fruitful in terms of ideas. I know there are other people who thrive on it and I know there are people who need to be there to hoard professional connections. So for everyone, but like for me it's like, get in get out, get it and have the meetings and get back from my real life as quickly as possible. And I really try to only

hang out with other journalists one on one because the dynamic is really messed up in groups.

Dan: And so when you're traveling, is this a lot of travel you do for *New York*?

Ann: I mean it's it really depends. I mean I travel quite a bit for *The Gentlewoman*, I've traveled for the *Guardian*, I've traveled for...I also like I also pay myself to travel the places where I don't have an assignment yet to you know meet people and try to find more interesting stories because when you're a freelancer no one is, I mean even when you're on staff no one's really fronting a lot of work to try to find interesting things that are going on. But at a certain point like I got financially stable enough to fund the occasional upfront trip to go see a place or go to a thing or meet someone so I don't know it really depends. But yeah all those things.

Dan: So when you are on assignment though, are you really just doing the assignment, or are you looking for new ledes on other things you're thinking about?

Ann: Oh I'm always working for everything. Like the direct quote that I use I'm not recycling or anything like that. But like you know it happens all the time where I'm interviewing someone for a specific assignment and they mention something that I'm like oh yeah that would be a perfect piece for such and such. And you know like make a note of it, and you know it's also been the case that I do tack on an interview with someone when I'm there, you know, maybe not on another assignment but when I'm there for some other reason altogether. Now I also do the podcast so sometimes when I'm interviewing someone for the podcast and they mention this thing and I'm like I will be great for a pitch. I mean the lines are clear in terms of like, I said I don't use material that is specifically for one story in another, especially not without like asking a source. But I do, I mean I'm always working for myself, which means I'm working for really everyone like all the time.

Dan: If you are going to spec a trip, how much time do you put in pre-reporting before you are willing to go out and travel for something that you don't know whether you can sell?

Ann: I mean sometimes it's like I don't know who I can sell it to but I know I can sell it to someone. That's kind of where I am at this point. I know enough people. I feel like I have a lot of knowledge about what you know certain types of editors are looking for and maybe I don't know before I go exactly what the angle is and exactly who it's for. But you know I mean I would say especially for a small group of editors who I have written for repeatedly, I would take that trip and if it seems at all relevant to them, you know kind of come up with some ideas about how it might fit for my top choice. See if they want to get on the phone. Talk about it when I'm back. If they don't seem interested, I mean then I just go down the list. But like if I'm interested enough to get on a plane upfront or take a side trip when I'm somewhere for a friend's wedding or something like that I'm pretty interested and pretty confident that someone will pay me to write about it in some form. And I think that's also just like years of being an editor before I was a writer. So I don't

know how people do it if they are straight from college to a writing job or they don't have any editing experience. Maybe it takes longer. I don't know. But I'm also not that I'm not that strict where I'm like this is exactly how I see this playing out before I go into the interview, if I'm interviewing someone up-front. That makes sense, like I'm almost always just like there's something going on here. I'm not sure what it is. And then there's like a lot of different ways that can live in a piece.

Dan: So in the past few years, has there been anything that you wanted to cover that you couldn't sell anywhere?

Ann: Yeah I think there have been a couple of things. Or I can't quite get it lined up at the right time, so you know there was a story where I did a bunch of preliminary interviews and sold it, and sold it to a magazine, and they were like great we're going to do it and it and I you know essentially reported it out and then it got killed because it was, you know they didn't have space. It was only assigned because it was for a special issue and then it was sort of returned to me and that by the time I wanted to repitch it somewhere else and reframe it, the people I interviewed were no longer interested in being interviewed for it. And it's kind of like, time got away from it. And I still believe that like the story in some way shape or form, like someone is going to come to me and be like, we're looking for essays about this specific topic. And I will I will be like, I know what's in my back pocket. Like I can't write it as a reported piece but I could do something essayistic based on these scenes. I don't know. Like I really don't believe that anything is, at this point, there's no such thing as wasted work. But you know what has happened where I'm like oh when I it and the sources aren't there, or I can't get there in person to get the scene I need in time for the magazine's deadline because I've got other commitments. But I haven't had the experience yet of like really committing, being like my top priority is one feature, and never not being able to place it anywhere. That's because I don't really have any top priorities, I've got a big, giant mish-mosh of stuff I'm interested in doing that I try to fit in where editors are interested and where my time works. You know it's like more like a jigsaw puzzle. If that makes sense.

Dan: Sure. And so apart from the whole writing and reporting aspect of the actual work, since starting freelancing, what's been the most surprisingly difficult thing?

Ann: You know I mean I think my biggest problem is that, and maybe this also goes back to being you know an editor for the first half of my career, is that I just I am interested in doing and writing so many things that I feel like you know everything I just said about jigsaw puzzle thing. It's really difficult to prioritize. Like I kind of do wish I was like okay, this feature is my top priority for the next two months and I'm focused, and that's financially not possible. And so when I think about the life of like a *New Yorker* staff writer who's literally only doing one story at a time, I have no idea what that would be like. You know so I think for me the specific thing is feeling like I'm pulled in many directions at once, which is a requirement in order to have any kind of financial stability but is also, I mean, I think I can feel really difficult to commit to what I know is important and what I know is like a story I really want to be telling right now for example. So I don't know if it's that kind of pattern, which I think all journalists

experience right now, but if you're on staff there's an editor to kind of help to prioritize and muddle through. It's a little bit different to do and being like wow I have to do this so I can eat this month. So this other priority has to slide.

Dan: Do you have a rough schedule you try to regiment yourself to?

Ann: Yeah I mean I have a rough flow to my weeks, like I you know in the the days when I was writing a column every week I would always pitch my editors on Mondays and I would report if I needed to on Tuesday and then write Wednesday and Thursday and then it usually ran near the end of the week. So like the column started with like an ideas search on Monday morning. Not always, but often, these days I always record the podcast at the beginning of the week. I always read my newsletter on Friday morning, that's usually 9 till noon every Friday. I try to do all of my invoicing and account stuff at the last week of the month whenever I have time and I'm not right on deadline. Often that's Friday afternoon. I don't know. I mean I really, I don't really have a strong routine. I have like some rules and you know there's always been things that I do weekly and those are kind of more basic. But everything else is like super variable.

Dan: If money weren't a factor in terms of you were working the same amount of hours but you weren't having to worry about diversifying what you do in order to keep that steady income, would you be doing anything differently?

Ann: That's a good question. I do honestly, I have quite a bit of leeway now in terms of like what pieces of writing and reporting work I say yes to and in part because the podcast and the newsletter both make me money. And so that's taken the financial pressure off of my writing which means I pretty much don't do things that feel...like I don't do profiles unless I'm actually interested in the subject and I've taken to actually replying to editors like sorry I'm not interested in this person, that's why you should not have me do it. It's not that I'm not interested in writing for you but, you know, sometimes when it's like a 20-year-old model I'm like why are you featuring this person anyway? So I do say no to a lot of things that I've had to say yes to in the past, and I think I mean I think that finding more to follow through on some of the feature conversations that I have. For every conversation about feature ideas, there are probably three that I don't follow up on. And I'd like to be in a world where all the time I never do that, but I honestly, at this point, I think the problem is not money. The problem is like my own wanting to say yes to a million things, like I'm just interested in a lot of different media and doing a lot of different stuff. And I do think about the world in which I'm exclusively a reporter or in which I'm exclusively a columnist or whatever and that's just not the world I have set up for myself.

Dan: So at this point do you ever envision there being a staff job that you would take over what you have right now?

Ann: I mean it's hard to say, honestly the value proposition of a staff job is not that great. Well first of all, the aforementioned New York thing, so were ruling out at this point a lot of the jobs that are interesting by description, I'm being totally serious. The premium for

me to have to live in New York City. I mean like oh God. Like really I don't think any magazine could really...I don't know I feel like...so in theory sure there might be a staff job for me. In practice, knowing how I feel about New York and knowing the joy that I get from like the parts of my business that like I own and get to grow and have complete intellectual property ownership over and the stability that I have. I mean I don't know anyone—that's not true—I know very few editors who have been in their position as long as I've been freelancing, which is maybe not a priority. But like I feel a pretty great amount of stability and control. So I don't know and I don't really get it, I used to get staff job offers or conversations, and those have kind of gone away. I don't really know. Like yeah I mean I think the short answer is no, there's not a staff job that I would consider. I can't think of it. But maybe if I had kids or something, like maybe if I had like, I don't know, there's like lots of big life "ifs" that I'm like who knows, for now.

Dan: And on intellectual property, do you still get contracts where you're like no, I need more rights, or indemnification?

Ann: Yeah. Contracts are awful. I mean like this is something that happened more often in the first few years I was freelancing where I was like I can't say no to this amount of money but the terms are horrendous. Often now when I write for places that are really not negotiable on the contract for like a short profile or something that I don't feel there would be much of a liability issue, or you know much desire on my end to retain those rights. You know what I mean? Like I think that like these days when I do things that feel bigger and like more important me, honestly I'm writing for places that are owned by people who are former writers or who are in the sweet spot of being enough to pay me something that's worth my time and not being part of a conglomerate. But I don't know, I mean I think my perspective on what magazines are good to write for has shifted dramatically in the time I've been a freelancer. I think I used to think the bigger the name, the better the higher dollar amount for word the more prestigious or something. And I just don't feel that way anymore.

Dan: So what does make a good magazine for you?

Ann: Oh my god, well the ability to pay me enough so it is worth my time, like I'm not being like oh I love working for free for anyone, but frankly really good editing really smart editors who are actual collaborators toward like making a piece better, places that are you know aware of the upfront work that goes into something, places that do have great contracts. You know I mean there they are out there. But I mean I also I have a pretty strong preference for writing for the digital side of a lot of the kind of like big name legacy glossies where the budget is not that much lower but the headaches are way, way lower, I think it's like actually possible for better work. So you know sometimes it's more of a choice like that. And sometimes the contracts are different for the web side of things. I mean I think I've had varying degrees when I don't like a contract and I can only think of like one or two instances where I was like I can't do that at all for you with these terms. Those were really egregious. And you know that's why you've really got to read it, especially because of the international edition of shit, if they're not going to pay you to license it either.

Dan: How much print work you do as a proportion of all the work that you do?

Ann: No I mean I do a few glossy women's magazine things the year, I do something for every issue of *The Gentlewoman*, which is print and often that doesn't even make it on the Internet. That's a couple times a year. I usually do a few things for like UK papers so I'll be like you know like the *Times of London*, a Sunday magazine thing, or a *Guardian* thing, you know a handful for sure. Usually those things are things that actors come to me with, not like things I'm pitching, I don't ever...it's pretty rare that I pitch for print for all of those reasons.

Dan: Do you feel like you need to learn anything new in terms of platforms in order to adapt?

Ann: I mean I have a podcast that at this point is paying for like probably a third of my income, which is a pretty good platform play in my opinion. I have this newsletter that I like monetize where it pays for the time I spend on it every week, it essentially like pays me as much as if I'd kept one of my columns every week. That again is like something that I own top to bottom. I also do consulting, which started as a thing where when people would email me and be like can I pick your brain? I could just immediately funnel them to that page on my website and, you know, I probably do a couple of calls a month that are just like you know someone being like I'm starting a newsletter too, what are the best practices? I mean it's nothing like me telling a big brand how to market to whatever whatever. You know it's often people who are other journalists or other people in media. I do a fair bit of public speaking, which is also something that I feel like I could expand into. At this point I figure like writing is still the most fulfilling and probably most financially important thing that I do. But it's frankly one of like six irons in the fire. One of them is not video. But like I said I've got that audio component there. I'm learning that audio right now. I don't know, I don't know how people are like "I'm just a writer and reporter and that's all going to be forever." I truly don't understand those people. Obviously I respect the skill set and I love it too, but I don't know, and working for myself allows me to do all of those things, like if I worked in a staff editing job I wouldn't have had the time or probably the institutional buy-in, and I definitely wouldn't have the ownership over the newsletter and the podcast if I started those under the offices of a traditional media company. And now I've got all the skills because I had to learn how to do all these things myself and I still own them. So I don't know. I mean I feel pretty good. I mean I don't think that I have an idea what's going to happen, you know like every year Nieman Lab does like a prediction for the next year of journalism. And I'm like no, I have no interest in doing that kind of forecasting. But I do think that self-employment, if you do it right, it is a nice way to expand you know the skill sets that you want to expand. And so I don't know. I mean I'm not pivoting to video. If everything truly does pivot to video maybe I'm screwed but I feel like I could place them in the podcast and show them a few public speaking clips and be like "take a chance on me with your video pivot" and probably not go hungry. I don't know, there's like, I think the more diversity of skill set and platform is more important than having to bet on exactly the right one.

Dan: Right. So is there anything that in a study of freelancers I haven't asked that you think is important in your experience?

Ann: You know I don't know. I think it's hard. I think it's a hard road if you're not interested in business at all. I like to think that in retrospect, like when I was an editor I used to feel like really annoyed by being pulled into meetings about the business side of things, or having to justify my decisions to people in business side. And now that I kind of do all of those things under you know one roof I'm pretty grateful that I had to think about that stuff, even if I make different choices now. There's like there's something about the question of freelancing being an area where you collapse the wall between business and editorial because you are a business, you're one-person editorial business. I think that question is pretty interesting. And I think that the freelancers who I am most interested in talking to in terms of like what do you think about this? Or like problem solving or going to them when I'm not sure about something are people who kind of have a holistic view about stuff, as opposed to people who are like I am an editorial purist and that's all I do, which is you know, whatever. I think that there is something about the mentality of freelancing as a business that I think is really interesting who has it and who doesn't. For example like the podcasting world, which is like you know so brand new. I mean that is like what blogs were in 2005 or whatever in terms of like not knowing whether they're going to get folded into bigger media entities or whether it's going to be a separate thing, is going to be like TV? Is it going to go away? I don't know. There's a lot of freelancers who are journalistically trained but in the audio space who I think are pretty interesting. I do think that there is something going on too regionally where people who are journalists maybe at papers or who live in mid-sized cities have a different experience of this than people in New York who have a different experience than people in other large cities that are not in New York, like I do think that there there's something too about the local hive mind around you what what the opportunities are for getting freelance work. For me, the only professional loss to me of moving somewhere else would be that I don't have the easy backstop of the dumb celebrity profile as a financial thing in my back pocket, but like you know thinking about like, oh, I actually relied on that a lot more in the days when I was brand new to freelancing and if I were in a different city I wouldn't have had that. There's like a regional question that I would have I don't know the answer to it. I'm just curious.

*Interview with Eva Holland, Yukon Territory-based feature writer
Wednesday, August 23 at 11 a.m., 43 min.*

Dan: To cover the basics, so where are you from originally?

Eva: Ottawa, which is in Ontario. I went to college in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I did my undergrad there. And then I went to grad school in England. I had a master's in history. My undergrad was in history as well and then was back in Ottawa for a bit before I started freelancing full time. My first year and a half of freelancing I just lived out of a suitcase and roamed around. And then I settled in the Yukon after that.

Dan: So you did history for grad school in the U.K. and then you came back. And what did you do. And I guess you were in Canada going to work. Where were you working?

Eva: Well I was trying to freelance and so I just made the decision while I was in grad school to come home and start trying to be a freelance nonfiction writer. I started actually freelancing on the side while I was in grad school doing some short travel articles for my hometown paper, The Ottawa Citizen, and decided that seemed like more fun than doing a Ph.D. in history and trying to become an academic. So I came home and started trying to freelance and worked a bunch of different jobs to start off with that first winter. I was like I worked as a snow shoveler, I was placing bagels and a deli. I was waitressing and then I did get a job actually in my field after a few months of historical research basically for hire I worked for a private firm that offered archival research researchers for hire basically for lawyers for lawsuits and things. So I worked there for a year and a bit while trying to freelance on the side. And then I quit that job and went freelance time in spring 2008.

Dan: Snow shoveling?

Eva: Yeah. It was like an industrial level job like we were clearing the front of office buildings all. So it was like a big contract. We had snow blowers and we had brooms as well. For like doing the stairwells and things.

Dan: So who were you writing for starting out?

Eva: I sort of have had kind of two distinct writing careers. My first one was in purely travel writing and so when I first of all when I quit my job I wasn't actually making a living from writing yet but it was at the point where I was getting enough work that I would have had to start turning down writing jobs to keep my day job and that seemed counterproductive. But I definitely making like under a thousand dollars a month from writing when I quit my job. So that was why I gave up my apartment as well and lived out of a suitcase for a year and a half. I did sort of hostels and short term sublets and things and just kind of lived kind of hand-in-mouth for a year and a half. And then I got a steady contract editing gig with a website called work World Harm that's sort of semi-defunct now that specializes travel essays and I had been blogging for them since before I quit my day job. And what struck me as an editor to edit the personal travel essays and blog regularly for them and stuff was sort of part staff-writer part-editor. But when the staff job it was contract. So that was what allowed me to actually sign a lease. And in White Horse, so I moved to White Horse about two months after I got that gig. And at the time I was doing, most of the blogs are gone now, but there used to be a bunch of kind of group-written travel blogs in the late 2000s. And I did some magazine work then as well for a couple of in-flight magazines and sort of industry travel magazines. And then that all fell apart in 2010 late 2010 early 2011, basically this sort of travel blogging bubble burst and ever be lost their funding and I lost my contract and everything kind of just crumbled. And so then I worked in the mining industry in the Yukon for a few months. And like a laborer literally like digging up dirt to send to the lab looking for gold. While I was doing that. I did a bunch of thinking about what kind of a writer I wanted to be and

what I was doing and I had been feeling a little bit unfulfilled with the travel reading. I mean it's a lot of fun but it can get repetitive after awhile you know I had written like five different Weekends in Barbados articles by this point and just wasn't feeling super fulfilled. So while I was working in mining I decided that what I wanted to do was more like reported narrative feature writing. And so when I got out of the mining camp I was working and I started trying to. And I was able to you know that mining job let me pay off my credit card and stuff like that and then I started doing more reported work. Partly about the mining industry which I obviously had contacts in a bunch about from that period. That was late 2011, I worked in mining from August to December 2011 and then a local magazine hired me to fill in for a U-Conn editor on maternity leave in 2012 so I did that for 10 months and I wrote a bunch of report features for them and that was kind of my introduction to that really, I had decided I wanted to do it, but I hadn't really done it before and I wrote like 20 features for that magazine that year. It was, I was cranking them out and so I got a lot of practice really quickly because you know 2000 3000 words. Nothing really long but that gig ended at the end of 2012 and I started basically January 2013 like OK I am going to be a freelance narrative reporter a senior writer now. And that's what I've been working towards ever since.

Dan: What magazine was that where you were filling in for maternity leave?

Eva: It's called Up Here and it covers the three northern territories in Canada. It's based in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. And so they used to have a Yukon editor. And that was the position that I took on. There was some editing involved but it was mostly a staff writing position and the editor had gone on maternity leave for 10 months so I just did her job and learned a ton. That was my first real exposure to how magazines work from the inside. So it really helped a lot when I went back to freelancing.

Dan: So then when you when you went out and started freelancing after leaving that magazine, what was that transition like? I mean were you able to line up stuff before you left, or were you just out in the cold?

Eva: I was able to line up some stuff because I knew that staff job was temporary I actually never stopped freelancing while I was doing it, they allowed me to freelance while I was on staff because they knew I had to go back to it. And I couldn't you know start from scratch. So I had two sons lined up but from what I remember 2013 was kind of a scramble, 2014 as well, I did a lot of different things I did some copywriting some copy editing and some I went back to do some research for hire. The way I had in my staff job years earlier just like people would hire me to go to the Yukon archives for them or whatever. I did a lot of different. You know I did some grant writing for money. I did some, like I got paid to do some organizing of local literary events. You know lots of kind of just whatever anybody would pay me to do and then probably starting from later in 2014 into 2015 I started more consistently getting magazines feature assignments and was able to phase out the side hustle.

Dan: So now I mean is that mainly the you're just really a magazine feature writer?

Eva: Basically I write a few short pieces but not many. Basically I just write features mostly.

Dan: Yeah I saw that thing you did on Mt. Marathon.

Eva: Yeah.

Dan: So I just called Ali Ostrander and she was like some writer named Eva actually hit me me up as well.

Eva: Small world!

Dan: It's like it's like a one pager or something like that. A moment ago, you'd said you were working toward being a magazine feature writer. Would you say that like in your opinion you got there? I mean obviously you probably always want more but is that how you define your career at this point?

Eva: I think so yeah. I mean that seems very it seems like it's sort of just started to really get there as far as you know my pitches being accepted more consistently and breaking into some bigger magazines. And you know I mean people always feel like they're still climbing a ladder I think. But I think I think I could say that what I do for a living now is for magazines. Yes. That's basically what I do.

Dan: How many features would you say you did last year?

Eva: Let me just see...it goes through your brain so quickly, I find. I would say in 2016 I will say it was I published because they get written in a different year. One to three so they only published maybe six or seven features last year. It's funny the way things work because like I had you know three or four published in a month in March and April that had been in the works for ages. So those are kind of hard to... yeah I typically... I typically write between 80 and 100 thousand words a year but I'm trying to bring that down now that I'm working for some higher paying outlets.

Dan: So when you say like higher paying stuff, is most of the stuff that do now at least appear in print?

Eva: I'm mostly now in print, and so do some online-only but less and less, partly because some of those outlets are disappearing as well you know like a lot of my early features were for SB Nation longform and it no longer exists for instance.

Dan: But weirdly, about the fact that there's digital outlets that were there and now they're not there, I mean like there's this whole you know, in terms of what you do, I mean has that really affected you or do you think that there's still enough work for you to do this for a while?

Eva: Yeah I think there's still enough work for a while. I wonder sometimes what things will be like five or 10 years. But for now you know I'm doing better than I ever have.

Dan: And so when you four to six features in a year, are these all things that this point that you're still researching yourself or are you now to the point where you're actually doing features where you're just you know on an assignment that was given to you?

Eva: Yeah it's a mix, it's mostly ideas that I pitch myself, but I do get some assignments as well, which is always fun, flattering certainly, although sometimes it can be hard if the editor has a particular image in their head is what they want from an assignment to create the story that they want when it's... when it's not your idea but I do get some assignments as well.

Dan: Especially for features, I have to imagine, if you're going to pitch something to say, *Pacific Standard*, I mean how long does it take you to research a pitch and like make it good enough to where you feel like it's fleshed out it's got a good shot?

Eva: Yeah it really varies depending on how well I already know the material, like if it's a Yukon story or an Alaska story, I probably have a character in mind pretty easily, you know like it's your level of familiarity can really make a difference in terms of how hard your pre-reporting is. And then we gradually get at something you don't know as much about going in. Then you have more legwork to do to be confident in your pitch and maybe more legwork to find characters, that sort of thing. So it really varies from you know writing something up pretty quickly about something you know well too you know weeks of work. John Valiant, I saw him give a talk to some writers once at an event and he he said he spent a year or so the series with a *New Yorker* feature before it was a book and he said he spent a year working on and off on the pitch for that feature.

Dan: So if you had a batting average, what would you your ratio of accepted pitches is?

Eva: Oh it used to be the one in ten I would say is now getting closer to one in five or six. Yeah it often takes me a few tries to sell a story. Some stories never sell. Some stories sell on the first try.

Dan: When you say a few tries I mean, when you think of a pitch, do you say, I have this magazine in mind and I have these magazines where maybe I can retool it if the first one doesn't want it, or do you make something where you have a shot at three or four magazines and see who wants it?

Eva: Yeah I usually have one in mind to start with but I try to have a list of next possibilities where it could also work for maybe with some retooling, I don't... if I can avoid it, I try not to do a lot of work on pre-reporting a pitch that only has one potential home because the chances are just so high that they'll say no. And then and then that's you know dead work. So I try to have a list of three or four, typically some of them might be more likely than others and maybe you know obviously go with the one that seems like it's the best bet first and then work down from there. And after I work down that list

you know it may be a matter of putting that story away for a while if nobody's bitten or sometimes if it's a story I'm really attached to like literally are paying it but it really varies.

Dan: Will you will you ever say that maybe I'll just do web-only because I think that it would be best for me and what I want to do in the long run?

Eva: I suppose yes sometimes yeah. If I'm really attached to a story or it seems important to get it out there or if I've already put a lot of work into it and it wouldn't be that much more to get it online then yeah.

Dan: And so do you think you might have that edge being in Whitehorse, just because of that the fact that you can do that de facto Yukon reporter?

Eva: I do think there's an advantage being here. I don't think that's it exactly because I'm you know the New York magazine editors are not hesitant about sending someone up here who doesn't think about the place. I wouldn't say that I automatically get those assignments. I do think it helps in my own pitches to be able to claim a level of expertise about the region. And I think it helps me be sort of stand out from the crowd as far as you know when I do go to New York and try to have drinks with editors or coffee or whatever. People are sort of intrigued. Like if they don't already know who I am, they're like huh, freelancer from the Yukon Territory that weird and different. So I think there's advantages. I'm also of course really disconnected from you know the scene. So there's pros and cons but I do think that it helps to have like expertise that I can genuinely lay claim to and in my pitches say I know this place, I know the issues, I know the people, I know how to navigate it. And you know better than anyone else that you would send up here.

Dan: So do you still travel a lot when you're on assignment? I mean do people still pay to send you out somewhere for a week-long reporting trip?

Eva: Yeah. I get to travel a fair bit with stories. My impression from people who've been doing this longer than I have is that the reporting trips are getting shorter. I've definitely had you know 36 or 48 hours on the ground to get a story rather than you know five or six days which can be stressful but better than just desk reporting everything for sure.

Dan: And when you're doing that I mean this probably doesn't apply to you as much as it does other people who do a combination of longer and shorter work. But if you're ever traveling to somewhere where you maybe have a break in reporting or something. Are you ever scouting out like OK I'm here maybe here, maybe here are some other ideas, or I'm here and this doesn't work for the story, but maybe I can sell it, are you kind of working that or are you just there to work for the place that pays you to go there?

Eva: If my travel is being covered for because I'm in I don't really work on anything else while I'm doing that. I might keep my eyes open but I wouldn't go report something else entirely while I'm on someone else's dime. What I do sometimes is on my on my own

time do kind of recon trips that I try to pair with friends or family and maybe do some pre-reporting while I'm traveling for personal, and then see if I can turn that around and get a reporting trip covered. But I know that's something freelancers talk about a lot. It's like, to what extent can you sort of, not double-dip exactly, but yeah, how much how much leeway there is there when somebody is paying you? And I tend to think that if they paid to meet me there, they shouldn't have to share my undivided attention.

Dan: If money weren't a factor, would you be doing anything differently? Is there anything that you want to do more that you can't do right now?

Eva: Yeah it's hard to do like a longer term stuff. I would like, I'm getting there slowly as I get more consistent assignments from higher paying outlets. It's, when you're hustling to just crank a ton of stuff out, it's hard to work on something long term, something more investigative, you know stuff that takes weeks or months of resources. I'm always envious of the staff writers who get to just dive into something over the course of like a year. That's really hard for me to do. As a freelancer because I'm always worried about paying the next bill. So that's something you know, and I try sometimes grant money can help with that sort of thing. But yeah if money were no issue I'd be writing less and I would be working on more kind of long term, deep-dive type of reporting, that's the stuff where you just have to put in you know weeks and months of leg work. I don't get to do that very often.

Dan: When you're shooting for something like that, how do you go about the pre-reporting that it would even take to sell something like that? I guess my question is, how do you justify going to a magazine editor and saying I want 3,000 words in print?

Eva: Yeah I guess it has to have an actual narrative arc you know and some heft to it, you know people talk about like the ideal the sort of ideal magazine feature is one that pairs like an individual story with a larger issue. And that's when you start to have some real depth to your storytelling, I think it's there to justify the longer word counts. Ideally I don't bring a pitch to editor and until I have the character or characters in mind and access to them the lined up rather than just an idea for a story. You know I try to do that legwork of having the access and the characters and a sense of the larger issue and how the two can interact.

Dan: And how do you line up the characters before you get the story accepted?

Eva: Yeah. Basically I tell them that I'm interested in doing a story, that I'm a freelancer that I don't have an assignment yet. But that if I did have an assignment, would they talk to me. I don't try to necessarily take up a lot of their time until I can be more committed. But I at least approach and see if they be open to talking.

Dan: What draws you to freelancing?

Eva: I love the lifestyle. It's hard sometimes but I'm good at being by myself, I'm good at motivating myself, I have the sort of necessary organizational brains to run my own

business. And I find that satisfying. So these are things that I've seen a lot of people quit freelancing not because they weren't enough writers but because they can deal with the uncertainty or they couldn't deal with the isolation or all the sort of administrative bullshit. But yeah I sort of suited for that. And I like it. I like the freedom to travel you know, to work remotely, you know, I can go visit my family for like a month and work from there instead of having to take one week vacation from a job you know. Yeah. You know it's funny I've talked to some freelancers who say that they were bad employees. And so that's why they're their own boss because weren't good with authority or you know following the rules or things like that and that makes sense to me but for me it's more the opposite. I was really good employee and kind of even my crappy high school job. I was like so committed to doing the best possible job. And you know these companies are never love you back no matter how hard you try. So for me it's almost better to be self-employed because I was giving myself so fully to some dumb job that was never going to you know reward me for it. And so now if I want to be a total workaholic I'm the only one who gets the benefits.

Dan: How much of it is about just doing decent work?

Eva: Oh yeah it took me ages to realize that you that like the bar is so low, people don't remember, there's a million freelancers out there, but people don't realize how many of them don't just you know turn in clean copy on time respectfully. You know when I was an editor we once got an email from a freelancer and all it said was "when am I getting a f**king raise." So it's like it's just not that hard to be somebody to like working with. I mean it. But is that hard, apparently, there's not that many people, so that's a huge...I had an editor once say to me, and he meant it as praise, "you know what's great about you Eva, you file your copy and you move on." And I was like, oh you know in my little insecure writer heart I'd like you to say "you know what's great about you Eva is that you just like you just do whatever it takes to make the story the best one you could possibly write because you even if you blow a million deadlines..." that is actually what he wanted. You know he wanted somebody who could file clean and on time reliably and not leave a hole in his magazine. I think freelancers can go a long way just by being reliable and responsible and respectful.

Dan: What's the hardest part about the job?

Eva: Everything is on you. You know you're not part of a team so you really have to generate your own ideas and you're the one who gets the angry e-mails if you write something that is it's and it's feels like you're pretty exposed not just financially but sort of. Yeah. You're, you're making this thing and you're putting it out to the world. And it's scary every time I still you know, I feel sick every time a feature goes live. I don't know who's going to yell at me or hate it or which sources are going to be upset that I describe them this way.

Dan: Do you typically have to sign indemnification clauses?

Eva: Yes. Yes. Yeah I try not to. But I also, I sort of pick my moments to push back on contract stuff. And I don't write a ton of stuff that seems likely to result in lawsuits. So I don't always play sort of play my hand to push back on an indemnification clause if I'm not sort of worried about it, because I always feel like you can push back on like money or rights or indemnification but like probably not all three given contract. But yeah if I was writing something sensitive that would definitely be something I would push back about.

Dan: Do you push back on rights ever?

Eva: Yes. I push back on rights often. Contracts definitely seem to be getting worse. And I just won't sell all rights to feature. It's very rare that people ask me to do it. You know do a feature as a work made for hire. And I just I won't. I won't do it. I try to push back even on sort of shared rights. Increasingly publications are trying to grab movie rights which were typically the author's, I try to pushback on that when I can, although that's getting more difficult. So far publications are mostly doing 50/50 like they're saying we get the movie rights but we'll give you half the proceeds. So they're not saying writers get nothing but writers used to get 100 percent. First rights are still the norm for feature contracts. In my experience, not many of them are trying to, but then in a separate clause, some rights are a separate clause.

Dan: What proportion of your time is writing versus reporting versus all the administrative stuff?

Eva: So reporting and writing tends to come in like small intense bursts, you know like I can go and go weeks at a time without writing anything and then nothing to write for three or four days. But I tend to write really fast so it tends to be like a fast burst. But yeah reporting, again it's like you know maybe I'll go on a two or three week reporting trip and that will be pretty intensive. But then I won't do another one for a couple of months. I would say it's less than half my time, maybe a third of my time, or a quarter of my time is reporting and writing and the rest is like admin, pitching looking for ideas, reading, you know messing around on the Internet, like self-promotional stuff, yeah.

Dan: Is there one thing you wish you knew starting out as a freelancer?

Eva: Yeah. Contacts and network. So important. You know I didn't even know for years that I shouldn't follow the instruction guidelines that most publications put out about sending to like a general submission email or sending you know a lot of them still say to mail in hard copy of your submissions. There was nobody at first to tell me because I got into it on my own without ever going to journalism school or doing any internships or anything. There was nobody to tell me like no don't send your pitch to slush pile, find an editor and email them directly. So that was like years wasted on, you know, just interns ignoring my pitches. Yeah I can't stress enough how important it is to have a network of people that they can help you and that you can help in return. And getting editors to know your name and pitching them directly. And that's so basic but there was literally no one told me that and I didn't know for years. So yeah I think having a network of fellow

freelancers, whether it's people that are slightly more advanced than you or people there at the same level as you and then you know eventually you get to a point where you're able to help people that are coming up behind you. I think that that is so important to figuring out how this business works. And you know, when push back on contractual stuff or how to ask for more money or all that stuff has been stuff that I basically learned from friends. And so I would encourage people to find friends and ask questions sooner than later.

Dan: Anything else an aspiring freelancer should know?

Eva: Yeah I think people should be really honest with themselves about how hard it's going to be and how often their pitches will just get ignored, particularly when they're starting out. And how long it takes for the check to arrive. You know I tell people to have at least six months rent in the bank when they go freelance you know and together if they can manage it because if you're planning to write for magazines you can take them from pitch to check you can easily take six months to a year. And that's assuming that they even say yes you're right. Yeah I think that's a big thing. Especially I've have had friends who've been editors on staff who were really responsive to pitches and then have gone freelance and they didn't realize how much of an outlier they were until they went freelance and nobody answered their pitches. I know editors are slammed and crazy busy so I understand that but you have to be ready for it. You have to be ready for just like silence.

*Interview with Martin Fritz Huber, New York City-based running columnist
Wednesday, August 23 at 12:30 p.m., 36 min.*

Dan: So to get started, remind me, were you born in the States?

Martin: Yes I was born I was born here but I grew up overseas. So I was born in New York and I moved to Germany and when I was 1 and didn't move back to the United States until I was 26. I did my undergrad in Scotland.

Dan: And did you get a degree in journalism?

Martin: So I got a degree actually in English with a writing concentration because I thought I would be on the academic track, but that didn't pan out.

Dan: So then how did you get into journalism?

Martin: The sort of, you know, roundabout way. I mean I went to University for the purpose of doing a graduate degree and then perhaps doing academia and just becoming more aware of the realities of academia and the humanities, and what the job market looked like and I have friends that are still battling that out, so I decided I'm probably not going to do this and around the time I was finishing up my degree, a friend who had money for a startup called Shop Econ, it was like an independent city guide and kind of

thing like stores restaurants all that and he needed someone to direct the editorial content. And so I went to work for him. This was a not journalism per se but like it's in service journalism world and that kind of was my introduction to it. And yeah I worked for him for a couple of years and had other jobs as well, I was a paralegal, I worked part time with this law firm. They had client in Germany and it paid well and they needed somebody who spoke German and then eventually though I got kind of sick of it and I went out West and I worked outside the National Park Service for a season to kind of get away from it all. Then came back after I got laid off by the crew and that's the way it works, everyone gets laid off and then everyone collects unemployment. So it was great unemployment for half the year. I could never run for office and country. But that wasn't my goal at any point. But Bernie Sanders was on unemployment for a while, so it is possible. And then I started a publishing course in 2013 at NYU, a six week publishing course. And then I took an internship coming out of that and worked part time jobs to support myself. But like the internship was my kind of entry into the journalism world or magazine publishing world and that quickly took the job at *Outside* which is an editorial assistant position that I took in 2014 and moved out west. And since that time I've been working, well I worked for a year on staff and then I went freelance.

Dan: That's exactly what I want to to. We talked about that before I actually had it all down so is In-Stride your only thing right now?

Martin: Yeah. I mean I do other stuff too for *Outside* it usually becomes to like two or three additional articles that will not be officially In-Stride that will be for them. They typically don't have a sponsored landing page but we'll talk to an advertiser who will say we want X number of articles on the subject of... an they'll have some theme like have to be your own coach or national park or whatever. The reason why this is not in violation of the sacred church and state line is that I guess the advertising companies cannot dictate to *Outside* you know what the actual articles are saying. I'll usually get a few assignments from that, a couple a month. Right now for instance I am on Friday submitting, believe it or not, like 4000 words on running socks. It's a good deal because like I get paid 50 cents a word and it's fairly easy and it's a lot of free running socks. A man can't eat from running socks but you go like OK. It's nice kind of the times come through all the time. In addition to that with In-Stride is the benefit that I have a contract, I get paid, it's automatically wired to my account every month. It's like a sort of reliable steady income.

Dan: Right, I saw the thing you wrote about the mile versus the marathon times, by the way, and people were having it out in the comments about that column. Do you basically get to write whatever you want?

Martin: I mean I think that again and again those are the kind of articles that are going to get going and get a wide reach there will always be people threatening, saying how *Outside* is the worst publication ever right now, they've gone liberal, but yeah. And those tend to take a sort of an argumentative stance it generally does well for them but it's tough because you want to walk the line don't want to be awfully hot-takey either. You don't want to just try and write something just for the sake of provoking people you want

to actually believe what you're trying to say or have an argument that's valid rather than just trying to piss people off.

Dan: Now are you then, as part of your In-Stride deal, prohibited from writing about running for other places or do you just prefer to work for *Outside*?

Martin: No I mean there is nothing in my contract saying that I'm not allowed to write for other publications. Writing is an informal agreement that I have, they're just like "would just like you know let us know beforehand, if it's like the kind of thing the *Outside* would publish?" And the reality is there are some things just like ideas for articles that I know are going to make more sense for other publications that *Outside* might not even be interested in, like they're too New York-specific or something like that. So yeah I'm not prohibited from doing it. But I've been writing about one a week for a couple of years now and occasionally, you know usually maybe once a month or once every two months I get an assignment outside with running, but I increasingly want to start to like un-pigeonhole myself. Part of the problem. There's a real incentive to specialize. But on the other hand if you end up being...I don't want to write about writing for the next like 20 years of my life. So I have to work against that. And that's why I'm also less inclined to even know be a subject that I know a lot about, to pitch running articles to other publications. But I would be allowed to if I wanted to.

Dan: Of course, I kind of did that with running, too.

Martin: Yeah I know and it is amazing how quickly it happened. So when I went to *Outside* I'd never not only had never written anything about running, but running was just a hobby of mine. I never thought of it as becoming something I would write on extensively. I hadn't heard of LetsRun, like I didn't know anything about that whole scene, and in the last couple of years, I have become, for lack of a better word, an expert on it. To me it's been great and I've been grateful that I had a chance but I have to look and say okay like you know what am I setting myself for. You know if I keep just writing about running I'm just totally pigeonholing myself and like if I wanted to get a staff writing job at *Runner's World*, assuming they're still going to be around, like that's one thing I would be cut out for, but other than that, like how do I transition to something else? That's something I'm increasingly aware of.

Dan: Do you do any print work?

Martin: I have gotten offers, like hey you want to contribute in print, but I haven't for awhile, just because you know, it's say the majority, the vast majority, has been online.

Dan: Can you give me an overview of an average day for you?

Dan: Well I mean a big part is to try and impose a structure on your on your daily routine with stuff that would otherwise not be provided for you. That sounds pretty obvious to say but you really have to have some discipline, but for me it's like being at my desk every day. You know at 8:00 AM and usually working till around noon or one and then

my taking lunch and getting back online for a couple of hours and going out for a run or something in the evening. In terms of the way it divides up between tasks, I don't keep track of what one of my writing versus when am I interviewing people, when am I pitching ideas, I usually in the morning the first I'll do will be like all my correspondents. But I'm not generally, if I'm writing a story and I'm coming on to chat with this person this person and that will be a good source I will usually then reach out right away and interrupt my writing. Does that make sense? Compartmentalize. Broadly stated I'm at my desk, I'd say six or seven hours a day I'm at my desk.

Dan: So what's your pitch research process like for the weekly column?

Martin: It's like pretty much every day in the morning, before I start actually writing something, I'll check my emails, I'll go on LetsRun, generally trying to see what topics are trending in the running world and just try to see if anything that strikes me that this would be a good idea. Check out the message boards see people rant about crazy shit. I find it intriguing and fascinating what people get excited about. On the other hand I don't really know if it's ever yielded anything, anything good. Well you know typically, I have no problems being open about this, like you know like Gretchen Reynolds who lives in Santa Fe actually and writes a wellness column for *The New York Times* on running. And I'm like right now and the kind of response to what the stories that she had earlier this month that, I mean, it is kind of like taking a scientific study one running that the study itself wasn't very good and her article, not that it was bad, but it was oversimplified and kind of responding to that. It's always a good story source: taking the results of a scientific study at face value the pitfalls of that, always good.

Dan: For a story bigger than the column, something that you're really passionate about, how do you gauge how much time you sink into something for a pitch?

Martin: I mean I think this is true for articles that I'll write for In-Stride as well. To some extent you can only even know if a story is going to work or not if you put a fair amount of time into it. I mean the research and in some cases doing quite a bit of writing and you realize eventually like aw shit, like I don't know really anything here but you're kind of a point where you're well I've already put so much into it. I really don't want to let it go. And I can be a drag because the danger is you end up not killing the story that probably should be killed because you don't want to waste the effort. I mean experience this even in my very low stakes version, I can only imagine if you work for something like *The New Yorker* and you're like you travel to places and you can collect hours of research and you commit significant funds from Condé Nast or whomever towards the project and only slowly realize this might not work, what that must be like.

Dan: Once you got back to New York, what made you not look at getting a job at a magazine?

Martin: Yeah I'm kind of always keeping aware of what positions are opening up at the same time. I do like what I do. I'm wary of giving it up for something that I won't like more. And like having the freedom to write, even though it is certainly only on one topic,

I get to kind of write the way I want to write it. And it's not too much of a heavy editing process and I do appreciate that. A lot of the jobs I looked at in New York, a lot of it is just like pushing content through the pipeline and I just don't find that very interesting. But yeah I mean it like I have some hard rule that I'm like a freelancer for life and there are obvious benefits to having a full time position at a publication. But I am fairly selective about what I would sign up for, more so now than I was before I did anything in *Outside* just because at the time I had no experience, and now I have some experience knowing what that would be like.

Dan: Is there anything you wish you couldn't told yourself starting out?

Martin: I mean I still this is naive of me but I think I'm still kind of new to this new. I've been doing it for a couple years. And in my situation there's so much BS and I've been lucky to start out with the contract. I think a lot of people that go into freelancing do not have a contract right away. It's a blessing and a curse because I think what it meant was I didn't have to hustle as hard. Right off the bat there's a lot of other people who had no assignments... I always had assignments. You know I had like eight stories a month that I was responsible for, which is not that much, but it's also keeps you busy. And you know you have a fixed income right way and I had two other projects at the same time right when I was starting. Advice that I would give myself...Before I started freelancing some of my colleagues have been freelancers. The whole idea of never turning an assignment down was something that I internalized and even assignments that really didn't appeal to me and that the pay was okay but it was not great. Like you know what screw it. Do it. You'll be happy when you've done it. You just want people to keep reaching out to you because they know you can you can make it work. I have some regrets like, I had something come through for me for the *Guardian* through a connection she gave me an assignment that I ended up telling her like no I can't I can't get this to you by tomorrow and that was my one big failure. That was just like writing a fairly long piece on a topic I'd never written on before and I had to turn around it like 12 hours and I wasn't able to do it. Partially I was really physically tired at the time. That's a big regret of mine because it was a publication I really respected and it would have led to more work; at the same time it's like there's not like a lesson I learned from that, whenever you get an assignment like you know take it and try to get it done. Yeah it's it's just something, I don't know. No amazing sage advice to my younger self.

Dan: And what's the hardest part been?

Martin: I think the hardest thing I didn't expect is I significantly underestimated the challenge of coming up with good ideas. I think I always start the thing writing is the hard part. You wrestling the words on page and figuring out an eloquent way to phrase something, that that would be the challenge and when it comes to thinking up ideas. I really thought like, oh yes it's like being in a meeting, that kind of throw shit at the board and eventually you'll have a bunch of ideas and that's the easy, chill part. But actually you find out that you know there's been a lot already written on every subject, especially a subject like running that to come up with like a really good idea is much more difficult

than I had initially anticipated. And I think that gave me an appreciation of what a good editor is and their ability to sort of gauge whether it works or not.

Dan: Do you think being an EA at *Outside* helped you with that?

Martin: I mean yeah, partially because at the time like my lone man on totem poll job was a lot of what I did was all the social media, which on one hand I never want to do again on the other hand it was a really useful education of seeing the way the importance of social media for the economy of online publications and how critical it is seeing the way that stories, I hate to use the word travel, but you know travel online is like oh it really is pretty critical how they are advertised on social media. So in that sense it that useful. Whether that actually makes me a better journalist or better writer is another matter. I would say probably not, but certainly it was something I learned from. In terms of like being a better writer, I did sit in on a few editorial meetings with the magazine people where they would just like talk about the pitches they had received from their writers, and seeing editors at the magazine converse with one another and seeing how stories were either enthusiastically received or just totally said no why the hell would anyone want to read that...that was very eye opening. Yeah just a behind the scenes look at the way these things are discussed and how often just comes down to the whim of one or two individuals is something that it seems totally obvious in retrospect.

Dan: Anything else?

Martin: Something I'm trying to do more is to really sort of you know pitch different publications and trying...it's ironic, it's the exact opposite what I've been doing, but try not pigeonhole yourself into to...or find a way to both specialize but also be a generalist, I don't think it's impossible and I think you can do both. You have to be mindful of not just writing on one category all the time.

*Interview with Eric Killelea, New Mexico-based energy and public lands reporter
Tuesday, August 29 at 1:14 p.m., 35 min.*

Dan: So tell me, how did you get into freelancing?

Eric: So after I got my English degree at The New School I decided that I wanted to do journalism, and I took a job at a small community paper in Glendive, Montana, in eastern Montana. And I bounced around a lot. From there, I went to the Wilson Herald in Wilson, North Dakota, and I went to the Helena Independent Record in Helena. And then I went to, there was a paper in Wolf Point, Montana, I forget the name. I was there for a little bit and I went to Wilson again and I was kind of circling around, what had happened was the Bakken oil boom hit. And the reason why I went to Helena was you know I had a girlfriend and she stuck it out for a year in the oil fields and was like screw this and we went Helena and I was bored so I came back. So I was basically in and around the oil fields for until last summer.

Dan: And then last summer was when you were at *Outside*?

Eric: Yeah. I had done some freelancing for the *New York Times* before that and worked one time with *VICE News*. And one time with the *Los Angeles Times*, mostly about the shale oil, and then I think I worked for the *New York Times* last year, I was visiting family in New Jersey and they asked me to do stringing for the Metro section. Then I went back to Montana and I was going to just chill out there. But then I had applied to *Outside* magazine and they hired me on as a fellow. So I came down to Santa Fe I think the last week of July 2016, I completed my eight-month fellowship, but I stayed on a little bit longer and I finished that fellowship in February of this year. And then I went full time freelance.

Dan: So did you start out with the *Rolling Stone* around the time that you left *Outside* or were you doing that during the fellowship?

Eric: I started writing for *Rolling Stone* in February. And I don't know like what your what your research is going to, but I had graduated with the my current *Rolling Stone* editor because she actually went to The New School. So that's how I got that, I was just very lucky to get an in.

Dan: So you're living in Santa Fe right now?

Eric: Yeah. I mean I always tell people you know like living situations are relative. I grew up in New Jersey in New York so if I moved here from there I think I would have been kind of bored. But since I moved here from bumblef**k Montana and the cold of North Dakota, you know there's art, there's a lot of food places, it's nice weather, etc. So it's a really good fit today.

Dan: So when you were getting ready to leave *Outside*, at what point did you decide that the next move was going freelance as opposed to getting a staff job somewhere?

Eric: It's interesting. I think quite honestly I think I was taking the *Outside* fellowship while I started to think about it because I had always thought about it, but I only saw freelance life through the lens of like the *New York Times* or like a hard news kind of you know daily. And when I started learning how the magazine process you know how they created a magazine how they've pitched in and what stories we're working on. I thought that I could give that a go. I kind of like the long form you know take a little longer to research stuff and whatnot. So yeah I kind of just looked at people and maybe what you are doing or what not. I looked at guys like Solomon or Abe Streep. And actually called Abe Streep try to figure out how the hell he's paying rent. And yeah so I guess was just accumulation of my experience there. And then by the end of it actually I had a good in with one or two editors and I said okay you know I can go back to Montana and work for it daily or go here or there and work for like a small daily with hopes of pitching like the *Times* but maybe that's just going to give me a shot at a couple articles here and there. I know that when I left *Outside* I had already planned like three or four articles that I was going to write, just so I knew where I was going as soon as I left.

Dan: So right now you're *Rolling Stone*, *Outside*, and I saw you're working for a paper somewhere?

Eric: Yeah I mean primarily what I do now is *Rolling Stone*, I average probably 40 articles a month. And then *Outside*, in my first couple of months I was doing you know one or two a month. Those were the previously prepared ones. I don't know if you know much about *Outside* today. There's been a lot of transition, a lot of people leaving. So my editors have actually left.

Dan: Right...did you work for Wes?

Eric: Yeah yeah. He was a cool guy. I mean he is, he's not dead, he still is. I think wrote one for him like two months ago, I'm working on one for this month. And then I got in with the *Santa Fe Reporter*, it's a local alternative magazine, so I write one or two things for them a month, and then just through friendships I actually write for my first newspaper in Montana, I write sports, because they're like a tiny newspaper that lost...I don't know, they never have reporters. So I'm just doing them a favor. But it's you know like 100 bucks a week so it pays my phone bill. Stuff like that. And I do some transcription work if I'm like in a rut or if I'm not getting a lot of work. Actually for Grayson, for Grayson Schaffer from *Outside*, I made that connection. He has his own company, like Cow Leg Creative or whatnot, and he throws me transcription work if he needs it. And I, that's kind of like, if I'm not reporting that week I'll do it.

Dan: So it's been pretty solid since leaving the fellowship?

Eric: You mean like today?

Dan: Yeah. I mean, given that it's been seven months now, I mean just overall do you feel pretty good about it?

Eric: Yeah I think I'm a pretty unique case because I don't have a car and I don't have money saved up so I don't have money in the bank. So I totally like nosedived into this for better or worse. So it's nerve racking but like I sort of rely on the *Rolling Stone* thing to pay my rent. And so it's working in the sense that, especially when you're starting out, I found, because I had no direction. Like nobody told me how to do this. But the first couple of months were very hard because as you know they don't pay until like two or three months or four months down the road. So you don't get the actual cash in hand for a couple of months or so. You know that was kind of nerve-wracking. So that's why I kind of went to like the *Santa Fe Reporter* or something else just get quick payback. I think after those couple of months it's becoming easier because you know I have money a little bit I have some checks in the works and all that crap. So I'm from saving up for a car and I think that will relieve a lot of anxiety because there's a lot of stories New Mexico, and I guess the last point to how I'm feeling about it is like, I mean right now I'm able to pay rent, and my phone, I'm not able to pay a lot of student loans with the money. I calculate my finances according to the work that I do, it doesn't necessarily mean that I get paid

that month that month. Once I get a car, like I hope to pitch more magazines and outlets to improve that number, obviously. But right now, I can't like, I it's hard for me to justify spending a month's reporting something, you know running around spending cash to report something and then it's like taking two or three months to find an outlet; for me it's very bread and butter, I'm pitching *Rolling Stone* and *Outside* and this *Reporter* thing, that's it.

Dan: So are you considering a staff gig anywhere? Or do you still think freelancing is the thing for the immediate future?

Eric: That's funny because, I'm laughing because I actually had this conversation my girlfriend last night. I see my career changing within the next year and I honestly don't know which way it's going to go. I really don't want to go back to like the *Billings Gazette*, the largest paper in Montana, like I don't want to do that. I don't want to chase cops around for the *Salt Lake City Tribune* or something like that. I have an in with the New York Times as a stringer in New Jersey, so that's an option while trying to freelance you know with *Rolling Stone* and whatever. But that would be more career-oriented. You know like, if I'm a stringer, I hope in three to five years to do more reporting for them or whatever it is. But right now I'm currently writing something for *Outside* and pitching something for their magazine. And so that's another direction and that's one like I hope if they take the magazine pitch, that would tell me that maybe this is the way to go. Ultimately I would love for them to pay me to go do this and that around the country. I guess for now, I can't, I'm sorry I can't give you a straight answer. Like I just don't know. It's kind of just writing and seeing where the opportunities flow.

Dan: So is the majority of the stuff you do web-only?

Eric: So for the local alternative it's print and web. For *Outside* I've only done web, I think I've done one print page or whatever. And *Rolling Stone* is all web.

Dan: Are you looking at any other platforms to supplement your income?

Eric: Yeah I mean my goal and what I want to do is purely just writing. And I guess what's frustrating, I don't know if other people have told you, but I've been in contact with other editors like *High Country News* or *Surfer Magazine* or blah blah blah, but you know, a lot of these guys don't have the money to pay you for little bits. You know so they like *High Country News* for example told me "Yeah we like your writing. Write us a big feature." And all I can really do is say yes, of course. But I mean the fact is you know I'm working to pay rent. Like I can't really go run around Colorado right now with no cash and try to you know write something for them. So I mean my short term goal is just to gain a little cushion from the *Rolling Stone* and *Outside* gigs where I can start just writing for other magazines longer form. I have no intention of doing photography or a podcast right now.

Dan: What's surprised you about freelancing thus far?

Eric: I don't know man, like I don't mean to come off like, I think I might be humble about it but I still don't know how I'm doing it . I mean I never thought I would be a journalist and never thought I'd be a writer until like, I'm only 31 but like you know like I started writing for little papers and I was like 24, 25. I couldn't string together a sentence. You know I don't know what I'm doing half the time. But yeah I don't know that might be like the kind of thing that's kind of humbling and also kind of surprising, you know kind of just toss you a story that's going to hit a lot of people and then you're like okay I can do this and you bang it out. And I don't know I guess it's just not mystifying. It's been a strange couple of months. Let's put it that way.

Dan: Do you ever have a hard time explaining what you do to people?

Eric: And it's you know again like I hate to be a broken record like I just didn't think I would do this. So like I met my girlfriend this year and she thinks, like oh you know what you're doing. And then when I explain, it's actually hardest to explain to family who you know have obviously known me forever in New Jersey and I tell them you know, I look for ideas and then I pitch I try to explain the whole pitching process and how many things get turned down. And what do you when you get the green light and they're like we didn't know you could read. So yeah think the daily newspapers helped a lot with fast turnaround, so that's been kind of good for me. I think a lot of magazine guys, at least from my short experience, don't necessarily turn things over quickly. So I've created kind of a little niche where I can, for *Rolling Stone* I can turn things around you know maybe not within a couple of hours, I'm not that fast, but maybe in a day or two which is better than some people. And anyways I just tell people it's a lot of rejection for every eight things you pitch, every 10 things you pitch, maybe one gets picked up.

Dan: For this pitch you're doing for *Outside*, I mean like how much time did you put into it knowing that you were asking for them to do a little bit more, like commission you to travel and whatnot. And you know how did you decide that you know, "okay I'm going to spend this much amount of time because I don't know if it will sell?"

Eric: Let's see. Well I mean I can tell you kind of what I'm doing now if that'll help. Like I'm actually formulating the pitch for *Outside* this month. I don't know if that's going to help. So like *Rolling Stone's* a completely different animal for me because I have a friend. I have like a previous friendship with this editor. It's very informal. You know, she's basically like "okay what do you want to do?" and I tell her I'm interested in crime or whatever and we just kind of talk that way like she's just like oh this trial is coming up, do you want it? Yeah. Okay. So I don't really like formulate pitches for her. For outside, this month, because of my relationships I have a relationship with an editor and we're kind of friends now. We are friends now. And so we'll talk generally about the magazine. And then a couple of months ago, there was a whale killing in Alaska, in southwestern Alaska. There were subsistence farmers and hunters and they killed this whale and now NOAA is investigating it. So we were bullshitting about the idea a couple of weeks ago. And I said you know this is interesting, do you guys think it will be interesting? And he's like yeah, you know, report a little bit on it and then pitch it. So I reached out. I called people, I made a couple of sources and then I updated him the other day. And then he

took a look at it and whatever he thought, he thought it might be good for the magazine. Not just online. So what we're doing now is that we're waiting for NOAA's investigations are going to be updated in a couple of weeks. And right now I'm writing the pitch and then I'm waiting on that and then we're going to send it through sort of like a team through the process, you know, pitch it to Jonah and the bigger guys. So I guess that's a super roundabout way of saying what I'm doing right now, I'm obviously not in Alaska, I'm in Santa Fe, and I'm doing all my reporting on the phone. So it's not a lot of money spent. You know it's face time but it's not like you know I'm not digging through FOIA files right now because I haven't gotten any sort of green light yet, but you know he had come back to me and say hey dig through some more research I'll be happy to do that just because whatever, I kind of trust *Outside* a little bit.

Dan: In your newspaper days, did you learn a lot of investigative skills that might help you with that? I mean I don't know how many magazine writers know how to file a FOIA but I imagine it's a smaller proportion. Did you learn a lot of stuff that you think you can use to set yourself apart in terms of reporting?

Eric: Yeah I mean there's a double-edged sword with my resume because, to be honest, in Montana and North Dakota, it was a lot about the experience, the personal experience, rather than...like I initially went there to get an experience rather than like learning how to write. So I mean I wasted a lot of time. Well I guess it depends how you look at it. I have a lot of friends now but I mean you know I did bartending, I was oil field hand for a summer. I traveled a lot. Like a party. You know I met women, like girlfriends and friends and blah blah blah. So I don't think I attacked journalism like the same way maybe a graduate student would. I wasn't taught how to do data researching. I mostly worked in community newspapers where it was basically the sports guy who had a family stuck around for 15 years and that's how he became editor. So these people didn't teach me the tricks of the trade or some you know some investigative research. I guess I just learned what I could. I know what's strong on my resume is like. I've done countless interviews and I'm able to meet people and sources and figure out things quickly. Like I've had to figure out what hydraulic fracturing was from scratch, and oil fields shit like that. So the resume is like a double-edged sword. Like I said like you know it's good for some things, it's I don't have like data reporting. But I think when you're when you're looking at city and state finances as a beat, I learned how to do a FOIA on my own, I learned how to analyze statistics in various ways not using technology but just through my own kind of ways.

Dan: But do you think the newspaper experience was how you landed the fellowship?

Eric: Yeah I think so. The guy that hired me was, I don't know, he said he was impressed or whatever word he used. I guess they didn't get a lot of people that have done just straight-up journalism. He said they got a lot of you know a lot of freelancers, or a lot of people straight out of grad school, which is great. I don't particularly know why, like I said I am not a runner, I'm not a climber. I mean I smoked cigarettes when I was at *Outside*, like I don't smoke now but I mean guys were going for jogs during lunch. I don't

know. I was dealing with energy and environment and I guess he saw that. And so I had some you know writing background.

Dan: So I know you said your goal was to get paid to go places and write—would you rather some day be a staff writer who has a ton of latitude to go places and report, or would you rather be a freelancer who just does longform?

Eric: I think...shit that's like an existential question. I think a lot of it is circumstance, right. You know like if nothing bad happens and everything goes okay according to plan at least there's some kind of you know momentary plan, then I'm just going to keep going at it and see what happens. Like I said I would love to be a staff writer for *Outside* or *Rolling Stone* or the *New York Times* per se. But right now I'm kind of enjoying, like, I wrote about life Michelle Carter trial in Massachusetts for *Rolling Stone* and now I'm thinking about writing about whales or some bike fest story that I'm doing for *Outside*. I think freelance provides an opportunity to explore all the weird and crazy shit you like. So for right now it seems to be working, knock on wood.

Dan: Is there anything else you've learned in your time freelancing that you think would be important for other people, or even just your younger self when you were starting out?

Eric: I mean I'm so new that I feel bad like giving people advice. So from my own experience I just take it or leave it. Hmm I think nothing is below you or beneath you. Just take all the work you can when presented until you have a cushion where you can do it you want to do. I think time management is a key thing. You got to learn how to not drive yourself crazy but hand shit in. And then I'd say everything you do has to be done well because if you've got one shot with *Men's Health* or *Outside* or some other paper and messed up like it's not like you're a staff member, you got to bring the goods the first time.

Linsey Knerl, Nebraska-based freelancer and content creator
Thursday, August 10 at 10 a.m., 37 min.

Dan: So I saw on your site that you've been doing this since 2006, what were you doing before that?

Linsey: Well I'm 39. So when I got married at 24 I'd been just like working temp jobs like in offices and I honestly had no writing experience. I dropped out of school to get married and have kids. And so I never finished my my English degree. Close but no cigar. And so I just kind of I went into writing backwards. I started doing a mommy blog in 2006 and then I applied for a bigger blog that got acquired by a major news network. So then a lot of my content that I was writing for a small site that became syndicated on some of these larger sites like MSN Money and *Christian Science Monitor* and that sort of thing. And then that gave me the clips needed to go out and pitch some of these sites directly as well. But it worked out. And so it's been 10 years and I just decided that that's

what we were going to focus on. So now I'm the breadwinner and my husband helps with the kids and we have a very small hobby farm here and he kind of runs that.

Dan: Interesting, so everything you were doing until like that point was just blogging basically?

Linsey: Yes, blogging for sites. I mean it's funny now because they don't call it a blog anymore. They call it web content, but at the time you know a lot of your online content from major news sites was just a digital version of what they were printing. They didn't have you know dedicated online digital content creators. So the blogs were essentially just syndicated from other sites until they started to produce so much content online now because of how people are getting their news. So now they specifically hire online journalists and digital content creators. But at the time I wrote a small blog they got purchased by a bigger one. And I had no intent to ever write for these things, nor would I have known even how to pitch them at the time.

Dan: So what was the point where you thought that you could feasibly do this full time?

Linsey: I think it was when I started writing about two years in and I wrote some articles that were focused on kind of how to grow your own food. At the time I was really concentrated in the personal finance niche, specifically frugality, and with the economy it was just like all crazy at the time. People were kind of freaking out. In 2007 I believe it was 2007 or 2008. You know we had elections and things going on and I actually was featured in Time magazine as a family trying to live on a budget, like they came up to my house took pictures of me and my kids, pictures of my garden. It was really strange because the way I've always lived was now trendy and fashionable. So I started pitching a lot of like, this is what I'm doing to save money. You know and it was new, people hadn't really heard it before. And a lot the magazines were rural and farm-based, like a hobby farm, *Mother Earth News*-type genre and they were really really eating my stuff up because it was kind of a new perspective. It wasn't someone in the city kind of sharing how they have done it on their patio or whatever it was. Truly here is my four acres and here's what I'm doing, but I'm modern. You know I love technology and I love traveling and all this other stuff, that was just a different perspective. And so the editors are really enjoying the pictures.

Dan: That's awesome. So when did start branding yourself independently?

Linsey: So from the very very very beginning I had said okay if one person is willing to buy one article on what I thought was a fluke, that means there's a market for this and we kind of just said you know let's do this, like these are the topics I want to cover. It was right around you know 2000-, gosh I would say 2008, 2009. I said I'm going to go all in. I started spending money to go to conferences and cover tech shows. You know South by Southwest some of these kind of not journalistic societies or whatever because I didn't have a degree and I didn't really feel like I was you know truly in that world. But I loved covering kind of for smaller magazine trade magazines. And then you know digital content. So I just really started...honestly I spent a lot of money then, more than I earned

at the very beginning because they just kind of wanted to get in there and immerse myself in the trends and the things that were happening and connect with other digital creators. I met a lot of print editors at places like South by Southwest and just kind of shows that weren't really geared at journalists but that they were they're just covering. And I actually pitched magazine ideas to people while we were enjoying coffee or on the bus or I think it's just you know that we're seeing in a really unique way. So that's kind of when I said okay this can happen because it's just an exchange of information and you don't necessarily have to pitch an editor. They were hanging out in coffee shops at conferences. And that's honestly how I've done a lot of my pitching is using social media. And once I figured that out I just I was kind of hooked.

Dan: How many times do you like to post something to social media in a day?

Linsey: Well you know I have my own blogs that are small but they earn a good chunk of money through advertising and sponsored partnerships. So you know I'll share that stuff on a cycle of two or three times a day. You know old posts. They're relevant but I use it to communicate with people. So I would say between 10 and 40 times, just depending on what I'm trying to do with it. I try not to use it for anything politically off putting or too personal just because I know at any time an article I write could get big and then people are going to look at me and I just I want to kind of maintain some kind of journalism neutrality even though I do share a lot of my personal life. So I'm so careful about what I share but yeah between 10 and 40. And then I do a lot of replies and private messages on there.

Dan: So I'm looking at all these places you've written for. So apart from the editorial stuff, these partnerships Walmart World, for instance, are those people who see the bloggers on social media and reach out or are you going to them making that first introduction?

Linsey: Yes that's kind of the weird thing. Bloggers have kind of crossed into the world of also being social influencers and journalists kind of have their their code as well. So I kind of have to always be like who's paying for this. And you know how do I make sure I'm disclosing and separating myself when I'm doing a magazine article from when I'm you know being engaged by like maybe Walmart. I've always been approached. So an example would be I did a series on food and how to save money on food for a bigger web site and then ConAgra approached me and they were doing a child hunger campaign and they said "we'd like to have a couple of bloggers attend these events and cover this no child hungry thing that we're doing. And you know it will be a celebrity press junket. We want you to cover that. And we want you to share that on your own blog." So they approached me, so it was from the standpoint of there were no traditional journalists there, it was kind of like a brand message being sent out. But we had the creative freedom to cover any way that we wanted to. And they approached us, so it was kind of a you know a blend of brand content and also you know we didn't have to seek approval, we could write if we thought it was great if we thought it wasn't great or you know that but they always reach out to us.

Dan: Do you travel much out of the state anymore? I mean outside of conferences and things like that.

Linsey: Yeah I actually. So Kansas City's about four hours away. I go there for a lot for events, especially like I like covering food and beer events. So I'll go to a Kansas City brew and barbecue event or to a trade show that covers like home items and I'm covering those for you know other outlets that might want a guide done or a product feature, but also for my own site. So they do that and then I try to go to two to three conferences a year, either as an attendee or as sometimes I speak as well.

Dan: And when you go to cover like a beer thing, for instance, do the people who are contracting you tend to pay your expenses or do you spec that out?

Linsey: For conferences, you know, unless I'm doing like a Keynote speaker or something, usually I pay our expenses and then when I'm speaking I usually only get like my ticket comped for the event.

Dan: So when you say like a beer or food conference, are there things you're covering there or are you going there to network?

Linsey: Well both. So a lot of times if I spoke, I did moderated a panel at South by Southwest one time. So I got my ticket comped. But there's hundreds of little sessions and things going on. So I was there to cover it but I happen to sometimes also get asked to write, because if they want to know about like pitching digitally and things like that. So it is kind of a combination I guess. So like I just went to one actually called Blogger Bash, it was for like for like bloggers and the intent was to get us there to like see all these cool brands that we could potentially cover for like holiday stories. I paid for that trip. But then I also worked out appointments with like the head of the Toy Association so I could cover new advances in toy safety. So like a parenting magazine that I'm working with. So yeah I definitely try work all the angles if I'm putting money out for a flight or hotel or something. Most always the people I know that do this, We're always to like fully book our day, breakfast lunch and dinner, with somebody that we could interview or you know a company that might be like based out of a certain city that we can you know get story either ideas or quotes or video photography, that's kind of always the goal and then if you come back and try to fit it somewhere.

Dan: Can you give me an overview of what you might do in any given week between researching, reporting, billion, networking and all that stuff?

Linsey: Sure. Well you know as you probably heard or know everything's kind of cyclical. So I actually just changed gears in June. I had like a big contract where I was providing content for a big company and that ended. Now I'm actually full-on freelance where I'm like every single penny that comes in my door has to be accepted. So for me right now it's like 70 percent like introductions, pitching, trying to like drum up these cold leads and turn them into like semi-warm leads, and billing is very small amount of my time. I would say less than 3 percent. I have an automated bookkeeping billing

system that I've been using for years. And so when I do an article it's tied into my Google account and I just kind of click a button and it goes in the spreadsheet and then I just send an invoice out automatically so that's hardly any time at all. I try to read and research in a given day at least 10 15 percent of my day. And to be honest I like to do all my writing in like one to two days, like I have my writing days. I like to write nonfiction super early in the morning and fiction late at night, just kind of the way am, so I'll maybe write on Monday and Wednesday and really drill down and then I do admin work and research and reaching out on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. I just don't like my writing to be all over the place. I get big blocks of time. Part of it is I have six kids, so I get to go to the library and hide away or my office or wherever and just kind of you know make sure someone else is dealing with them. Yeah a lot of time right now spent pitching but when you have a big clumps of work I just dedicate like two full days a week to that.

Dan: Right. And you also publish fiction as well?

Linsey: I mean I'm working on section, I haven't published anything, but I'm working on a big project. I do have an agent for both a nonfiction book project that we're working on and then a fiction project that kind of went backwards, I got an agent before I got my book idea. And so we're we're kind of trying to develop a couple of things. But yeah I am working on fiction and I'm finishing a manuscript for a large book so that was new for me for sure.

Dan: When you saying that you're doing all these cold pitches now, are these mostly editorial or are you also pitching brand marketing?

Linsey: So I kind of look and see...not to give away all my tricks, but I look at it like whistling across the PR newswires, like if I see journalists or certain publications are asking for sources for a story, I'll look and try to find that journalist and see if they're also a freelancer, and then I'll look at their portfolio and see places that they've freelanced for and then that tells me that obviously the publication is taking freelance pitches. And so then I'll try to contact that managing editor, usually on Twitter, and they're very responsive and usually I can get you know pitches going that way without having to go through the regular channels.

Dan: So you'll just tweet at them rather than emailing?

Linsey: I might email and say hi and send email because I want to make sure I have the right address. Or, "are you the right person to send pitches to," and I'm not like gross about it where I'm sending out 15 a day or anything. Mostly I like to use LinkedIn and then use my sales lead software to find their email address and go that route. But a lot of people, either their emails will bounce or I can tell they haven't read an email, and if I can see they're using Twitter a lot and they love Twitter and they you know on it all day long. I know there's a better chance of catching them on there than email. So yeah I will tweet and just say, "you know I see I see you work with freelancers. Is it OK if I send you a pitch?" And most of them are just like, "yeah go ahead here's my email."

Dan: So I know you started out with this blogging expertise and frugality, but would you say that there are certain things that you write about or that you research and pitch with the intention of writing about just because you know that they'll pay steadily and pretty well versus things that you're really passionate about? Or would you say you're always getting to do what you like to?

Linsey: I would say no until just about a couple months ago. So I did the frugality and finance thing to death, eight years of that, I was actually even the community manager of a major content platform so I was like handling all their social media in addition to doing like that was our daily articles and then also you know handling comments. I got so burnt out. I think I wrote 3000 personal finance articles over the course of six years and I just didn't really want to do it anymore. So I think something I was passionate about was education because I have six kids and I we also homeschool our children, so I'm kind of always following new trends in education so we can implement those, especially like STEM topics. I have five boys and they're really into like coding and engineering and that sort of thing. But I also do care for an elderly grandmother. So I've been doing a lot of health-related stories, things related to elder care, aging in place, that sort of thing. And I find that because I'm dealing with and researching those two topics all the time in my life, I'm constantly coming up with ideas that haven't been covered and so it makes it really easy to have a busy personal life. And then also covering those topics, they seem to both be really in demand, so they are paying for the goods.

Dan: So to expand on that a little bit, because you it's interesting that you're able to source all these ideas from your personal life, but are you then having to go out and find a whole new set of publications and kind of go in cold again? Or are you trying to adapt that content for or maybe different editor somewhere where you're working?

Linsey: Yes. So both. But what I find interesting is most sites now are trying to cover so many verticals. You know your AARP has your health and finance and recipe thrown in there. So as more as magazines kind of try to cover like the whole gamut, so that they can even have celebrity news shoved in there somewhere. I find most of the time the publications I'm already writing for, I say, "hey I have a health idea. Do I pitch that to you?" to my regular editor and they'll say, "oh you know Caroline handles wellness. I'll just let her know that your pitch is coming." And it's a pretty seamless crossover for most places.

Dan: Is there anything that you have been wanting to cover or that you've been passionate about but haven't been able to sell anywhere?

Linsey: You know that's a really really good question. I am honestly, so I'm kind of a strange bird as far as like my politics and my religion. And I find that a lot of times in the earlier days I was able to inject a little bit of like that into my writing. And you know especially for like an op-ed or a personal editorial page piece. But today with the world being what it is, you can't even mention certain things, much less say these are the values that have guided your opinion on this without having half of the country just hate you. So I feel a lot of times like I wouldn't use an editorial piece to like try to convert anybody's

ideas. But I think there's a lot of times where it's helpful for people to know where you come from to know how you've how you develop these interests or passions or what led you to pursue a certain topic. I feel like there are some stories that I've kind of shelved just because, both I don't want to lose readers who may not want to know about my background, and certain people may not be open to hearing a different idea. But also editors are kind of scared to put things up that might alienate readers because pageviews are really driving a lot of what they publish. So I do have stories that you know kind of go a little bit into my personal reasonings for researching things and I kind of feel like we're sadly in a place where we're just everyone's real prickly and you have to be really careful.

Dan: On the other hand, have you ever declined an assignment? Or do you get worried about assignments that might reflect that you feel a certain way about something?

Linsey: You know it's interesting. I am a huge like free speech advocate. And one of the reasons why I love to homeschool my kids is that we make them read things that we don't agree with because how can you understand an issue if you don't know all the sides? So I love writing for publications where my voice is most definitely different, especially if I'm being given a thoughtful platform to express that. For that reason I have written for sites where I was the token Christian conservative in a crowd of you know whatever. And as I kind of I grew up in a little more towards like a libertarian view on certain things, it's made it difficult to write for finance if I don't agree with the assessment of how the markets work or I don't agree with ,you know. But for the most part I would not write for someone just because they have other people's differing views because that to me is a sign that they're really a true journalistic outlet and they allow for different opinions. I would love to work for a site like that. What I don't like is when an editor says, "write on random topic and I'm not going to give you any guidelines." You just do your own research and then bring it to them and they're like why didn't you address this issue?. And I say I don't believe that's actually a real issue. I have a hard time with the, "as you know, people are outraged about this." I'm like I don't know that they are. I'm not finding many examples of that. Maybe you're outraged about it. So that's been my only point. With an editor where I'm like, are we making something sensational just for the sake of making sensational? I have a really hard time with that.

Dan: Do you think that there's also perhaps a strength in being, like you said, like either Christian conservative or libertarian from Nebraska and maybe being able to connect with other people?

Linsey: Yeah. And you know I guess my interest is not necessarily to be the voice of whatever, I think my interest has been, you know, I sit on a plane in business class next to somebody and we strike up a conversation and we share two beers and he tells me why he's like a hardcore Bernie fan. And I tell him how I haven't found anybody that I could vote for in like the last 12 years. But we share our reasons and it's, you know in journalism I get exposed to a lot of ideas where people are a little bit better versed at expressing them. But a lot of my colleagues are nowhere near where I am. We agree what the problem is and I think that our intent is that we want to solve the problem, it's just we

have totally different ideas how to come at that. And I have been able to work with some people on the other side of a lot of things and we've actually done collaborative pieces and it's been it's been fun. I have no problem doing that sort of thing. Kind of like Hannity and Colmes type thing you know where you're you got your liberal on one side and your republican on the other or whatever. I just I actually really enjoy hearing other people's ideas. And I love being able to publish in arenas that kind of encourage that.

Dan: Is there anything you know now as a freelancer that you wish you'd known when you were starting out?

Linsey: Yeah, editors, so editors are kind of given this big, scary, powerful, Oz-type aura and almost all of them are writers. A lot of them do also write freelance. And I've seen so many where they're like hold my baby I'm trying to like get my diaper bag. I mean it's just funny when you meet an editor and you realize that they're put in a very difficult position a lot of times but they're just kind of the messenger is that very few editors that are really truly terrible people and probably fewer editors are terrible than the population as a whole. I try to approach it more as like okay this person has a job to do. How can I help them do their job better? And if I can do that the two things I hear all the time is you turn your stuff in on time and you ask questions if you don't understand it and they love they love working with me because I may not be the subject matter expert but I ask the right questions and I'll get it done on time and really be on that. You know they can fix that piece up. They don't necessarily like the tone or the style, but those two things are really hard to come by. So I just had I known that that those two things are more important than maybe being the smartest person in the room or having the best vocabulary I would have quit worrying about a lot of things and just you know got my stuff in on time and was professional about it. And I just try all sorts of different things, you know that whole "throw it at the wall and see what sticks" and see if it sticks as far as communication with editors pitching or research. I always try to take the common advice and try to do something other than that because I'm thinking of all the freelancers. There's so many of them we're all kind of fighting for the same piece of content. You know we all want to write for all these places and are more of us than there are places and I get really frustrated when I see standard advice as the only advice. I guess I really just you know, I look at some of these old school journalists that been around for a long time and they're not on Twitter and they're not going to ever use Twitter. And I think okay, here is an opportunity. So see something that people are kind of avoiding just for convention reasons and try that, like that's kind of always what I try to do and I manage to always squeak by, my bills get paid ,it gets crazy some months but they always get paid and I have six kids and it's just me working. So it can be done.

*Interview with Amanda Chicago Lewis, Los Angeles-based investigative reporter
Sunday, September 3 at 12:30 p.m., 69 min.*

Dan: To start, can you tell me how you got into freelancing?

Amanda: I quit my teaching job in 2013 and then was freelance writing a year and a half and then was a national reporter with *BuzzFeed* for two years and then have been freelance since November of last year.

Dan: So what was the catalyst to go full-time freelance?

Amanda: Well I mean I think I had at that point decided that like I was good enough to do it for real but also I mean honestly the catalyst had more to do with the fact that like I was like a little bit too intense about journalism to be running a high school journalism program. And so it's like a really competitive, you know, it's like one of the best schools in Los Angeles. But I was teaching. And so the girls are like really pretty serious seriously smart you know people. And so you know, once we really went deep on the principles of journalism and what we are trying to do in that community. And like you know hold people accountable and whatever we like just got ourselves into all kinds of trouble. And because it's like you know it's a fancy prep school and so like they are concerned about their reputation and like stories online and there was like weird censorship snafus and drama. And if you Google the school one of the first things that will probably come up is the fact that my former boss, my former my boss who was the head of the English department at the time, like has now gone to jail for being a pedophile. Anyway this guy basically like one of my students, he sent her some sketchy emails and said some stuff to her in person when she was like a junior she'd been my English student when she was a sophomore and then joined the newspaper like because of me and I found out that this thing had happened and then like I was sort of like her confidant while she was like freaking out at the school about it and the school was like deciding what to do. And the school like ultimately just like demoted him and like took away some of the responsibilities, but didn't fire him. And then like hired, like let him come back the next year which was her senior year. And you know at this point we didn't know that like he had gotten a girl pregnant a couple of years earlier and like all this crazy shit. To be fair like in any I think in any educational situation where they're like children or whatever you're going to have pedophiles. I mean it's just like that sort of a natural where do the pedophiles go? They go to jobs where there's a lot of kids.. I mean this guy was a sociopath that is very very very charming. He's like one of the best bosses I've ever had. He's probably the best boss I've ever had. So anyway like I knew that was happening and then because of some of the other things that were happening with the newspaper I basically decided that like the school was not like an ethical institution to be working at. And I felt like I was like, alright, and there were sort of like some more dramatic things that happened to me like the last you know six months that I was like I think I'm just going to say goodnight on this one. And then I also at the same time I was like I was 25 and I was sort of like well you know if I really want to do journalism like this I can always be a teacher. But like I said this is probably the best time to try and like up my game in terms of what I'm doing and be successful. And so like I really got to go with it right now or you know I'm not going to, it can be really hard to be like 40 or 35 and be like oh I wish I had been more successful as a journalist but I like to take a little bit harder when you're older to break in the things like that and like I don't know. So I was like this is sort of like a combination of things.

Dan: So why did you then want to do the *Buzzfeed* bureau, since you'd gone freelance for a while?

Amanda: I mean I was like I ran through all of my money. By the time I got the *Buzzfeed* job that was like the luckiest break ever. And it wasn't really luck. And I feel like I would not be able to be freelancing in the way that I'm freelancing now, I believe, if I hadn't had the *Buzzfeed* job. You know part for me in L.A. is that book by I think like generally I was like the right person in the right place at the right time.

Dan: How did you become the pot beat reporter? Did you just submit a cover letter that said, "I smoke pot?"

Amanda: I was writing for *LA Weekly* and when I was writing for *LA weekly* I was just covering just whatever quirky random shit was going on in the city and sometimes that involves pot and I smoke pot and they're one of the first things I published right after I left teaching with like a story that involves like a cannabis bar like a social space that was like closing down and everybody was sad about it. Myself included. And that fall of 2013, one of the editors at *LA Weekly* at that time asked me to do a like newsletter about cannabis. Like she was like we have this newsletter. And the person's like not going to do it anymore. Will you do it? And it's like the big three news briefs. And it was every other week or something. You knew it wasn't even being published on the website or anything like that. And then at a certain point like, so two things simultaneously made it so that I like was prepped to get this job, at a certain point the music editor at *LA Weekly* like saw that I was doing these like really good like newsletters and said why aren't we publishing these? And they actually found like a little bit of extra money for me. And by the way we're still trying really incredibly small amounts of money. I like found a little bit of extra money and then had it like that he was posting one of my briefs like every other like every week like one was coming out every week so I essentially had like an online column about cannabis with *LA weekly* for like most of 2014, for all of 2014 really. And then it's like simultaneous to that I basically decided like after I left teaching like I was like okay if I really wanted to do journalism full time like I'm not going to write about like bullshit like I'm not going to be like oh there's like a gathering of like LOTR fans in Griffith Park, which is like a real story that I wrote at *LA Weekly*, but only if they would assign me those. All those stories are like not... almost none of those stories are stories that I came up with, like a few of them are. But for the most part they'd be like oh, this weird thing is happening and go to it and be like okay and it was fun, but it wasn't what my real job was so it didn't feel like it had to be very serious. But basically I was like I'm like I'm going to write you know full time I need to do something then I go more comfortable with in terms of like what I'm contributing to the world. And started working on this story about inmate firefighters in California which is tough because the *New York Times* ripped it off this past week or two ago.

Dan: Yeah I saw that headline recently.

Amanda: Yeah yeah. so I did a story for... okay so the story I did eventually came out in *Buzzfeed* when I was freelance, like this was like how I got in with them, I like to this big

feature for them that came out in like the fall of 2014. And so that and then the *New York Times Magazine*, who I had been talking to about that story, did the same story. But just like women. They're like same story, but like twist, women. Yeah those women like it was I was. Whatever who cares what you do? I almost tweeted about it and then I didn't. So I started working on this story about inmate firefighters. And by like basically after, many different things happened, but like ultimately that story ended up with *Buzzfeed* their features people, they had like a big freelance department then and after it came out their newly hired national editor e-mailed me like the next day and was like hey are you going to be in New York anytime soon. I would love to talk to you about work. And I just thought he wanted me to pitch him stories. But he wanted me to be their full-time cannabis reporter and I happened to be in New York the next month for Thanksgiving and then they hired me like a month later to December 2014.

Dan: And so I mean you did that for a little over a year then?

Amanda: Yeah I started like January 3rd, 2015. And I left October 26, 2016.

Dan: So how was that? Why did you end up leaving?

Amanda: Well I got fired. Certain things about it were extremely beneficial. They have a lot of money. And it's nice to have resources like that because I was making a good amount of money and I was make even more money, I also got like a big raise at one point. Three months before I got fired a 35 percent raise. I mean, it helped give me the resources to like learn a lot more about my beat and like travel a lot and I meet a lot of people and do a lot of reporting that I never would have paid for myself. And it helped me develop like I had like a much bigger platform. I don't know I mean like by the time I got that job I had done the freelance feature for them and then I had a feature with *Rolling Stone* so like you know I could have, who knows about what would happen otherwise. One of the biggest I think benefits also though is that like even though they like have pretty high turnover for people working for them like they do because they have so much money they were attracting a lot of talent. And so like I met a lot of really smart talented journalists and writers by being there. And I like you know those are contacts but I still have. And like I've met you know other people too then like other people who are those people and I like that sort of I feel like I like I feel that maybe like four years ago I would have been like I don't understand like New York media scene, it's like intimidating. And like I said I think it's intimidating but like I don't I don't find it, you know and I'm like yeah I know all the people, like it's okay, like I like you know a lot of people now which is like very helpful in terms of like you know it's really hard to like cold email an editor and get them to respond to you. So that was beneficial but also like the person who hired me, though he was like a very he was a fan of my work and was supportive of what I was doing. You know they sort of conceived of this like a national desk that is not really... so there are national desks at newspapers that are sort of generally known to do certain kinds of work. And like that was not the kind of work that they wanted the national to do. I was hired and they were like "we want the national us to do longform with like sort of an investigative twist" and in this like Captain Planet-style thing like each person on the desk had like a like a specialty. So it's like I did drugs and there's another person in

immigration, another person did race, and another person sharing their criminal justice, and another was writing about on like sexual assault and women and things like that. So and then everything was sort of like grand scope to it. But like really readable storytelling so that it wasn't like the investigative stuff which was like a totally different thing. So that was like the conceit of the national desk. And then they hired someone new. Meanwhile everybody's in New York basically and I'm in Los Angeles and in this whole time I'm like working on a big investigation and like nobody's helping me with it and I'm like desperate for advice and contacts and whenever and then they hired this new person last August and without ever having met me she decided she really didn't like me or trust me. And you know drama drama drama and then I got fired.

Dan: So when you got back into freelance, did you have a handful of smaller things on the side, or did you go straight into feature ideas?

Amanda: Yeah I mean I immediately lined up meetings with like as many editors as possible and I do like happened to be going to New York like a couple weeks after that for Thanksgiving, and like you know I just like got you know sort of like this like slight momentum or buzz when you leave somewhere and you can sort of like capitalize on that, also I was sort of in like shock but also like anger and like sadness and like whatever that I was just sort of spurred to action in a really intense way, I met with a lot of editors a lot of people in the last month and a half after I got fired for sure. And lined up a bunch of different things and at least relationships, almost entirely people that I already knew and maybe a couple of people that were like friends of friends and even if they were friends of friends it was like I knew them through people I met at *BuzzFeed*. And the only thing like the only relationship that I like established a hundred percent of my own was *Rolling Stone*, and that's only because like the first time I really got in touch with them or like really pitched them something it was like something that was so good they couldn't say no. And now I've had like our relationship with them for like almost four years. But it's really really hard to just be a random person and email an editor and then they get back to you. That just doesn't happen, even if have have an amazing idea, it's like really, it's so stupid.

Dan: So you left Buzzfeed in October and you came up with the idea in November for the *GQ* pot story, you did that within the first month of being fired?

Amanda: I mean like this is in the *GQ* story, I say that was what was happening, but there are basically like there are lots and lots and lots of of cannabis conferences. But like the big one big big like annual gathering of everyone is in Las Vegas in the middle of November. Vegas is very expensive. You have to be very careful with the whole plan. Raisin Bran is a secret...I'm not joking, like bringing Raisin Bran saves me so much money when I go to Vegas, for which like literally is for work. I mean it's work slash work/partying, but it's like it's work. So it's not like I'm like I'm going to Vegas for fun. But so I was in Vegas and like, you know, Vegas is just like this. I was there for like probably three or four days and it's just like I couldn't miss it it's like a huge event. It wasn't like just because I got fired I'm going to change what I'm doing in my career. And at that point it was clear that like basically I'm better than anyone else who covers

cannabis in the country. So it was sort of like I'm not going to stop doing this like that would be ridiculous.

Dan: Do you get a lot of free weed?

Amanda: I have like pretty serious ethical lines that I have drawn around myself and some of which were discussed with people at *Buzzfeed* and some of which I drew around myself but I don't take free product. Like if I'm with someone and they are like let's smoke this joint I'm like great let's do that, but like if someone's like here's a pound of the stuff that I grew I'm going to be like no thank you. I can't. I don't take free product.

Dan: So right now how many stories are you doing a year?

Amanda: A year?

Dan: Yeah.

Amanda: Features? Like long features? Um, I mean like how many will get published or how many am I writing?

Dan: I suppose both.

Amanda: I think that by the end of 2017...one...two...three...four...I think by the end of 2017 I will probably have written four or five features.

Dan: And by my publish you just mean they'll all get published at some point?

Amanda: No, they might not all get published at some point.

Dan: Really?

Amanda: Well it's so partly because I do like investigative work and partly because like you know doing investigative work about businesses is like much harder in doing investigative work about politicians or something like that. And because weed is federally illegal and like people who have a lot of money tied up in weed, it might be like secret, and so like talking about it can be very contentious. And so I mean first of all when I got fired last year I had like two huge features that just never got published.

Dan: And you couldn't get the rights back?

Amanda: No so like one of them I like re-wrote. One of them I thought was important enough that I rewrote and then it was at *Esquire* and then the digital features program at *Esquire* and that editor got ended maybe a month ago. So that will not come out there.

Dan: Which editor was that?

Amanda: Megan Greenwell, she's wonderful. She also used to work with Ann actually, they were together at *GOOD*. And Megan Greenwell is wonderful. Too bad. And then you know like I just I get it's not uncommon for me to be in sort of like legally complicated places where we have to go over every single word and make sure that we're not going to get sued. And then sometimes you get chickenshit publications that you don't even want to take a small risk about something that is 100 percent true, proven and it's out there. So you know sometimes there are things that don't come out.

Dan: So how do you negotiate that risk then? In terms of the amount of pre-reporting and personal investment, and the actual reporting that goes into it, I mean how do you calculate your personal business model whether something like that is worth doing?

Amanda: I mean I would say that like I am financially not someone that like, I mean the fact that I'm surviving right now is like borderline coincidence. Like I first of all I have not even received the money from the *GQ* story yet, to be clear. That is a story that I have put a ridiculous amount of work into in the past like 10 months and is on stands and I have five copies of it sitting on my table right now and probably like a little more than a quarter of a million people...well online...so probably like half a million people have read that story at least, because they have a million subscribers.

Dan: Doesn't Condé have to pay in a month because they're in New York City?

Amanda: So somewhat inexplicably Condé sent my money to my agent, and not even to my agent. They weren't like who is your specific agent? They just sent it to William Morris Endeavor, which is the agency that represents me at the moment. And what do you mean you just sent it to WME? That's a huge agency and although I need this money somewhat soon, not like urgently urgently, but like sort of soon you know this is very small potatoes for a huge agency that deals with movies. So like why would you just send them this check that's probably like floating around somewhere? Anyway my agent told me she was going to overnight it to me like a week ago. There have been a couple of things that have made it possible for me to be solvent right now, and like the first one is a total coincidence which is that I totaled my car and then I took the insurance money and just hung out with that and two... and two is that in June. Well yes in the end of May. Mark Oppenheimer, who is the person who runs the Yale Journalism Initiative got in touch and was like do you want to come teach the thing in New Haven for \$5000? This is the weirdest and best thing that's happened all year. They do like nonfiction storytelling sort of you know like conference or something where like say all these people like pay a bunch of money to go to movies and it's like workshop some of their nonfiction storytelling and go to a bunch of like talks with professional journalists. And you know radio people and stuff like that and it's like sort of a lot like two or three weeks before it was supposed happen one of his workshop leaders that has been doing it for the past couple of years backed out and he thought of me because sometimes I'm lucky like that. Cultivate relationships with people. And so yeah I got flown to New York and the way you know spent like four days in New Haven and got like \$5000 for barely any work but it was really a very nice coincidence. So I'm like yeah I mean I think basically those two things. And I'm like you know the column and then like since I got fired I had

unemployment, I had severance payment, I have a story that got optioned. And so I got another option payment this year. But the biggest things were the insurance money from totaling my car and this little teaching gig that was like ridiculously well paid. And then you know this *GQ* money will come in and I think that there is, you know, I mean I have lots of other things pending. So we'll see, everything moves really slowly. And I think that it's very possible I will hit a like sustainable groove in the next six months. Just like adding one more thing on top of the *Rolling Stone* column, that would be like great, because the *Rolling Stone* basically covers my rent and a little bit more in terms of expenses. But it doesn't cover my full life. I need a little bit more money coming in each month. And so you know I've talked to a bunch of different people about a bunch of different options of like what that could look like. And I feel like it's not crazy to think that that would work. I'm applying for grants and like fellowships and stuff like that for bigger projects. But no I mean like if someone offered me a good job I would totally take a good job. But there are also not a lot of good jobs.

Dan: What's surprised you the most since you started freelancing?

Amanda: I don't know. I think like... this shouldn't have been surprising but it is the thing that like so much depends on like who you know and who your friends are. I definitely didn't realize when I first quit my job in 2015, how you need to freakin' negotiate. I mean this is like capitalism or whatever. But you know everyone is basically out to like screw you. This is the life. You need to fight for every single, it's not just like "oh cool, well welcome to *GQ*. Now you're a *GQ* writer and we'll pay you the totally appropriate amount that all the other writers are getting and you'll get all the things that everyone else is getting and it'll work out and it'll be great." It's more like. "All right. Well okay you can have a story, we'll publish this story. But these are the terms and we're going to act like they're normal," but there's all these little things where you to be like, "and I want the rights to a story and I want a per-word rate. And I want my expenses paid up-front." and you have to be like super demanding and like it's like every single thing and every time I think that like I'm like yes I like I've got this it's like it's like no I forgot to ask for the other thing I forgot to ask for the other thing and now I just ended up screwing myself out of money or I ended up like not being paid for something for like a longer time. I don't think I realized how it was going to be like a constant battle for people to give you what you deserve for like the work that you're doing. And I don't know, even like I think like a year ago, it was like a year ago, was when things started to get really bad. I'm starting to be like shit, what's going on with this new editor, she doesn't respond to like my e-mail. I don't know what to do. If I was up that I would be like "oh it's ok you can even leave, you can like live without *BuzzFeed*. You can be a *Rolling Stone* columnist and you can have a print story in *GQ* and like lots of other stuff you know coming out soon or whatever that would sound really good. I think I would have been like excited about it but I think it's amazing how things can sound impressive and you can still be financially totally screwed.

Dan: What sort of things are you always fighting for contractually?

Amanda: Yeah really. I yeah I mean like one of the things, I mean this is also is sort of like, well when you know what the things are you make sure that you ask for them upfront. And like a contract and everything. Whatever. I mean it's also like I learned the hard way about like all of these things. So many things, but also the other thing is like if I really want to make money I think they like movies and TV, like my stuff getting turned into movies and TV, is probably my best option, because I mean I have something right now that like if it keeps going the way it's going like I make it like a lump sum of like \$50,000 which is great. I don't need to worry for like another like you know three years or something or I can like you know figure out how to like you know move that around so that it helps. It really helps provide a cushion. But yeah no I mean I think like asking for like the rights to your stories, asking for like expenses being paid upfront or getting reimbursed upfront or them putting out money for plane tickets so you don't have to or something like that, you know asking for a per-word rate and not like a flat rate, making that per word rate pretty high, like the lowest per-word rate that I do is for is basically for the column for *Rolling Stone* and that's only because I like them and I trust them and I would rather do the column with them than with like *VICE* or somebody else. I would rather work with better editors at a better publication.

Dan: Do you have to worry about indemnification clauses?

Amanda: Yeah. Indemnification that's another one, that's another thing. Like you have to, that's one that I should have been thinking about, but I didn't even know was a thing until like June, when I was at the Investigative Reporters and Editors conference with a friend who's also a freelance. So my friend was dealing with this big negotiation over indemnification clauses. And that was when I learned that they existed. And it became relevant twice over the summer. And it turned out one of my contracts, I am indemnified, and another one I like wasn't in an airtight way, which is part of why something like didn't come out.

Dan: So do they just come to you and say, "hey, in case something goes wrong, you're screwed?" How do they put that?

Amanda: One situation when it started to become like we were getting threatened. That is a really good editor, and I would like to know the person that was like, "also I need to figure out if I'm like indemnified" and the editor was like oh no I actually spent several hours looking into that yesterday and you are you're good and I was like thank you. Like best person. You are wonderful. And then in another situation also over the summer. They we're like, it was whatever we're getting threatened and all this stuff was happening. And I sent an e-mail and it was like we were communicating like me and the editor and the lawyer and I was just like. So it's all privileged or whatever. But I was like I was like "we are not publishing this unless you can you can guarantee in writing that I am indemnified because I looked at the contract and I wasn't 100 percent sure. So like we're not publishing this unless I'm indemnified." And they were like "you're not," but they were like you're not like 100 percent indemnified, it's sort of murky. And I was like okay well if you guys think this is could invite a lawsuit then we're not doing it. It's ridiculous.

It's crazy. So you know and everyone's an asshole because like I you know they're just trying to like suck whatever they can out of freelance labor.

Dan: If there was something that you wished you would know...

Amanda: It's all this stuff, it's this list of things, it's this list of things that's like... but also, I mean like the pay stuff I probably wouldn't have, it's like I couldn't have been asking for \$2 a word four years ago. But like yeah it's like all of these things. And there's other stuff even beyond not just getting something optioned, but that getting the life rights. And I didn't realize that that was the thing. You know like there's all this basically yes, all of these things you know in a list, and how it works with contracts and kill fees and everything that would have been really great. Really helpful. And then what different people get paid for different things and like what to expect and ask for.

Dan: Yeah exactly. Are you part of any professional writing networks where you can crowdsource that?

Amanda: Yeah I'm in a flack which is very nice. One is my former, she was an editor at *BuzzFeed*. She was like the person who edited the inmate firefighter story when I was freelance and then I worked a little bit with her when I was full time and then she left. She started the flack of like nonfiction writers sort of all over the place. And that is like a really good resource and a group of like near colleagues.

Dan: So when you say figuring out what other people get paid, is that like just keeping up in general? Or do you figure that out before you go into the negotiation with *GQ*, what someone gets paid for something similar?

Amanda: Yeah. There's like situations that I can point to in the past or things that are still sort of like, whatever it's like okay this is what this magazine is going to pay, this is the range of what you can expect from these people and you should ask for this or you should really insist that they pay you this.

Dan: So then the final thing, and this is a wild hypothetical so you can brace yourself, but if money weren't a factor, not assuming that you could just like have a million dollars and quit. But like if you're getting paid something like *Buzzfeed* would pay you, but to be a freelancer and you can do whatever still working full time, would you be doing anything differently than you're doing right now?

Amanda: And to be clear I think that's the situation for a lot of freelancers. I think a lot of freelancers have like a partner or like a situation where like they're borderline doing this is like labor of love and it's like, I mean like I know a lot of people who are in a situation where it's like "my husband really is the person who's like making money" or like say I was just talking to a girl the other day who like somehow was basically getting money from her grandparents. But it was like a roundabout way to make that pay for her life and I was like that's weird. But would I be doing anything differently? I would probably have the ability to travel a little bit more. I already travel a lot. So travel and do

more sort of like, I'm just going to go to this place and like do some reporting, which is like kind of a proactive thing. I was able to do when I had the *Buzzfeed* resources at my disposal. Yeah I mean like maybe I wouldn't have been as motivated to do the column for *Rolling Stone*. But like now I think that like even if I had unlimited money at my disposal like, it's smart to be doing that, because just a good...which is part of why I am doing it even though it's like 75 cents a word, not like a dollar a word. So no, I don't really think I would be doing. I don't really think I would be doing very much differently in my entire life. Like I think I would maybe go to restaurants a little bit more and maybe I would like hire a cleaning lady and you know probably go to therapy more. I'm like not a very materialistic person. I mean every decision that I, every professional decision that I have made...like look, I grew up in a pretty privileged situation, like my parents were working class that they made money and therefore like I went to a prep school for high school and I went to public school before that, but I went to a prep high school and everybody had a lot of money and then I went to Yale and I didn't have loans and things like that. And like I 100 percent could have made decisions where right now I had you know a million dollars saved because I liked did finance or I did consulting or like whatever the heck and that's what my brother is doing and my sister is a doctor and like, you know, but like every decision that I have made basically since college has been about "how can I contribute the most to society." And like not really oriented around making more money than I need to survive. So it's hard to imagine living very differently, because I write about an industry where people are like making a lot of money and people sort of believe like this same delusion that people are likely about to get really rich and make all this money and if you get in early you could make millions right now and stuff like that and that's the delusion.

Dan: Do you think that's a delusion? Just curious.

Amanda: Well yeah, I'm actually writing a column this right now, but yeah I know that there's a lot of like there's a lot like, it is real, it is real. And actually if anyone could make a lot of money off of weed like I certainly could because I have the knowledge and the connections and I'm white. And I don't have a criminal record. I can, I mean there's immediately five different people I could call that would give me... I have a source who I think like really would just love to hand me a paper bag full of a hundred thousand dollars because he likes me and like that like I just like I feel like there's been so many times when he's like tried to help me and you can't help me. Please don't do this. I guess what I'm saying is no, I don't think I'd be really doing pretty much differently at all.

*Interview with Elizabeth Millard, Minnesota-based health and wellness writer
Wednesday, August 30 at 1 p.m., 51 min.*

Dan: So I understand you live in northern Minnesota?

Elizabeth: Yeah we're about 40 minutes south of Duluth. I grew up kind of in the western suburbs of Minneapolis and then I went to Boston for school and Cambridge and then I stayed there for about 13 years. And then I moved back to Minneapolis and then

my partner and I literally bought a farm about two years ago. It's a good combination because you know I work from home and then I get to spend like half my day doing farm chores and getting goats when they get out and things like that so it's a nice little mix.

Dan: Well why don't we start with a little overview of your career trajectory?

Elizabeth: So I went to Harvard and while I was going to Harvard I was working at MIT. I guess that always makes me sound like such an overachiever but MIT had a tuition reimbursement. That's how I basically worked my way through college and I was working at a publishing house, the MIT Press, in their advertising department. And then I worked there for nine years. So it was really just kind of advertising and communications. I was also doing public relations for them. And while I was there I started to do some freelance writing. Just moonlighting, and that was back right before the big Dot Com boom. I guess so I began writing for technology magazines, which MIT gave me the clout to do that. So you know I wrote for...it's funny because they're all kind of like gone now, but they were they used to be really big places like *Business 2.0* and the *Industry Standard* and all these places that paid like a dollar to 2 dollars a word. And then I wrote a little bit for *Wired* and so then when I got done with college my freelance business was really increasing to the point where I felt like I could lose the benefits of a full time job and just kind of try it out on my own. So in 1999 I started full time freelancing and I did that for like a year before I was recruited by a tech startup tech publication online publication and I was there for a couple of years freelancing on the side and then I decided to move back home to Minneapolis. And so I worked for a publication kind of part time but really it was more that I've been full time freelancing since 2001. So. Wow. I never really thought about it but yes. So for quite a while and that is that's what I've been doing.

Dan: Did you stay in tech writing the whole time or if not, how did you branch out?

Elizabeth: What I did originally was to specialize in technology and business but basically to write about anything I was. I told people that I'm a generalist and you know if somebody needed a story on women's health, basically I would write about anything that somebody wanted me to write about. And that was kind of the bulk of my career. And then in the past five years what began happening was I was getting a lot more content job sponsored content, website writing, white papers, things like that. So I've been kind of thinking well maybe I'll gravitate towards being a content strategist and then I went to a conference about two years ago that was all about content strategy. And I realized how much I hated it. I was like oh my god this is horrible. And it had Anne Lamott as the speaker. So I thought oh my god Anne Lamott, you know. Right. And she got up there and her first words were, "I don't know what you people do but I guess it's about writing so." Yeah. That's not that's not what I want to do. I want to be a journalist so I weaned myself off of the teat of corporate writing. And then I realized that what I really wanted to write about was about health and wellness and fitness and so in the past year I have increasingly specialized and so now I specialized only in those topics and I turn down any job that don't that aren't in that in that content fields. So you know it's been a big shift actually. I mean you'll probably ask me that challenges at some point but you know it's a

shift in income because I have to kind of downshift to go forward. But it's a big shift in my happiness level because I don't have to write horrible...I don't have to write, well like I was writing blog posts about identity theft every month. You know and just stuff like that and I thought this is this is my life and this is my soul and people would ask me what I did for a living and I'd be like you know is that important.

Dan: So were you recruited to do content in the first place?

Elizabeth: What happened was a couple of my editors that were from journalistic publications went to go work at PR firms and then that's I mean that's not unusual. So usually what I get is a pitch just PR pitches for articles. But what happened, what's happening then and now in certain PR firms, is that they create content. So they said you know would you be willing to go write this and I'm like sure you know you, paying me a nice chunk of change to do it. That's fine. My name won't be on it. But then that kind of evolved into you know these these larger plays where it's like oh would you rate the annual report for EMC or you know something like that. And the more you do it the more your name gets out there. That's what you do. And the more experience you have with it. So I could see it's almost like I came to a fork in the road when I realized that I needed to kind of choose a direction because it also the ethics of it were making me squeamish. You know I never crossed the boundary where I wrote a story or any kind of journalism that involved a company that I had written for you know like I didn't do identity theft stories with the companies that I had done the blog post for. But I thought that time is coming. And so I just wanted to back away from that.

Dan: Have you ever been called out on that or questioned about your ability to write something journalistically?

Elizabeth: No. No. Never. But you know you have to remember like your name isn't on a lot of this content strategy stuff. You know I've written whole web site. And my name isn't anywhere. So it's not like and I'm not ashamed, I'm not. I actually do have a couple corporate clients still as long as they're within my wheelhouse of what I like to write. I wrote a blog post for MyFitnessPal because I write about fitness. It's not a sales tool, it's just a blog post.

Dan: And when you say taking a step back, are you talking in terms of income mostly?

Elizabeth: Yeah it's in terms of income because the thing is that you know I was putting so much of my energy and my time toward corporate clients that I was neglecting any kind of expansion of my journalistic clients. So I had a kind of a mix going but at the same time I wasn't pitching and pitching and pitching, I kind of stopped pitching and I was waiting for people to come to me and give me work. So when that happens sometimes your journalistic efforts come wither on the vine.

Dan: So considering that you started that work at the tail end of the recession, was your normal editorial work more scarce?

Elizabeth: Yeah definitely. I mean I think the worst times for me really were like 2000, right after I started. So like 2002 was a little sketchy. And then again 2009. So just when the recession comes up then I had not filled up enough of my journalistic clients to feel comfortable. So yeah I was just attempting to take some fat job that doesn't take you very long.

Dan: 2002 being the Dot Com bust?

Elizabeth: Yes. That's when everything started falling apart. And then that's when you know I was writing a lot for these larger magazines like *Business 2.0* and *Industry Standard*. So at the height of the Dot Com boom the *Industry Standard* was like the bible of the tech revolution and it got so fat. It was like like a *Vogue* September issue. And that paid \$2 a word and they needed like 5000 word stories on these startups and it's just like boom you know. And then almost overnight they're like oh everything's going down and there's no money, bye. So when that happens you're kind of left scrambling. You know that and that was kind of early in my freelancing career too. So I felt like really panicky because I had made the unfortunate mistake of having just a few clients, which was a good lesson to always diversify your client stream.

Dan: So how does that lesson manifest with the web writing you're doing today?

Elizabeth: The thing is that I decided to specialize in...I mean I can't believe I'm really about to say this but health became like a big thing right now. So all these places want health, even places I wouldn't think of like *AARP* needs health content, everybody needs health content, health is the big thing now. So I was like oh my gosh I actually anticipated something for once which is very exciting.

Dan: In terms of your skill set, are there things that you're working on apart from writing and editing that might align you with where the industry is going digitally?

Elizabeth: No. I mean I haven't tried video at all. That's not it. The thing is too though that you know I live in northern Minnesota so I don't know how video would be applicable to what I do . You know maybe those are famous last words for me but it's just, it's just not what I need to be doing right this second, and there's enough content needs happening right now. And—one second, I'm trying to move two pigs—there's enough content needs happening right now that I don't I don't feel panicky about like oh my god I need to hone my video skills.

Dan: Over the course of your freelancing career, have there been any staff jobs that really attracted you?

Elizabeth: There have been a couple of opportunities for staff jobs along the way. And I would say I briefly thought about it but I know there's just no way that I could work in an office now unless I was desperate. I'm not geared toward working in offices anymore. I was talking to my friend and he goes "oh I have to go because my lunch hour is almost up," it makes me itchy to even think about something like that. Any kind of restrictions,

and I've just been working on my own for far too long with my own schedule to think about being able to you know that having to ask somebody if I can take a vacation.

Dan: What are the other reasons why you work for yourself?

Elizabeth: I can see it both ways. Obviously having a stable income would be refreshing. I haven't had that in 16 years. So knowing how much I'm going to get per month and then getting that much per month would be that would be fun. But you know I've I've developed enough resiliency not to need that and but yeah it's really compelling. That's one of the reasons I stay in freelancing, the main reason, not just kind of the freedom that I have in terms of my schedule and everything, but that I can ramp up my businesses as big as I want it to be. I can write for multiple people, if I don't like somebody that I'm writing for I don't have to write for them anymore. It's just a lot more control for me over being I guess being more entrepreneurial and being able to expand and that's fun for me you know to kind of you know get a new client and always be growing.

Dan: Do you find it difficult to come up with solid pitch ideas when you're not around people?

Elizabeth: Sometimes, but it becomes a habit. You know I had read some advice one that said and for every article that you read think of two stories that you could pitch. And that was really interesting advice. And I thought well I wonder if that's the case. And so when you get into that mindset you know what is the trend what stands out for you. It's just become like I'm sure you've done this too it has become a habit. So I appreciate that kind of bouncing ideas off of other people and collaboration and stuff like that, but I think that having been a freelancer for this long it's become almost second nature to me to try to think about story ideas on my own.

Dan: What's been the most difficult thing about freelancing?

Elizabeth: You know I think it's always for me, it requires motivation to stay motivated. Because you really do have to kind of let a fire under your own ass like every day. And that can be really challenging. I mean, like today I don't have anything to write, so I'm like yay I don't have any write I'm not going to work today. So that's great. I'm actually not working today, but then I think I really have to get back to it tomorrow because otherwise, you know, I mean I have like 80 mouths to feed on this farm. So I you I've got to work it, so always to kind of keep your enthusiasm up and that's not always that's not always easy to do.

Dan: Do you set a schedule for your workday to help with that?

Elizabeth: I used to have no boundaries in terms of time. Like I took on so many projects and so many assignments and things like that that I'd basically be working from like 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. every day. And even on weekends. And I just really burned myself out. And that was up until a couple of years ago so there was a good kind of five year stretches being insane. And I was just really unhappy about it. I mean I mean a lot of

money but which is nice but I think that now what I do is I have a cut off time, I stop work at 4, no matter what. And I also occasionally if I'm lacking the motivation to start writing something then I just kind of do a little Pomodoro Technique. It's all about basically setting a timer for yourself and working within a specified amount of time. So what I do is I'll give myself X amount of time to write something, I'll say I think that this article should take an hour and a half to write. That's all I'm going to give myself. And then magically, I get done in an hour and 29 minutes right, rather than like going on Jezebel.com or Twitter and you know the pattering around and then suddenly it takes six hours to write it.

Dan: So would you say that you work even 40 hours a week, with the full effort it takes to run your business?

Elizabeth: No I say probably right more like 25 hours a week. I spend much more time reporting than I do writing, which I think anybody would tell you. I would hope so. So probably out of if I'm going to work for 25 hours a week reporting is probably like 18 you know and so writing is like seven.

Dan: Have you seen your contracts change much over the years?

Elizabeth: I haven't seen a huge change on my part and I do read my contracts, I make sure that you know that the publication will kind of get my back if anything happens. But in terms of retaining rights I don't really fight for that because I don't enjoy trying to resell my work. I feel like everything I write is so customized for that publication that I don't reprint anything. I know a lot of writers that have a lot of success with that effort but that's never been never been a thing to me.

Dan: And when you talk about publications having your back, have you ever backed out of a story or negotiated for indemnification?

Elizabeth: No I never felt the need to do that. I suppose I'm not like reporting on the corporations, like I don't think the Catholic Church is going to come out because I'm reporting about you know women and strokes. The thing is that I'm a features writer so everybody that I talk to want to wants to talk to me and I enjoy that aspect of it. So I guess I'm not as aggressive about pursuing that language in the contract.

Dan: So in terms of looking back at where you were starting out, if there's one piece of advice you have for yourself based on what you've learned, what would that be?

Elizabeth: Hah good question. I would say don't freak out over the rise and fall of your fortune. It'll be ok. Like I was looking at my books the other day over the past eight or nine years and some years are really good and some years are less good. And I think early on in my career I thought if I don't really ramp up and make a lot of money then I'm going to be out on the street or I'm going to be sitting in some cubicle somewhere. Don't freak out and have a savings account. Those two things create your own cushion. Because some people won't pay for like six months for it.

Dan: Do you have any strategies for maintaining a work/life balance?

Elizabeth: So I walk the dogs you know just go outside any time trying to freak out about work. I just go outside because then and then it just feels better like it doesn't. I think that it's easy to feel really overwhelmed if you're sitting at your desk like really thinking about work and then that's when I can't think of any stories like what am I going to when am I going to pitch. I don't have anything. And then I go walk the dog and I think of like three stories. By the time I'm done and I never bring a notebook to jot it down I just then I try to put a note in my phone and I send myself these really weird email messages and so it's just getting moving. I mean I'm also a yoga teacher so I also try to just kind of stay active and you know do some yoga yourself, if you can physically move, I mean you are a runner, so if you can physically move it usually helps you to kind of pick your brain. I just want to support my farm going to be fun.

Dan: If money weren't an issue, is there anything you would be covering differently, or any kind of work that you would prefer to be doing that just isn't sustainable right now?

Elizabeth: I would probably do some of what I'm doing but I'd probably, if money wasn't an issue, and then you know I'd probably just work on my novel a little bit more.

Dan: You're working on a novel?

Elizabeth: Yeah it's just fun like I get to just make shit up. I get to make people up, I mean I'm not even writing it for publication. Like it's a dystopian novel because everything is great. And I guess I think I should write it really fast because is going to become nonfiction in the very near future. I heard something about missiles headed toward California and I'm like shit, I'm feeling like Orwell all of a sudden, and maybe I'm just picking up on you know everything that's going on. So I mean I just need to get this out a little bit before I sit down at my desk so I can't just spend my whole day feeling outraged about the politics of this country. So the novel kind of helps with that.

Dan: Anything else you'd like to say to aspiring freelancers?

Elizabeth: I guess the only thing I would say is like a bit of a cautionary, you know, which is every once in awhile I have a freelancer ask me to network them with my contacts at publication, which I think is so weird. Why would you do that? You know like why are I cannibalize my own work. I've had people from high school that are like hey I'm thinking about becoming a freelance writer like how do you do it? And I'm like well go to school, for one, and then they're like oh you, can you connect me and your editor via e-mail and I have to say no. I'm not going to do that. I try to be polite but sometimes I probably come off sounding a bit of a bitch but I usually I say "Hey I totally get. I totally understand why you would ask me this but this is a really competitive business and I don't want to cannibalize my own work by having you raid my network."

Dan: Maybe the word cannibalized is the ticket, because now it sounds like they're asking for something really sinister or something.

Elizabeth: Right? All those aggressively ambitious people. Could you just be a little bit more Midwestern about this? You know maybe that's the takeaway here.

*Mark Obbie, New York-based criminal justice reporter
Friday, July 21 at 2:50 p.m., 41 min.*

Dan: So tell me a little bit about your background.

Mark: I went to Mizzou to specialize in legal affairs reporting, I did different courses that were helpful, but mainly learned on the job. I started doing daily newspapers, starting with cops and courts, and worked for the *American Lawyer* media company for most of my career. I started as reporter and ended up the editor of *Texas Lawyer*; they cover the law but not specifically crime, and I had never really—after my daily news days—focused on crime. When I left the *American Lawyer* in 2004, I was planning to write about business, legal affairs generally. Then I took teaching job at Syracuse while freelancing. Then it was only part-time, supplementing my teaching, and I discovered while working on story about a murder that I really got excited about digging into policy issues and the psychology of victimization, so I became more and more interested in doing in-depth stories for *Pacific Standard* and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. But doing long, deeply reported stories on top of a full-time teaching job just wasn't working for me. I was really frustrated, so I left teaching in 2012 to freelance full-time and decided that it was time to focus as much as I could on crime policy and crime victims. I always tried to gin up a big project each summer that I could work on at Syracuse, sometimes successfully, but sometimes big stories overlapped with teaching. It was too hard to...I couldn't travel to do much reporting while I had teaching obligations, and I wasn't good at juggling big projects. Frankly, big stories interested me far more. In my career, I was promoted at relatively young age to an editing position, and I didn't get to stretch my legs as a reporter and writer as I assumed I would. I always just wanted to be a reporter, and in fairly short order I found myself editing and managing for most of career. The key reason I left Syracuse and management was to report and write, which I knew would be a hard way to make a living. Teaching would be perfect day job with writing on the side, but it proved difficult with this kind of reporting and writing.

Dan: How were you feeling about freelancing when you made the leap in 2012?

Mark: The main reason I felt confident that I could make that jump was that in my career I had developed a really good network. *American Lawyer* was superb springboard for lots of people to move into other magazines and I had contacts everywhere, so I wasn't just cold-calling editors. I'd contact friends and pitch them, which helped get me started in frequent full-time work. The first year was a struggle. I wasn't making the kind of money...when I was teaching I hadn't made the kind of money that I did when I was on staff, and when freelancing wasn't making the money I made teaching, I worked my way down the income ladder. At this point in my career, that was okay with me, I was making

an investment in a creative challenge. I had never given myself the chance to work at the highest level I could, and that was the most important thing to me. I've been dipping into my savings to help pay the bills, and my wife is freelance children's book illustrator, so we've never made enough money to carry us. Right from start we had to dip into savings, all but one year that's been the case, because I never made enough money to pay ordinary bills. I won a fellowship for that year, the Soros fellowship. It paid well, and that was the only year when I didn't go into retirement savings.

Dan: Is that part of the reason you don't live in a pricier urban area?

Mark: Right, I'm in upstate New York, about an hour south of Rochester. I'm sitting on a bench in the woods next to my log cabin. Expenses were a big part, I could make the money last a lot longer in a rural area than in suburban New York City.

Dan: What have you learned about landing pitches since you've been a freelancer?

Mark: I've learned that it is a great advantage to develop a brand name for myself as an expert on a particular niche. Even narrower than crime, I focus on urban violence, policing, crime victims. The chief lesson that I've learned is that I have an endless appetite for this topic, I never get tired of it, I feel like I am really advancing every day in my understanding of what's important to write about and what I want to pursue. I've been very successful at the substantive side of this work, developing that expertise, and I don't want to say that I've consciously given up on the idea that I can make this pay well, because I don't have that luxury. Income has been secondary for me, it's a luxury. If I didn't have some savings to live off of, I wouldn't be able to indulge my this plan to dig in deep on big, in-depth stories, that are on a particular beat; that wouldn't pay the bills.

Dan: Are you, or were you, seeking any salaried staff jobs?

Mark: I didn't seek out staff work, I still haven't. I haven't put an enormous amount of effort into finding an anchor client, or a super steady gig that would solve some of these problems, and part of that has just been that the fellowship—I wanted to use the fellowship as a springboard into doing a book on these topics—and I put that off for a year after the fellowship ended. I've needed to crank back up on pitching and getting assignments, that's when *The Trace* came along, it was very helpful because I did a lot of work for them and I haven't seen any opportunities to do that and stay where I am, living where I am, I haven't found that.

Dan: So the stories you're writing for *The Trace* are also destined for a book?

Mark: I have an agent, I got an agent when worked on murder story, so I got that in the bag. I have probably 90 percent of the reporting done. I began work on a book proposal while at the same time doing a lot of reporting that I needed to fill in gaps in and see what I the book was. The book proposal has been slow-going, I had a hard time convincing my agent that my story plan was the right one, and I had to go back to the drawing boards. Right now, I'm probably two months away from finishing another draft of the proposal,

which if it sells, I have the vast majority of the work done, other than the writing. I even have a good chunk of the writing done too. It's a big gamble on selling this book, I would hate to have all the work that I've done go to waste. I'm like this hopeless gambler, I keep putting money down on the same bet, digging the hole deeper and deeper, an addiction at this point, hoping that it pays off.

Dan: Apart from assignments with *The Trace*, are you writing much print content, or is your genre more online-only?

Mark: It's mostly online, I did a Sunday feature for the *New York Times* and another for *Pacific Standard*, and then everything else I can think of: *TakePart* and *Al Jazeera America* were the last two for digital. I'm working on finding more opportunities in digital than in the traditional print realm.

Dan: And do you take any non-criminal justice work?

Mark: I'm not doing stuff outside of criminal justice work, which is not a great business plan, unless the book is a smash hit, which I'm wise enough and battle weary enough that that's probably not going to happen the way that book advances are these days, but I care about it and I really feel driven to finish what I started.

Dan: What was freelancing like when you started out?

Mark: I don't know if I can quantify it, there was a lot of work to be had, although I'm not sure if it's more or less than now. What I have seen and what everybody has seen is pay rates have gone down, not up. When I was farming out freelance work, we didn't do a lot of freelance at *American Lawyer*, almost none at *Texas Lawyer At American Lawyer*, 15 or 17 yeras ago, I was paying people a dollar a word. Now, a big favor is paying \$1 per word. That's troubling.

Dan: So how are you balancing the magazine assignments and book reporting?

Mark: When I have something for *The Trace*, which is all I've been working on for some time now in addition to the book, but when I have a *Trace* assignment, I put the book aside indefinitely and focus on that. So I'll spend take the story I'm doing right now, it's a 4,500-word feature that *Politico* is going to publish as well as *The Trace*. I got the assignment from James in March, and I spent two or three weeks just doing background research and laying out reporting calls, doing pure reporting. I work from about 4:30 a.m. to 5 at night and hope that I can knock off then, if my editors want to keep talking at 9 or 10 at night that's hard because I'm so shot. I typically work 50-60 hours a week, and I just focus obsessively on getting all the reporting out, outlining and writing and rewriting. On this St. Louis story, it was maybe five weeks of that, just totally focused on that story, every day I'm collecting information, I'm making phone calls for the book that is, the book is always on a low boil, if it's not my primary focus it's at least occupying maybe an hour of my time every day. One of the chapters in the book is on a particular case or program that's in Rochester so it's nearby and I've spent a lot of time

driving up to Rochester, spending time with a group of people who I need for the book. Whenever they would tell me they had something that would be useful, I would drop *The Trace* work and rush off to Rochester and spend an evening with them. Once I filed *The Trace* story, I immediately turned to full-time work on the book. When edits come back, they take priority, and it's a back and forth between the two. I'm also not doing what good freelancers do which is scrambling all the time and pitching however many times a week. I have a bunch of stories in the pipeline for *The Trace*, but I have been focusing on one at a time so I can continue to work on the book proposal.

Dan: In that way you just said, do you think you're at odds with what you assumed to be the successful freelancer's strategy?

Mark: Big projects are the antithesis to a smart business plan. One of the problems of juggling a book and those kinds of stories, especially when they're useful to the book, is I know that I'm overdoing this reporting, but it's all going to be good for the book. It's all that gambler's problem again, pouring more and more into that project with a hope that someday it'll pay off.

Dan: Do you have a strategy for traveling to keep costs down and get the most out of your time?

Mark: I haven't done any reporting travel for *The Trace*, which is surprising because I've done a bunch of big stories, but it's all been phone work. The big travel that I've done is for *New York Times* and *TakePart*, and before that for my project, for fellowship which is paying my travel out of pocket, no stipend. When I'm on an assignment, I'm not spending extra time there for the book so much as I'm confident that what I'm getting is going to be useful for the book. If I'm in St. Louis for a week as I was for the *Times*, I just was confident that every interview I did was a keeper, which I'd use later in a different context.

Dan: Assuming all work paid the same...

Mark: No I'm kind of doing that, no I'm already doing that! The only thing that I can do even more extreme would be to not do *Trace* stories, but because *Trace* work is directly applicable, like being able to juggle those assignments, it's all helping. There's not much else I can dial back on the income front.

Dan: What's been the most challenging part about freelancing since you went full-time?

Mark: My greatest frustration with the freelance work that I have done is that, on these big sprawling stories, is that even though I was an editor for most of career, editing is never easy. It's the really time-consuming part of what I do, and it almost always makes me very anxious to finish these projects because by the time they are done, I'm just totally wrung out, this business is really... I always told my students, don't even try to do this kind of stuff until you're way into your career, there are some young freelancers who do very good job of in-depth features, but I don't think it's practical for most people,

especially if you don't have big network and financial resources. When editing takes so much time, it eats into any reasonable pay. If you were to break it down hourly, it just makes it so uneconomical, and again I'm being paid pretty well by *The Trace*. It's pretty sweet, the deal I have with them is that, once we agree on a topic, and a possible way into that topic through a particular story, I do a couple weeks worth of preliminary reporting and write an outline for where I think the story is going, they don't really edit that, it's just an outline, and I get to invoice them \$1,500 for that, and then once I get the green light and the editor has signed off on where story is going to go, I work a lot more on it and I'm paid a dollar a word for the final product. It's quite a bit more than a dollar a word when it all works out, this story I hope will be around \$6,000. I've been paid that for a number of stories, *TakePart* is paying me similarly, I worked out to \$1.50/2 per-word rate with them, but the amount of time I sank into those was also very considerable. It's not unheard of for those stories to take two months, when you count all the editing time. If I were hungrier and I guess more of a go-getter, if I were really going for it, I'd have a lot of little things to fill in the spare minutes of the day, like it's practical to do a few phone calls. I could do a much better job of maximizing my income, but I don't know if I want to be that busy, and I'm 58 years old. I've always worked 50-60 hours a week and at a certain point like Jesus Christ, I don't want to work this hard forever and ever, after 30 years it gets old. I have made the conscious choice of not trying to kill myself even more with that kind of strategy and just be super tight-focused on stuff I care about.

Dan: Can you give me an overview of your day?

Mark: When I'm really in the thick of it, in the reporting, I'll have 2-3 interviews a day if I'm lucky and got scheduled and they call me back, so I'm transcribing, following up on things that they told me, digging up more people to talk to, reading research reports, clips, running off to the library to search databases, I'm definitely filling in the time in between those phone calls.

Dan: What's your outlook on the rest of your freelancing career?

Mark: It's important that there's room in the journalism business for people doing the kind of work that I do, and there are a lot of people doing the work that I do. It's not that I'm alone in this, but to be able to spend real time on in-depth stories and really learn a topic in-depth, and talk to lots and lots of people and really make sense of a complicated subject, we need a better economic system to support that. It's really a shame that I have had to make the choice to pursue that to the exclusion of making a good living. Another thing I've done that hamstring me is that I haven't checked into any corporate work, I've had opportunities to do corporate content, sponsored content, and other sorts of PR and whatever and I just refuse to do anything that isn't pure journalism. These days that is the kiss of death, as a business model, it's very hard, you won't find many full-timers who will say that because that's where the money is. It's awfully tempting, but I don't want to have conflicts of interest, and I don't care about writing stuff for law firms. It's not why I became a journalist. It looks like journalism but it isn't, in my mind, so I'm refusing to do anything like that.

*Interview with Ellen Ryan, Washington D.C.-based freelancer and writing coach
Thursday, August 10 at 8:45 a.m., 47 min.*

Dan: So I saw you left the *Washingtonian* in 2009 then had two jobs after that?

Ellen: Right. The next one was the Banking Association and that lasted two years. That may or may not have been directly the recession but it was during the recession. And you know they might have kept me on had it not been a recession. So you know partially attributed to that I guess. And then the next one was a nonprofit that ironically put people back to work who were unemployed and that lasted a year.

Dan: So when you say you were freelancing before you decided to go full-time, were you doing that while you were at the *Washingtonian*?

Ellen: Oh I've done that for decades. I graduated from college in 85.

Dan: And just to confirm you went to University of Virginia?

Ellen: Correct. I started freelancing like a month out of college, kind of by accident like a lot of people do. And I just continued freelancing on the side continually.

Dan: So but it was in 2012, when you decided to do this, would you still take another salaried position?

Ellen: Well the last official job ended at the end of 2012. And I didn't plan to go full time freelance, In fact I tried for gosh almost two years to get another job. I temp'd you know full time for several months at a time here and there. I spent almost full time when I wasn't temping looking for a job because you may or may not know it can take. It can be a full time job to look for a job. You know generally sounds like a cliché but it's really true. If you're really concentrating on it and so I was barely freelancing during that time because I was concentrating so hard on trying to get a job and it just wasn't happening.

Dan: If you don't mind me asking were you looking for magazine jobs?

Ellen: Yes, I was trying to get back into print.

Dan: Like in the D.C. area? Or were you willing to move around?

Ellen: No I want to stay here and there is I mean there's plenty and there's plenty of print in Washington it's the capital of the free world and all that stuff. But you know it's like top of the food chain. And in any in any what do you call it pyramid. It's harder to get jobs at the top. I wasn't going to go for the bottom and they wouldn't have hired me for the bottom and so I was something suitable for my skill level. And you know there's only one editor in chief type job at a time. So, hard to do that especially when they want you to

have 16 different skills when you do that and I only have 14 or 13 or whatever. Can you also do video and can you also do that?

Dan: So what sort of freelancing were you doing while you had a job?

Ellen: I did a lot of primarily magazine writing even though I editing my magazine, but I just did different work than I was doing during the day that day. At one point I had a job when I first went to work for this boss and he said, "I don't want you doing stuff as a freelancer that would be competing with what we do here at this job." And I said "I don't want to be doing anything as a freelancer that would be repeating what I do during the day," why would I want to do the same thing at night that I do it during the day? So I did completely different stuff. Fun stuff. And at one point actually I wrote and published a book on my own time. So I did some stuff like travel writing. Looking back I guess I was pretty lucky because none of my employers were concerned about it except that there was one or two at the very beginning, they said, "oh you know we like that you have freelance skills, that's one reason we hired you, but we're kind of worried now that we're here we are hiring you you know is this going to be bad for us." I'm like really I'm not going to be competing with anything I do during the day and I'm they're oh okay. So yeah I guess I was pretty lucky that way.

Dan: Do you think you were also concerned about just your ability to do that and do the job that they're hiring you do?

Ellen: They never actually said that. And there were no no cell phones at the time, but that wasn't really the point because I guess I could always use my work phone. So yeah I the only job in which things really overlapped was at the *Washingtonian* because I had so much freedom, we all had so much freedom and everybody there was freelancing on work time and you know they were doing calls and stuff on personal time and they were doing personal stuff on Washingtonian time and people were in and out of the office physically, they were on the phone doing personal stuff and work stuff. There was so much wishy washy freelance wishy washy time and in the space-time continuum was so messed up with a job like that and the boss didn't care. He totally didn't care as long as everything got done.

Dan: So leading up to that point in 2012, how did your work evolve front print to digital?

Ellen: I actually wasn't paying that much attention. At some point in the 90s publishers started saying we also want this to appear online but it was primarily to print stuff. And I was an early proponent for writers getting their due contractually. And so I made a point of any time I had a contract to insist that the contract would pay for which would cover web rights as well as print rights. And if they wanted first North American serial rights of course they would have to pay extra for web or else changed the contract. Because first rights means one time rights which means print only or web only but not both because first is one and one is not two, I teach my writing classes that all the time. And so a First North American serial Rights contract does not cover being online as well as being in print.

Dan: Have you seen the copyright law and what these common practices are involved with web expanding?.

Ellen: Well you know about the major lawsuit that went to New York Times in 2002, *New York Times versus Tasini*? Well that one actually started in the 90s and it went through, it took almost a decade or thereabouts to go through that initial court and then the appeals court then got all the way of the Supreme Court and that was exactly on the issue I just mentioned, that publishers were paying for one-time rights and yet putting things online. And the National Writers Union says you know you pay for one, you can't use two. And that is pretty basic math and the Supremes agreed. But we won the battle and lost the war because contracts got really really bad after that. And they said fine you want us to pay you for it too. We're going to squeeze things out of you so bad in the contracts and so contracts have gotten hellish and there's publishers I just won't write for because contracts are so bad, which is really unfortunate.

Dan: So are there publishing houses you just don't do, or have you had success negotiating?

Ellen: I've done relatively well. There's a bunch of threads on the forum on this in which people have talked about it. A lot of publishers and other people have negotiated either all rights back or first rights or gotten rid of liability clauses and things like that. There didn't even used to be liability clauses. That's new, that's really bad. It used to that first rights versus all rights was a big deal and now you know like people have even given up on first rights now that they're all worried about liability clauses and even worse things.

Dan: When you say liability clause, are you talking about if something goes wrong, like a defamation situation?

Ellen: Defamation is a big part of it. It's only part of it. But yes part of it is basically it puts all the blame on the writer. If anything goes wrong, if anybody sues, if anyone threatens to sue, if there's is a fact wrong, if any number of things goes wrong with the article then the publisher can throw up their hands and say it wasn't us, it was on you and they can even refuse to back you in court. They can say we're backing ourselves but you're on your own. And even if you're right, backing yourself in court is phenomenally expensive and it takes a huge amount of time. And even if you come out right in the end you're down hundreds of thousands of dollars in months out of your, months or years of your time. And who needs that? And liability insurance used to be super cheap and it's gotten super expensive.

Dan: So then since you've gone full time are you still freelancing mostly print?

Ellen: I haven't done math to figure this out and besides it changes all the time, just in the past week I've gotten two new clients and one of them is primarily editing at the moment but it might turn to writing more. So I'm not sure the proportions. But I still do primarily magazine work, most of it is print although pretty much everything that's print also shows

up online. Probably all of it. I mean take a wild guess and say maybe 5 percent of my work is editing. I don't want to do more because then you just don't have much to show for it. I mean you can't show samples that you're editing. Who cares, right?

Dan: So I'm just wondering I mean if you work for magazines but you also work for content clients like newsletters or web copy or stuff like that, or do you still do that? I saw that on your site.

Ellen: I mentioned the word content because I took a class or two and I thought I might try they work for corporations. But the more I looked into it it just, it didn't as appealing after, I probably need to change that back.

Dan: Okay gotcha. If you don't mind, what do you find unappealing?

Ellen: A lot of that was the contracts, there's just something so much easier about one article at a time, you get paid, you send in one article, you get paid one check, you're done, and then hopefully you have a relationship with editor and they send you more work, but it just seemed so amorphous. And like you go down some rabbit hole when from what I understand you work for some content company or directly for the corporation or sometimes it's both. It's really confusing. And the have you going on this project for months and they ask more of you, they have price that, and they ask you for different things and come back and have changes that go on for months at a time and it just made my head swirl so I tried to get away from that.

Dan: In terms of like the freelance work you do, have you had to really adapt your skill set or the way that you market yourself in terms of thing can provide you in order to continue getting the work that you'd like to get?

Ellen: Well let me let me reiterate. I kind of really went full time freelance in 2014 or thereabouts because I spent the previous two years doing a lot of tempting and looking for a job. So although I was on my own starting at the end of 2012 I wasn't really, I barely did any freelancing for a couple of years. I only got to the point of kind of giving up and saying okay I guess this is what I'm doing about three years later.

Dan: In terms of like how that affects the rest of your life, I mean how do you make that consideration with know health care, benefits, and things like that? I mean did that weigh heavily on the decision?

Ellen: Well I didn't really think of it as a decision, it seemed like more of a fall back. I'd rather do what I did all those years, have a main job and then do freelancing on the side. I mean there's a lot to be said for this. It's you know some people think oh wow that's so glamorous and it is kind of glamorous. It's kind of fun. I like setting my own schedule. I like having the freedom during the day if I feel like going out to the gym or having a doctor's appointment. I don't have to ask anybody I don't have a boss on the other hand. I have like 12 losses so you know. But you know technically I don't have a boss. Ask anybody. I can sit here in my bunny slippers. I can go and do something and if I don't

have an appointment then I can go out. But on the other hand, in the end it is kind of cool you know somebody said oh wow you're a writer, so what do you do? And I say well you know I talked to the poet laureate of the United States today and they were like wow. So that's kind of fun. But on the other hand, I have to pay my own benefits, which is crap. So yeah that part stinks.

Dan: Do you travel much to go report? I mean outside of the D.C. area or do you do mostly stuff there over the phone?

Ellen: I never leave the D.C. area unfortunately. I mean well going to the ASJA conference. But yeah I know some people leave to go report elsewhere but I just haven't. Pretty much everything I do is by phone oddly enough. I have gone to interview people around here because everybody who is anybody in Washington, you know, it's a great place to find people who are worth writing about. And so it's a wonderful place to be. But so yeah I often do go out in the car and public transport around here to interview people in person. But a lot of it is just on phone.

Dan: Could you give me an overview of where you view just in terms of like reporting, writing, editing, billing, in a typical work week?

Ellen: Lists, lots of lists, who to talk to next, crossing off who I've already talked to. What I need to do at follow up, when I need to do the fill in this story, who I need to hear from. Often times it's a long list of hear from this person, hear from that person and then checking next day. Have I heard from that person? No. Get back in touch with them. It's like one of those biology textbooks. Have you heard from them? Yes. Have you heard from them. No. Then call them back. Tell them that. What do I say? If this. Yes. If that. No. And filing, you know years ago we used to talk about the paperless future? No, forget it.

Dan: Like filing reporting materials? Published work?

Ellen: All of the above, everything. Because I when I do a phone interview I record it here on the computer but then I also take notes by phone and by hand because I'm kind of obsessive about that because I've had so many times when the recorder or whatever thing I'm using to record has failed in one way or another, every way you can imagine it's failed. So if I could take notes in three different ways I would just because would be horrific if it failed. So then in terms of like if you I don't know if you have like a target you know amount of money that you want to make every week or month or something like that. But if you have a way in which you structure like who it is you work for and the type of stuff that you do in order to make that amount of money. And what I mean by that is like just assuming that there are probably a lot of people who take work that you know they might be lukewarm on but they you know the cost benefit ratio is really good. Do you do that or do you mostly just do stuff that you want to do and it works out.

Dan: And how do you decide how much time to devote to a pitch, knowing it might not be accepted?

Ellen: I haven't managed to swing taking work I'm not so thrilled about in order to make more money because I'm not really qualified, I think, to do anything that I'm not so great at because I don't know how to convince anybody to send me work that I'm not so thrilled about that pays more because other people are a lot more qualified and that sort of thing.

Dan: Is there a vast distribution in your work in terms of how long or how time consuming each assignment is? I mean do you do a handful of smaller things and a couple of bigger things, or do you do consistent 500-word or 1,000-word pieces or something like that?

Ellen: I used have one client that consistently gave me 3000 word articles and that was really good, I can really sink my teeth into that. Unfortunately they relied a lot on trade with China. And when that went belly up two or three years ago they haven't recovered and therefore they brought all their freelance in-house. There was another client lost. So I don't think this is a reflection of the freelance market as a whole but my assignments have gotten smaller lately, the ones I've been getting I think have become smaller you know 1,000 to 500 words, and I need to find clients who are assigning bigger ones.

Dan: Do you find those trade publications to be more reliable generally than regular magazine work?

Ellen: Oh yeah those are great. They pay very steadily. They're steady work. They love writers. They love actual professional writers because they have a lot of knowledgeable people in their own area but they're not necessarily writers. And if they can find professional writers like us they can teach them whatever the field is. This is Association central here in Washington D.C. So aside from Washingtonian I spend a good now in my professional life as an editor at some of these trade associations and professional association magazines. And so you know they're real magazines. They pay decently, although a lot of writers are unaware of that. They often treat you better than that big time national publications and its steady work, and you know not as glamorous as *Glamour* or *Men's Health* or something like that but it's really interesting stuff. So I like waiting for the trades.

Dan: If enough money weren't a factor in terms of, say there were some sort of industry-wide compensation structure of like X amount of work no matter what you're doing, would you be doing any different work in terms of the topics you cover than you are now?

Ellen: You mean if there were some kind of guaranteed income?

Dan: Yeah, yeah this is totally hypothetical. I was wondering if this were a thing.

Ellen: I love what I do. I would still want claw back a few months and get back to the situation, not necessarily with the same clients, but you know a similar situation of having a few of those clients who were steady work, handing me lots of assignments all

the time, pinning me bigger assignments all the time. I still wish I had that one that did a lot of work with China. That was that was really interesting and big time stuff. But you know until things settle out in that part of the world that's not coming back. So yeah if there were a steady decent income like you said, hypothetically, I would still want better, deeper assignments but I would still keep doing what I'm doing.

Dan: And since 2014 or so, has there been anything that you've been really passionate about that you haven't been able to sell anywhere?

Ellen: I've had several stories that I've been pitching around quite a bit of places. Oftentimes I sell one story in one obscure place and then try and take it national and I just can't get anybody national to go for it. Well there's two on this list. I tried six different magazines and was kind of really surprised and disappointed that it didn't go anywhere. One was a pediatrician here who doubles as the head of a clinic in Haiti and she goes down there three times a year for a week at a time and does extremely low cost health care, like a couple of dollars per person, which is a lot for them. I was going to go down there and embed myself there for a week and be her right hand person just hand her stuff. I couldn't get her alumni magazines to say yes, I couldn't get local magazines to say yes. I couldn't get anybody to say yes to this. Another one was a local game designer, a board game designer who is quietly making a million dollars living in a very obscure house driving a six year old Volvo and he designed four games everybody has heard of and everybody is playing, and you know he's out to win the theme of the year award in Europe and board games have come up 37 percent in the past five years and yet get anybody interested in this story. Yeah have to check that out.

Dan: So there anything that you wish you would have known when you started out freelancing full-time or even when you started out freelancing part time that you know now?

Ellen: All those years when I had a full time job and I was freelancing on the side I always had in the back of my head if I ever take this you know I can always take this full time. And then years later when I actually did it was really hard. I just thought oh well I'll just the next morning I'll sit down on my desk and ramp this up this whole time. You know and snap my fingers and that's it. My my part time freelance job will become my full time freelance job. And it wasn't like that. It was a lot harder than that.

Dan: Can you elaborate at all in terms of what was the part that was a lot harder than you expected.?

Ellen: I wasn't relying on it when it was part time. I wish it was a supplement. And so although I was doing a lot of freelancing on the side and it was a decent chunk of my income and it was a decent amount of time, but if I went on vacation one month I just didn't freelance. If I you know if we were moving from one house to another I just didn't really take assignments that month, you know I had other things going on; this, I can't take a vacation from, this is this is my job and you can't just ramp up, I actually had to put new processes into place, like I had to start Excel spreadsheets to keep track of

invoices and to keep track of queries and to keep track of everything and to pay attention to who I was writing to and redo my filing system and I treat this like a real, a real job.

Dan: Does that affect your mental health at all? When you're in a slump is it tough to walk away from it when literally don't have anything to do?

Ellen: Yeah that has really started kicking in in the past year. There's been a lot of articles. They say you have to take time off. You have to schedule a vacation. You have to tell your clients I will be going on this time. I will not be working on your stuff. And you have to get away from your desk. And then others of them write back and they say I can't you know I have to finish this. My clients demand me you know. . . And then there's a dialogue and it goes back and forth. And the other writers come back and they say that's exactly why you need your time off because you can't be at their beck and call you can't constantly have this pressure on you. That's why you need to get away because you feel like you can't get away. And I feel like I can't get away. I feel like I'm constantly under pressure. I feel like I can't leave. I feel like well if I leave they'll find somebody else. If it's not me obviously because everybody has the same fear. I'm just going through what everyone else is going through. The more experienced writers, and it's nice to be in an organization where I can see that other people are having the same struggle and to see what they've done about it.

Dan: Have you developed any sort of habits or anything that help you de-stress and not worry about it all the time?

Ellen: It's not so much worry as...well I worry about the income part but it's more the stress of always being home of always working. You know I try not to work every day, all day every day. I do work some part of every day and it's obviously healthier not to. So I try to maintain some boundaries and do a little work on the weekends but mostly put weekend stuff on weekends and weekdays stuff weekdays and that that structure more like you know working people, office people, it helps keep a boundary on what's working and what's not and then get away on weekends. Like two weeks ago, almost two weeks now, I went out with a friend the Appalachian Trail and it was only one day but it felt like getting away. So that was nice.

*Interview with Lauren Steele, New York City-based outdoor writer and content creator
Monday, August 7 at 9 a.m., 74 min.*

Dan: You graduated from Mizzou in 2015, right?

Lauren: 2014, yes.

Dan: And then you moved straight to Santa Fe?

Lauren: That's right. *Outside* magazine before I went freelance. I was on contact with them my senior year of college. So I was like already writing In-Stride column. And then

after I graduated I kept writing the column and then moved out and I started editorial assistant position.

Dan: And were you there a whole year or like nine months or so?

Lauren: Yeah whenever it came down to it I think I was there for a full year but I was only on contract for like eight or nine months.

Dan: I'm not sure I ever asked you this, but why did you decide to go to New York instead of staying in Santa Fe?

Lauren: It was a situation where it was like at the time *Outside* was like a dream job. It's like everybody has a lot of respect for that magazine. It's a great learning environment. It's a great cohort of people who are in the office all the time. One of those situations like, I just had that dream job and I'm twenty two years old now like what the hell am I...you know like like what are my priorities here. You know it's like where do you go from my having the dream job? And I just decided that like the dream job doesn't mean that you have a dream life for yourself and it is obviously a reality to everything and for me it was like loved *Outside*, loved Santa Fe, but I was 22 years old and like I didn't want to be a one and done. Like I remember specifically thinking that like I don't want to at *Outside* and to be the extent of my success or my life. If I've learned this much here, how much can I learn other places like I don't want this to be the pinnacle. I can be there at 22 years old. Also like living in Santa Fe, there's not much of like a social scene there so I was like also I need to go someplace I can grow as a human being, not just like as a journalist or writer or whatever. I wasn't going to go back to Missouri, going back to my parent's farm didn't seem like the best option. I guess I'm going to go to New York. That's where a lot of things are. And so I just like literally packed up my car and drove from Santa Fe to New York. Like four out of 10 would not highly recommend doing that. The thing is like I saw New York as an opportunity for me to grow culturally, socially, professionally, it's like it was so far beyond just like what am I going to do for work. Because when I moved New York without having a job lined up, I told everybody in Santa Fe and like in my life like "oh yeah like I'm going to go be an editor," I'm like I've gotten to like final rounds of like this and that, and I had, like I talked to people at *Runner's World* about being the gear editor. I talked to people at *Men's Fitness* about being an online editor there, but like nothing was finalized obviously and I didn't have anything on the line. I had no reason to actually be living in New York, nobody has put my name on a business card. I just didn't feel like I had anywhere else to go, so that's why I ended up moving to New York.

Dan: Right. I think when we met in New York for the first time you said you were walking dogs, right?

Lauren: I knew it was gonna be was really hard to succeed. But I knew it would be harder on me in my life if I failed, like I was not going to let myself fail. I work so hard like I spent Christmas alone, Thanksgiving alone, my birthday here and like I sacrificed all this shit just like say that I am in New York and like I made it into an apartment and into a living situation and obviously like the expenses of moving here were a little bit

much. So I actually did take a job walking dogs for the first six weeks of me living here. So what I would do it is, because I needed to be able to pay off all the parking fees and tickets from having my car in the city and also help pay to wait for my next month's rent because I had no money. So yeah I took a job walking dogs. And what I do is I wake up every morning at like 6 a.m., get down in the West Village by like 7-7:30, start walking dogs, walked dogs from 8 o'clock to noon or 1. And then I wanted to save money so I wouldn't ride the subway home and I didn't have the money for a gym membership so I would run. And this is like literally in January during winter storm Juno in 2015. And I would run from the West Village up the Westside Highway back to Harlem where my apartment is. And then I would run back have lunch and then work on the *Rolling Stone* CMS like there their archives, I was copy editing all of their archive features because they didn't have an online archive of their magazines. And because I had learned how to use a CMS at *Outside* I was able to snag a freelance job by copy editing all of these amazing historic features and then plugging them into the Internet so that people can see *Rolling Stone* magazines on the web. So that's what I would do. And like I would walk down by morning and create the *Rolling Stone* online archives by night and did that for like six weeks until that project was over and I had enough money to like pay off my towing fees. And then yeah I just kept freelancing, I didn't ever anticipate whenever I moved to New York freelancing being the end game I thought that that was just what was going to get me by before until I could get myself at a desk somewhere. And then I quickly realized like shit I don't want to be anywhere at all, like everybody has as those that are like emailing me asking me like you know what I'm doing what I'm hearing what I'm seeing. Like they're stuck. And I don't have to be. And I was like if I can make it work I want to make it work. I'm going to have to work to make it work. That was something that never really scared me because I had nothing to lose, number one. And number two, as long as I could pay my bills I was happy. And that allowed me explore a city, like explore a new lifestyle, and like not not be consigned to making friends in the office or having a schedule revolving around clocking in and clocking out or whatever it may be. But my life has never been it's never been formed by a job, like a lot of people you think about, their schedule, their friends, their relationships, where they live revolves around what they do. Everything is hanging on their occupation and mine does not. And I think that that's what makes me happy and that makes it worth even all the difficult stuff and the dog walking and whatever.

Dan: And how long were you doing that before you got hooked up with Columbia Sportswear?

Lauren: I was freelancing for over a year and a half before the Columbia thing happened. Well I guess it was I guess it would have been like a year. Yeah. So that was October 2015. So I guess it would have been like right around like a little less than a year after I'd been here.

Dan: And how did that come to pass?

Lauren: I didn't think it was something I wanted to do, I came across that because I had to write a news story about it. That was when I wrote for Men's Journal every day and an

editor sent me an email saying hey did you see this? This could be a fun little news story, like a call to action of like, hey look what this sportswear company is doing. You could have a dream job. And so I wrote that story that morning, I had to call the people of the PR department of Columbia and get more data from them on my job so I could write a story. I wrote it, I put it up, and then obviously I take after and writing it and I was like it wouldn't hurt to apply, that would be kind of funny. And then I got a callback to do it in person interview and person interview here in New York. And then like less than a week later they offered me a job.

Dan: Did they say why they chose you?

Lauren: It was storytelling. Like they had between 50 and 100 in-person interviews in each location. And they asked me why should you be the director of toughness? And I told them a story about having skinned knees and going on a first date with this guy and this guy freaking out because I had scabs on my legs from falling during a trail run and how he didn't think that that's how we should live our lives. Like somewhere along the line like between ages like 12 and 20 it becomes like frowned upon to have skinned knees. And when you're a kid like that's no problem at all that just means that you're like living your life. And I want to surround myself with people and be places and do things that allow me to live with my whole life with skinned knees because I think that that means that you're doing the most that you can. Figuratively and literally. And they liked that. They liked my story, they liked my ridiculousness, and at the end of the day that's what they were looking for were stories. So that's why they chose me and Zach as a photographer because we can have these experiences and then we can share them with other people because regardless of whether it's a magazine or a sportswear company or any kind of like any kind of business it's a brand, like you're always working for brands like whether it's literally *Vogue* or *Outside* magazine or Columbia Sportswear or whatever it is like you're always working for brands and brands need to be able to connect with their audience and their consumers and they need people who are going to like give them legitimacy. So being able to tell a story like having these experiences and then being able to share with an audience that create not only a narrative but a business opportunity for these brands is very appealing to them. So yes that is why that is how I got the job, just by being the person who can tell a story and who actually can tolerate having skinned knees.

Dan: And had you done some traveling/adventuring for stories before that?

Lauren: Yeah I mean I had done some stuff like a reported story for *VICE* in Chile in the Atacama Desert and some other stuff, whether it was by way of me finding out about people while I was traveling on my own or you know just keeping my eyes and ears open on press trips and like kind of expanding upon that. But like the example in Chile like that was very unique because I found a story about this soccer team that won the national title for the first time after...like I just I was looking for news stories and there was this Italian sports soccer forum that I fell across and it was like David beats Goliath, like this no-name team in the Atacama Desert in Chile that just won the national title and they beat winningest team. And I was like fascinated by it, so pitched it for news. I was like

look at this like a really cool like a heartfelt story, and like it totally got shot down, like we we are not reporting Chilean soccer news Lauren. I mean I was like okay, single tear. I was fascinated by this tiny little nugget of a story that I found and I started researching it, and then I realized it was a much bigger story than just like the miners winning the national title for the first time, they had just been through a national tragedy, their mine is you know 30 kilometers from the mine where 33 miners were trapped just like four years before. There's a lot of history there. There's a bigger thing that's going on there. And so I saw it as a feature and started pitching it everywhere. I sent it to Rolling Stone and it got shot down, I pitched it to *ESPN*, *ESPN The Magazine* picked it up. And then two months later they dropped it. It was really really really hard to get that story. And like without somebody saying that they were going to put it in our pages I couldn't really figure out a way to report it. So what I ended up doing and I got I reached out to the Chilean tourism department and I was like I'm Lauren Steele, I am a writer, I write for x y z. I found out about the miners, I really want to come meet them and interview them and write a story and I want to bring up photographer and take photos and I want to make a story about it and I can't make any promises but I have these relationships and like this is what I want to do. Like I'm a freelance writer and I can't afford to do it so will you please help me? And it's just about kind of putting your tail between your legs and like realizing that the world is so big and information is so easy to access now that like reporting isn't Google searching and it's never going be. And I am pretty passionate about that. And like it's hard to, it's hard to report. It's hard to be there. It's hard to do the right thing. But like if you do it you're going to get a story that you're really proud of. And so I just like put my tail between my legs and I'm like please. Fly me to Chile. Please give me a hotel room, please get me a translator so I can talk to these men. And I don't know why they did this, but they did, the tourism department of Chile flew me and my friend Grant who is a photographer down and set it all up and it was amazing. It turned out to be one of the most incredible travel experience of my life. And then I was able to write one of the stories I'm most proud of. I knew if I went down and I saw the story that I would know how the story would fit, because before I was just trying to shove this idea without having any actual tangible proof of how amazing it was, and the proof is in the pudding. I had to go in the pudding, per se, to be in Chile and see these really stirring things, very real things for somebody to be like oh shit, that's an awesome story. And that happened to be *VICE*. It took me a year and it was like something I wasn't willing to give up and I had to ask people for favors and I have to, you know, I was up for 48 hours straight, like I'm not kidding you, writing that draft. Like I won't I'm getting paid to do that. I didn't have an editor saying here's the angle, this is what we need, like this is like something I believed in and I knew if I believed in it and I thought it was an amazing story that somebody else out there was too and all I had to do was basically like show people that it was good. And so I did and it ran in *VICE*, besides a couple of obviously minor changes, it basically ran as that draft that I stayed up for 48 hours writing and that was something I was really proud of. So when I think about what I what I've learned about life traveling and reporting in general, you've got to be able to finagle your way and like you know it's not easy, to be honest. So I'm savvy when it comes to that kind of stuff, like I recently went to Cuba for *Rolling Stone*. But *Rolling Stone* isn't going to pay for me and a photographer to fly out to Cuba, they're just not. A lot of publications don't have the budgets these days, they don't have that desire, it's just like a flack to actually pump

money into good reporting. But they all want stories that involve good reporting and that's what I've learned. Like if I can help them and I'm going to write or I'm going to try and I'm just getting the story and they don't have any sort of investment in it besides the fact that they're going to get a bomb ass story that's been reported face to face in this crazy place, like they're going to take it because it's no skin off their back at all. And then like I'm also not going to take the skin off my back financially, so that's whenever it gets tricky. With Cuba, I told *Rolling Stone*, I was like hey I'm going to Cuba for the inauguration. You want a story on it? And they were like yeah, and I'm like great. And then I was like shit I need to get a ticket to Cuba. And then I'm like shit I've got to get a ticket to Cuba. I ended up like reaching out to a tourism agency to travel to Cuba. I'd talked to their president a few times for service pieces and like reached out and was like is there any way that like I can write like blog post for you. Or I can give you image assets from the photos that we take in Cuba. Is there any way I can do something for you to get a trip to Cuba. And they were like yeah Lauren like it's great working with you. I will get you accommodations and fly. And yeah I would like to have you write like five blog posts for us and we would love images and that was the deal. I got to go to Cuba for free. All I had to do was write you know a couple of blog posts for the tourism agency and then I was also able to write a *Rolling Stone* story. So it's like a lot of stuff just to save some money. But like otherwise if I want to be able to a story like I don't think people understand like the amount of strings I have that...like I'm like a puppeteer, it's like I'm over here trying to to work out a deal between say Cuba also trying to like be a journalist for *Rolling Stone* and like trying to like make the tourism department material. Like once I did pull it off. It's an amazing feeling. And also just like these stories wouldn't happen if I wasn't working all of these different angles to make them happen because it's really expensive to travel. I don't know. You've got to make people like bet on you.

Dan: It sounds like you're always pulling off some sort of a heist.

Lauren: Exactly! Exactly, but it's a heist where everybody wins.

Dan: Right. And obviously that's not something that they teach you.

Lauren: I legitimately want to come back, like I thought about applying for a guest lecturer, like at some point I think I want to try to do like one semester, be a guest professor in journalism, and at one point I want to teach people how to be freelancers. To be wolves! To make your life happen the way you want it to. Nobody teaches you this stuff and it bothers me, because like, if I can do it, anybody can do it. Freelancing is a situation where I think that if there's a will there's a way, but sometimes you just have to show people that they have the will to do it. There are more finer points, like invoicing and rates and negotiation and pitches, and I probably four to five guest lectures at different universities around the country. And the question I always, always get is like, how do you make these connections? And that blows my mind that people don't know how to Google somebody's name and find the e-mail and just email them, I didn't make these connections, I just went and found them. I got the number for Wenner Media and I would call it and ask for Ty Trimble. I obviously don't think that freelancing is for

everybody. You have to have some sort of gumption and a little bit of, call it being stubborn, call it being determined whatever you want to call it, you have to have something that's a little bit extra inside of you. It's not easy it's ever going to easy, everyday is hard. But anyone can do it if it's something they actually wanted to. And I feel bad for the kids out there who want to do it that they don't feel like they have tools to do it. But, on the flip side, like if you can't figure it out on your own and like make it work in trial by error and see what happens, then it probably isn't for you anyway and I don't have much sympathy for people who like just freakin' try.

Dan: So in terms of your work now I mean are you still doing the shorter daily news stuff that's kind of the churn, or are you able to do mostly stuff that you want to be doing right now?

Lauren: That's literally dependent on which day you ask me that question honestly. Because this summer has been a shit show. I mean like the magazines that I have been working with for years, now my livelihood depends on this stuff, and I like *Men's Fitness* folded, it's only online now. *Men's Journal* is an abyss right now like people aren't answering my emails. I'm not getting any assignments like editors are moving here and going there like it's actually been a really hard summer in terms of actual magazine work. Dan like there are literally sometimes when I'm like I don't know if I'm going to make enough money to pay my rent or this month, it's gotten very real and like I haven't felt like this in my years. And so that's all part of it. This summer has been really hard, but luckily I have other things to fall back on now because I'm not just like a one trick magazine pony. Thankfully. So I've like written a couple of scripts for like commercial advertising pieces, like voice over scripts, for like documentary style outdoor films. And then I actually like you know I did that documentary film, sponsored, which was really fun because I still like to sometimes be like in front of the camera. I was able to do some shoots, like do some scriptwriting, like do some other things that, do some commercial things that have a commercial you know price tag, which is awesome to get me through the summer. In in terms of what I'm doing in the magazine, it's like whatever I can. Actually wherever I am right now it's like I am writing a piece for *Fatherly*, which is an online publication for dads and I'm also. But I'm like what is my life like I'm writing a sponsored piece for *Fatherly* you like what is my life? I have not gotten to this point in my career where I dictate my assignments. I don't know if I ever will. I actually have to think about what would 2014 Lauren would do. Like I always have to like check myself like that because I never want to get the place in my career where I turned down anything because everything is an opportunity to learn or to make connections or to do something or be something or try something that you wouldn't have before. Like everything has value, everything no matter what little value or a lot of value, like you never know what that's going to lead to. And as long as I have that work ethic and that will do whatever it takes to make it work, something's going to work. And I just have to have faith in that process. I think that's what it is, just like I have the faith of the person who decided to start freelancing in the beginning. You know because it takes a lot of faith just to begin. And you can never let go of that. Because like there's never a comfort zone in freelance and you have to keep the faith that it takes to even start this type of career to be able to continue it. It's like the most deflating thing ever because you think you made it and you

never made it. Like that's the thing I'm like never get used to it like it doesn't matter how many years you're doing it. Doesn't matter how many publications you have in your Rolodex, it doesn't matter. You know like what you were doing last month. It literally doesn't matter because it can all change in one email, it can all change for the best in one email and it can all change for the worst in one email and like that's what I was saying it's like this actual workflow is never going to be consistent. So like the only thing that you can do to guarantee some amount of success is having a consistent effort. It's like you know you use the crest of the wave and you go down into the trough and like every time you're in a trough you're going to be like oh my god my career is over. I'm never going to make enough money. I'm going to move out of New York City like it's over like it was a good run like thanks journalism. It always feels like that, it always feels like that like it will never not be that hard because it's such it's such a tumultuous life. The highs and lows like freelancing is an abusive relationship. It takes you all the way out and you feel like you're really successful and you're great. You're in a safe and stable place. It really is. Exactly. And then it's just like okay no goodbye like. That's the way I feel and and like it's never going to be that way and as long as the highs continue to be as good as they are I don't think I'm ever going to not be able to tolerate the lows because I know that like this too shall pass. I know I will never get to a place where I'm comfortable enough in my career just to be like okay I made it like. Like honestly at the end of the day the whole reason I am a freelancer is like the lifestyle, like this is the life I want to live, I like not knowing what I'm doing tomorrow, I want to be able to travel wherever I want to travel, I want to be able to meet whoever I want to meet. Personally I think my faith comes into play because aside from everything professionally like there are enough people in this world who love me and there is enough like desire and like work and like hope inside of me that like I will never die of starvation, I'll never die on the streets, like I'll never not have a roof over my head. But there are so many people in the world that like to love me and won't watch their friend die that like this isn't going to kill me. And that's like almost like a really sadistic thing to have to say about your job. Like I literally have to tell myself like did you die? Like I literally have to be like but Lauren did you die? And I was like that's a crazy relationship to have with your profession but that's the thing, freelancing is not a profession, freelancing is a lifestyle.

Dan: So in the midst of all that were you doing content marketing work as well?

Lauren: So yeah I mean I do a lot of content creation because that's kind of where Columbia and my former life as a fitness model have really come into play for me, like you know commercial is where the money is going to be and that's just facts. So luckily through my relationship with Columbia, my saying that I'm willing to be like in front of the camera and to work with brands and to do the things, like it's a completely different side of my career. Like there's journalism freelance Lauren and then there's like brands freelance Lauren and they're two completely different people. It's kind of like boxing Lauren and writer Lauren and like people on the boxing gym don't know that I'm a magazine writer and people like at Columbia and at *Men's Journal* don't know that I box, like it's like one of those things like I just keep them completely separate and they serve different purposes in my life but it's all part of who I am as a writer, as a person and as a content creator. So although I think that it's like through maintaining relationships with

brands like that even comes from being at magazines, like whenever you do a story about shoes like running shoes for *Runners World* you do like a round of about five best trail shoes of the summer or whatever. And then you've got to reach out to all the people who are at Asics or whatever it is, like don't just like flimsily do that. Like those are people who are brands with money that are always pushing out content. And that's how I've come to be able to tap into that money is like okay well I know that you guys know that I write service pieces for *Men's Journal* but like also, by the way, did you know that like I spent six months creating content for Columbia sportswear and I I can write really great Instagram captions and also like if you need to me stand in front of your camera and like wear your clothes I'll do that too. I'll take it. It's one of those things where you just have to see content as an all-encompassing opportunity like whether it is a news piece or a morning show or a documentary. And that's something that I'm really thankful for because like we've seen magazines are not the most stable brands. And Columbia is pretty stable, like they've got 2.1 billion dollars to play with. And if I need to write a couple of blog posts for them it's nothing for them to pay me 300 bucks a pop. Sure there's not a lot of glory in saying that like you wrote blog content for Hoka. Or that you wrote a script for a bigger company but like shit all of a sudden you now have twenty five hundred dollars coming your way for something that took you one day to do. In the brand world like publications are the weakest link because they were the ones being two-faced to say that like oh we're not about that, like this is ethical. This is like non-bias like this as we are the voice of the people, it's like no you're not, like you're just a business just like everybody else and like now because it's been so long acting like you weren't run by businessmen you're screwed because you have no money and everybody else does. So it's like I'm always I'm a firm believer in the fact that we need journalism and I'm going to be an advocate, but like as a business woman like another person who has to pay bills, I also realize that life whenever it comes to doing things for money you need to be working with people who have it. So it's like I can't tell you how many stories I've written that I believe in and I'm passionate about and that fill up my soul so much for free. Like I have written stories for free. So it's just about being savvy as a business person and also being honest honest as an artist.

Dan: Have you ever run into any issues with a publication questioning your content creation versus editorial work? In fact like this piece for fatherly that I just reach out for me and they were like hey this is brand content like that by we can pay you like an actual decent amount of money. Are you going to do that like they asked me like are you calling me.

Lauren: I've never had anybody see the Director of Toughness or brand partners and told me that like it was suspect. It's kind of what I said earlier about being savvy. It's like I know that I've come in and do like a lot of the stories that I should never be a part of like a gear guide or something like whenever I am working really closely with brands because that is pretty suspect. If you have to justify something it's probably not correct.

Dan: If someone approached you with like, a MacArthur Genius grant, and they're like here's a million dollars to cover whatever—the financial part is taken out of the equation. What would you be doing?

Lauren: Because that's the thing. People used to ask me this question in college, like what's the dream publication? What's the dream story? What's a dream job? I literally had to tell people, don't be offended, but there isn't one. Like I don't believe in that because possibilities are always greater than the plans. Like I think it's very important to have small goals like hey my goal is to be able to pay my rent this month. My goal is to be able to travel to somewhere new before December. You know like it's cool to have those, but to actually lay out like a five year plan or a three year plan or just stay like this was the penultimate goal like, that's always going to leave you dissatisfied because the things that your life and your opportunities can offer you are so much greater than anything you could ever just expect.

*Abe Streep, Wyoming-based outdoor feature writer
Thursday, August 31 at 11 a.m., 29 min.*

Dan: So where are you currently based?

Abe: I'm in Laramie, Wyoming. I lived there until last December and then I was based temporarily in Montana again through July of this year and then I'm back down here. It's been kind of a peripatetic year because my partner was overseas for NPR. And I went up to Montana to pursue a couple of work projects so we've been kind of in the wind for a little bit.

Dan: Sure. And you left *Outside* as a senior editor?.

Abe: Right, I was a contract writer for the first year. I was a contributing editor and I still am a contributing editor at the magazine, but I'm not on a yearly contract. I was a senior editor.

Dan: So I know you said you wanted to write, but I mean compared to the lifestyle that you presumed you would have as a freelancer versus what you had as a senior editor, I mean what was that decision-making process like three years ago?

Abe: It was about writing and it was also a personal life decision. But yeah I mean I really I wanted a lot of it was I wanted to try to be a writer. And I was able to write stories at outside as a as an editor. But my experience was that you know most of my energy was was taken up editing, I was editing feature stories and I was overseeing the front of the book. And I was focusing mostly in print on and I wanted to try to write. And I think that as an editor you're limited in what stories and reporting projects you can pursue. You're limited in how much time you can be out of the office and some people can do both who are really fantastic, like Charlie Homans at the *New York Times Magazine*. But I think that like, so experience was that to be a really great editor your energy has to be focused on the writer and the resulting story. And that doesn't bring a lot of ego with it. And if you have those inklings and that urge to write and you want to really be a writer you know I think a lot a lot of editors can come into conflict with the

work of being an editor. So I think that at a certain point I was the one I wanted to write and I knew I wanted to write and I wanted to try and an awesome job really wonderful job. And I think that to a certain point for me to really pursue what I had to pursue it. I was responsible for a certain number of stories for *Outside*. So in the end that turned out to be a mix of features and online stuff, news analysis and service journalism too, which is a big part of what *Outside* does. You know the sort of the front of the book stuff. So I sort of knew that that was going to be the deal and that was a good way for me to really get to do this. It's very scary to just say you're going to go be independent. So that was what I did for the first year. I also talked to a couple of friends including colleagues, including someone who had made a similar transition from editing to writing. And he said, "Just make sure you don't like get nervous and insecure and load yourself up with six features, you won't be able to do any them the justice." And you know that of course I think a lot of people do that, like with each story you think you'll never get work again. You have to hit a point where you have a bit of faith or confidence that there will be more work, which is really hard these days because it is really brutal. I taught at the University of Wyoming, I taught a summer workshop environmental journalism and I think it's like obviously hugely important work and I'm very careful about when I recommend people coming out, as young people who want to do it, and try to become freelancers, it's really unforgiving.

Dan: How have you managed that personally, in terms of like feast or famine internal conflict of not knowing when there's going to be work? I mean is there anything in your lifestyle that has allowed you to you know develop a tolerance to the uncertainty?

Abe: Yeah I try to live in places where you can go outside and I go try to go fishing on Tuesdays when there's nobody at the river. That's one thing I do think that on a larger scale you just hit a point at which, I'm also really fortunate because I don't have like student debt. There's no way I would be able to do it if that were the case. At a certain point you kind of have to stop freaking out over oh my god am I really going to be able to pay the bill in two months because that never goes away. There is no such thing as security if this is what you do unless you get you know, if you're super fortunate you get a long-term, very stable contract. But those are pretty rare these days. So I think it's kind of self-selecting, it's like you are willing, like the insecurity doesn't cripple you, or it does and if it does then you stop doing it and you just do something else. For me just figuring out the stories that I'm working on, the ideas that I'm working on. You know traveling just to report on subjects, treating them with respect and trying to sort out the world in my head before presenting it to an editor is more than enough to keep me really really busy without like losing my mind over financial issues. And I think that like I was really, a couple of times when I first started you know I had a couple of freak-outs. But then I just sort of learned to let it go a little better for myself. I would be able to get another job or that the you know just to not worry that much about the bank account because you know you get maybe all of your checks come in one day and then you don't get paid for six months. And that's just how it is. But there's also, there's also you know it's a really amazing and fun job and I'm very lucky to be able to do it. An important job. I think an important job but there's also no guarantee. I mean if you called me in a year I might have

quit, gone to teach or do something else entirely. It's very very difficult. You wouldn't want to underplay that.

Dan: At least on your level and in your cohort, have you seen more people in the last few years and do what you've done?

Abe: No. You know I think it's just always a dynamic that people need a lot of people you know are maybe sorting out if they want to write or edit. And when they sort that out then they do that. I'm not seeing like some big trend, but I mean maybe there is, I don't know.

Dan: Do you still do a mix of shorter service-oriented stuff with your features are you like laser-focused on these bigger stories?

Abe: I'm not doing service stories right now.

Dan: How many stories have you done in the last year or so?

Abe: Well it's September. So I published a short dispatch for the New Republic last November. So that's one story. Like a thousand words. I've published a short story in the 2000-word length for *Men's Journal* in December-January, I published a public lands online report for *Outside* where we're previewing the public lands battles also in January or February. That was maybe 2000 words. I published a short piece for the *New York Times Magazine*, that was about 800 words or a thousand words, a profile, a book review for *Outside* would be five. Most of these being short; and then I published three features all of which came out this summer. So I was reporting them over a longer period of time. So that's 6-7. And then I just did a story on wildfires and logging for *Outside Online*, so another short piece, that would be nine. Yes, nine pieces, of which like four were long.

Dan: Gotcha. And then of those features, were any of those assigned or pitched to you by an editor? Were those things that you all pitched yourself?

Abe: The *Outside* piece about Patagonia, they brought to me, then the *Men's Journal* piece I did on the outgoing BLM director, they brought to me, and the *Outside* book review, which was a short one, they brought to me, and then the other two features I pitched.

Dan: Gotcha. Of the longer features that you pitched where it's understood you're asking for you know at least two thousand words in print—how long you spend pre-reporting and researching to where you know you have enough to sell someone on it, but you don't spend so much time that you're out if if nobody bites on it?

Abe: I think it's different. I mean it is always different. I'm a proponent of taking a risk on a story that you are really obsessed with and think that you can make interesting. So I did a rodeo piece for the *California Sunday Magazine* where I'm a contributing writer and that was the first piece I'd done for them, and that led to a really wonderful writing

relationship, but that piece I had spent like way too much money and been driving all over the West. I'd been pre-reporting for like at least six months before I sold it. So that would be an extreme example of that. And I still do that. I'm working on a story now that is a feature now that is commissioned by a magazine, but I sort of identified it and jumped in the car and went and tried to figure it out. But then with with editors with whom I have a well-established report, a lot of the times it might be a one-line idea or two-line idea or one paragraph. But then I'm also more temperamentally inclined to do stories that require a lot of pre-reporting because I'm interested in doing stories about place that are not necessarily always a classic magazine narrative.

Dan: Considering where you're at now and having done so much of this long form in these three years that you've been freelancing, is there is there anything that you're like personally working on—not talking about stories—but in terms of like your technique or any like bucket list goals you have you know for this line of work? Or is it mainly just, see something and to chase it down and then live another day?

Abe: I don't know, I mean I think that everyone who does this is like, you can't be like oh I wrote a feature, I did this and now I'm good, like you're constantly trying to reinvent. On every story I work on I try to make it structurally more interesting. Try to find new ways to say things. And meet other writers who are doing really great work. I mean I'd like to write a book. But other than that, I'd like to be able to make a living doing this kind of work and try to do good stories and not have to compromise in choosing stories. Yeah I mean in terms of like, everyone figures it out and re-figures it out every time and learn more. And not doing the same thing someone else is.

Dan: Do you have in a typical work week, or is there a day you set aside and say I'm going to do paper work or research pitches, or is it all dependent on what you're doing?

Abe: Yeah I think you know what I'm doing, I tend to do a lot of writing early in the morning. But that's about the extent of routine, because increasingly a lot of my—for this year at least—a lot of my reporting has been in the American West and that's meant I've done a lot of driving without a lot of notice. So I am not the best person to hold up for routine.

Dan: Why morning for writing?

Abe: I don't know. That's when I sort of have clarity and energy and maybe it's just not as bad as the results, they're are not as bad as at night. You know in college I would stay up all night and write papers.

Dan: In terms of your space in magazines and in media in general, I mean are you cautiously optimistic about the availability of work, the amount of publications that pay for what you want to do?

Abe: Well that's a hard question. This is a challenging challenging time. And I am optimistic because right now I'm working on a couple of stories that I'm really excited

about and glad to be able to work on. But you know the number of outlets that...I mean it's always changing right, so like when the legacy outlets or being sold or contracting extensively and then there's some really new and exciting places like *California Sunday Magazine*. Everyone wants an expense budget and there aren't; the kind of stories I like, I'm not very good at like hot takes, or I have yet to prove myself at being very good at stories that involve sitting at a desk and making commentary. I'm better at spending a long time with the subjects, and that's suited me more is spending a long time with a subject and trying to seek out what their story means. Why it's important. And that kind of reporting is really expensive to produce. And the expense budgets for that kind of reporting thinner and thinner, and that is not a reason for optimism. But I have a couple of assignments that I'm really grateful for and I think are stories that I really want to do. So that's the reason for optimism. But my general attitude is that if I were the editor-in-chief of a publication I'd be trying to figure out the business model. And I'm grateful that a lot of smart people are focusing on that and I hope they figure it out. In the meantime I'm trying to keep doing what I do and try to do well.

Dan: If there was one thing you could tell yourself when you left *Outside* as a salaried employee three years ago about freelancing, what would it be?

Abe: Try as much as possible to cut out the noise and not run toward what is popular of the moment but to focus on subject matter that you know and care about and actually something to say about.

*Steve Weinberg, Missouri-based freelance feature writer, book reviewer, and author
Wednesday, July 19 at 9 a.m., 38 min.*

Dan: So when did you start freelancing full-time, and when did you stop?

Steve: 1978 to a couple years ago, I had part-time income from j-school, some years I didn't teach at all, freelancing was always my predominate income, and I always had a book going since 1976. I had stroke a couple years ago and it took while to learn how to walk, I'm old enough for social security and Medicare now so I don't do much magazine work.

Dan: What was it like when you were starting out?

Steve: Back then, newspapers were pretty much the whole game. There was only one professor while I was an undergraduate and he was drunk all the time anyway, I never took course with him. Newspaper was the obvious route in 1970, jobs were plentiful, if you could bleed you were going get job offers, before I got my bachelor's of journalism I knew I wanted to work for magazine and maybe write books. Even as an undergrad, I was able to freelance a few pieces to national magazines. When I started full-time newspaper work in 1970, I did a little bit of freelancing on the side, I continued newspaper work until 78, and then I had one book to my credit by then. I had just gotten married for second time in 1978, no kids yet, my wife and I agreed I could start freelancing, so I gave up the newspaper jobs, I was going to freelance without any

interruptions. To my surprise the journalism school asked me to run Washington D.C. program, which was very different then because it was only for grad students and almost entirely print-oriented. I had some experience already as Washington correspondent, the person who had founded the Washington program was only one who had ever run it, so I ended up in Washington D.C. with a new wife and freelance desires. I started freelancing very heavily while running was program part-time. In 1983, I was talked into moving to Columbia and running Investigative Reporters and Editors, which was also a job where I could continue freelancing and get a small salary at IRE. I pretty impoverished then and couldn't make a living, part of the deal was teaching at the university, so I had a combination of a small IRE salary, some occasional teaching money and my freelancing. I left IRE by 1990; with two kids it was such a demanding job, so in 1990 I really kicked into freelancing even more. I did teach part time at the journalism school depending on semester. Seven years ago I retired completely, gave up teaching completely and made a living as best I could, starting seven years ago without any teaching salary at all. In that stretch, I did 8 other books, lots of magazine work, a lot of book reviewing, and it stayed that way until two years ago. I always a book in progress, two years ago I had a stroke and that took me out of everything for about a year and a half. I had to learn to walk again and everything, I was an invalid for a while, I'm pretty much back to normal in terms of physical health but I'm so far behind on this book. I had to give up my *Nature Magazine* work, so I'm mostly working on a book under contract. As you probably know, a major magazine piece takes a lot of time, it can become all consuming, and then I'd never finish my book. Book reviews, I can churn out in a day or two, sometimes in a week, which are much more practical.

Dan: And how did all that affect your freelancing career trajectory?

Steve: In 1978, as you probably know, it was much easier to break into freelancing and get substantial assignments as well. We had no internet, the digital world was almost unknown to someone like me, it's still definitely a different atmosphere. But by then I'd been around professional journalism for almost a decade, I had a lot of contacts, which helped get in the door. I sold a lot of pieces where I didn't have any contacts, some of the magazines were *Mother Jones* in its early years, *The Nation*, sometimes kind of more specialized magazines, very good ones I've always been interested in the criminal justice system and I've sold to the *Journal of the American Bar*, I sometimes took pieces from journalists and sometimes from lawyers, so I had ups and downs there. I sold to a few regional magazines, like the *Chicago Reader* and *Chicago Magazine* and other regional and city magazine. I sold to alumni magazines. If I had a good angle, some I sold to Mizzou, others I sold to alumni magazine at the University of North Carolina because I had a good angle on a piece. Some alumni magazines pay really well, and a real range of national and regional magazines. And it was all print; later I sold some digital-only magazines like *Salon* and *Slate*, but they all pay pretty poorly. But I was doing a lot of book reviewing, and I also taught the course on critical reviewing for a while at MU.

Dan: So how did you structure those assignments of varying lengths and time commitments to accomplish what you wanted to do?

Steve: My book writing eventually took precedence, which was plan all along, I got some decent advances and one great advance but I still needed to sell magazine work and book reviews to pay the bills for a while. When you get a book advance, you get half up-front, and you've got to live off that until you finish book and get the other half. I'm not complaining, this is a choice I made, but I had to generate a lot of freelance work still, depending on how much book advance was and what my wife was or wasn't earning. She never had a lot of earning power in her field, she's an interior designer, she's doing now better than ever, but it ebbed and flowed. Book reviewing stayed pretty constant, I did so many book reviews for so many outlets for quite a stretch. I was earning between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year with book reviewing, that helped a lot, and some years I might pitch five major magazine pieces and hope I'd get assignments. Other years I'd pitch three major magazine assignments that would take half a year to finish. I've had a book contract every year since 1976, except for a stretch fairly recently, right after my parents moved here unexpectedly in 2009, so it was a bit overwhelming trying to deal with them. They're both dead now, and I didn't seek another book contract after 2008. I quit teaching and freelanced when I could, lived off savings when I adjusted to my parents. My mom died in 2011, I still had dad until last year, and I got a book contract in 2011. But as I told you, I got a stroke and was paralyzed for a while, so the book reviews by choice took precedence. Some years I did major magazine pieces, which I was very thrilled about, other years I just pitched magazine articles I knew I could finish quickly, one for the *American Prospect* that I was very pleased with. There was a change of editors at *Mother Jones* and they didn't want to work with me anymore. The *American Prospect* piece was on a professor at Iowa State University, an expert on wrongful convictions; I did another version for *American Airlines Magazine*, there were three versions of that piece on James McCloskey.

Dan: And when you do pitch these major magazine pieces, how do you decide when you've spent enough time researching to land the pitch, but not so much that you're taking a substantial loss if it doesn't get accepted?

Steve: There's clearly no objective answer, but after a while, you get a pretty good idea of what magazines want if you've already been published there and established relationship with an editor. Then, you can often just discuss the proposal ahead of time and kind of fit it to that person's specifications. Every year, even when I had plenty of work, I tried to query at least one magazine I really respected cold so I didn't lose my edge, I just wanted to see if I could break through. One magazine I tried several times and never broke through, that was *New York Times Sunday*, but normally the editors would call me and we'd talk about it. It's still good to try and stay sharp, so much depends on whether you've published in a magazine before, sometimes whether you can drop a name. Theoretically, if I wanted to pitch *5280*, I might talk to Robert Sanchez ahead of time and say, "Robert what do you think Geoff would want from me?" Maybe get some guidance that way, I wish I could give you an answer, it just takes a lot of homework, reading a lot of back issues, and of course it's easier to read back issues now. In terms of crafting the query itself, you just kind of eventually know in your gut when you've got enough to send a good query, but not so much you've spent a lot of time.

Dan: Is that more difficult with the criminal justice pieces in specific?

Steve: I've often pitched pieces where I had no idea if, for sure, if I could get access to important people, but I just trusted myself to be able to get access somehow or be able to work around it. When I pitched a piece for the *American Prospect*, the whole piece was built around this Iowa State professor in a major major way; he completely shut me out, wasn't going to bother. I got no guarantees from him, even though he said he'd consider letting follow him around, but I knew he traveled a lot, made a lot of public appearances, so I just showed up to a 3-day conference in Dallas for a speech that he gave to 200 cops.

Dan: So how much of your work now is strictly online?

Steve: Probably 10 percent, I've learned enough about computers and online to get by, but I don't feel like I have the brain cells to immerse myself in that world, I didn't write *Salon.com* any differently than I did for print, but I've never really had to feel like I needed to develop some kind of new style or approach. If you're writing for a publication with print and online, I don't know of any that pay as well online.

Dan: Do you find yourself being forced to adapt to changes in publishing and digital media?

Steve: There are not as many good paid outlets, a there's lot more competition from people who are half my age or a third my age. One thing that helps me keep up is I'm on a listserv with about 25 other freelancers, it's one that started a long time ago, it's by invitation only, we don't advertise it a whole bunch that we're even doing it. Everyone is younger than I am, I'm positively the old man, and somebody usually contributes something every day, like, "Hey I just sold a piece, hey I just worked with this editor," sometimes it's really technical stuff like the best transcription service to use. Most of the people who are still on the listserv are very very active magazine writers, some of them extremely successful, all somewhat successful. We haven't added or subtracted anyone for a long time. If we let someone new in, it has to be done unanimously. By reading the posts on listserv, there's a tremendous amount of frustration at the diminishing of markets that pay decently, there's nobody on listserv who's going to write under a dollar a word, and they write for *AARP*, *National Geographic*, places that pay decently. The frustration level there is sky high.

Dan: Have you seen a high attrition rate among your original cohort?

Steve: Not among the people I know, the amount of attrition has been minimal. Overall, if you go to somewhere like ASJA, I think you'll find a lot of the people who are still current members have switched over to content farms, PR. There's just not as much real journalism as there used to be. For the first time in the past few years, I did not renew my ASJA membership. It has nothing to do with quality of ASJA, I'm just not doing any magazine work anymore to speak of, and the book forum doesn't really help me that much. I really respect the organization, though, and I know a lot of people who are active.

Dan: Have you developed a strategy for getting travel assignments paid for?

Steve: I don't have any magical answer for that. Each query that I sent out, I would try to determine ahead of time to best of my ability how much travel it would take and the expense money I'd need to ask for and how many months I'd need to finish the piece. After I became a father, during the times when our kids were young and I didn't want to travel as much, I tried to pitch book ideas that didn't involve so much travel. It's something I've thought about with each query, depended on story idea and how open the magazine would be to covering all expenses. That's why you have a listserv, why you have an ASJA network, to ask questions like, "What is this magazine like on expenses? Which editors are flexible about deadlines? Which are good with line editing and which are awful? Which respond every time and which ignore you? In trying to figure out all that stuff, networking is really vital.

Dan: But overall, has it become harder to receive expenses for magazine assignments?

Steve: Absolute, payments are delayed more and more. It's a generalization, but the bigger the publication and the more accountants and payroll employees they have, the slower they are to reimburse you. There's no compassion at all. If I have to use the local plumber, I try to pay that person right away, it's just...common courtesy. There are so many people, so many publishing offices who stall and stall and stall. I've never been stiffed; at times I really needed the money a lot sooner than it came and they were supposed to pay me sooner than they did, but there are others who are totally dependable.

Dan: Can you give me an overview of your work week?

Steve: Let's say at beginning of every week, I would tentatively plan out what I was going to put aside, what I was going to work on hard. Depending on the nature of the assignment, and who was it important that I talk to quickly, there was definitely some thought into that. It's a week by week thing; at the height of my freelancing, I was juggling a book and two major magazine assignments, so I had to be somewhat organized and plan out what was going get my primary attention that week and what was gonna get less primary attention. You've got to have some kind of system, even if it's ad hoc.

Dan: And what tools do you use to stay organized?

Steve: A paper calendar, a day-by-day calendar. Oftentimes I'd have three, I write everything down on a central calendar. I never had a calculator on my computer, although obviously I know how to do some things on the computer, but I use computers as minimally as possible, mostly just as word processors. I am pretty active on Facebook, but no, just a regular paper calendar, to write things down and cross them off.

Dan: So was book reviewing the way you insulated yourself financially between these long projects?

Steve: It got to the point where I could get assignments anytime I wanted from most of my editors, reviewing for 20 different places at one time. I did book reviews when I needed to generate some fast cash, and chose books I really wanted to review because they would fit in with my own work. Book reviewing was on autopilot for a long time. Everything else is hard-won, you just don't snap your fingers and get major magazine assignments or snap your fingers and get a major book contract.

Dan: If money weren't an issue, would you have changed anything about the work you did?

Steve: I wouldn't change the work, I liked the proportion I ended up with. I knew I'd never get rich, I just wanted to make enough money to get by and not deprive our children. I liked the mix of writing a book at all times, doing some magazine work, and doing book reviews.

Dan: Have you ever had a piece that you just couldn't sell?

Steve: There have been some pieces, especially personal essays. I always wanted to break through into the personal essay market better than I did, to magazine like *American Scholar*, which runs fabulous personal essays. I just had minimal success selling personal essays. At specific times, I wanted to sell more pieces about criminal justice system, but couldn't find a market. Most of time I did okay with that. No, I don't think so, I didn't score at every magazine I would've wanted to, but I almost always scored somewhere with ideas that felt important.

Dan: What would you tell someone who's looking to start magazine freelancing?

You have to be really comfortable with uncertainty. I'm okay with that, a lot of people aren't. My daughter tried freelancing and hated it, she wanted the comfort and certainty of a salary, so she took job as magazine editor. Wright is full-time at *ESPN* and paid very well, they pay their top writers more than you can imagine.

Dan: And there's one thing you wish you knew when you started, what would that be?

Steve: I wish I'd had a better idea about how hard it is to make a living writing books. I thought it would be easier once sold my first big book, but I was sort of delusional. Still, I feel like I knew what I was getting into, and I made the choices I needed to make.