**SYP PODCAST TRANSCRIPT**

**FREELANCING WITH LAURA JONES**

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**[0:02] SHIV:** Welcome to this episode of Inside Publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.

Today's guest is Laura Jones of 404 Ink and Dead Ink Books. We talk through the highs of freelancing,  including the geographical freedom it supports and the passion projects that can be pursued - as well as the lows, such as the stresses of starting out. And one of the reasons we all go to work: the money.

Hi, Laura, thank you for joining me today. How are you?

**[0:35] LAURA:** I’m great. How are you doing?

**[0:37] SHIV:** Not too bad. We're really excited to have you as a guest on today's show. So would you mind before we get into the nitty-gritty details of today's episode giving me a little bit of information about yourself and kind of your publishing path so far?

**[0:53] LAURA:** Hi everybody, I’m Laura. I guess I've been working in the publishing world since 2014.

I think I’ve had what would be called a pretty traditional lead up into the publishing world. I studied English Literature at Edinburgh University from 2008 to 2012. I then went into studying publishing: the Publishing Studies course at the University of Stirling from 2012 to 2014. And then I was lucky enough to get my first job, while still studying at Saraband (Saraband being the independent publisher, back when they were based in Glasgow).

I managed to become their Editorial and Marketing Assistant from 2014 to 2015. I kind of hoped that it would last a bit longer, but as will probably be the theme of this podcast episode, money is always a problem. That position was funded partly by Creative Scotland. So the funding ran out, and therefore my job ran out, which kind of left me in a bit of a stranded situation in that - at that time - in Scotland and Scottish publishing there weren't many job opportunities, at least none that I could find.

So I thought, well, I guess I should try this freelance thing that I hear things about. You know, there might be an opportunity in that kind of avenue. And during some of that time, I was also on the SYP Scotland committee; I think I was there for probably the full three years or so in various capacities.

Yeah, I think in terms of things pretty much what could be considered a traditional trajectory into publishing. But it hasn't been traditional since then, pretty much!

**[2:27] SHIV:** Something that struck my interest when I was kind of delving into my personal research about your history was an article that you wrote in 2015, when you just kind of launched your freelance career, called “The F Word: Freelancing, the Dirty Word.”

Things that you covered in that was this divide between necessity and desire, as well as the geographical freedom that freelancing gives you. Which seems poignant now, given that you were in Scotland, and I believe that you live in Cardiff at the moment.

Where do you stand now? You know, six years after releasing that article, you're no longer a newbie freelancer; your career is well established.

**[3:14] LAURA:** Yeah, I have to say, I was actually almost kind of mortified to be reminded a bit. I forgot that I put this little, I guess, stream of consciousness out on LinkedIn at the time.

So, yeah, some context around that. [It] was I think around November 2015 that I put up this article that was very broad. There's all these attitudes, anti-freelance attitudes, in Scottish publishing and, you know, they're seen as lesser than paid employees, lesser than full time employees, blah blah blah.

Looking back, I'm not sure that's wholly accurate. I think I had a bit of, you know, maybe bitterness, my job running out and, you know, I had fire in my belly at the time. I think looking back there are definitely nuggets of truth in there.

 I mean, it was interesting to read that - at that time - in the previous three years in Scotland, there was apparently a 25% increase in the number of self-employed and freelancing graduates which is incredible, and I'd love to know if that's still the case today.

But yeah, looking back, I think generally the gist is still there, and it's still accurate. I feel like if you're going to go into freelancing you do need to jump in full-heartedly with faith in yourself.

I must admit that having read it back I definitely had some - I guess you could call them safety nets. I did have savings stemming from previous jobs that I did, you know. I also didn't mention I've done odd jobs in retail and every year I worked with Edinburgh Christmas Market to make a bit of cash when other jobs didn't quite pay the rent. So I had built up some savings and that was something I had to fall back on.

So freelance for me - I didn't realise it at the time, [but] it was a little bit of an easier potential journey for me. But yeah, generally it's correct, I think.

I would take a little bit more caution in telling newbie freelancers to to be quite as wholehearted as I was, particularly as I can say is it comes from a point of some privilege, but I think we're going to talk a bit about it later in terms of geography and where you're based in particular. So if you're, you know, in Scotland, and there are few opportunities - and I believe it's probably the same in Wales. [For] general opportunities in publishing, all the jobs are in London, as we know.

All the jobs, to be honest, [are] in America - if you want to go to America to work in publishing, you probably have much more opportunities than here! So London is the place to be, unfortunately, if you don't want to be like I didn't want to be, and I still don't want to be.

In that way, nothing has changed, even though I've moved to Cardiff. That was a personal move; my partner got a job here. So we kind of had to go with a job loss, but it didn't affect me whatsoever. I have the same clients. I've picked up some new clients, I've picked up some new London-based clients, but my geography just doesn't come into it at all. That's fantastic! And I think that can be the case for new freelancers.

I would put on the caveat though, that when I wrote this I had just done a year of work at Saraband, I had worked with SYP, I had done my master's degree. So I had a network; I met people in real life. A lot of my first clients at that time were Saraband authors who wanted me to help them with their social media, occasional[ly] making the ebooks. Sarah from Saraband kept me doing typesetting bits and bobs. So I definitely had that safety net as well. It's a very different position right now. So anybody who's looking to go into freelancing and publishing, having just gone through the pandemic, and if you're going into it for the first time and looking for your first clients, it is going to be tougher, it's probably gonna be a lot tougher than when I had my running start.

**[6:39] SHIV:** Yeah, I think what really resonates with me [is] what you said about geographical location. I'm from the Midlands and I now reside in Chester. So whilst publishing, I think, is an amazing industry, its London-centric-ness is not something that appeals to me personally. Whereas freelance gives you that opportunity to do so. So I would be interested how it came about that you created your brand 404 Ink?

**[7:09] LAURA:** Well, yeah, 404 kind of did kick off from some very strong need to avoid having to move to London. Again, I feel like I should add the caveat. Nothing against those who come from London and love London! I know it’s such a passionate thing for people who are happy living there and happy having careers there. That's fantastic.

I think my main thing is just that I grew up in Scotland for the first 30 years of my life. So I do consider that home. I just felt no reason to leave. And so my business partner, Heather McDade, who I started 404 Ink with had pretty much the exact same ethos. [We] decided we did not want to have to go to London to do interviews, for jobs, let alone even move there. We both had bad experiences with interviews in London. My worst one was having spent my own money to get down there on the train and spent my own money to stay in a hotel, did the interview, and then didn't even get a rejection. I just heard nothing back ever again. And I think Heather had quite similar experiences. I don't know if it's still the case today, I really hope not. But that certainly made us angry, and maybe overly angry at the publishing industry.

But it was that fire that kind of pushed us into creating 404 based in Edinburgh. We were both living in Edinburgh at the time. We just thought if we can't get jobs in London, and the job market in Scotland is similarly quite small, we're just gonna have to do it ourselves, we're gonna have to make our own way. And we realised that we had very separate skill sets. I'm much more inclined towards the production end of things. And I quite like playing with our finances. And she's good with the marketing. She loves doing all the social media and everything. We knew exactly where our gaps were. So we knew: “Oh, well, we know people who we can get on board to do that. So actually, would we be able to make a publishing company of our own? Could we represent this part of the community that we think is lacking?”. And as you mentioned, at this time we were, I think, like 23 / 24 years old.

We definitely had, also, that feeling of “oh, we don’t care about the books that are coming out from here”. You know, your gritty crime, your Rebuses, and your, you know, tartan shortbread, tourist advertising kind of books that in hindsight we know that are so vital to the Scottish publishing industry. But at the time, we were like, this is not for us. This is not what we're reading; this is not what we're interested in.

We want to read gritty fiction and [our] own voices, poetry we want, we want all these things that we're not seeing coming out of Scotland. So yeah, that was kind of where that started. And just a belligerence! Just we have to do this if we're otherwise we're just going to have to become part of the system. And we really hated that.

We really liked the idea of being a big cog in a small machine that was our own, as opposed to small cogs in a massive machine that we're just gonna get lost. And we just thought that was also the best way of getting experience - just doing it yourself and teaching yourself as you go. I mean, starting your own publishing company, there's no experience quite like that.

Granted, you might not be learning the ways of big corporate publishing, but we thought, well, maybe that could come later. And we didn't think that 404 was going to be as successful as it was. So we at least thought that whatever we did with it, hopefully that could become really good CV fodder. At the time we thought, well, if this doesn't work out, we at least have a nice thorough, bulked-up slightly, CV!

**[10:35] SHIV:** I suppose you've kind of pinpointed there one of the great things about freelance in that you get to choose your projects to a certain degree, especially what you've said about kind of finding a gap in the market, and really delving into something that you're personally invested in. And I think that's very true of 404 Ink.

I remember purchasing *Nasty Women* thinking this is quite unlike some of the other kind of feminism pieces that I've read about. And I know that you've got your Inkling series coming out as well, which is really exciting. Especially my partner is well into D&D, so that one specifically about queer communities I've already got pinned as something that I need to read. How do you then choose your titles?

**[11:19] LAURA:** We don’t! We’re quite careful actually to not look for anything - we like to just open up our submissions window when we can and then we justsee what lands. That was a bit trickier in the early days. Luckily, now that we have a bit more of a reputation, people know that we're legit and we like to work hard. People like to work with us for the sake of working with us. They trust us with their books, and that's great. So that means we're starting to get authors who are at the beginning of their journeys and starting to look to the bigger picture. And therefore we get a lot of debuts, [which] we're really happy to be part of.

We basically just say that we have a list of things that we probably won't publish just because we're not experienced in that side of the market. So that might be, obviously, your children's books. And maybe, I guess…the term “checklist”, I'm doing air quotes here, I think that's a bit of an outdated term there. But probably, you know, the kind of sci fi fantasy and the things we're not so confident in marketing.  It's more about for us the contemporary, the gritty. We like the term alternative, whatever that might mean; we'd like to think that “alternative” has a shared knowledge and people go “okay, I think I understand what you mean by alternative”. Basically something that's not going to be picked up by any of the big publishers, we'll definitely have a go on.

 Like I said, we've been publishing poetry about identity and belonging in somebody who's Latin American, and moving to Scotland living there, and then has experienced there as a gay man. And we're publishing some debut fiction from an author who was part of Inklings. And that's a fictional story of somebody who is just trying to basically survive, actually, ironically, living in London, being part of the, you know, music fandom, and then accidentally kind of becoming part of a of a threesome in a way, in a accidentally polyamorous relationship. So that was definitely a really interesting one to read. We just thought, well, that fits with 404, we're totally gonna go for that.

And then we also have a book that's coming out, it's going to be based half in India and half in Skye in Scotland, kind of almost an anti-wanderlust book, which is, again, completely different from what we expect us to be interested in publishing - that's not something we put down on paper. So this isn’t the kind of book we were looking for, but it just landed with us. And we loved it. And we can see so much potential for it. So we thought, let's go for it.

And then we're publishing a memoir from Carrie Marshall all about being a trans woman, which is really a funny memoir, like we hadn't seen a funny memoir, you know, in terms of like trans memorials for a while. Definitely we've read some humour in there. But Carrie is just actual laugh-out-loud funny, amongst all of the hardships that come along with being a trans woman. So we just kind of accept whatever lands on our lap and kind of, it's more about reading it and going, “that's a 404 book”. And it's really hard to explain, and I think our sales team hate us for it! Because we can't just say we want these things. It is much more we'd much rather just open up the window, see what lands, and then we'll vibe with something.

I think it can at times frustrate people, maybe people who submit their books as well, because they submit a book to us that they think oh, this is a 404 book. This is exactly [what] should fit on their list. But we're just not  - well, there's something about it. It's just not entirely 404 Ink. I don't want to say the word magic, but it's just me and Heather look at each other and we go yeah, yeah, yeah, this is it. Yeah. Okay, this works. Yeah, this is totally one of our books.

So that's the book side of things. Whereas Inklings [is] a lot more succinct and it's a lot more of a methodical kind of thing we're looking for. So with the Inklings, for those who don't know, it's a nonfiction series. And it's like little pocket books about all kinds of topics. But the point is, it's barely about 100 pages, and you can literally fit it in, you know, your back pocket and walk around with it. The point is that you can dip into it if you're wanting to learn about something, but you don't want to read a massive 300-page book about it. But [if] you're curious, these little books kind of give you a little bit of insight.

So last year, a series dealt with the history and the impact of the fashion of Prince. We also looked at the queer culture of the TV show Schitts Creek; we looked at trans masculinity in the UK; we've looked at how the structural integrity of the universities in the UK [have] fared after COVID. So that's [an] incredibly niche area… About women in hip hop, one about kind of living in between two identities when you're a person of mixed race. So a lot of it is about the personal experience of those authors.

It always has a twist on it. In our heads, we branch them into to kind of the lived experience, sort of personal books, and then we have kind of the cultural-based books, but the cultural books always have a slight element of identity.

And they're like - like you say that the one that we have coming up like Dungeons and Dragons - there is, you know, a look at the queer community around that and how, you know, queer communities have shaped D&D, not necessarily just in recent years, but in you know, many, many years previously. And we love that that's called *They Came To Slay*, we just think that's such a fun title.

So - [laughs] - so with those we do have a very specific, right, we’re looking for this and the submission process is based around that. So we're asking people to really identify: what are you trying to say with this?

Some of the submissions we get are a little bit too big, a little bit too vague, kind of trying to encapsulate… Imagine trying to do an inkling base about the entirety of feminism! That's how that works, in terms of Inklings, and it's lovely. It's going pretty well, this is our second year of doing them and we're crowdfunding them on Kickstarter right now.

And we just found out that Patton Oswalt backed us a few days ago, which was very exciting. It's not everyday you can say Patton Oswalt bought your books there anyway. Yeah. So…that felt like a bit of an advert! I promise I didn't mean that to sound like an advert for Inklings.

**[16:50] SHIV:** I think that's quite all right! So you mentioned that you work with Heather, who’s your co-founder of 404. And I'm also aware that you use a network of freelancers.  How does it feel to be both on the receiving end of freelancing - you know, your website, you've got the possibility for admissions for work - whilst also then being the delegator of freelancers in your own personal company?

**[17:19] LAURA:** This is great. I love doing it. And I hope it means that [at] 404 we are good employers, because both Heather and I are freelancers. [So] we'd like to think we know what a freelancer needs. Like, usually, as soon as an invoice comes in, we pay it that same day if we catch it early - within 10 minutes kind of thing - just because that's what we want to see in the industry. We love it when we're paid that quickly. Doesn't happen that often…!

But we like to hope it could happen. So yeah, that works really well. And I really do hope me saying this… If any, you know, if any freelancers who have worked for us are hearing me say this, and they're like, they weren't that good to work with - I'm sorry. But we do aspire, I promise we try so hard.

It can mess up your head a little bit. Within the same hour I could be, you know, emailing a freelance client of ours, somebody who we're hiring, like, oh, we need this, we need this.

And I'm switching over to my other email address. And then I'm talking to somebody who's hiring me and going like, oh, I need this by this day. Can you? Oh, no, I'm sorry, can I have a bit more time on this bottle? I don't know. I guess I don't think about it too much. Maybe if I think about it, my brain is going to break. Maybe I just have to roll with it and not get too deep into thinking about it.

I love it. I do love it. I love the flexibility. Getting to work with different people all the time. That's great. We did get into a bit of a habit of working with people who we know we work well with. So we gave them multiple projects. And I think after a while we started to [think] oh, maybe it's our responsibility to get in some different people, some new freelancers, if we can. We do like to try and give some new opportunities, if possible, to those who are just starting out.

I try to, again, pay them fairly. So it's always nice to work with different people and be surprised. Like, for us, the main thing is cover design. It’s something we know we obviously have no knowledge in; we have no kind of design experience. So we have to pass that off to very experienced freelancers. And pretty much every book now that we do is done by a different designer, obviously, except for the Inklings series. That's all branding done by Luke Bird. So we stick with him for that. But everything else is yeah…We just decided to go for a different freelancer for each book, working with many people and giving as many opportunities as you can as well. If we're not doing that, for the industry, then what are we doing?

**[19:35] SHIV:** And it feeds into what you said about the publishing industry being a tough place to start out in just getting your foot in the door really. So the more opportunities there are to be included in projects and things like that is kind of increasing inclusivity and diversity, tapping into talent that may have otherwise gone amiss.

How do you therefore keep all of your plates spinning, as it were, since you've got your own publishing company, your freelance work, and then as well as being like the interim publisher for Dead Ink? What does an average day look like in the life of Laura Jones?

**[20:16] LAURA:** There is no average day, basically, every day is different. Technically, how it should work, I do two days a week for Dead Ink - it started as three days a week, it's about to go down to two days a week. And then the rest of the time I spend freelancing - if you can do maths as well as I can originally that's five days and then freelancing around it.

So the 404 days are a bit more flexible. Heather understands that sometimes I need to drop off and do some urgent freelance deadlines for other clients. So I do freelance work with clients occasionally, such as Knights Of, Charco Press, Cipher Press, [inaudible], [and] I just started some work for Bloomsbury, [inaudible]. Those are my kind of increasingly most regular clients. I'm usually talking to at least one or two of them every week.

So if there are any hours, I do try to keep it 9-to-5 now. [It] used to be the case where I've been working 10pm, 11pm, 12, you know; I used to have insane hours, it was really unhealthy. Unfortunately, I probably say it did help set me up as a hard worker, a fast worker. But it definitely was at the cost of, you know, at times my mental health, so I had to kind of rein that in a little bit once I got more established and I created some more boundaries. So now I'm definitely much more of a nine to fiver. Occasionally, it'll be 9 to 6, 7. If it's crunch time, especially when 404 are doing a Kickstarter, if we're doing something big, that needs a little bit extra time.

But basically, no average day! Even when I should be focusing on 404 for this one day, or Dead Ink on this day, honestly, I can always see pings on my email when another client is emailing an urgent thing. But okay, I'll zip in, I'll do that, make that change, send it back, go back to the thing I was doing originally.

So the only thing that keeps me routed, the only thing that is a constant in the week of Laura is Heather, and we have a meeting every Tuesday to kind of just touch base and see where we are on deadlines and how things are going, which we never did [before].

And it was really - I don't know why we didn't  - it took the pandemic for us to finally actually talk to each other on a weekly basis, because we usually were on Slack. Like every day, we're constantly like pinging each other relevant things. But we never spoke face to face, and then kind of made it clear who had to do what and when deadlines, which are vital, obviously. And suddenly, everything got a bit smoother when we did that. So we've kept that up through the entire pandemic. And you know, things are lightening up a bit. We currently live at different ends of the country, so we have to keep that up. So that might be the only thing that is a constant. Otherwise, I am dipping in and out of all three of my hats at the same time.

I'm also on the board of Publishing Scotland. I'm a board member. So even though that's only four meetings a year, technically, there's a little bit of, you know, voluntary work in the background there. So occasionally I'll do a bit of that as well. Yeah, my days are full, they could be a bit emptier. Might be nice, but I'm not very good at taking holidays, I don't know how people can do it. I just get very jealous - I see people on holiday on Instagram, like how are you doing that? Then I realise ah, forward planning, maybe I should get on board with that! I just tend to look at, you know, my two weeks ahead of time, I never really think months ahead of time. Surprisingly, I think a month ahead of time in terms of publishing books. So that ,yeah, there's your warning for anybody looking at freelancing: you need to make sure you remember yourself.

**[23:48] SHIV:** So could you tell us a few top tips of how to get into freelancing in the publishing industry and [the] key skills that are needed?

**[23:58] LAURA:** Of course. It depends what you're going into freelancing to do, but I think on a general basis, you have to be very self-disciplined. You have to be self-disciplined, you need to have your deadlines tight, and you know what they are and you allocate them. And you have good communication skills with your clients to make those boundaries and say, I need it by this time, and it'll be ready by this time.

And then in terms of, you know, payment and finance, I typically only really invoice the… I don't really do half up front and half later, I just tend to do a big amount at the end.

The values you need to have and the abilities you need to have [are] good communication, good time management. Those are the obvious essentials. But in terms of getting clients is a tricky thing that, of course, I think freelancers are asked all the time. As I mentioned earlier, I think the pre-existing network I had really helped; the fact that I worked in a full-time job for a year in publishing. So some people were aware of me. The key thing was I shared, I shouted about it. I made a website. I think a website is a bare essential, you need to have something out there. If you're a designer, it has to be a portfolio and it has to be online, you know. Like, sending potential clients your PDF, portfolios, and everything is great, but you have to be aware that quite often those emails are going to be filed away. It's just a bit easier sometimes to click on a link and see your website and see everything in one place, as opposed to opening up a PDF or looking for an email that you know, you got months ago, even years ago -

**[25:24] SHIV:** I think the interactiveness of it as well is quite self-serving to your own purposes, you can kind of showcase in your skill set too.

**[25:32] LAURA:** Yeah, there has to be. And especially you have to showcase what you are; the services you're selling. So if you're selling designing services, your website needs to be nice, it needs to look good, you've got to put it all out there, your social media needs to look nice. I've always been a bit torn about the social media side of things because I got in trouble for my social media before, because I can get a bit grumpy and sassy and I'll call out companies for bad behaviour. And sometimes I'm, you know, a bit angry and unfair. And, you know, yeah, I have definitely been told off, which is fine. But at the same time, I didn't want to just like sanitise myself for the sake of keeping a job or getting a job. I always thought somebody [if] wants to work with me, they'll…I don't say overlook the social media. But you know, they'll be like, well, that's not all she is.

So yeah, there's an element of being like, don't tailor, don't pretend to be somebody else in your social media. But also, you know, you don't have to make it a perfect, beautiful picture of professional 9-to-5 life, you know - Instagram worthy life goals, work-life goals, whatever, you know, because that's all  - to me, that's rubbish and made up anyway. Because we're all just hunkered over a keyboard most of the time with coffee dripped down our shirts, and you know, all that stuff.

So when it comes to putting yourself out there, obviously be somewhat professional, but you don't have to worry about it that much. Unless you are freelancing in social media, then yes, your social media should probably be good. That's my only caveat.

**[27:02] SHIV:** I think you've highlighted something that is integral to freelancing, which is that you're building your own brand. You're not Penguin, you're not Bloomsbury, and therefore, you know, if you do want to have a certain kind of flair, you can go about and do that. Because ultimately it kind of boils down to you, doesn't it? As you said, putting yourself forward and people will take or leave it. I imagine that's quite a liberating theory.

**[27:33] LAURA:** Yeah, I think flair is a really good word for that, actually. Yeah, it is showing your personality: what part of you shines on social media? What part of you shines in the work that you do? What are you actually passionate about, and you know, talk about that. So when I talk about, you know, being angry about something [in the] industry is because it comes from a place of passion, I want it to be better. So you know, twist that on its head and be like, well, that's an opportunity to talk about why these things could be better and to at the same time then celebrate the things that do work about publishing and talk about those.

Not to put things that don't work under the carpet, but there's just freedom and, you know, talk about things that you want to talk about and put your…I always try to avoid saying branding when it's attached to one person. I'm much more comfortable talking about branding for…like 404 Ink has a brand.

I don't like to say that I have a brand. But saying that you have to admit there's always a part of what you put out there as a potential employee, potential freelance employee, it is part of a brand and you know, that flair, you should really, absolutely figure out what that is. And make that clear on any platform that you're on where you're trying to sell your wares. Whether that's your work, or, you know, if you're a writer. Don't just dampen yourself [for], say, a figurative employer you might have years from now, because that's what I was doing.

**[28:51] SHIV:** So freelancing and money is a big topic. You probably experienced yourself being with Saraband, you would have had a stable income. You have X amount, month on month. What then happened once you started freelancing in terms of managing your money?

**[29:10] LAURA:** It definitely got more strict. I opened up my bank account app a lot more. So when I was at Saraband that was 2014 to 2015. So I think I was on £15,000 then which was okay - I was living in Edinburgh and commuting into Glasgow. And at that time, you know, my rent - God, when I look back I think my rent at that time was about £300, which was incredible how times have changed so quickly in seven or so years.

So obviously I was quite nervous to lose that income. But as I said, I did have some savings. So I knew I had some time to try and establish myself. I feel like I should almost open up my spreadsheet and have a look back because obviously I've got accounts of every single year. Maybe that's the first thing. Actually I did; I started a master spreadsheet. So now I have tabs of every single year and I actually put down every single job I've had, how much money I got, and how much needs to go towards tax because that's a huge thing that nobody thinks about when they start freelancing. They forget that they need to put aside a good 20%. And I only started doing that far too late. That's my number one piece of advice - put aside your tax early. Oh, boy.

So yeah, so I went from I think about £15,000 to…I'm pretty sure the next year was probably half that. It was not, not much. I mean, again, I was living pretty cheaply. So it was manageable. But gradually, I started to get regular jobs. Like I said, Bloody Scotland, I started to get that. And that became a regular bit of monthly income, not a huge amount, maybe a couple of hundred pounds a month if that.

And then I started at it - well, how I met Heather, the other of 404 - was through Scotland Fest, which was a virtual literary festival as part of The Saltire Society. We did that for two years. And that was a good couple of thousand pounds from my memory. And this is when I started picking up bits and bobs because, you know, I was putting together a little festival, I started talking again to more publishers and more authors. Just doing that gets your name out there, even if they might sort of recognise my name from Saraband. And then when 404 kicked off, people started to recognise my name a little bit more from a different end of things. I think some people got confused because some people knew me from Bloody Scotland, some people knew me from The Saltire Society, some people knew me from Saraband, some 404. And I think some people had some trouble putting that all together. And it took a while for that to kind of reconcile and go, oh, so she offers all of these services. And gradually that started to feed through.

And then I started getting all these little jobs from, again, authors. And I think that's when publishers gradually started to get in touch with me. Occasionally I would go to publishers and email them just coldly and say, “Well, I'm available for typesetting”. Most of the time nothing came from that. I think the most success I've had is actually social media, because I had a healthy following. Probably from the beginning, you know, my beginning being when I started studying, publishing Sterling, and through Saraband, like, so it's all been gradual steps. There was no like, you know, one year, it just, you know, like my income doubled or anything like that. It was always just a really small bit every year.

And now… So I think my last year, my gross income was about £25,000, which for freelancing I think is pretty good. Of course, you can take 20% off of that.

And I think this financial year just passed, I think I've just about £20,000. So you know, that's about a £5000 gap, which I can manage, because my partner's also got a reasonably well-paid job. So we're quite kind of equal in that way, which keeps us nice and comfortable. So I feel very fortunate - not to say it's not hard! And I'm, you know, I am working hard. And it took a long time to get to this point. Only a couple of years ago, I was still maybe getting about 16 grand, which, again, still pretty good for a freelancer but I think that has come from 404 and reputation-wise, and the practice, you know, the practice and experience you get before it has all added up.

I kind of worry that people look at that and go, “Well, of course, you know, she started a company. So of course she's doing this as well.” But it was a lot of baby steps. Like I said, a lot of long hours, a lot of investment in my personal - air quotes - brand, which I'm still working on every day. I guess what I'm trying to say is like, you know, I did have that reliable income and it was scary the year after, and it was coming in bits. And I could still manage but I absolutely know a lot of people won't have that fortune to be able to do that. I was really quite lucky.

And you know, from there on I've managed to cultivate quite a successful freelancing career. Yeah, yeah, I really do hope that we can get more people on board with freelancing, but I think it's tougher now than it was then. Just with the cost of living going up. I don't think we can talk about money in freelancing without talking about the incredible rises in cost of living right now. So I wouldn't blame anybody being terrified about the idea of freelancing right now. I salute anybody who is going into freelancing for the first time during this strict period because I'm scared right now, you know, again, looking at my income and thinking, oh well, my, my gas bills are going up double. But at the same time, I know there's things I can do. That's the nice thing about being a freelancer, you can go, well, I'm just gonna pick up more work. Obviously, if you're on a full-time contract, if you're a payee, you can't just go to your boss and go… Well, you *should* be able to go to your boss and go, “Well, could I just have it please?” Because look at the world around us. As a freelancer, I can actually go, well, I'm gonna go pick up some more work that might, you know, harm my boundaries that I mentioned earlier of not working beyond 9 to 5 and not working on weekends. But it's there, you know, I mean, the opportunity is there. I can't say I'd recommend it, but we have to be realistic and sometimes overwork is just a part of the freelance life.

**[34:53] SHIV:** That's a very poignant point about the cost of living. It’s a bit of a tangent. It's, you know, [I] went to do my food shop the other day and nearly dropped this block of cheese thinking, oh God, it's gone up 15 pence. And it doesn't sound like a great deal, really. But when everything has gone up 15 pence, it's a different ballgame that we're dealing with. And it is scary, especially when the world has been rocked by COVID. And the amount of insecurity, financial or otherwise, that that has harboured. So I'm really thankful for your transparency and kind of talking about your finances, because it's quite easy to just push them under a rug and not tell people. But certainly, in the UK, the socio-economic climate at the moment is quite precarious.

**[35:44] LAURA:** Yeah, yeah, incredibly. I think maybe that now having spoken about that, that's something that should be taken into account with the little article I wrote seven years ago. And at that time there was no COVID, there were no huge rising costs, there was none of this. Yeah, a bit of a scary reality we have today. And these are extra factors you have to consider if you want to be a freelancer.

We haven't even really spoken about people who are freelancing and who might want to get out of freelancing because of this, and they might want to get into a more secure job, which is also completely fine and viable.

I mean [...] I think it's irregular, at least every couple of months I have a crisis of faith in being a freelancer and thinking, oh, I should really be getting a regular job. Because of course when I think about things like, you know, I won't have maternity leave as a freelancer, I don't have a pension of any kind, I don't have a lot of these securities. So we might end up seeing that kind of change, we might actually see people moving out of the freelance life looking for some more security, if they can get a well paid job that keeps their head above the living cost rises right now.

**[36:51] SHIV:** [inaudible] said that at the moment, as of like January 2022, that there [were] about 14.19 million self-employed people in the UK. However, in early 2020, it [peaked to over] 5 million. So there's been quite a drop really in the amount of people that were self-employed. And for whatever reason - whether they've gone into, as you mentioned, a stable job or otherwise - have taken the leap against freelancing, self employment, whatever that may look like for them.

Yeah, and I wouldn't be surprised if that happens in publishing as well. But at the same time - this is a slight deviation - but I know I've seen on Twitter where the case [is] that in America a lot of editors are leaving their jobs, big publishers, because they're just not getting promotions. They're absolutely valid, they aren't getting pay raises when they deserve them. Because, you know, the publishing industry, not just in the UK, but also in the US is painfully underpaid. So, for us, it might be a worry that it's not even people leaving freelance work to go into publishing and that people are leaving publishing altogether - because I think that, for me, the freelancing is probably better paid than if I tried to get a full-time job in what I do. And yeah, that's something that publishing needs to look at itself about, if you know what I mean. We need to have a bit of a consideration of why we're losing talent, whether it is I wouldn't say losing it to freelancing, but not just losing it at all, I can see that happening more and more.

I was gonna pick up on the fact that I, a lot of the time, when I do talks about freelancing and realities, it does quite often end up on the negative side. Because, you know, we are always aware that there's a lack of transparency in publishing. And therefore that can usually end up [that] you talk more about the negatives, because people aren't talking about them. But on the flip side, I do feel like I have to say how much I do actually enjoy freelancing. So even though I said how difficult it can be, I do really like it. I love the freedom. I love the fact that I'm talking to different publishers every day, other different freelancers, and that at times there can be a sense of community. I'd quite like the community to be a bit bigger. But what is there is great. So I would always encourage people to at least try a little bit of freelancing on the side if there's something that you're interested in and have a skill and [inaudible] freelancing.

And every few months that I go, oh, maybe I should try and get a full-time job, I ultimately come back down to earth and go, no, this is what I should be doing. I'm happy doing this. Everybody around me is going, “You would be mad to drop all of this for a full-time job to get lost in a big system.” So I do love doing this. I love working for multiple publishers.

**[39:34] SHIV:** There's something to be said about being your own boss, I think.

**[39:39] LAURA:** Oh, yeah. I mean, you know, even today, I kind of reluctantly got out of bed at 9 o'clock. So I knew we were doing this at 11. And I got very little work done before that, but I know I'll get lots of work done afterwards. And that's okay. Like I know everything will get done and it won't look like necessarily a 9-to-5 all the time. And that's the great thing. Sometimes I feel like I could be a better boss to myself and give myself longer lunch hours, maybe. But by and large, Yeah, I'm okay.

So if anybody wants to get in touch with me about any questions about freelancing, again I know the transparency is a problem. So if you want any kind of advice, anyways, any questions, you can find me on Twitter at @laurafjones.

**[40:17] SHIV:** Well, thank you so much for giving so much food for thought. I think you've really catalogued kind of the highs and lows of freelancing. There is so much to take from it if you're willing to take that leap of faith.