

EPISODE 42

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:02] SP: I just got right to the end. I was so terrified. Of course, I was clueless. I had no self-awareness. All I was doing was feeling the emotion. I was just so terrified of actually finishing it, and then putting it out there for people to judge, even though nobody would give a shit, or even know that I'd written or anything. In my mind, it was a big deal. I just, like what they say in psychology, when you act out, you do something. I'm not going to say what it was, but it was enough that blew up my marriage and blew up the rest of what a regular life I had at that point.

It forced me to ask myself, why am I doing this? Am I just crazy? Why do I keep saving money, taking two years writing a book; nobody wants it. Nobody buys it. I can't get it published. Everybody thinks I'm an idiot. My family's in utter distress over, "Poor Steve. He's going down the tubes." I had to ask myself over and over, "Really, why am I doing this?" It's not for the money, because I'm not making any money. It's not for the recognition, because I'm not getting any recognition. I didn't see anything on the horizon, either. It wasn't like I thought, "Oh, I'm just this close and I'll be over the hump." The answer that I came up with is, I just can't do anything else. This is the only thing that gives me hope.

[00:01:31] LW: Hey, there. It's Light Watkins. We're back with another episode of At The End Of The Tunnel. I'm truly honored to have on the podcast this week, one of my biggest creative influences, author Steven Pressfield.

I first heard about Steven Pressfield through his book, *The War of Art* several years ago, when I was struggling to write my first book, *The Inner Gym*. Then I ran into another creative at Whole Foods one afternoon, and I'll never forget this. I was sharing about the struggles of writing this book and he said, "Dude, you have to get a copy of *The War of Art*. You can read it in a day. I just used it to finish the screenplay I've been working on."

I was sold. I immediately went out and I tracked down a copy of *The War of Art*, and I read it, and then I read it again. *The War of Art* is basically a guide book about overcoming resistance with a capital R. It was written by a creative, for creatives to help us push through the resistance and approach our writing, or our art, or whatever our passion happens to be, like a professional.

Steven Pressfield's intention was to help us understand the nature of resistance, so we can stop treating our work like amateurs; showing up for it when we feel inspired only. Instead, we start treating it like a job. Meaning, we show up to it every day, whether we feel like it or not. As my friend predicted, it was just what I needed in order to motivate myself to finish that book. No exaggeration, I now think about *The War of Art* every time I take on a new creative endeavor, including this podcast. I 100% guarantee you, if I hadn't read *The War of Art*, this podcast wouldn't exist, nor would any of my other books, because I would probably still be approaching my passion projects like an amateur.

Now meanwhile, there's a fascinating backstory to the creation of *The War of Art*, of course. There's always an interesting backstory. Somebody doesn't just write a groundbreaking, impactful book about overcoming resistance, without having to go toe to toe with resistance in their own life. Mr. Pressfield went through over 20 years of failures before he earned his first paycheck for writing.

He started writing in his mid-20s and he didn't get paid for it until his 50s. Can you imagine? While he's now known for writing this landmark self-help book, *The War of Art*, he's even more passionate about his fiction writing, and particularly historical fiction, which is often said in ancient times. His book, *Gates of Fire* sold millions of copies, and he's written 19 other books, half of them are self-help, but the other half of them are fiction.

His newest book, *A Man at Arms*, embodies the principles of the inner warrior, told through the story of a mercenary, who happens to be a recurring character, named Telamon of Arcadia. What I mean by that is, Telamon keeps reappearing fully formed in several of Steven Pressfield's novels, even though he's never planned in the initial outline. Steven Pressfield

decided that his inner muse was trying to tell him something. As he advises us in the *War of Art*, when that muse speaks, you better get your butt in front of a blank page and start creating. He wrote an entire novel about Telamon, which came out at the beginning of March 2021.

In our conversation, we go back to the beginning of Steven Pressfield's childhood, to the various odd jobs that he took on while he was avoiding his writing all those years; jobs that he now refers to in *The War of Art* as shadow careers, which are revenue streams that may look good on paper, but they're really an escape from us having to face our true purpose. We unpack how he eventually overcame the resistance himself and how he began taking his writing seriously, how that led to his first string of successes many decades later. More importantly, we talked about what he had to give up in the process of becoming a professional, including his own marriage.

This was a very fascinating conversation. I have to admit, I don't get nervous very often when I'm interviewing my guests, because I've done my research. But because Steven Pressfield is such a hero of mine, I was a little nervous. It was nice to feel that, because I was so eager to hear what he had to say. I can't wait to share this conversation with you.

Without further ado, I want to introduce you to the creative legend himself, Mr. Steven Pressfield.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:05:56] LW: Steven Pressfield, it's an honor to have you on At The End Of The Tunnel. This has been a long-time in the making. When I say that, I literally remember being in Whole Foods one day, and I ran into this fairly famous actor. He is someone I taught meditation to, because I was teaching meditation for years. He was asking me what I was up to. I was telling him, I was trying to write my first book. He said, "You have to get this book, *The War of Art*." I went out and got the book right away and devoured it. You heard the story a million times.

All that to say, we literally wouldn't be having this conversation on this podcast if I had not read that book. You are obviously the author of *The War of Art*. I want to get a little bit into the backstory about all of that later. I'm honored to be here and I'm having a full circle moment right now with one of my personal heroes, who I'm just getting a chance to meet in person for the very first time. Welcome to the podcast.

[00:06:54] SP: Hey. Thanks, Light. Like I was just saying to you before we started recording, you and Rich Roll are two of the guys that I really wanted to meet, above and beyond any other thing, just to meet you, because I've admired you for a long time in what you're doing. It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:07:09] LW: Yeah. We've crossed paths a few times. Actually, came to your Lionsgate book signing at the Diesel Bookstore in Brentwood.

[00:07:16] SP: Oh, isn't that right? Really?

[00:07:17] LW: Yeah. There was maybe a couple. There was a dozen people there. You gave a little talk, then you signed my book, and I was so excited, because you were the guy that wrote *The War of Art*. Then I would start to see you in Venice almost every other day, I would see you at Gjusta, because you would meet with some friends of yours and I would be there. I was actually reading *The Knowledge* at the time. It was really exciting for me just to even be in your presence and imagine what you guys were talking about on the other side of the restaurant. I figured maybe one day, hopefully, I get a chance to sit down and talk to you. That day has come.

[00:07:53] SP: Wow, that's amazing. Alright.

[00:07:57] LW: Listen, I like to start these interviews talking about your early days. I saw on your Wikipedia that you were born in Trinidad?

[00:08:05] SP: Yes.

[00:08:07] LW: What's the story behind that?

[00:08:08] SP: My dad was in the Navy. It was 1943, World War II. My mom was pregnant with me. It was a big deal, because she had to take a ship from New Orleans. The waters were infested with U-boats at the time. It was a very scary thing to be pregnant and coming down there. Yeah, so that was one of the happiest times in my parents' life. They took me back, or my mom took me back. My dad went off to the Pacific and my mom took me back when I was three-months-old. It's not like I have any real memories, but that's on my passport.

[00:08:44] LW: When you think back to little Steve, do you remember any toy, or activity that you really love, or cherished?

[00:08:53] SP: Wow, you're really going back here, Light. Actually, I was just talking to Diana, my girlfriend, that you were just talking to a minute ago, about we used to live on 94th Street in Lexington Avenue in New York until I was five. I remember the first time that I actually walked around the block by myself, the circumnavigating, when the concept of if you keep turning right, you're going to – I had these two Hopalong Cassidy cap pistols that I wore in the holster to protect me as I made this circumnavigation of 94th street. I remember them.

[00:09:29] LW: Is that something you would play with a lot, your cap pistols?

[00:09:33] SP: No, I don't remember anything else really, except that walking around the block that one time.

[00:09:39] LW: Right. Talk a little bit about your family dynamic when you were coming up. Your parents were both – I knew you have a brother. What was it like in the household?

[00:09:47] SP: It was a really all-American type of leave it to beaver household. We grew up in a town called Pleasantville. There's actually a place called Pleasantville. It's a commuter town, north of New York City, right next to Chappaqua, where Hillary Clinton lives. In Chappaqua,

they look down their noses at us in Pleasantville. It was just a typical all-American. It snowed in the winter, Santa Claus came, that kind of thing.

[00:10:17] LW: Do you remember any sayings, or philosophies about life that your dad, or your mom would echo in the house to you and your brother?

[00:10:25] SP: Wow, this is like an interview for the Marine Corps or something. I can say that back in those days, long pre-Vietnam, everybody admired the president and the whole idea of the United States. Everything we did, if we ever went to war, we were the good guys and we were always fighting the bad guys. I can remember my dad, but my brother and me making a sit down for the State of the Union, whenever that came on a TV on the black and white Dumont TV, and the President was Ike that time. We had to sit on the floor. We don't have a clue what was going on. This was the president and we had to pay attention. It's very much a patriotic household. Pretty much I think, the whole country was like that in those days.

[00:11:16] LW: One more question about your upbringing. How did you look at success during those days?

[00:11:21] SP: That's an interesting question, Light. My dad was the black sheep of the family. Everybody else was quite professional in a business sense. Successful. We never got a TV, until it was a hand-me-down from somebody else. On some level, I felt I'm going to have to carry the flag for this family, for our little family. I'm sure on some level, I set my mind to be ambitious, and that I was going to show that our family could do something.

[00:11:54] LW: What's interesting is you've said before in one of your books, I can't remember which one, but you said there were no creatives or artists in your neighborhood, or maybe even in your town.

[00:12:03] SP: That's true. Yeah.

[00:12:05] LW: There was no example of how you could make a living as a creative. What were you thinking of doing to carry the flag in your adult life, as a kid?

[00:12:15] SP: I have no idea at that time. I had no idea. You're absolutely right, Light. That's another aspect of my upbringing, that in our little town, in my family, everybody was in business, that men wore ties and suits and they went to on commuter train, went into New York City and were in business. There really were in my whole wide world, no artist. It wasn't like I knew any writers, or any musicians, or anything like that.

Sometimes you read about families where they grow up and the dad was a jazz musician and the mom was an actress, or something like that. They met, Norman Mailer came over to their house, or whatever. That was certainly not that way in our town, or our family. The idea of being an artist of any kind, was completely beyond my kin.

In fact, when I went to college, I went to – my dad's main deal, his main hope for me, my younger brother, Mike, him having coming out of the depression and that sort of thing, where their whole world fell apart and there were breadlines and all that stuff, was that we get some trade that we can count upon. That when the shit hit the fan, if it did and the economy collapsed, that we could survive.

When I originally went to college, I applied and was accepted as an engineer. I was in the engineering school. The first week I got to college, I switched over to English. I just knew. I didn't even thought about it. I just knew engineering wasn't for me and I switched over to English. My dad didn't forgive me for years. He really felt I betrayed everything that he hoped for, and I was going off on some crazy path by majoring in English. Of course, he was right. It did work out like that.

[00:14:01] LW: You ended up in the Marines.

[00:14:03] SP: Well, I was just dodging the draft in the Vietnam era and I joined the reserves, the six-month active duty and then five and a half years commitment. I was just trying to get in anywhere out of the rain. Anywhere, not to get sent to Vietnam.

[00:14:20] LW: You're basically a creative, or a writer in the making, who is pretending to be a marine. Or were you more of a Marine, who thought about writing from time to time?

[00:14:30] SP: At that time, I hadn't even thought about writing at all really. It wasn't on my radar at all. Winding up in the Marine Corps was a real surprise for me, too. It was the last place I would have pictured myself. I can't say I liked it, but I certainly got into it, once I was in it.

[00:14:49] LW: You eventually got out of the Marines and you went into advertising?

[00:14:52] SP: Yeah. Since I was in the reserves, I was still going to meetings and stuff like that. Yeah. My first job I got married, I moved to New York and I had a job. I got a job in advertising. Worked in advertising for a little while.

[00:15:07] LW: What was your work ethic like in those days?

[00:15:10] SP: It was pretty intense. I mean, in those days that there was more of a concept that you could go to work for a company and work for them for a long time. The company wouldn't throw you out on the street. Wouldn't abandon all promises to you, or something like that. Although, that was less the ethic in advertising, where it was more that you would move from one agency to another as your career evolved.

[00:15:35] LW: You mentioned that you hated it, but you learned the most from it. What do you mean by that?

[00:15:40] SP: I hated the whole idea of selling people shit that they didn't need. When I'm watching TV and a commercial comes on now, I just hit the remote, or the mute, or I just

fast-forward through. I hate it. In fact, I really think the whole concept of advertising and the whole consumer society that we live in is a really – can we use profanity on –

[00:16:06] LW: Yeah, yeah. Go for it. Speak –

[00:16:08] SP: It's really a fucked situation and always has been, and is vastly underrated for how much harm it does to everybody, psychically and everything. I will say this. Being in the business and having to adapt to the rigor of it, meaning like, I wrote a book, as you know, called *Nobody Wants to Read Your Sh*t*, which is about my various writing experiences in various fields.

One of the things that you learn in advertising, the first minute, is that nobody wants to read your stuff. Your ad, they hate your ads, they hate your whatever it is. They don't want to read about Preparation H, or Alpo, dog food, or whatever it is. They don't want to know about it. What that means to you as the writer, or anybody creative person, is that you've got to come up with something that's so good, and so arresting, and so compelling, and so interesting, that people will stick around for it. That is a great lesson for any creative person, podcaster, anybody at all that's doing anything, to know that just because you did it and put it out there, doesn't mean anybody gives a shit.

Quite the opposite. They don't want to know about it. They're busy. They're overwhelmed with stuff. Whatever you're going to do, it has to be the absolute best. That was a great lesson going forward in everything else.

[00:17:34] LW: During that time, you said you were anxious, you weren't able to sleep, you lacked self-esteem. Somehow, this translated into you starting your first novel. What was the genesis of that?

[00:17:44] SP: I had a boss, who quit and wrote a novel. It was a hit right away, first novel, right out of the gate. Really, his name is Ed Hannibal. I just thought, "Well, shit. Why don't I do

that?” You're pretty dumb when you're young. I never thought about it before. Then I just thought, “Well, geez. This is pretty easy.”

[00:18:07] LW: You said something else. I was going to mention this later, but since you brought it up, you were saying that the three stupidest guys were Charles Lindbergh, Steve Jobs and Winston Churchill. Why? Because they thought they could do what they did. Turns out, being dumb, or naive is actually a tactical advantage in some ways, right?

[00:18:27] SP: I think it is. They certainly say about entrepreneurs that the two virtues are ignorance and arrogance. You have to be ignorant of how hard it is, then just so arrogant, or stupid that you think, “Well, I can do this.” I mean, if you think about Lindbergh flying across the Atlantic, think of the balls that took back in 1927, or whatever that – there was a great contest and all kinds of people were throwing all kinds of money at it, and they were crashing and dying. He thought, “Well, hell. I'll do it.”

[00:19:12] LW: I wanted to consolidate these next few years, because you had a lot of jobs while you were trying to get this writing thing off the ground. At points you were living in a van. You were working as an apple picker. You were an over-the-road truck driver. You were living in a halfway house. You were living in a shack at one point.

[00:19:37] SP: It's all true.

[00:19:40] LW: We're not even done yet. You went back to advertising a few times.

[00:19:42] SP: But I was not living out of a backpack in Mexico City. That I did that –

[00:19:45] LW: No, you weren't. You mentioned that at one point, you saved up \$2,700, 31-years-old and you turn, in your words, you turn pro. Talk about the difference in what was happening before that moment in time, versus what was happening at that point at 31-years-old.

[00:20:07] SP: I would say, truly, that was not like any absolute inflection point. There were a lot of inflection points along the way. At that point, the demon that was torturing me was that I could never finish anything. Yet right at the finish line, and I wouldn't choke and run away, or whatever, like writing books. Get to the very end and then quit.

I did save up 2,700 bucks at one time, which was a fortune in those days. This was around the time of Watergate, whenever that was, 1970 something or other. I moved back to California, where I'd been before. Found a very affordable place to live. I figured, I could last for a year on that 2,700 bucks, which I did. I just committed to finish something, writing a novel. Finish it, whether it's terrible, whatever it was, I just had to finish it. I was just absolutely driven to do that, and I did.

[00:21:04] LW: You'd gotten divorced as well. You said that right at that moment in time, you'd gotten all the way to the goal line, but then you fumbled. What did you mean by that with the first novel? You didn't finish it.

[00:21:16] SP: Literally that, Light. I just got right to the end. I was so terrified. Of course, I was clueless. I had no self-awareness. All I was doing was feeling the emotion. I was just so terrified of actually finishing it, and then putting it out there for people to judge, even though nobody would give a shit, or even know that I'd written anything. In my mind, it was a big deal. I just like what they say in psychology, when you act out, you do something. I'm not going to say what it was, but it was enough that blew up my marriage and blew up the rest of what regular life I had at that point.

[00:21:57] LW: The novel, you eventually finished. Was it the same one, or was it a completely different –

[00:22:00] SP: No. A different one. I completely threw that first one away.

[00:22:03] LW: You threw it away? This was before word processing and floppy disks. There's no record of it, right?

[00:22:09] SP: Yeah, no record of it. It's gone.

[00:22:11] LW: Wow.

[00:22:12] SP: I have two others that I did that never got published. I still have them. Never gone and take them down out of the attic. I think, is it possible that these things are any good? I look at them, I go, "Nope, they're not good."

[00:22:29] LW: You said, you were lucky for experiencing so much failure so early on, while your friends were out there making money and building their lives. What did you mean by that?

[00:22:40] SP: It forced me to ask myself: Why am I doing this? Am I just crazy? Why do I keep saving money, taking two years writing a book, nobody wants it, nobody buys it. Can't get it published. Everybody thinks I'm an idiot. My family's in utter distress over just, "Poor, Steve. He's going down the tubes." I had to ask myself over and over, "Really, why am I doing this?" It's not for the money, because I'm not making any money. It's not for the recognition, because I'm not getting any recognition. I didn't see anything on the horizon, either. It wasn't like I thought, "Oh, I'm just this close and I'll be over the hump." The answer that I came up with is I just can't do anything else. This is the only thing that gives me hope, that makes me feel good at the end of the day.

I just said, "I'm going to do this." It's a little bit like Elizabeth Gilbert. She in her one of her TED Talks, she talks about how early on, she made a deal with her writing, where she said, "I will never ask you to support me. I will support you. If I have to work as a waitress, whatever it is, I will support you." That was the deal that I made with myself. Only, I didn't think about it. It wasn't conscious. I just said, "I don't have a choice. I'm going to have to keep doing this, no matter what."

[00:23:55] LW: Okay. Here, I want to break off and talk a little bit about something you've been writing and doing a lot of videos about recently, which is The Warrior Archetype. You've got this

book coming out is called *A Man at Arms*. I got a copy of the book. You sent me a copy of the book. Look, normally, historically, I should say, I'm not a fan of reading a lot of fiction, particularly historical fiction, but the story behind that book was very appealing to me. When I read the little cards that you put together and just the whole presentation. You talked about the main character in this book, Telamon of Arcadia, and how he had been appearing fully formed in several of your other books, how he represents this this warrior archetype.

I love to just talk about your life story through the lens of this warrior archetype, to tease the listener of this podcast and what that is all about and how it plays out in your work, because I don't really see your work as being very separate from that, and I'm sure you would agree with that in hindsight, looking back.

[00:25:10] SP: Yes, I would.

[00:25:11] LW: It seems like, very much you had started to set off on your own hero's journey. You talked, one of the stages. Well, first of all, can you just talk about the Jungian archetypes?

[00:25:22] SP: The concept of the archetypes comes from Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychologist, who was a contemporary of Freud and I would say, greater than Freud. One of his breakthroughs was that when we're born into this material dimension, our psyche is not a blank slate. There's software already in there, which makes sense if you think about from the evolution – from our evolutionary history that we would develop some – a little bit of a head start to tell you, this is what life is like.

One of the things in that software is the concept of the hero's journey, that Joseph Campbell has talked about so eloquently. I'm sure we'll get into that more and more as we talk today. Another thing that's in there are the archetypes. The archetypes are the super-personalities that already exist in our psyche. An example would be, like let's go through our life chronologically. An early archetype is the divine child. If we think about legends and myths, whether it's Jesus, Krishna, this archetype of the divine child appears over and over.

Then it moves on as we move out to the youth, the virgin, the wanderer, the seeker, and then sometime, for women as well as men, sometime around adolescence, the warrior kicks in. The warrior archetype is one of the most – the strongest and most powerful archetypes that we have. Beyond that, as we get into our 30s and 40s, are things like the father, the mother, the mentor, the artificer, the trickster, and then on up to the king, or queen, the sage and the mystic. Those are the archetypes and they influence us much more than we think.

For instance, the warrior archetype kicks in, let's say, for a boy, maybe around 12, 13, 14, and runs all the way through to maybe 30-years-old, or something like that. When it kicks in, we want to do things like, try out for the football team. We want to drive fast. We want to blow things up. We want to do all kinds of crazy shit and we want to hang out with our buddies. We're just compelled to. Whereas, we weren't maybe when we were six-years-old, or five-years-old.

Another thing that we want to do when the warrior archetype kicks in, is we seek mentors, particularly male mentors. This is male psychology I'm talking about now. We're looking for a coach, a football coach, whatever, a sergeant in the military, that will model for us, be role models for us and will guide us and put us through a certain initiation to manhood. That's what the warrior archetype is for me. Then of course, there are a lot of other archetypes going forward.

The sage archetype would be somebody like Obi-Wan Kenobi, or Gandalf, or Merlin. or something like that. The trickster archetype is another. Now anyway, there are a lot of archetypes, and we evolve from one to another as we mature.

[00:28:33] LW: Obviously, you've worked your way through the wanderer, when you were working all those various jobs and the seeker.

[00:28:40] SP: Of course, I was completely unaware of that as you know.

[00:28:42] LW: Right. As most people are.

[00:28:45] SP: You may be in a wanderer archetype right now yourself, Light. There you are in Mexico City. Yeah. I don't know what you're doing, but maybe that's it.

[00:28:55] LW: Who was the Obi Wan Kenobi figure in your life that got you through your series of failures in your 30s and 40s? Because there were a lot of them.

[00:29:06] SP: Yeah, there were a lot of mentors in my life. I was just thinking –

[00:29:08] LW: No, no. A lot of failures. A lot of failures.

[00:29:10] SP: Failures. A lot of failures.

[00:29:11] LW: Where I think, anybody in their in their right mind probably would –

[00:29:13] SP: A lot of mentors too.

[00:29:15] LW: Yeah. Who was one of your main mentor figures?

[00:29:20] SP: I'll tell you, there's one of them, who's still a friend of mine. His name is David Leduc. He was my first boss in advertising. He's now 91-years-old, I think, and he could kick your ass and mine. He's just an incredible inspiration to me for just being – since he “retired,” he's written 27 books, and he's just an unstoppable force. He was the one person in my life that when everybody else, including my family, had let me go and drift wherever the hell I was going, he actually kept in touch with me, and would recommend books to me and things like that and was just always a North Star for me that I could – It was great to think that he was out there somewhere, and that I had some contact with him. There were many mentors along the way for me. Many.

[00:30:15] LW: What do you think he saw in you to make him keep in touch with you like that?

[00:30:19] SP: Well, it's interesting that David is a guy who has many protegees. If we really knew, he probably has hundreds of people, men and women, that he's just one of these guys that spot something in somebody; ambition, or talent, or something like that, and goes out of his way. Even if it's just simply like – the things he did for me would be maybe, he took me out to dinner a couple of times in New York City when I was really at my lowest ebb. That was all it was. Just went out to dinner, talk. That was it. See you around. It made all the difference, because nobody else was taking me out to dinner.

[00:30:56] LW: I know you're Jewish and you also talk a lot about the Bhagavad Gita. I'm wondering, speaking of the seeker archetype, were there any sorts of practices that you would use to help you get through those low points in your writing career? Did you meditate?

[00:31:13] SP: No. I wish I could say. I mean, I know that you're a great meditator and a great teacher of meditation. I mean, I tried it a bunch of times, but I could never really do it. I will say this. This is an answer to that question. It's not really a discipline, but I've always paid attention to my dreams. I've always believed that – not like I kept journals or anything like that. I've always believed that we do have a force inside us that's guiding us, whatever you want to call it; the unconscious, or the muse or whatever. Maybe an archetype of some kind.

There have been definite inflection points in my life when a dream turned things around for me, or gave me courage to keep going when I was lost. I consider dreams to be mentors too, and the best mentor of all, because it's coming from your own divine part of your psyche.

[00:32:11] LW: I'm glad you brought that up, because you had a vision about this golfer, this golf story. You presented that to whoever your agent was at the time and apparently, he fired you? Can you tell that story?

[00:32:30] SP: Well, when I had the idea for the book, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, that became the movie. I'm not too happy with the movie, but I'm very happy with the book. At that time, I was in Hollywood, and I was working as a screenwriter. I've been doing it for about 10 years. Never with any real success, but I was about to be successful. My agent was a good

friend of mine. His name is Frank Wuliger. Well, one of the things that I used to do with Frank, when I would have a two or three ideas for scripts that I might write, because I always like to be a spec writer, write on spec and not – let's say, I'd have two or three ideas and I'd sit with Frank who I knew his office and I'd pitch him these ideas. It might take me an hour to pitch an idea.

He would very patiently sit there, then he would give me his feedback. He would say things like, "Oh, you can't do that story, because 20th Century Fox, they're developing three of them right now." Or he'd say, "Western's, they're really out and nobody wants them. Forget it." Anyway, I came in to pitch him the idea. I said, "Frank, I have a good news and I got bad news." The good news is I'm seized by this story. I'm in love with it. I've got to write it. The bad news is it's not a movie. It's a novel." He fired me. I don't blame him. I mean, basically, his point of view was, he'd been working for me, trying to get me out there, sending me on meetings, trying to get people to be aware of me as a screenwriter. Now suddenly, I'm going to drop out for a year or more. In Hollywood, they completely forget you. I don't care what you are. All of his work was be for nothing. That was why he basically said, "I'm not going to help you. You're on your own."

[00:34:20] LW: You invested 10 years in this industry. It seems like you have a pretty connected agent. Was that a big decision for you to step away for a year and risk losing everything you've been building to fulfill this dream?

[00:34:36] SP: That's a great question, Light. I never even really thought about this. At the time, I was just so seized by this idea, and that it was going to be a book and not a movie. That I just had no choice. I just said, "I just got to do it." I didn't even really think about it twice. I just knew, I just had to do it.

[00:34:53] LW: Do you have any friends, or any other mentor that you consult with before you –

[00:34:56] SP: No. Not that I remember. I probably talked to a couple people. Basically, I just was seized by it internally.

[00:35:03] LW: That's how you know it, right? You don't have to ask people for their advice, or what they think you should do, if that idea is coming from the right place within, you just know that this is what I'm supposed to do.

[00:35:17] SP: I think so. I mean, I felt and I also felt this about the next book after that *Gates Of Fire*. Both of them, I thought, when I assessed them cold bloodedly for their commercial potential, I thought both of those stories, I thought these don't have a chance. These are really stupid ideas. They're not commercial. Like Gulf's novel? Who's going to read that? That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard. Then *Gates of Fire*, a story about a battle that happened 2,700 years ago. There were no Americans involved, no John Wayne was involved. It's a place that nobody can spell, nobody can pronounce. Who's going to care about this? In both cases, I was just seized by this. I just knew I just had to do it. The idea of not doing it was absolutely out of the question.

[00:36:05] LW: What's interesting also is, I know you're friends with Randall Wallace, who wrote *Braveheart*.

[00:36:11] SP: Randall Wallace. Yeah.

[00:36:12] LW: That's his same story, too. When he wrote *Braveheart*, that was his Hail Mary. He'd been trying to make everybody happy. Then he had this one last opportunity to write a screenplay. Did you guys know each other at the time?

[00:36:26] SP: Do we what? Do we know each other? No. Not then.

[00:36:27] LW: Did you know each other at the time? Until later on? Yeah.

[00:36:30] SP: Yeah. He's told me that story too, where he was literally on his knees praying. "Help me. I don't know what to do." I said before that I believe in dreams. I think that books and movie ideas are like dreams. They come from the same place. I believe that for Randy,

Braveheart came from some deep source inside of him. Obviously, it's about William Wallace, his name is Randall Wallace, the whole thing. He just had no choice.

[00:36:58] LW: For context and for the listener, you've written 20 books now. The reason I'm going back into your history like this is because these kinds of moments are the moments that you have as a point of reference for when you're hitting up against these consistent failures, like a lot of creatives do. If you don't have these moments where you just know deep within, because you've had so many experiences where you maybe didn't know before, but you try to do it anyway, but now you have this knowingness, and now that's never going to leave you. At least in my experience, when you have that knowingness, it really doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. You know, "I have to do this. I'm not doing it for me. I'm doing it, because this is something that needs to come out." Then it ended up being, was it your first novel that actually sold to a publisher and got published?

[00:37:47] SP: Yes. Yes. Yeah.

[00:37:49] LW: Then Robert Redford ended up optioning it and making a film out of it. Then you said, the film, you didn't like that very much. The film also got a little controversy with the black community. What would you think about that when all that happened?

[00:38:01] SP: No, it's funny. That really blindsided me, because the structure of the Legend of Bagger Vance comes from the Bhagavad Gita. The character that is Bagger Vance is Krishna.

[00:38:14] LW: God.

[00:38:15] SP: God in human form. His title of respect is Bhagavan, meaning Lord. That's where Bagger Vance came from. They said of Krishna, that he was so black that he was blue. In fact, looking at your video here, you can see here's my little picture of Krishna. I never even thought of that, the whole thing of the – what is it? The benevolent Negro? What is it that it was some trope out there? That hit me and took me by surprise. I didn't think that that was the issue at all. It turned out to be. Yeah.

[00:38:51] LW: Another interesting anecdote from that experience is you got fired from the movie as well, right?

[00:38:58] SP: Yes. Yeah.

[00:38:59] LW: You are grateful for getting fired. Why were you grateful?

[00:39:03] SP: Well, the thing in Hollywood is, whoever the original writer is on a project, whether it's a novel that they option, or it's an original screenplay, the first thing that happens is they fire that writer. Let me tip my hat. You said Robert Redford produced it. I don't think he actually – he directed it. The bruiser was a guy named Jake Edwards, who was a wonderful guy, who – a Canadian. Unfortunately, died way too young. He also produced Gandhi and Chariots of Fire and a bunch of other – He picked up two or three best picture of the year things.

I was in my kitchen. We just sold the option. The phone rings and it's Jake. He apologizes. He's very sweet about it. He says, "I'm sorry, but I have to fire you." I immediately thanked him. I almost fainted, because I said, "I've been fired off every project I've ever been on and nobody has ever told me to my face yet. I've always had to read it in the paper." I thanked Jake.

Let me tell you just a little – got a little sidebar here, Light, about Jake. I think this fits into our story. Jake came from a family in Canada. I think, he had either four or five brothers and they were all very successful and he was the black sheep of the family. He had a wife, he had kids and he was just going nowhere. Everything he did turn to shit. He finally got some job at a bank in England. He was so bad at it, that they exiled him to the worst part of the bank, Siberia, which was financing motion pictures.

When he went there, he thought, "Oh, this is hell. I'm lost." To his amazement, he discovered that he had a talent for picking properties. He did that for the bank for a couple of years and then he started his own company, Goldcrest. The next thing you know, he done Chariots of Fire

and Gandhi and a bunch of other things. If you think about those two movies, *Chariots of Fire*, or *Gandhi* are not obviously successful pictures. I mean, they're long shots.

Two Olympic guys from the 1924 Olympics, *Chariots of Fire*, is anybody care about it? It's even in England. They're English guys. Best picture. Then *Gandhi*, too. God bless, Jake. He found himself after being the black sheep of his family.

[00:41:21] LW: The Bagger Vance experience opened up this golden era in the Steven Pressfield professional career, where you started to have a bunch of novels get published. The next one was *Gates of Fire*, as you mentioned. Talk about the story of reading that quote, The Dienekes quote and that triggering the idea.

[00:41:45] SP: By the way, it wasn't such a golden era. The only thing was, that I was at least –

[00:41:50] LW: You were selling.

[00:41:51] SP: Getting things sold. Anyway, the idea of –

[00:41:57] LW: You're in your 50s. You're in your 50s now.

[00:41:59] SP: I'm in my 50s. I'm now 55, 56-years-old. When I wrote *Gates of Fire*, I wrote that completely on spec two years. No Deal. I just again, I was just seized with this idea that I had to do it. The story you're getting to is I've always been a fan of the ancient Greeks. I love to read Xenophon and Plato and Herodotus and Thucydides and all these books that most people, you couldn't beat them with a stick to get them to read it. I was reading Herodotus, which is a great book, which I highly recommend, called *The Histories*. It was talking about the Battle of Thermopylae. It was talking about this one true Spartan warrior, named Dienekes.

It's the famous story that the Spartans had arrived at the pass of Thermopylae, waiting for the Persian army to come. They knew that they were going to be outnumbered a 100 to one, a 1,000 to one, whatever it was, but they had not yet seen the Persians. A guy came running into

the camp and he had seen the Persians. Not a Spartan. He was a native of the local village. His hair was on fire. He was totally freaked out. He said, there's so many of them, that when their archers fire their volleys, the mass of arrows blocks out the sun. Dienekes said, "Good. Then we'll have our battle in the shade."

When I read that, and this is – true thing. Nobody made this up. I just thought, I can relate to that guy. I've known people in the Marine Corps that were like that. I just thought, that was the key for me to that story that I thought, "I got to write this story." There's a character, he can be the hero. I love the guy already. That's a way for me to get into this story. At that point, I'd never even thought of that story as a subject for a book. Then from that point, I was seized by that.

[00:43:51] LW: Just quickly, going back to the warrior archetype, you've had all these battles. You've lost many battles. You've won a couple here and there. At that point in time, having had your success with *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, are you now feeling more confident as your creative warrior at that time, or you still feeling you're shooting in the dark and hopefully, something will hit?

[00:44:14] SP: No, I did feel a lot more confident, Light. That's true. In fact, when *Bagger Vance* got published, I felt like my life is okay now. I felt like, this was more than I ever could have hoped for. I never thought I would ever be able to publish anything. Just to publish and have a modest success was great. Of course, it's like being an actor, where you get a role and you think, "I'm never going to get another role. Nobody's ever going to hire me again." Same thing. Writers feel the same way. It's like, "I'm never going to have another idea, or the next one is never going to be any good." Insecurity, it goes with the program, I'm afraid. I did feel more confident. I thought, I've done it once, maybe I can do it again.

[00:44:56] LW: One of your bonuses for *A Man at Arms* is you said, you found the 800-page original manuscript of *Gates of Fire*. There's a backstory, because your agents told you that you have to cut that thing down by was it 400, or 500 pages or something like that?

[00:45:20] SP: 300 pages. Yeah.

[00:45:22] LW: What did you cut? I mean, at that point, you've been writing for so long. It seems like you would know how to write a novel. Why did you have to cut so much out of that novel?

[00:45:32] SP: Because it was 800 pages long. Who's going to read an 800-page novel? My agent was absolutely right, that he couldn't sell it at that length. This is another, I did a little video about this. Maybe you saw this, Light. It's another story of encouraging people that like, my agent told me, you got to cut 300 pages. I was in despair over this. I thought, "How can I possibly cut 300?" It actually turned out, I had to cut 400, 500 pages.

[00:45:59] LW: 500 pages.

[00:46:00] SP: When all was said and done. I just didn't know what to do. I was beside myself. I thought, here it is, two years of work down the toilet. I can't possibly do this. My agent who was – I think he was maybe 70—something years old. He's a 100-years-old now. He's still my agent, Sterling Lord. He used to go to lunch once a month with three other guys who are elder statesman of the literary business. One of them was a guy named Tom Ginsburg, who had been the head of Viking Press for a long, long time, who also was a marine on Iwo Jima, and was a Purple Heart marine on Iwo Jima, aside from that, he had read the book. Sterling, and we asked him to read the book.

Suddenly, one day out of the blue, I got a card from him with a beautiful – nice envelope, a handwritten card. He never had met me. I'd never met him. The card just said, "I know there's a great book in here, Steve, and I know you can bring it out." That meant the world to me. I thanked them. I pasted it to my computer. That really kept me going. Took me about six months to cut those pages. That meant the world to me. Really helped, speaking of mentors.

[00:47:10] LW: Yeah. You encouraged other people. When you told that story, you said, “Don't hold back.” If you have any encouragement that you can give to a creative, don't hold back, because you never know how much it will help.

[00:47:21] SP: Definitely.

[00:47:22] LW: Then you also mention about *Gates of Fire*, that there was a female character that you add it to the book after turning it into your editors. Then this is one of the most –

[00:47:34] SP: Light, you've really done your research here.

[00:47:37] LW: This is one of the most commented scenes in the book that you get bail about now, because it's one of your most – if not, is it your most popular book, I think. Your biggest selling book.

[00:47:47] SP: Yeah. Actually, I had two female editors. The book was ready to go [inaudible 00:47:52] and Kate Misiak. The book was ready to go. Manuscript was ready to go to the press and they called me and then they said, “We love the Spartan women, but there's not enough of them. You got to give us one more big scene.” I resisted at me and I said, “I'm too tired. I've worked too hard. I'm not going to do it.”

Finally, I gave them their scene. Just amused gave me a scene. It turned out that it was the most commented upon scene in the book. You never know where something's going to come from.

[00:48:23] LW: Let's talk about the feminine now, because when you hear the warrior archetype, I think naturally, you think about the masculine. We're going to talk about *The War of Art* later, but a lot of these kinds of books, like *The War of Art*, or like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* that systemize an approach to life and if you were to do this thing, you can create levels of manifestation and abundance that you wouldn't have otherwise. What I've noticed just for myself is that a lot of the examples, the anecdotes that get cited in these books

tend to be with men. There's not a lot of feminine examples. I'm just curious, what is your thinking around the feminine when it comes to the warrior archetype?

[00:49:09] SP: I'll answer it in a slightly different way. I had a dream on time. Like I say, I always pay attention to dreams. I was in New York. This was long before I was driving a cab and long before I had any success at all. When I wasn't working to make a living, I was writing a book. A friend of mine came to town. He was one of these live wire guys that went out on the town and had a great time and was doing all these things. I was thinking to myself, "What's wrong with me? I'm beating myself up. I stay home. I'm either driving a cab, or I'm hitting this, pounding the keys on – I'm wasting my life."

I had a dream. In the dream, a friend of mine, a woman who was pregnant at the time, came to me, this was one of these dreams where that dream hits you right over the head with a 2-by-4. She said to me, "Steve, you're like me. You're pregnant with something right now. You're pregnant with this book. Just like me, I can't go out to parties. It's not my job to be drunk and passing out in the street, or anything, or dancing all night at the club. I have new life growing inside me. I have to take care of that life. That's what you have to do, too."

My answer to this, Light, is that I don't think of the female as a warrior, so much as a mother. The mother is the ultimate warrior, if you think about it, that a mother will do anything for her child. Run into a burning building. A mother also is like the artist. Like the artist that's bringing forth work, because the mother is bringing forth new life. She's putting our own needs completely on the shelf. Everything is about the new life that's growing inside her. She'll change the way she eats, change the way she sleeps, change what time she gets up in the morning, change everything.

Of course, once the baby is born, she changes everything again, to help that baby grow to something proud, that she can be proud of. A mother is another parallel that I would give to the warrior, as a metaphor for what the artist, or the creative person, or the entrepreneur, the life that they live. To think of oneself as a mother, I think is a great way to – particularly, a single mother, because that's the toughest of them all.

[00:51:17] LW: What do you think made *Gates of Fire* such a viral hit?

[00:51:21] SP: Well, first of all, it took a long time for it to become a viral hit. It took 10 years, little by little by little finding word of word of mouth.

[00:51:29] LW: Because, when you publish a book, the publisher usually depends on the author for marketing. It didn't sound like you have a huge platform at that time. I'm curious, how all that worked out.

[00:51:41] SP: At that time, there was no such thing as a platform period. That was 1998. There was no Google. I don't think there was such a thing as basically, only email. I don't think if they had email then. What they did have then, which I missed desperately is they had things called book reviews. *Gates of Fire* got reviewed twice in the New York Times and that alone, put it on the map. What was the question again?

[00:52:05] LW: Well, do you remember what the critic in the time cited as the reason why they thought it was so great?

[00:52:11] SP: he two reviews, one guy really panned it. Really trashed it. It goes to show you though, that somehow that worked, it helped it. Even though he trashed it, he cited various mistakes, historical mistakes I made. I was a bum and a loser and that thing. Somehow, any publicity is good publicity, I guess. The reason why I think it found an audience, it found an audience mostly in the military, or people who were associated with the military. I think it was not so much because of the book, but just about the subject matter of the ancient Spartans, that they had such a code of honor and a warrior ethos that hadn't been dirtied at that time, like so much of our American stuff had been dirtied by Vietnam and by other stuff like that. I think people in the military were hungry for an example of the purity of why they had joined the military themselves to serve, to help the country.

[00:53:16] LW: You and Robert Greene, one of my other favorite authors has said that, if you haven't read about the Peloponnesian War, or Thermopylae, you're not properly educated. You're not educated. He didn't mean it in a critical way. You mentioned, more is in a helpful way, because you were referring to how that then led to the democracy that we all love and cherish today. You have this fascination with telling war stories, but you never identify yourself as someone who actually likes war. I mean, this is what you've been talking about recently with *Man at Arms*, is you're more of an inner warrior. I'm just curious, how conscious you were of that at the time when *Gates of Fire* was catching fire, when you were starting your next book, *Tied to War*, did you have a recognition of this inner warrior? Was that a conscious thing at the time?

[00:54:12] SP: Definitely. I mean, I think what you do, Light, meditation, there's the inner war par excellence, right? Uses to sit still, to go inside, to fight off the demons that are there, to find, to climb that mountain to that stillness and get to that place. I mean, that is the inner war par excellence and you're trying to reach the divine part of yourself. Definitely as a writer, or as an artist, like a songwriter, something like that, but certainly, a novelist, you're trying to do the same thing.

You're trying to go within and find that thing that's the dream, the story that's already in there. You're not looking for stillness, but you're looking for something that exists on another – on a higher plane, on a higher level of reality and you're trying to bring it down through yourself. The way that you do that, just like meditation as I understand it, you can correct me if I'm wrong, is that you get your own ego out of the way. Your ego, you will face your own ego, and so that you become a pure vessel to let this story, or this song, or this idea come through you. Very definitely, I feel myself as an inner warrior. Anybody that's an artist is this, because there's so many demons that you have to actually have to fight to get through.

[00:55:34] LW: I'm so glad you brought that up. You made one of the best distinctions I've ever heard. I talked about thoughts all the time in the meditation seminars that I do, but you made one of the best distinctions I heard between thoughts and chatter. You wrote this in one of your books. Do you remember what the distinction was, because I remind you if you don't?

[00:55:53] SP: No, I don't think I remember that. I mean, I think, pretty much 99.9% of the stuff that goes through our heads, or that we hear is not us thinking at all. It's chatter. It's resistance. It's bullshit. It's all the stuff that you, I'm sure as a meditator, have to let pass across your mind like clouds, right? Let it go. Very rarely do we, in our whole lives, I think even have a thought, or real thought.

[00:56:32] LW: All right, I want to talk about *Tides of War*, which is your next book. You wrote this 800-page first book, and then you obviously learn, "Okay, I don't need to do that." Then, this surprised me. When I read your description on your website of *Tides of War*, you said, "This is my own favorite of everything I've done," your words. "Long, complex, confusing, hard to read." Then you go on to describe what the story is about. What is that about?

[00:57:06] SP: That's another great question, Light. I mean, the story of the Spartans at Thermopylae is a really simple story. A small group of folks. They hold a line, they fight, they fight, they get killed, it's over. The story that I was telling in *Tides of War*, which was really about Athens and the fall of a democracy, and how a great democracy came undone is quite a complicated story. It's not about pure heroism at all. It's about a lot of people who are compromising, and it's really like America right now. A lot of bad stuff happens.

Also, the way I structured it, I probably screwed it up. I had multiple narrators. It was very confusing. In fact, my great editor and friend, Shawn Coyne, sent me back to the drawing board for nine months on this one, because it was even more confusing the first time around. It is a difficult read. I really love it, because it deals with such complex and ambiguous issues. It's not just a simple, straightforward story. It doesn't really succeed. It fails here and there. A lot of people can find fault with it, but it was a real noble try, a real swing for the seats.

[00:58:21] LW: Why was it your favorite, looking back on it?

[00:58:23] SP: It was the most ambitious. It was the hardest one to grasp in totality. It was just the most complex.

[00:58:31] LW: I think that's important to point out too, because thinking about something being the hardest to do, there's value to that, to getting that out into the world. Even though you may be known for other things that you've done, I think a lot of people can relate to that. Thanks for pointing that out. Then a couple years later, you're now in your late 50s. You've had all of these experiences as a writer.

[00:58:58] SP: Before we enter and be in my late 50s again.

[00:59:02] LW: All of these failures, a few successes, and you have this collection of anecdotes and writings that you are calling the writers life. You just hand it over to Shawn, who you mentioned was your editor. What did you tell him?

[00:59:22] SP: I said, "I think there's a book here. What do you think?" I wouldn't call it a collection of anecdotes. I think, it really has one real point of view. That's the book that obviously, it became *The War of Art*. That was his title, not mine. Shawn came up with that title, great title. A lot of times, a writer will write a book. I mean, I'm sure you know this, Light. You don't even know what it's about. If somebody said, "What's the theme? What is this book about?" You don't know.

You give it to your editor and the editor's job, the editor will tell you what it's about. That's what Shawn has done a lot of times. He's just, "Oh, this book is really about such and such." I'll go, "Really?" Then he'll explain it to me. I go, "Wow, I had no idea that's what I was doing." He really pulled this book together and gave it a shape and made it cohere.

[01:00:09] LW: What's interesting, too, is that that book is written so conversationally, and so simply, which sounds like it's different from the war books? Was that a very intentional thing for you?

[01:00:21] SP: Oh, absolutely. The war books are obviously what were set for me in the ancient world. In order to evoke that sense, in the reader, that they're reading something from another

era, I very deliberately wrote all those books in an archaic style, a formal style. I patterned it after the translations that Oxford and Cambridge dons did of the great Greek stuff. They're very formal. In this book, *The War of Art*, I'm speaking directly to a peer, a contemporary reader, a friend, and so I'm just talking colloquially, just the way I would – talking to you right now.

[01:01:07] LW: In that situation, speaking of the warrior archetype, the reader is the hero, or they're on the hero's journey, and they're becoming the warrior. You're the Obi Wan Kenobi figure. You're guiding us along and mentoring us. Resistance is the villain.

[01:01:24] SP: Yes. What you're talking about here, Light, is that one of the points that I was trying to make in another story was that even a piece of non-fiction, like *The War of Art*, which is really a self-help book, about helping an artist, or an entrepreneur write or get their act together, that book can be written like a novel, like a story. There is a villain, there is a hero, there is a narrator, there's a crisis-climax resolution. That's what you were just saying that the villain in this book is the concept of resistance with the capital R, our own tendency to self-sabotage ourselves, procrastination, self-doubt, fear, all of those things.

The hero is the reader who's dealing with that villain. They wouldn't have picked up this book, unless they were struggling as a writer, or an artist, or whatever. The narrator, or the mentor in the book is me, addressing the hero and trying to like Obi-Wan Kenobi talking to Luke Skywalker. Anyway, that was what that was about.

[01:02:29] LW: You described this battle as the battle of life. You've said that we're all like Spartans. We're all warriors. None of us are going to get out of this alive.

[01:02:42] SP: Yeah. I mean, I think that's what it is. Life is a battle, right? I mean, if you talk about meditation, as soon as you close your eyes, as soon as you sit still, the enemies appear and you're confronted with these distractions, this chatter, everything that's working to stop you from getting to this higher level. That's life in general. We're constantly battling our own tendency to self-sabotage. Not only external enemies, like if we're going into business, we have competitors that we have to deal with, but our worst enemies, the enemy inside our own head,

that is working against us constantly and that we always underestimate. We always think, “Oh, it's not there, or I can overcome it.” Certainly, all of the failures that I went through, I'm the author of those failures. It was me that being afraid of succeeding, or whatever, that stopped myself. That's why I think we need to be warriors, or mothers to combat those forces.

[01:03:46] LW: We're all warriors, but we're on a spectrum. How do you know you're getting towards the other end of that spectrum, towards the mystic?

[01:03:54] SP: I would say, and I hadn't really thought about this until you asked me this question. I think, it's how much ego we have. How prominent our identity as this flesh, this mind is. The farther we move along in maturity, the less ego there is. I just was talking and you probably know this much better than I do, the character of Bheeshma. I don't think it's in the Bhagavad Gita. I think it's in the Mahabharata. It's the character, the ego. Krishna, the warrior, the great warrior, finally slays Bheeshma.

I just learned this the other day from a brother of a self-realization fellowship. He shoots him a 108 times with arrows. He's so full of arrows, the ego, that he's actually on his back, off the ground, held up by the arrows, and it takes him a month to die. Through this whole month, he never stops talking and talking about how important he is. In other words, the bottom line of that legend is that killing the ego is the hardest thing in the world to do. The ego just does not want to die. Even at the last gasp, it's still telling you how it's still in charge.

I would say as we evolve, the ego becomes less and less. In terms of a writer or an artist, like I was saying, we learn to get out of the way of the work that's coming through us, if it's a song, if it's a dance, whatever it is. Whereas, when we're at our earliest stages, I can say this certainly for me, my ego was everything. Everything was about me and all I cared about was how people would react to it. I think as you evolve you, you realize that it's not about you at all.

[01:05:47] LW: I love that. Like I said, I went to the Lionsgate book signing. It was very modest. What inspired you to put so much promotion behind *A Man at Arms*? I mean, you've done a 50, a proper 50 video series with a beginning and an end and theme music. You put a whole

storyline together. You have these mugs made up that are replicants of what they would carry back in the Roman army, the legions. I mean, what has brought all of this on?

[01:06:20] SP: A book is like a child. It's something. This particular character, Telamon, is to me is not a fictional character. He's a real person. He's still ongoing. I said before that when he first appeared in a couple of earlier books, I didn't plan him. He just appeared. Again, it's like a dream, Light. It's like, I see this person appear, he's got an entire philosophy. I don't know what that philosophy is. When he opens his mouth, he spouts it and I think, "Wow, that's really interesting." I wish I could sit down and talk to him and interview him and find out where –

This character, the thought that – I really felt like I really got him in this book, or at least there will be more, but I think I've got him in this book. I thought, the thought that this book would come out and this character, Telamon, would not get his day in the sun and people would not get to hear him speak and get to see who he was, I just couldn't bear that thought. I thought, whatever I've got to do and I'm sure you can tell from talking to me, I am not a natural promoter of stuff. I mean, this is way out of my comfort zone.

I just thought, whatever I've got to do, I'm going to do it. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. At least, I want to say to myself that I tried. I really have thought. I've had to educate myself and Diana, who you met earlier, she's been my right-hand guru and mentor with this whole thing. I just thought, I've just got to promote this book. I've got to get it out there. People have got to see it.

[01:07:56] LW: To me, when I was reading it, it's the embodiment of everything you talk in *The War of Art*. That is the Telamon character. Resistance is the Roman army that's tracking him down and all of that. I'm curious, how much of yourself, you personally see in that character, in that Telamon character?

[01:08:18] SP: I really do see a lot of myself in that character. Although, the character of Telamon is like, for our listeners, you like the Clint Eastwood character, the man with no name, or a samurai character that you might see. He's a one-man killing machine of the ancient world.

He's the warrior archetype, par excellence. He has come to the end of that archetype. He's used it up. He can handle violence. He can handle adversity. He can stand up to anything. He realizes, something's missing. Of course, without giving away too much in the book, well, the missing thing is love, which is not necessarily romantic love, not romantic love at all, but another kind of love; a love that borders on, or crosses over into the spiritual, that goes into – is at the soul level. I suppose that I am evolving myself in that way somehow.

Again, like I say, a book is like a dream and it takes shape like a dream. It's trying to tell you something. Even though you're the one that's giving birth to it, you don't know what that is, until it appears on the page. Then you can you see, "Oh, my God. I didn't realize I was saying that." I think, that's another reason why this book is so important to me, that I just wanted to get its day in the sun.

[01:09:43] LW: The cover, you have a photo, or painting of Telamon. I'm curious how intentional that was and what the story is behind that.

[01:09:51] SP: That's definitely intentional. There's a whole long story behind that cover. Because it was done in the COVID era, we couldn't actually do a photoshoot. The art director, whose name is [inaudible 01:10:05], she put various overlays together to do that. The reason you don't see the full face is because I wanted Telamon to be in the in the viewer's eyes, someone that they could be themselves. I don't want you to see the full face. He's an archetype. He is the ultimate warrior, or the universal warrior, I should say. He's the warrior that exists in all times and all places. That was a definitely a reason why you don't see a character's eyes, so he can be everybody, every man, every woman.

[01:10:40] LW: You're now celebrated for your fictional books, as you are your non-fictional self-help books. You've written a handful of really amazing artists, journey, books. Which one do you feel more excited about these days?

[01:10:55] SP: I mean, I'm basically a fiction writer in my mind. Although, *The War of Art* has been – probably, people know me more for that, which is I don't want to say I'm sorry about

that, but it's not what I hoped for. I think of myself as a servant of the muse and as a storyteller. Sometimes, it's hard to sell stories these days. People like these instant save-your-life type books.

[01:11:22] LW: How are you defining success these days?

[01:11:26] SP: I always just wanted to be able to write and pay the rent and not have to do something else. Like I was saying before, Light, that through all my years of failure, I had to ask myself, why am I doing this. I guess, I'm doing it just for the love of the work itself. I see going forward for the rest of my life, and it's been this way for a long time, I think of it just like you have a meditation practice and I have a writing practice. This is a practice I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I'm a follower of the muse. Whatever she tells me to do next, I'll do. Who I am, I believe unfolds through that. I didn't know I was going to write *Gates of Fire*. I didn't know I was going to write *A Man at Arms*. I don't know what I'm going to write next. It'll reveal itself as it goes along.

[01:12:15] LW: I see you have your old Smith Corona typewriter there over your shoulder as well.

[01:12:19] SP: Yeah, it's actually not a Smith Corona. It's a Royal. I lost the Smith Corona temple. This is a replacement for it. It is a good time typewriter.

[01:12:28] LW: Right. Now you just pretty much right on your laptop, I'm assuming?

[01:12:31] SP: Yeah. Once I learned how to copy something and paste it, I will never go back to that again.

[01:12:39] LW: Yeah. Cool, man. Well, I like to wrap these conversations up talking about childhood and the image that has been sticking out in my mind while we've been having this conversation is of you going out with your cap gun and walking around the block. What that represents for me is an inherent willingness to leave your comfort zone and to explore the

unknown, which is where in the meditation philosophy, that's where all the creativity lives is in the unknown. If you're not willing to go into the unknown, and that's the whole idea behind sitting down and overcoming the chatter is that you'll finally pierce through that ridge of your everyday thinking, and into that field of infinite creative intelligence. Then that's where the ideas start to generate from that place.

You've talked about how there's always an acorn phase, where there's a potential there. All you have to do is really, just get it out of the way and allow that potential to come through. I feel like, no one else could have written the works of art that you have written other than you, because of your very unique life experience. It starts with that child wonder of, "Hey, let me see what's out here beyond my comfort zone." That continues manifesting and manifesting and then overcoming the resistance and the failures and all of those things.

Just want to acknowledge you, Steven Pressfield, for all of the millions of times you had to say yes and keep going and overcome your own resistance in order to inspire all of us creators to do the same, and in a way we stand on your shoulders as creators and everything that I have got the galley copy from my next book right here. I've actually got a little mention of you in here. Something you were –

[01:14:37] SP: Will you send me some when you get it. Send me when you get it?

[01:14:40] LW: I will. I'm telling you, man. These things would not be happening if I hadn't read your book, *The War of Art*. It's interesting to even think about all of the creations that have come into the world as a result of people reading your work, as a result of all of the things you've had personally overcome. I'm just honored to be able to have this conversation with you.

[01:15:03] SP: You're very kind, Light. Thank you very much for saying that. What you were saying about that nobody other than me could have produced what I have written, that's true of all of us. Nobody, but you can produce what you've written. Nobody else could produce what Joni Mitchell has produced, or Tony Morrison has produced. We all have that unique genius.

I never had thought about the walking around the block thing that you just said. You're a great psychiatrist, by the way. One thing I would point out about that, now I think about it is, in the end, you come back to where you started. It's like the hero's journey. Odysseus finally comes back and returns to Ithaca. That's all of our journeys, right? That we leave the place that we're familiar with, then we come back, and we find that's where we, or Dorothy comes back to Kansas in the end. Thanks a lot, Light. You're a great psychoanalyst here, or it's beyond that. It's into some other dimension.

[01:16:03] LW: I tell people, sometimes when I'm interviewing them is, it's going to sound a little bit like a therapy session. There is a point to this. I really just want to inspire people to know that when you hit your first, second, 50th, 200th failure, it doesn't mean that it's over. It may mean it's just starting. Keep going.

[01:16:21] SP: I love your daily doses. I'm a subscriber. I check about every day and they're great. Thank you very much for having me on the podcast. It's great to be here.

[01:16:30] LW: Thanks, man. I appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[01:16:32] LW: Thank you for listening to my interview with Steven Pressfield. After reading his latest book, *A Man at Arms*, I left the following review. This was an instant classic. I now feel I'm ready to go into battle, not against any external forces, of course, but against my own internal resistance. Steven Pressfield does it again by using the art of storytelling to make us look deeper into our own inner nature, while transporting us back in time through another action-packed, epic adventure.

Make sure, if you pick up a copy of *A Man at Arms* and/or *The War of Art* and you enjoyed it, leave a review. Reviews and ratings are so important for authors, as well as for podcasters. Speaking of which, if you haven't yet left a review for *At The End Of The Tunnel*, it's literally the best thing you can do to support this podcast and help to make sure that I can keep sharing

these stories. The good news is it only takes 10 seconds. All you do is glance down at your screen, click where it says At The End Of The Tunnel, which is in purple. If you're not listening to this on the podcast app, look for a button that says listen on Apple Podcast, and then you'll see the purple link.

Click it. Scroll down past all the previous episodes to where it says ratings and reviews and just tap on that star on the far right and you've left a rating. It's literally that easy. I thank you in advance for taking those 10 seconds to do that for me.

You can also follow Stephen at stevenpressfield.com. There, you're going to find access to his social media channels, his blog, which he posts to every Wednesday, and his YouTube channel, which is where you'll find an excellent 50-part series about the warrior archetype. To get the show notes and a transcript of my interview with Mr. Pressfield, you can go to lightwatkins.com/tunnel. While you're there, don't forget to sign up for my daily dose of inspiration email, which is a short and sweet daily motivational message that I've been sending out every morning for years now.

I'm also gearing up for my next book launch, which is based on my daily dose emails. It's called *Knowing Where to Look: A 108 Daily Doses of Inspiration*. It's like *The War of Art*, but it's for inspiration. It's coming out in late May. It's now officially available for pre-order everywhere books are sold. You can find purchase links at lightwatkins.com.

Thanks again for listening. Thanks for sharing this episode with your friends and your followers. I'll see you back here next week with another amazing story from the end of the tunnel. In the meantime, keep trusting your intuition. Keep following your heart and keep taking those leaps of faith. I'm sending you lots of peace and love. Have a blessed day.

[END]