

EPISODE 606

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:34.4]

FT: Welcome to So Money everyone, I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi, happy Monday, happy last day of July. It is August 1st tomorrow, how are you going to make the most of this summer? I am right now on vacation, that's what I'm doing and I'm enjoying every bit of it, I think I am at least.

I'm recording this before I'm actually on vacation but I'm predicating that it's going to be a relaxing beach filled, pool filled wine filled relaxation. Our guest today is Karen Rinaldi. After two decades editing and publishing bestselling books, Karen is out with her first novel, a book entitled The End of Men.

Karen Rinaldi is the publisher of Harper Wave, an in print she founded in 2012 and a senior vice president at Harbor Collins Publishers. She also writes nonfiction essays and has been published by the New York Times, TIME and Oprah magazine.

I really enjoyed our conversation, we talk about the challenges of writing and publishing, of promoting a book. Karen is insistent too that we must all suck greatly at something. This is an incredible thesis and she also speaks candidly about the unassailable truths, her previous marriages taught her about money. You're going to like this episode a lot.

Here is the wonderful, Karen Rinaldi.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:03.7]

FT: Karen Rinaldi, welcome to So Money. It's a pleasure to connect with you and congratulations on your new book, The End of Men.

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KR: Thank you Farnoosh, I'm very happy to be here and talking to you.

[0:02:15.5]

FT: Is it really the end of men?

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KR: It isn't, you know, it's a provocation. But, you know, if I wrote something called The Beginning of Women, nobody would care so The End of Men seemed a really good alternate title but actually, what I mean by it is that, I really do feel like it's the end of the straight white male rule I'd like to think.

And that we're all, I just want them to join us on the ground with all the other ones you know? Men, you know, other men, you know, straight, gay, black, white, everything in between, women, you know. Name it, everybody's on the ground and the end of men just means the end of their –

The end of it being all about them, at least, that's what I wish for. I know there are men who wish that too.

[0:03:05.7]

FT: I want to talk about the behind the scenes of you bringing this book to market. Someone who has been on the other side of publishing for decades, tell us a little bit about the book. I know that it's a nonfiction book called The End of Men by Hannah Rosen which is more about the socioeconomic changes happening and that's impacting the "need for men".

Your book is totally fiction, a great summer read and we should mention was actually the inspiration for a movie.

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KR: Yes, it was. Maggie's Plan, directed, produced by Rebecca Miller is based on one of the characters or one of the storylines in the novel, The End of Men. In fact, the movie came out before the book because the book, I had written the book actually 15 years ago when I was struggling to – with young children, I had – I was running a company, we'll talk about money in a bit, but money was tough so I was commuting from a long way away and basically having a hard time holding it together.

In my frustration of looking for support but more than that, sort of looking for the experience that I was having looking for it in media and books or movies or TV. It wasn't only my experience, it was actually all of my peer group and I thought, why are we not, why don't we hear these stories of women who are actually pulling off an incredible amount of work?

I couldn't see, I didn't see us represented so I just started creating these characters and then the characters turned into characters that interacted and they were friends and then I create this story line that I really wanted somebody else to write the book.

As an editor and a publisher, I thought well, I'm going to do this and I'm going to give it to people and say hey, here's this idea, can you write this book? Because I didn't intend to write a novel. Then I started making notes and started doing a draft just so I could show it, and then finally I ended up writing the damn thing over the next two years. It was almost like an unintentional novel.

It was all about – I explained to somebody, it's like a Greek chorus of feedback, you know, trying to help me figure out what I was doing, how I was doing it and how was I going to manage it going forward.

It turned out to be the end of men. Book was okay, had basic plot lines and characters and everything else but you know, I was writing it in between spaces, I was angry actually at the time and we can talk about that too I think.

So there was a little bit more vitriol that exists now 15 years later. The book went through a lot of – was in and out of the drawer over the years and then when Rebecca Miller who is a very dear

friend of mine was looking for a movie, I said, you know, let me tell you a story and I told her the story of Maggie.

Which is one of the women in the book who – anyway, and she fell in love with Maggie’s story and said I want that to be my next movie. We worked together over the next four years to make Maggie’s Plan and the whole time, she kept saying, we need those who not, you know, let it be the movie, it will be the movie, it will be really good, it will honor it.

The movie just kept getting better and bigger and sort of more attention and the ask on my side was like, can we see your novel? I said no, it’s in the drawer, after a while somebody just turned to me and they go, “for god sake, just give me the damn novel, I want to read it”.

I think some of that was just my trepidation as being an editor and a publisher all these years, I knew the novel wasn’t – I felt like it needed work and of course I forgot that that’s what editors are for even though I’ve done it for 30 years. You think I would know that but somehow, it didn’t – the equation didn’t work on the flip side.

Yeah, all I need is an editor who is going to kick my ass the way I do all the time to people and turn it into a book that was publishable. Which in fact, I had the great fortune of finding somebody who was able to do that with me and for me.

It took another year of basically pulling the book apart and rewriting it but again, essentially, the main characters were still there.

[0:07:17.7]

FT: Incredible, you wrote once that the hardest thing for a writer to do is to write something that people want to read. That’s an interesting perspective coming from an editor and a publisher and now as a writer and funny enough, your book was something that people wanted to read before it was even finished.

[0:07:37.3]

KR: Yeah.

[0:07:38.3]

FT: That's quite an accomplishment.

[0:07:39.6]

KR: I don't know what it is, it might be insanity but I think you know what? I think it's these – I don't even feel like it's mine, it feels like it belongs to the world, it feels like these women who just existed on the page and in fiction and these characters who wanted to be released into the world.

I really do, I mean, Rebecca and I talk about this all the time, we just want to tell these stories of women and then put it in the world and then let them populate the world of storytelling and fiction in a way and that's what it always feels like, you know, me writing it, I'm sort of just a vessel for representing women with certain issues and with a certain socioeconomic – you know, status and when I granted, we're privileged in many ways but still, saying you know, there's still stuff we have to deal with.

[0:08:32.0]

FT: Yes, just another fun fact about Karen Rinaldi, it turns out that the movie, *The Switch*, starring Jennifer Aniston and I believe it's Justin Bateman, that's also based on the goings on in your life at the time. You said your life's really been a vessel for great storytelling on the big screen.

[0:08:51.6]

KR: Yeah, I think there's been on the screen, I mean, I feel like, I wrote a little thing about this just start trying to suss it out for myself and tracking the storyline and saying, it's just me trying to figure out how I – me trying to figure out how I wanted to live my life according to my own rules.

I created stories for people along the way to sort of build on. The Switch actually came from a Jeffrey Jenetey's short story and then a new Yorker called Baster. Baster, if you've seen Maggie's Plan is the way that Maggie was going to get pregnant which was based on –

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FT: Turkey baster.

[0:09:35.7]

KR: With a baster. Anyway, she doesn't use the baster, I think she was using a syringe but anyway, the story goes, there's some truth to this which you know, which people who know me well, know the story well. There is some truth in this that should I just you know, I'm done with men at 33, I was finished with men and I thought, I just want to have children.

I was going to have a child with a gay friend with who I'm still very close, I mean, he's still – he's like my family to me. That's what we were going to do, we were trying to decide, do we do it the old-fashioned way, do I get basic? Then anyway, Jenetey's, this was stemmed from a weekend with a bunch of friends and he loved it, he wrote the story, the story got an option, it became The Switch.

Yeah, then there are actually other stories that came out of my sort of making a big mess of my life as we do, as we're trying to figure out how to live it. Yeah, I'm glad that I'm father of the stories and I feel like that if anything, it makes my missteps and my less than conventional lifestyle at least maybe interesting to other people.

[0:10:51.0]

FT: Well, to say that your life is interesting and fodder for great story telling is an understatement and I was actually reading one of the pieces that you wrote for the New York Times about previous relationships that you've had and you're very open, you're very transparent about those experiences and you talk about what you learned about money.

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KR: Yes.

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FT: From those relationships, you say you came out of those relationships with some unassailable truths, the first is that if the man was making more money then you were doing things his way.

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KR: Yes.

[0:11:20.6]

FT: You also said that if he was broke, he resented your ability to support him. You really experienced that?

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KR: God yeah.

[0:11:30.3]

FT: Well, because it's the ego right? It's the male ego.

[0:11:33.5]

KR: Well, I was going to say, ego. It doesn't matter, I don't – no, I'd be lying if I said that what I'd better be saying that supporting a man is easy, you know, it creates a different kind of tension, I

mean, what's beautiful about it is that you have your own agency in a way, I mean, it can help for you to have your own agency.

Yeah, I think the male ego is fragile and frankly, I think that it's a very hard thing to do. Interestingly, all of my closest friends support their families and the husbands are stay at home dads. There is something in that that I've tried to capture a little bit in the book and then in the piece that I wrote.

You know, we may be, we went and wanting our own agency, some of us went a little bit too far. Sometimes I think that. I also think that it takes an amazing man with incredible sense of self to be a stay at home dad and it's not to say too much that men who don't live conventionally have to have a sense of their manliness in other ways. Those men are awesome when it works.

[0:12:48.1]

FT: I agree.

[0:12:50.2]

KR: One of them you know? It's incredible but I think it's hard. Yeah, then I think the third point right? That I'm making the pieces that if you make the same amount of money, he's constantly having to show you who's boss.

[0:13:03.1]

FT: How did your ex do that I'm curious?

[0:13:06.5]

KR: Listen, the first story's tragic, you know, he was the guy who made a lot more money and we were doing things his way and that wasn't working anyway but then it wound up if you read the piece, you know how that story ends. It's not a happy ending.

Then you know, my second husband actually was in love, he is a really good guy and really wasn't the money issues there, it was just other issues but you know, in dating, you know, I was a serial monogamous my whole life.

Not only was I married but I also lived with a couple of people and I never felt like there was a restful place when it came to money and I think money is you know, you know this. Money is emotional, we attach things to it that don't belong on it.

I think it can become, it's almost like a sponge that absorbs the money issues in the house can absorb the other things you don't want to talk about but because it's tangible, because you can count it, because it connotes power or you know, means, it soaks up the other emotional baggage in a relationship.

I don't even have an answer for any of this, I really don't, I've been struggling with it my whole life, all I know is that there was never any doubt in my mind from when I was very young that I was going to make my own money and that – and then take it from there.

It was never a question of you know, should I be a stay at home mom or should I let someone support me. I mean, it wasn't even a consideration because I wouldn't want to give that up.

[0:14:47.5]

FT: How did you learn that? Was that something that was engrained in you as a kid because you saw something unravel in your life or you were exposed to an interesting experience because not everyone has that mentality.

[0:15:00.8]

KR: Yeah, it was probably from watching my parents fight mostly about money as I was growing up and they were – you know, we were middle class, you know, suburban New Jersey, Italian family, you know, father worked, mother stayed at home, until I guess high school and then she went back to work and – but there were always issues and my father wanted to control the money and my mother wanted to spend the money.

They fought about it all the time and it was you know, money that was controlled, you know, by the bigger personality meaning my dad, but my mother always being resentful. Again, once she started making her own money, you know, the cast was set right?

Where he controlled it the whole time and I thought, you know, I remember my mother asking very specifically, asking my dad, this is back in the day right? For the check book. Can I have the check book today? I'm going to buy myself a dress or get my hair done or whatever it was and I remember thinking, I'm never going to ask somebody if I could have –

That will never come out of my mouth. It was a visceral response of going, I don't even want anybody to know – my money is my money and you know, I still – you know, my husband and I have separate – we keep separate accounts into a larger degree.

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FT: I think it's so important especially in your case, this is not your first marriage, you are your own person, you run your own business. That's like a lot of people getting married today, they are getting married later in life, they're coming to the marriage with their own assets, their own set of experiences and ideals around money. You have to have your own autonomy, you have to be able to maintain some financial autonomy in your relationship.

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KR: You know what? I couldn't agree with you more and I know that again, we're talking from a place, maybe from a place of privilege because we're able to have jobs and make our own money and all of that.

Let's just say that those essential things are in place but yeah, I can't imagine relying on somebody else because you know, anything can happen, this is the one thing I learned from my life very early on which is like things can happen that you can't even conceive of right now. You know, not just the guy having the affair and leaving you.

You know, that's one thing that can happen but you know, anything can happen right? You just want to be able to say, no matter what happens, I can take care of myself and in my case and my children. I mean, I want to be able to take care of my children.

Then, if there's more, that's gravy but – and I think that that autonomy thought probably makes some people nervous, I mean, some men nervous, I mean, who cares but I just – I would never sort of leave my fate in the hands of someone else, end of story, you know, unless -

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FT: Exclamation point.

[0:18:12.5]

KR: Unless it's the apocalypse and omebody's got a sword and you don't. It's like yeah, I'll hang around behind you.

[0:18:16.7]

FT: Right. A man is not a plan as the saying goes.

[0:18:20.6]

KR: Yeah. Heavens no.

[0:18:23.2]

FT: I love what you say about sucking at things and everyone, follow Karen on Instagram @suckatsomething. You can brand this, you've written about how it's great to suck at something, you suck at surfing, I suck at tennis but I keep at it like I am Martina Navratilova. It's like, I will get that ball over the net, consistently someday.

[0:18:49.5]

KR: Right. How long have you been doing it?

[0:18:51.9]

FT: I remember trying out for the tennis team in eighth grade and thinking, I'm going to go out there, I'm going to do this, so hot, I've got all the accessories, I got my skirt, my tennis shoes and I was terrible, I didn't make the team.

Back in the day when everybody made the team.

[0:19:09.4]

KR: Right, everybody but you Farnoosh, I'm sorry.

[0:19:12.3]

FT: Everybody but me. I remember crying so hard that day and thinking. It was tough, it was a tough day, it was a tough realization and like you say, you were at this piece, no one really ever tells you, you suck at something unless you have a mean boss, an abusive parent or a malicious friend. In my case, it was a really mean tennis coach but she had to make cuts.

I don't know, I keep at it, just last summer I took tennis lessons and I think I got the ball over the court like three times. That's three more times in the summer before.

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KR: Yes, also, you don't have to be good at it because you're not paying the bills with it.

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FT: Right, I enjoy it.

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KR: Yes and I think that with the ability to enjoy something that you will never excel at or even get any of the rewards to the barrier or not to the barrier but the barrier to what the reward is there are no rewards to it and you think well who does things anymore where there is no reward and actually what happened from writing that piece is that when I talked to people about it at first, it made people a little bit uncomfortable because I would always interview people.

I have been talking about this for 10 years, right? This is an idea, a bulletin board in my office and it says, "What do you suck at people?" and I'd say before you have this conversation, tell me what you suck at and people just shift nervously and I thought right. That's a little too hard hitting and so when I wrote the piece, I actually wrote this piece years ago and I've been writing it and re-writing it and re-writing it.

I also suck at writing by the way because I wrote things forever before they actually go into the world and I just revise and revise and revise and revise and when it went out, the response was overwhelming. I mean people have just come to me now and tell me the stories, the tennis story or Lacrosse or playing music or some guy saying that he sucks at speaking ancient languages but he studies Greek and Latin anyway. It made me unbearably happy to hear that.

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FT: What's the science behind that? There's got to be some kind of psychological or adrenalin rush or some stimuli.

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KR: I think what it does and it's funny because I am doing a lot, this has been a theory I've had for about 10 years and I'm doing the research now to back my own theory which is really a bizarre way to do it but it was just something I know instinctively and I know it instinctively from surfing for the past 15 years and being so consistently bad at it and having to deal with the fact of that, so I think it touches everything.

I mean I'll go so far to say that it touches everything from teaching you great humility which I think in our heart and souls we want but our culture does not condone or reward humility. With social media and just the whole world out there it's just saying reward, reward, reward, success, success, success as opposed to saying humility, patience, forgiveness and this is all of the self. This has nothing to do with other people.

I'm saying to forgive yourself for sucking and then if you go into a mantra, it's almost like a practice. It's like a meditative practice. I have to go in the water, paddle out and suck at surfing every single time and I do it all the time and always say don't be angry with yourself, forgive yourself and it's a beautiful thing. It's almost like a discipline and I think it touches on spirituality. I think it touches on an incredible endorphin rush.

When you do get the ball over the net, it doesn't take much right? It's like what else can you do worth it, a little bit –

[0:22:50.8]

FT: Right, it's the little things. The humility factor is huge though. I think looking back on my own experience, failing miserably we all knew what that sort of feels like and it's kind of addicting.

[0:23:05.2]

KR: Well because you have to learn and I also think that I mean a lot of it is I am on a one person mission to make this something that we practices and keep practice I'm doing in fact my next book is on this. I have the proposal together.

[0:23:20.2]

FT: I love it. I'd buy that book for all my friends and family.

[0:23:23.9]

KR: And it really is basically saying look at yourself. Stop looking at other people and pointing the finger and saying “where do they suck at?” everybody judges everybody else. It’s very hard to judge people in that way when you do something and have a practice of something you are not good at yourself because what you realize is that if you’re forgiving yourself for being bad at something and you’re getting a rush from it anyway, you’re generosity for other people.

And your patience grows, when that grows guess what happens? People are happier being around you and it comes with being happy and I realized that this feedback loop is like something that we are missing right now because all we’re doing is hating each other online, lying about how great our lives are on social media, reward driven, success driven. I’m going it’s not working.

Well it’s not working, people aren’t happy. People are more – we’re exhibiting less, mental health is a problem and I do think it comes back to go forgive yourself. Self-compassion is a really big piece of this. I am reading a lot of Tekanan because just of the fundamentals of Buddha and I am not a Buddhist but I think that there are some fundamental truths in and I am basically an atheist who has found herself because of this whole practice.

Seeking the wisdom of our spiritual religious leaders because my kids are like, “Are you becoming religious?” I was like, “Well yeah in a way but in a way that is something else” it’s because there is wisdom in that teaching as opposed to Dogma and institutionalization and everything that goes along with it. So what if you peel that away? So I mean that’s what it is, it’s seven waves and what they taught me about humility, patience and taking it on the head, that’s the working subtitle.

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FT: Well is Harper Wave going to publish this because it sounds like it’s all leading back to Harper Wave because your subtext is “Unexpected Perspective on Mind, Body and Soul” this is it. This is your big idea.

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KR: It is but I can't because it's my own imprint. I can't publish my own book, so I will sell it weirdly to another publisher, yeah. I couldn't do it. It would be too close and too weird to publish itself, yeah.

[0:25:46.5]

FT: Too close, yeah I see that. Well one thing you're very good at is having an instinct for great literature, great ideas, great perspectives, what does it take now to write a great book from your perspective? If someone comes to you with the proposal, with an idea, what are the questions you're asking? What are you looking for?

[0:26:10.1]

KR: Oh, that's a good question and a really hard one to answer. What am I looking for? I'm looking for an original idea. I'm looking for an original voice and an authentic voice not one that is sort of created because you think it might sell. I'm looking for – I'm sorry it's all crazy, sorry about the noises that are happening in my office. You know mostly I am looking for original ideas and something that can only come from either the work and the experience of that person.

So I work with authors and writers and the difference is an author writes his or her own work and a writer will write for an expert. So I publish a lot of doctors and practitioners and people who have big jobs and who aren't writers. First it's very hard to write a book that with a – like I said it's very hard to write a book that people want to read. It is actually one of the hardest things to do because they are all – I mean you know you've done it right?

So it's hard for me and it is very hard to explain to people who don't understand that. They'd be like, "Yeah I can write a book. I can write it in six months" it's like you know you probably can't. It's even hard for writers to write books and authors to write books let alone somebody who doesn't do it basically every day but yeah, I am looking for original ideas and people who are pushing the limits of how we understand the world we live in.

And I am looking for and this is interesting, well not interesting, just considering from where I came from, I used to love edgy fiction when I was a kid. Literary edgy fiction and I am really –

and there is a place for that and I still love it but really I am looking for earnestness and candor and transparency and vulnerability which is definitely where I got to after many years.

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FT: Right, your craft informed you, it formed your take on life.

[0:28:26.0]

KR: Literary, I am learning everyday yeah. I am learning, I learn every day.

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FT: What a great job you have.

[0:28:29.9]

KR: I have one of the greatest jobs in the whole world, I do.

[0:28:33.7]

FT: Well even looking at your list of books coming out or recently published I want to read all of them.

[0:28:41.0]

KR: Well I could send them to you.

[0:28:41.9]

FT: Yeah, I need some summer reading. Strange Contagion, I want read that.

[0:28:47.6]

KR: Yeah, that's really apt right now because of what's going on politically, internationally and domestically not only with violence but just the contagion of faulty thinking in one way or the other. It's really good and he's great. He's a writer, he's a journalist and a psychologist so it comes from a good place and I'll send you *Strange Contagion* and we'll get your address after this.

Yeah, I get to sit in my office and have the smartest, most wonderful people come to me and tell me everything they know. I mean, how much fun is that? It's a great privilege and I love it, I have done it for all these years because it's always new because I am always publishing a new book and there's always someone, just people much smarter than me coming into my life and I feel like I'm a perpetual grad student.

[0:29:46.0]

FT: Yes, you are always seeing what's next because these authors are coming to you with these big new ideas that are going to move the needle and I have to say it is very hard to be a publisher these days right? I mean that's an understatement.

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KR: It's never easy. You know what? Publishing this is the thing that people look at from a historical perspective, publishing has always been hard and for different reasons. So we change the reasons why it's hard changes, but it's always been hard. I mean think of James Joyce trying to publish *Ulysses* and *Soviet Beach* and Harry Crosby. If you go back to the publishers from the mid-20th century, it was really hard.

And then if you go to the 19th century there were no copyright laws so they would just stole everything from everybody else. So there is always a story about why it's hard so it's more of a vocation than it is a business. Of course because of how we live, where we live, we have to treat it like a business and it becomes hard to take that vocation with very low margins and very high risk and then put it into a business model.

I always think of us as, and I think your audience will appreciate this, I think of publishers as venture capitalist. That's really what we are where we see guys. Another crispy feedback because what I do is I have to look at all these projects and say, "I want that one, that one, not that one, that one, that one" and then you've got to be really right because if you are wrong all the time basically you lose your job because you're not making enough money to support everything else.

So you are hedging and you are evaluating and you're evaluating on nothing. It's mostly instinct and the thing about your instinct is that sometimes you're right and a lot of times you're wrong.

[0:31:24.6]

FT: It's hard I'll say as a thrice published author, it never gets easier to promote your book to convince someone to buy your book is hard. I mean family members are like, "We'd love a copy of your book, can you bring me one to Thanksgiving?" and I want to say, "Could you buy it?" I only poured the last two years of my life into this work but sure I'll give you a free copy.

[0:31:47.4]

KR: Yeah, I think that the thought of getting it for free, what do I want to say it feels and this is a weird counter intuitive thing, it feels more special because they are getting it from the author because I know that feeling which is "could you send me a copy?" I'm like, "Go buy it", support the local bookstore or support the whole publishing process and no, people feel like it's an intimate exchange to get it for free on one hand.

On the other hand, if you give away a hundred copies it's not going to make one difference about whether your book is a success or failure because we are talking books have to sell in the many thousands to be – and then successful is also a relative term.

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FT: Right, what is your goal really? I mean there's making money and then there's other ways to leverage your book.

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KR: It's just putting your ideas into the world to me and then if it catches fire and people like it and read it and it spreads then wow, that's gravy but getting it into getting an idea that you feel very passionate about into the world, to me that's the goal.

[0:32:51.6]

FT: Karen thanks for spending time with us. This has been a lot of fun.

[0:32:54.9]

KR: Thank you. It's really fun talking, we've covered a lot of ground.

[0:32:58.3]

FT: We did, I can ask you more questions but you have a busy job and a busy life and I want to leave people wanting more. So everybody go out and buy *The End of Men* and I'm going to really rally behind you, behind this concept of you've got to suck at something. I think that's genius and I think that's your next legacy.

[0:33:18.0]

KR: Yeah, no I think I'm pretty passionate about it and it's well underway so I hope it will be out probably be done with it in a year and –

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FT: Well great then we definitely will have to have you back when that is a book.

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KR: Thank you. Alright well keep up and let me know about and do get in touch with me via email about the books on the wave list that I can get for you.

[0:33:39.0]

FT: Well looking forward to it, thanks Karen.

[END]