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JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST: At The Rabbit Room, we're always saying that art nourishes community and community nourishes art. Here's another way to say the same thing. We can all be allies in bringing good, beautiful, true things into the world. One way you can be an ally with the musicians and writers and artists whose work you care about is to leave a review. It helps other people find and benefit from the work that has meant something to you. And if you want to leave a review for this podcast... well, that'll be okay too.

(THEME MUSIC)

JR: Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I'm Jonathan Rogers, your host.

Don Pape has been in the book business for a long time. These days he's the publisher at NavPress in Colorado Springs. He's a kind and generous man, and much loved in the publishing world. On more than one occasion, he's given me an encouraging word just when I needed it. You're gonna enjoy hearing from Don.

Don Pape, thank you so much for being on The Habit Podcast!

Don Pape: Hey, fun to be here!

JR: Yeah, so you are a publisher at NavPress. You have been an editor in the past, if I understand correctly, right Don?

DP: I've acquired, but you know, my career is varied. Publisher, marketing, sales, and I wouldn't say I've edited a book. I've done a sort of a macro edit. I'll read most of the — I read every manuscript I publish, sometimes two or three times, and give my feedback to the editor who is involved in

the project.

JR: Uh huh. Well I... one of my sort of, I guess you'd say policies on The Habit podcast is that I only talk about the craft of writing and not the business. Obviously, I talk about writing, not publishing.

DP: Yep, yep.

JR: However, I thought it would be fun to make an exception and just hear from your side of things. Just some things that maybe writers don't know about publishing.

DP: Cool. And I've got your questions!

JR: Okay, great! Yeah, so what is a, um... tell us about what an acquisitions editor does, what a developmental editor — what the different kind of editors do — what the publisher does. Can you just give us a quick overview of how things work in a publishing company?

DP: Sure. So, my role is author relations primarily, but with some fingers in the business pie. So I work with our business manager and finance. That's the part [chuckles], candidly, I like the least. The most fun is working with the authors and the editors, quite frankly. But you mentioned different editors. There's an acquisition editor that is the individual that is out there beating the pavement, trying to find new talent. They'll go out, they'll hear of a pastor that's an up-and-comer, or they'll go to a writers conference and meet individuals. They're hunters. They're out there looking for the new voices. And most big houses have those out there. They often are not editing the actual product. They're sort of at the macro level. So they're out there acquiring, getting it in.

The developmental editor — and sometimes he or she can be an acquisitions editor and a developmental editor, but in most cases, very often, it's different roles. The developmental editor is... they're looking at the whole project and looking at the arc of the book, moving chapters

around. They'll look at it and say, "You know, if we put chapter eight at the very front, that's where the book actually kicks off. Let's move that." That's what they are. As the title would suggest, they're developing, with the author, a stronger book.

JR: Uh huh.

DP: And then you have the copyeditor. And they're the style Nazis, the style manual cop. They're going through and getting nuances and grammar. And they have the Chicago Manual by their side, guiding them all the way. And then you have the proofreaders that come along after that, that are just catching, you know, grammatical errors or the comma in the wrong spot, or two spaces behind a comma, heaven forbid! Those kinds of things.

But what's interesting is each of these editors play to different to people's dispositions. So you know, I have a copyeditor that is an introvert and just loves to be in that role of sitting in front of the screen looking at the text, and then you have another editor who is an extravert and is ideally suited to being the acquisitions person. Going out, being the life of the party, finding all the voices, and so on.

JR: So you said you've done acquisitions, not the other roles.

DP: I'm not trained as an editor. My, you know — I came into this through the back door. I had a part time job — I was InterVarsity staff working on a campus, and I could make extra money working in the InterVarsity Press warehouse picking and packing and shipping. So I came in through the warehouse, then I became — I was involved in graphic design, did some marketing, then got moved over to sales. And it was in my role as a sales director that we acquired Harold Shaw Publishers, where, for example, Madeleine L'Engle was. So I became her publisher and got into the publishing role where I oversaw — worked with the editorial director and editors and so on. So it's been a circuitous road, but I got into this role as publisher that way. Most publishers would come in through editorial. You

know, they're a copyeditor, or kind of an entry level, and then they ascend to the publishing role.

JR: Yeah, yeah. Interesting. So what's something about your business that surprises people? I mean, that a writer would be surprised to learn about your business, what publishers do?

DP: Yeah, I mentioned to you that I came in through sales, and um, "sales" can be a nasty word, a dirty word for editor types. You know, wordsmiths who ooh and ahh over, you know, a little word or syntax or whatever. And I think what authors — your listeners — might be surprised to hear is that everyone is a sales person. So while you have a sales team — a sales manager, a sales director, you have telemarketing and telesales — the editorial team are really sales people.

And that's one of the things that I, as a publisher, work with our editors. To educate them and help them understand, you are a sales person. When you find that author that you love and want us to publish, you've gotta do a sales pitch, initially, at the editorial round table, at the editorial discussion. And then it will go up sort of the food chain to the publishing committee, and the editor will present that project. You've gotta do a sales job to them, convincing them, convincing marketing it's worth their while, convincing sales they can actually take it to market. And then you meet in front of the designers. You know, the ones that are gonna put a cover to this project. You've gotta sell them too.

And somewhere along the lines, often, the editor will meet a speed bump. The designer will say, "I don't understand the title." Or, "I've read the manuscript, and I'm not figuring out how..." And that's a good thing. Cause those are the first lines of defense before we actually take it to the consumer. So anyway, all that to say, Jonathan, it's really important that the editors — no matter how much they hate it — that they know how to sell their project, that they can really defend it and say, in thirty seconds or less, "This is what my book's about."

JR: And so what can writers do for editors? Editors that don't think of themselves as sales people but are forced into that role — what can writers do for them?

DP: I think the best thing a writer can do is help them understand what is your book about! When a writer says, “Well, this is really a book not unlike the *Left Behind* series,” or, “This is a book very similar to *Star Wars*,” well, that's all good and proper, but help me define it a little bit better. So writers can really, um, yeah — writers too need to sell. And I've often been at a writers conference with a writer, and they just haven't done enough of a sales pitch to convince me to say, “Oh, I'm interested in that,” or, “That's the same ol' same ol' of 52 other people in the room.”

JR: Yeah, so do you still go to the writers conferences? Is that still part of your world?

DP: You know Jonathan, if I do, I don't go to acquire. That is not my first priority. I go simply to encourage writers. That may sound silly. So in saying that, I don't go to a lot to be honest. But if and when I do, I always let the sponsoring group or the host or the director know that if I come, I'm happy to be there, but I want you to know I'm not going for their attendees to be acquired by Random House or David C. Cook or whatever. I'm going simply to encourage them in the craft of publishing. And so I've met over the years with a variety of writers and said, you know, if you never get published, that's a really good story, and you know, write it for your family or write it for yourself or, you know that cliché, write it for an audience of one. But that's the role I've had over the past 30 years, just providing that encouragement.

JR: One thing I've been interested to talk to publishers and editors about is the question of, um... editors and publishers often say that what they're really looking for is a unique voice from a writer.

DP: Right.

JR: What do you mean — I assume, is that something you say, Don?

DP: [laughs] Yeah...

JR: And if so, what do you mean by that? [laughs]

DP: [laughs] Yeah yeah. Well, I mean sales will always say, “Oh do they have a platform?” Oh brother.

But I mean, what — you know, when we get a project in editorial, invariably it’s that unique voice. It’s that freshness to the topic. It’s that distinctive. It’s Mike Mason writing on *The Mystery of Marriage* in a way that you’ve never thought of marriage. It’s your local friend there Andi Ashworth writing on hospitality unlike anything you’ve ever read. It’s, you know, Madeleine L’Engle on faith and the arts in *Walking on Water*. You read it and go, “Oh... I’m caught up in this and it’s a book on childcare, but it’s so beautifully written.” It’s rich. It’s *A Severe Mercy* by Sheldon Vanauken. And They’re rare and few and far between, but — so that’s what you’re trying to help.

You hope that each author would find their voice and bring their voice rather than, like you said earlier — when I meet with an author and they say, “Well, I’m just like Max Lucado or Andy Andrews.” And it’s like, yeah but I want Jonathan Rogers to come through and read it. You know? So it’s that uniqueness. It’s the Madeleine L’Engles, Eugene Petersons. I mean, when you read *The Message Bible*... you’ve read the King James or the NIV, and then you read it through his voice and you go, wow, that is such a different take on the Beatitudes.

JR: Yeah. Is there any way to give people guidance on voice? You know, I mean — when you go to a writers conference to encourage writers, are there ways that you encourage them to have a unique voice, or to point in the right direction or whatever?

DP: Sure. Yeah, I mean only you can write the Jonathan Rogers story, and

only you. You know, so when I meet — some writers try so hard to be something they're not. And I think the voice comes from writing from the heart, and honing that craft, and learning to tell the story really well, rather than be a gun for hire.

Oftentimes I'll be at a writer's conference for example, and they'll say, "What are you looking for? What would you like me to write about?" And you know, "Do you want me to write on marriage? Do you want me to write on divorce? What's hot right now?" Rather than, "I have a passion. I wanna really write well and discover my voice in writing this book about..." whatever. You know, insert topic here.

And you know the books that — there are so many books coming out, more now than ever probably, but those books that rise to the top are the ones that you go, "Oh, the distinctive of this person, writing on—" We did a book on parenting with a writer Catherine McNeil from Chicago. There's many books for moms on parenting, but *her* book was exceptional. And it was just her voice. It was... it was just beautiful.

JR: And so "voice," tell me about — sorry for being insistent. Um, are you talking about the way she writes sentences? What are you talking about when you say that?

DP: Yeah, yeah. It's her use of words, it's um... her stories, how she wrote her stories. Her choice of words, her pacing, her thesis, I guess. Um, yeah, and the takeaway, the nuances, and um... yeah. And I don't know — I mean, you can go and learn how to write, you know, sort of the craft of spelling and grammar and all those kind of things. But it's then, how do I put my words together? You know, everyone can sew, but not everyone can needlepoint. And I guess that's what I would say.

JR: I'm also interested in the idea that on the one hand, an editor and a publishing house's job is to help a writer get their voice out there. There's always the risk of somehow hijacking... an editor hijacking an author's voice.

DP: Oh, yes. [chuckles] Yeah, a good editor will come alongside the writer and make them good to great. And oftentimes — and I've said this to you, I think I mentioned to you earlier — in my career of 30 years, on occasion I've had to take an editor off a project because they were overpowering the author. They were wanting to write the book. And you have to come alongside of the editor and go, "Your name is not on the cover. It's the author. And you're here to edit the book, not write it."

And um, so [laughs], so like I said. I have had on occasion — probably two or three times — pulled an editor off a project and assigned a new editor to the project because of that.

JR: I'm just curious, how did you as a publisher know that was happening?

DP: Um, I was reading the manuscript, reading it and going, "This doesn't sound at all like Person X."

JR: Uh huh.

DP: And you know, like I said, I'm not gonna share names, but you know, this was someone that you would be familiar with, and you probably would've heard them speak, and then when you would go to read their book, you realize, "Oh my gosh, this doesn't sound at all like him, at all." So, um... yeah.

JR: Yeah. I often say that sort of the start of — when I talk to writers about voice, and it's a hard thing to talk about. It's sort of nebulous, right? It's one of those things you sort of know when you see it. You know a unique voice when you see it, but it's kind of hard to know how to pin things down. But I often say that you wanna make sure in your writing, you're never writing a sentence that you uh, that you wouldn't wanna say out loud. That somebody would laugh if they heard you say it out loud.

DP: Yeah, yeah.

JR: I mean, that's just the tip of the iceberg, as far as what voice is, but it's a good place to start. Am I writing this in such a way that at least it sounds a little bit like something I might say?

DP: Exactly, exactly. So if I'm sitting around a campfire and you're spinning a yarn, And then I go and pick up, um you know... what was your book? *The Bark... Bark of the Bog...*

JR: *The Bark of the Bog Owl?*

DP: Yeah. And I start reading it and it feels like it's an Amish novel, I'd go, "What happened?" How did we go from Jonathan giving a yarn... you know giving a campfire talk or story, and spinning a yarn around the fire, and I'm getting this and going whoa, this isn't at all like you.

JR: Yeah, you know, when my books came out... yeah when the *Bog Owl* came out, I got an email from a friend who I hadn't seen since college — that would've been, you know, 15 years or so — and she said, "I read your book, and it sounded like you." And I thought, all right! That was a good thing. Somebody that hadn't talked to me in 15 years, but she still thought it sounded like me.

DP: That's your highest praise —

JR: Oh, I loved it!

DP: — when someone reads a book and goes, oh, I could hear you saying this... that's your highest praise.

JR: Yup. That made me feel like I was on the right track.

DP: So that suggests you've found your voice. Because if what your

friends said was “it sounded like you,” and they haven’t seen you since high school or whatever, then yes, Jonathan, you’ve found your voice.

JR: And therefore, I had a lot more confidence to sort of move forward with my writing. You know, that was the first book I’d ever written, and uh, yeah, that was...

DP: Affirming.

JR: Yeah. Yeah. Um, do you write? Or what do you write when you write besides emails?

DP: Ha! I have a novel that is gestating... let’s put it that way.

JR: Okay.

DP: And one of these days, maybe when I retire — Lord, may it be soon!
—

JR: [laughs]

DP: — I will get it. But yeah, I have a novel, Jonathan, that I have started, and I dabble at it every now and then. It’s set in 1964 Brazil, and um... yeah! In fact, I’ve started thinking about it again. Even today, I was thinking I need to get back to that and just start writing it. I was born and grew up in Brazil the first ten years of my life, so It’s kind of informing the book. And what I can’t decide is if it’s YA or adult fiction, but um... stay tuned.

JR: Okay. And when... have you been back to Brazil a lot since your first ten years?

DP: Oh yeah. Yeah, I went back... yeah. So I’ve gone back as an adult now. But what I’ve done is I’ve pulled some books on Brazil during that time period. And that’s kind of informing my story line. I won’t tell ya much

about it, but that's the setting and it's helping me... it'll be a novel. And uh, I'm just seeing where it goes! [laughs]

JR: Yeah, sounds like a novel in which place is gonna important.

DP: Yes, yes.

JR: [pause] Great. [pause] Will there be monkeys involved?

DP: Possibly!

JR: Okay.

DP: [laughs]

JR: This is just free advice. Any place you can work monkeys into a story, people love that.

DP: [pause] Yeah, there you go. [laughs]

JR: So, last question I always end with... who are the writers who make you want to write?

DP: Well, see if you recognize this writer, um... this is the opening line of his book, or their book. "I don't remember one thing about the day I was born."

JR: [laughs]

DP: "It hasn't been for lack of trying either."

JR: I know that one!

DP: So... [laughs] *The Charlatan's Boy* by You Know Who!

JR: Wow!

DP: You know, I... you are one of... you know, Leif Enger who wrote *Peace Like a River*. Eugene Peterson. There's a number of writers, Jonathan, that just, you know, are inspiring. And you... you just go, "Wow."

JR: Yeah.

DP: Um, I... you know there's... John Blase is a pastor, local pastor. He's written a few books, he's written some poetry. He's amazing. Um, I have just discovered a new writer, Cara Wall. She wrote a novel that just came out from Simon & Schuster called *The Dearly Beloved*. Oh my goodness, it's an incredible story.

JR: When you say Wall is it W-A-L-L or W-A-H-L?

DP: Yeah, W-A-L-L.

JR: Okay.

DP: Yeah, and uh... just... you know, again that voice thing? But just... she's writing a story about these two Presbyterian pastors and their friendship and their wives, and it... go out and read the book. But she's inspired me, um... She's put the bug in me again to go back and say, "Yeah, I should go back and finish, or dabble in writing that novel that I started some time ago." [laughs]

JR: That's great... so what is it about *that* book that made you say I wanna go try this again?

DP: [pause] Yeah it's how... it's the characters she developed. They were just larger than life, and they were just fully developed, three-dimensional. One pastor is this way and the other pastor is this way. One wife, um...

spoiler alert, one of the pastors's wives, she is agnostic. And so you imagine this guy in the pulpit every Sunday with his wife who doesn't believe in anything who's talking about... you just got really in there and felt them, and understood their angst, their rhythm. Yeah, they're just, they were fully developed. And I was taken away in the story. I found myself — I don't know if you read Leif Enger's latest novel.

JR: *Virgil Wander*?

DP: Yeah, *Virgil Wander*. You know, again, you're in this small town on a lake, trying to put together a festival. Um, and all these quirky people — this guy that's running a theater that's, you know, gonna close down any moment. You're just there!

JR: I know, and one thing I love about that book is that it makes me want to go to this place that I would, Lord willing, not want to go to.

DP: Right?

JR: I want to go see a dismal little town on Lake Superior now.

DP: [laughs] Exactly! And I think that's — to answer your question of what writers make you wanna write — they're the writers that take you away to their place, wherever that place is. And you just... you almost mourn! When I finished *The Dearly Beloved*, I had to take two or three days before I could read another novel. I just lost really dear friends.

JR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know the books that make me like things that I didn't think I liked... those are the ones that I really, really love. You know, whether it's a genre that I thought I didn't like or — I've talked about this on the podcast before — I love Dickens, and yet Dickens breaks every rule of writing that I think, that I say I hold dear, you know? But I love him anyway, and that makes me love him more. The fact that he's overcome all my rules, all my prejudices, you know?

DP: [pause] Yep, exactly, exactly.

JR: The fact that Bruce Springsteen makes me wish I could live in New Jersey... you know, that's saying something right there!

DP: [laughs] Right, right! Ride a motorcycle and wear a torn t-shirt, right?

JR: [laughs] That's right. [pause] Yep. Well, Don, thank you so much for taking some time with me today. I really... I always love talking to you. It seems like it's been a long time since we talked.

DP: It's been a while. It's been a while. Jonathan, you need to write another book!

JR: Ah, well okay! Duly noted! I think I'll try to do that.

DP: Okay. Your friend from high school or whatever is awaiting, as am I.

JR: [laughs] Okay, good. Alright, well thank you so much. Talk to you soon.

DP: Okay.

JR: Bye.

DP: Take care!

(THEME MUSIC)

DREW MILLER: The Rabbit Room is partnered with Lipscomb University to make this podcast possible. Lipscomb has graciously given us access to their recording studio in the Center for Entertainment and Arts Building. We're so grateful for their sponsorship, their encouragement, and the good work they do in Nashville. Special shout-out as well to The Arcadian Wild for allowing us to use their delightful song "Finch in the Pantry" as part of

this podcast. Check out their album of the same name for more excellent music.

JR: The Habit Membership is a library of resources for writers by me, Jonathan Rogers. More importantly, The Habit is a hub of community where like-minded writers gather to discuss their work and give each other a little more courage. Find out more at TheHabit.co.

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