

**EPISODE 111**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:09.2] AT:** Welcome to the Portfolio Life Podcast with Jeff Goins. I'm your host Andy Traub. Jeff believes that every creative should live a portfolio life. A life full of pursuing work that matters, making a difference with your art and discovering your true voice. Jeff is committed to helping you find, develop and live out your unique world view so that you too can live a portfolio life.

Why doesn't Jeff like podcasts? Why is he frustrated with most conversation and the thought leader space? Today we'll find out the unlikely places that Jeff gets inspiration. We'll also Google a few words that we don't know which is actually quite entertaining. Here is my conversation with Jeff Goins.

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:56.2] AT:** Most everyone that's listened to this show has heard names like Seth Godin, Steven Pressfield, Malcolm Gladwell, they certainly know your name, Mike Hyatt, people of that — sort of that cut of that cloth, of that slice of creativity and I wanted to ask you, what are places that you find creative ideas from or inspiration, outside of places that people would normally look?

**[0:01:24.0] JG:** I think this is a great question because...

**[0:01:24.9] AT:** Thanks.

**[0:01:26.2] JG:** Good job.

**[0:01:27.2] AT:** Thank you.

**[0:01:28.2] JG:** You know, we talked about this a little bit before, why I don't read a lot of blogs to listen to a lot of podcasts. Because I think that that world becomes an eco-chamber of the

same five ideas, kind of spinning around and around and around. I was reading a friend's blog recently and he quoted some thought leader, kind of the cloth that you just talked about. The ilk — I never know when to use ilk.

**[0:01:52.2] AT:** Every episode we're googling something, is it ilk right? You've got to Google it. It's funny, I'm the host and then I have to talk while you Google things.

**[0:01:59.8] JG:** Cut of the cloth was good, I mean that was a good reference but then I said "of that cloth", so I don't think that was really appropriate. "Of that ilk, a type of people or things similar to those already referred to."

**[0:02:10.5] AT:** I think cloth is fine because people really, I don't know what an ilk is. I thought that was an animal but that's an elk.

**[0:02:15.3] JG:** Well, it's Scottish for, "of the place or estate of the same name". So you and I are of that ilk, like of Nashville. That's interesting.

**[0:02:25.2] AT:** Interesting. Now back to regular programming.

**[0:02:27.5] JG:** I think this is good, we should have a word of the show.

**[0:02:30.5] AT:** It happens every time because every time we have a show, we use the word that we're like, "I don't know if I used that right, can you Google that?"

**[0:02:35.8] JG:** I'm terrible about vocab, it's an embarrassing fact.

**[0:02:40.6] AT:** You're good at grammar though.

**[0:02:41.5] JG:** Yeah, but I always forget words.

**[0:02:43.1] AT:** You know why I know that? Because you correct my grammar when I text you.

**[0:02:46.0] JG:** Yeah well, that's just kind of fun.

**[0:02:49.2] AT:** I enjoy it so much.

**[0:02:52.1] JG:** My biggest grammar faux pas, my biggest frustration...

**[0:03:04.3] AT:** Oh, I though “pax”. I just wanted to test you, I wanted to see if I knew something — I think it’s pax.

**[0:03:08.0] JG:** Faux pas. “Faux pas means an embarrassing...”

**[0:03:11.6] AT:** Now, how do you spell it?

**[0:03:13.1] JG:** Faux pas. Two words. “An embarrassing or tactless act or remark in the social situation.” It’s a faux pas to me when people say — I think it’s embarrassing, they don’t know they’re being embarrassed. When they say like when they’re saying “our thing”. “This is Andy and I’s show,” is the worst.

I’s? When in the world would you ever say that? People of the iInternet, stop saying this. “I’s”. This is how you know if you’re using anything that’s sort of a compound subject. This is your grammar lesson for today.

**[0:03:51.9] AT:** People are loving this right now.

**[0:03:53.1] JG:** This is how you know you’re miss using something. Take out one of them, right? You would never say “I’s” anything. What would you say?

**[0:04:03.0] AT:** “I’s” is an incorrect word.

**[0:04:04.0] JG:** Singular possessive. This is mine. What would you say? You wouldn’t say, “I’s. This is I’s show.” You would say, “This is my show. Andy’s and my show.”

**[0:04:17.4] AT:** Got you.

**[0:04:18.4] JG:** Stop doing this people.

**[0:04:20.3] AT:** He's fired up.

**[0:04:21.6] JG:** You're embarrassing yourselves.

**[0:04:23.0] AT:** We're in the woods, we've got to get back on the trail.

**[0:04:24.2] JG:** Sorry. So, I've said before that the I don't listen to podcasts.

**[0:04:28.2] AT:** Yeah, so it's a little bit of an echo — I would say this just to clarify. I agree with you but it's not just that it's the same topics and listen, I have a podcast, I host this podcast, I get that but I think another issue is, a lot of times, the issues are spoken about from the same angle, right? That's one of the other primary problems.

**[0:04:47.4] JG:** Yeah I mean, so here's the thing. You've got a bunch of thought leaders quoting other thought leaders who are really quoting the original researchers, talking about this, that or the other thing. If I have to read one more blog post saying, "Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 Rule", it's like I'm rolling my eyes because you're just sort of, we all read that book and we'll regurgitating the same thing that another person sighted from another source.

**[0:04:47.4] AT:** Or a reference to Apple. Like Seth Godin had a talk I was listening to, last week and he said, "Now I'm going to make my first Apple reference and it's 20 minutes into the talk. So I deserve an award for that because I haven't used that in 20 minutes." So yes, you're not listening to as many podcast, I know you listen to some. Don't read as many blogs but where are you getting...

**[0:05:32.9] JG:** Right, so where does inspiration come from, where do ideas come from?

**[0:05:35.6] AT:** Unlikely places?

**[0:05:36.7] JG:** Yeah, a few places, one — what I'm looking for by the way is I'm looking for what an academia is called "primary sources". If everybody's citing Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000

hour rule but they haven't read Anders Erickson's book who was the original research for that study that Malcolm cited in *Outliers*, they need to go read his research and now his book *Peak* which talks specifically about that research in less academic terms which is a great book.

So find the originator of this ideas. I was reading a friend's blog post the other day and they were quoting some thought leader's quote and they were talking about like "don't die with the music still in you". I said, "That's cool, that's a cool quote but you should quote Thoreau, the guy who originally said it, here is the link to the quote."

Dig a little bit deeper than the Seth Godin blog post or the Michael Hyatt podcast. I think those things are great but if they're citing somebody else, because these guys have original ideas, we all have good original ideas and I think that's great but if they're citing somebody else, find out who they're citing, dig a little bit deeper. If you want to produce interesting ideas that are going to move and motivate and connect with people.

I don't care if you're writing a novel or writing a blog post or doing a podcast, I think you've got to dig a little bit deeper and find something a little bit older, a little bit harder to find than most people are going to find to Google search.

**[0:07:10.7] AT:** So older, I'm hearing older, what about on the edges? Where if I go, "Hey, have you heard of this person?" "No I haven't." I have some friends who go, "Dude, you've got to follow this Instagram," and I would have never ever followed that Instagram and now I do. Or, "Hey, have you read this book by this person?" No, because they're not Malcolm Gladwell or, "Hey, I listen to this comic, because I learn a lot from comics or whatever it might be?"

Where are places that you go and you go, "Hey, people probably haven't heard of this book, they don't watch this show." Where are you going? This art, right? Where are you getting ideas and maybe it was one time, you got an idea, you don't go there repeatedly but can you think of times when you've been surprised by inspiration because it was at a gas station off I65 or you know what I mean? When does inspiration sort of pop in versus, "Oh, I'm going to study now," right?

**[0:08:00.1] JG:** I think one of the best ways to do this, because something new to somebody might feel like something old to somebody else. I'm sure somebody's listening and going, "What's the 10,000 hour rule?" So I think one of the best ways to do it is to borrow from other industries. I have some friends who are photographers and they started teaching other photographers how to build businesses.

They realized that in that industry, especially since it was like seven or eight years ago that they started doing this, that a lot of people weren't very savvy with marketing, with kind of hard core business principles. So they started reading Seth Godin and they started reading all of this Peter Trucker, all these like classic management, business, marketing leaders that in a more entrepreneurial community, they're old hat. Like, "Oh yeah, of course." But when they started sharing this with their tribe, their community.

**[0:08:56.6] AT:** Photographers, yeah. Because photographers aren't reading this right?

**[0:09:00.0] JG:** They were really in to their art. I think that's changing in that industry and that's not true for everybody in that industry but it was certainly true at the time with that group of people. Same thing's happen to me with writers. I've said before that all I really did when I started my blog was tae stuff that was really obvious to marketers and was obvious to me and I shared it with a group of creative and writers and artist, they're like, "Wow, this is so great." I was like, "Really?" So I love that Derek Siver's quote, "What's obvious to you is amazing to others."

**[0:09:33.5] AT:** That's so true.

**[0:09:34.7] JG:** Stop looking at things that are obvious to you and go find something that's obvious to somebody else that's amazing to you. That's how I get inspired. So I go to somebody who is different from me and I go, "What are you reading right now?" They go, "I read this cookbook." "Cookbook, really?" "Yeah, it's really great." So I'll go consume content that's in a completely different industry, completely different world and I'll gain insight from it and then I'll bring it back and go, "Oh, they did this, this way over here what if we do it this way?" So I think there's a few ways you can do this, one, you can time travel so I read a lot of biographies or history books.

**[0:10:13.1] AT:** People were really excited for a second because you were like, “And here’s how I time travel.”

**[0:10:17.0] JG:** Yeah. So borrow something from another time. I heard a group of entrepreneurs talking about how they’re taking techniques that Walt Disney did and they’re applying them to their businesses today because there were ways in which he innovated at that time and place as a filmmaker as a cartoonist that they can borrow and apply to their own businesses today.

So borrow form a different time, read widely in that, read lots of biographies and histories and see what principles you can extrapolate from that. I like doing that because timeless stuff stands out and then there’s also the fact that nothing new is under the sun and so everything new was once old and so these same ideas kind of keep recurring and you can go 50 years back and read something that somebody did and go, “Ah, I can use that today.”

It’s going to look new and original just because nobody else is doing this because everybody’s copying the people around them. So it’s not about being incredibly original, it’s just about copying or stealing form some other source or industry that’s so old that people have forgotten about it or it’s way over from left field that nobody’s paying attention to it. So first, time travel, second, borrow form another industry, as my photographer friends did.

If you’re in a creative field, look to business or finance or something, if you’re in business or finance, look to creative field if you’re in one part of the world, look at the opposite part of the world for you, in the west, look at the east, if you’re in the east, look at the west and take those ideas and then appropriate them, but then try to contextualize them jnto whatever your situation is.

**[0:11:55.9] AT:** I love that, there’s something so beautiful where we’re both big fans of Rob Bell and he’s been featured and interviewed and what’s interesting is he’ll talk about “this is what the root of this word is”. He’s just saying, “Hey, here’s what this non English version — this is what it meant when it was originally written.” He’s talking about the same word but he’s saying, here’s what they meant when they wrote it in their context.

That just fascinates people. Why? Because it's going a layer below the obvious. I love that advice of go further back, than what's on the Amazon suggestions, go further back than that, there's real power to that, I love looking in other industries because you're right, it's amazing how if you can bring some business to the creative or creative to the business. It is, it's like lighting the dark place.

Or like, "I've never heard of this craziness?" And you can just keep doing that, let's end with one sort of fun idea which is can you think of a time where — let's do this: What's a place where you get a lot of inspiration? Is it when you're playing with your kids or you're listening at church and you're bored or you're listening to church and you're engaged or conversations with your wife or having buddies over?

What's a place where you go, "I'm constantly getting ideas when I \_\_\_\_." Or when you sit alone and you just listen versus read? Or is it from the New Yorker? I know you're a big fan of the New Yorker. Where is a place where you go, "Man consistently, I just keep getting that lightning strike of inspiration there."

**[0:13:30.7] JG:** I feel like a bad dad if I don't say I'm not getting inspired by hanging out with my kid.

**[0:13:33.5] AT:** No, no.

**[0:13:36.3] JG:** I know what you're saying. The truth is, I don't. When I'm hanging out with my son Aden or balancing our daughter Emelia, all I'm trying to do is to be fully present to that.

**[0:13:46.3] AT:** I realize that was a really bad example because I'm like, "I've never been inspired with the creative idea while playing wiffle ball with my son.

**[0:13:51.3] JG:** Which is good, it means your present dad.

**[0:13:53.1] AT:** But he's also hitting the ball so I'm pretty forced in that. So where else? All right, not with the kids but where else?

**[0:13:59.4] JG:** I think some people would say that, “Spending time with family, I find that inspiring,” whatever. Honestly, for me, I’ve gotten to the point where I can kind of switch modes, it doesn’t mean I’m not sometimes thinking about work or inspiration doesn’t come in the middle of a family dinner or whatever but more often than not, I’m just trying to enjoy that and usually I am enjoying it.

**[0:14:17.8] AT:** Sure.

**[0:14:18.7] JG:** Really, I think because I’m such a fly by the seat of my pants kind of creative and I’m a verbal processor, the way that ideas come together is when I talk about them, when we’re doing something like this. I love that quote, “I don’t know when I think about something until I’ve read what I’ve written about it.” I don’t know what I think about something.

**[0:14:42.6] AT:** So what just happened is Jeff just read my face and he’s like, “Now I have to repeat this for the guy from Indiana.” So go ahead, say it again.

**[0:14:48.5] JG:** “I don’t know what I think about something until I’ve read what I’ve written about it.”

**[0:14:52.7] AT:** That’s awesome.

**[0:14:53.3] JG:** Yeah, so I mean it’s the idea that I actually don’t know how I feel about that until I start talking about it and then I go, “Oh yeah.” Case and point, I’m working on this book and I was working with the research assistant on it and she was going and getting studies and stories and we’re putting these together and then we would go, “Okay, what is the argument?” In my mind I had the idea what the argument was. Then, you go, “Well, this is what people actually did or here is what this academic research says about this. Do we still believe the argument?”

That’s often how you write a nonfiction book like that where it’s got an argument and you’re trying to prove a point, what I try to do is go out and try out disprove it and if I disprove it, I go, “Well, can’t write this book or I got to change my argument a little bit.” Then if you try to disprove it, obviously you’re anticipating objections in the reader’s mind and you can kind of address those. She would go, “In light of this, what do we think now? What’s the argument?”

I was like, “I don’t know.” I was like, “Let’s talk about it.” So I called her and we talked about it and then I started going and I started thinking and I realized I had opinions about this stuff. I said, “Well this, and this,” and I started naming things and it was this creative — I said, “I hope you’re writing this down because this is good.”

**[0:16:03.4] AT:** Yeah.

**[0:16:06.0] JG:** But I learned that as a musician, as a writer, as an actor in college that I needed a few things to be really creative and to feel inspired, I needed a deadline. Opening night of the play for example or manuscript deadline.

**[0:16:21.2] AT:** So let’s just pause real quick. Please stay on your train of thought but the first part of being creative for you is have a deadline, which sounds like the most non-creative thing in the world but go ahead, next one.

**[0:16:31.1] JG:** Well it is non-creative. I think creative and non-creative things have to collaborate together. If you’re creating something new and original, in theory, it’s never existed the way it’s going to exist after you create it. So you’re bringing that, something creative into a non-creative space and you need both.

You need the creative and the non-creative. The non-creative is a very firm, set do this at this time and it will get done. And I think those are kind of the yin and yang and they work together. So I need a deadline because I’m lazy without one and I’m also a perfectionist where I was just going to keep tweaking and tweaking and it never feels quite done.

So I need a deadline and then I need some sort of process and that could just be “get up and write 500 words a day” or whatever and then I need some form of feedback. Deadline, process, feedback. For a book, that means I’m going to write this by March 1st, my process is, if I have six months to write it, I’m going to write 500 words a day, I’ll have a manuscript done by that time. Then feedback is, I’m going to work with this editor who is going to tell me what they think about it. Readers will talk about the thing about it, but at that point I’m too late.

**[0:17:39.6] AT:** Yeah, let's maybe get some feedback before the readers see it, yeah.

**[0:17:42.2] JG:** So in the case of working with that research assistant, in the case of this podcast or whatever, I'm constantly feeling inspired because I'm like, "Okay, we have blocked out a day, half a day to talk about this stuff," you come with some topics and I go, I don't know anything about that. By the end of it, I'm really energized because I go, "I didn't know that I thought this but now that we talked about it, I'm going to go write about that because I learned what I really thought about something by putting myself in an environment where I was forced to perform really, where I was forced to give an answer based on my own knowledge and research."

**[0:18:18.1] AT:** Isn't that really — I think you've offered a lot of people is freedom to say, "I'm not sure yet therefore," I mean, if you want to have a winning idea, you need some verbal volleying, right? Which is in Tennis, back and forth is the volley, or volleyball. It's this idea of, this back and forth of the ideas. Through that, you will solidify what you really think. Where a lot of people just go, "What do I think? What do I think? What do I think?" Well you need somebody or some way of kind of going back and forth with it. I think that that's, again it goes back to community, do you have people you can do that with?

**[0:18:56.1] JG:** Right. Yeah, so here's a practical way to do it for my own craft of writing, there's this sort of catch 22 of I want to write a book for example but I don't know what it's going to be about and do I just write until I figure out what it's going to be about or do I wait until I figure out exactly what my argument is going to be and the write it? The answer is "yes". I mean for most writers I know, most creative, the answer is "yes".

Yes, you just pick something and start working on it and yes you're going to learn as you're building it, as you're creating it, you're going to better understand what it is that it needs to be. There's that Michael Angelo quote and I'm paraphrasing here where he would see the sculpture in the big block of marble and it was his job to just sort of chip away at it until it was there.

**[0:19:40.2] AT:** Actually Malcolm Gladwell said that. Michael Angelo stole it from him.

**[0:19:43.2] JG:** Yeah.

**[0:19:43.4] AT:** I'm just kidding. No you're right, there's something and they're waiting to be revealed.

**[0:19:47.4] JG:** You don't know what it is until it's there and then you go, "That's what I was searching for and I didn't know until I started." So it's not like I — in some cases, if you're building a bridge or whatever it is, it's a little bit more true, and you're not like putting the suspension pieces together and going, "Oh, that's what it's supposed to look like."

You're architecting it and engineering it and building out and I obviously don't know anything about building bridges and you go, "That's what it needs to look like." But in a more creative field, I think it's one part planning and one part discovery as you're creating it.

**[0:20:17.1] AT:** I love your analogy you're carrying because the reality of it is, what no one's ever seen a picture of is the left over from the Statue of David. What about all the extra rock? It's rock. What about all those little — those were not attractive, but were they necessary? Yeah, because you have to move them out of the way. So on, so many of us as creative go, "I just want to write the sentence and let that be the sentence forever." The reality is, and you teach people this all the time, in Tribe Writers on your blog, is that you've got to create a lot to get good stuff, right?

**[0:20:54.7] JG:** Yeah.

**[0:20:56.3] AT:** That's part of the process. So you're not doing it wrong when you cut 80% of your words because you had to get 100% to get the 20% of the good stuff, right?

**[0:21:04.9] JG:** Right. Yeah, so to make it super practical, I think you just pick something. You pick an argument, you pick a project, you pick a direction and then you start building it and as you start building it or start writing it or whatever. I believe, because it happens almost every time. You realize, "Oh, I actually don't think that, that's not true." So I was writing a blog post today and I was like, "I want to explore this."

I wanted to explore “what’s the difference between a professional and an amateur?”, and I didn’t know. I had some ideas but I knew that once I started writing it, if I had a direction, I would figure it out. I was like, “I think maybe there’s seven things.” Like that was totally arbitrary. I was like, “But I think maybe seven things?” So I just started writing seven things and I was like, “Okay, this is the direction,” and I wrote about 50% of it and it was wrong. I just kind of wrote this story.

When I started out writing, I thought this, I did this and I did that. I realized, “Oh this is the argument.” The argument is, I used to chase the results instead of the process, I’d see Andy succeeding and I’d go, I want what Andy has, I’m going to do what I think Andy is doing to get that result and the truth is he wasn’t doing that at all, he was working his own weird process and I didn’t understand the process.

When I finally understood what it took to succeed as a writer, it was following this disciplined process day after day, not going, “Oh, she’s writing satyr, I’m going to write satyr now because that’s what it takes to succeed.” It wasn’t just one random technique, it was really just the whole process of, “No, they picked a topic, they stuck with it, it was more about this discipline of just continuing to do this process over and over again.” And it ended up being about seven things, “Here’s what a pro does, here’s what an amateur doesn’t do. Here’s what a pro does, here’s what an amateur doesn’t do.”

**[0:22:46.8] AT:** Yeah, we live in kind of a 3D printing world where you go, “Hey, I just want to make that,” hit a button and it will happen, right? We forget, there’s a process and very few people ever show their process which is why we go, “Man, just everything they do is great.” I remember, I think we were sitting in the same room, somebody asked Chris Guillebeau, “Why does everything you do work?” And he said, “The stuff that doesn’t work, you don’t see because it didn’t work.”

**[0:23:10.2] JG:** Yeah, by definition.

**[0:23:11.9] AT:** Right? That’s how everything I do works, is you don’t see the failures.

**[0:23:14.9] JG:** Yeah. So there you go, it’s really about the process and the process for me and I think for a lot of people is going to be, you’re going to start somewhere start with some rough

plan and it will probably change but go ahead and give yourself some structure and then get to work and as you work, and as you start chipping away at the marble, the statue so to speak will reveal itself and you'll go, "Oh, now I know what I think, now I know what this needs to look like. Okay, now I'm going to create it and polish it and turn it into this thing that I never would have known had I not started somewhere anywhere just to get going."

[END OF EPISODE]

**[0:23:50.7] AT:** Where do you get your unlikely inspiration? Let us know by going to [Goinswriter.com/111](http://Goinswriter.com/111) and it's also the place where you can go if you'd like to share this episode. I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us. Now, go build your portfolio.

[END]