(Image created at BookBrush.com)

"I love what I do. I love to meet people struggling the way I have. I love to give helpful tips or advice. I just hate when people are not told the truth. It is kind of like the people who go on American Idol, and all their family and friends have told them they are great singers when, in fact, they're horrible. We need a Simon Cowell for potential authors before they waste their time and money publishing something that has no chance of selling. Or worse they get bashed with bone-crushing, one-star reviews. No one deserves that kind of pain." Micheal Maxwell

From as far back as **Micheal Maxwell** can recall, he says that creating stories has been a part of his life. His first printed work was from the 6th grade for a literary magazine his teacher put out every spring. Micheal recalls, *"I had a story in it called Orvil and the Tin Critter. As a matter of fact, it is the first story in my short story anthology, The First Chapter."*

We are incredibly grateful for Micheal's generosity to share with us so openly and honestly. What he shared in our recent interview reveals **THE REAL AUTHOR, THE REAL STORY and THE REAL STATS**. We believe he will encourage and inspire authors everywhere in finding success of their own.

"Micheal Maxwell has found a niche in the mystery, suspense genre with The Cole Sage Series that gives readers an everyman hero, short on vices, long on compassion, and a sense of fair play, and the willingness to risk everything to right wrongs. The Cole Sage Series departs from the usual, heavily sexual, profanity-laced norm and gives readers character-driven stories, with twists, turns, and page-turning plot lines." (Source: Amazon)

Now for our exclusive interview with Micheal Maxwell.

THE REAL AUTHOR

Q: What do you think helped you the most to develop your writing skills?

Without a doubt being a storyteller. I've always said writers are just big liars that put their fabrication to paper! Along with being a storyteller at an early age, I read anything I could get my hands on. Most of all though, I think my love of words, puns, turns of a phrase have always thrilled me. I remember as a kid watching the Marx Brothers and being captivated by the way they could turn things around and make the most ridiculous comments out of the simplest thing.

In A Night at the Opera, there is a scene where Groucho and Chico review a contract, and they get to the sanity clause. Chico says, "You can't fool me! There's no Sanity Claus!" I thought that was astounding. I still do. I don't know if I came by it naturally and found kindred spirits, but my mind has always worked like that, much to the amusement and dismay of my family and friends.

Q: What does your workspace look like?

I have a very simple set up. Keyboard and monitor in front of me, a small box computer (8x8x16) on the right and a 20-terabyte hard drive array (6x6x12) on the left of the monitor. I used to have an office in our last home with a huge bookshelf, and the walls were covered with framed autographed photos, posters, and signed albums and CDs. It was very cool. It's all boxed up but I do have a few little items that surround me, though. An antique brass statue of the see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil monkeys. A six-inch figurine of Alfred E. Newman from MAD Magazine and the Dancing Jerry Bears the San Francisco Giants handed out on Grateful Dead night a few years ago. Oh yeah, and a little handmade Martin guitar I bought in Japan.

THE REAL STORY

Q: Can you describe your feelings when you realized you would actually be a published author? Do you feel differently now that you've published multiple books?

To be totally honest, I never dreamed my first book, Diamonds and Cole, would be published. The day I saw my books on Amazon for the first time was like an out of body experience. I remember leaving the site and going back and doing a search several times that day. I wanted to tell the world, but I was raised that you shouldn't toot your own horn. That, I soon had to overcome.

It is still exciting to see a new book go up. The feeling is different. Now it represents the expectations of my readers. The responsibility to provide stories that are true to the characters they have come to know. So, it is excitement born of fear they might not like it. The wait for the first reviews to come in is pretty nerve-wracking.

Q: When it comes to your writing career, is there anything you look back on and wish you had done differently?

Do we have space for a list that long? First and foremost, I wish I had found a good proofreader early on. I have neither the patience nor ability to catch mistakes. I simply read right over the top of them, because I know what it is meant to say. So, I have spent a fortune on people who leave glaring mistakes. I actually had one, after I pointed out 30 errors I found in the first chapter, say "And that is my fault how?" Of course, there are no refunds, and most get snotty if you start pointing out their inadequacies.

I wish I hadn't wasted so much time posting on author sites. ***Authors don't buy books. Readers do****. Looking back, I really don't know what I thought would happen. We are only concerned with selling our own books. Then I realized the people who did the most pontificating, either weren't published yet or when you looked them up had one book with a hideous cover and one review! So, I did what they should have been doing, I went back to work - writing!*

I would not waste money on online courses that promise sales, success, and a living wage. You can find most everything online. Great articles, some garbage, but they are free. Want to know the best place to buy an ad? Google it. How to write a great book blurb? Google it. Network with other authors. What do they do? We don't have enough space to list all the people who have helped me. The one thing all those classes can't/won't/don't do is tell you if what you've done is any good. ***You can have a great marketing plan, but if your product isn't any good, the public will vote with their wallet****. If your cover looks like an eighth grader did it as a class project, people won't even stop to see what you're about. Spend the money on a real cover.*

Look at your competition. Look at the covers of bestsellers. PAID, not free. What do their covers look like? You better match up.

The last thing I would change, looking back, is to realize that ***NO ONE loves your book as much as you do****. No matter what you pay them to help market your book, they will never care as much as you. I have paid out a lot of money to marketers who, I bet $1,000, never read the first page.*

So, you see I have bloodied my nose a hundred times doing stupid stuff. ***Just because I've sold a lot of books and have a lot of reviews, doesn't mean I haven't struggled, wasted time and money, and have been frustrated and ready to give up.*** *Being an Indie author is hard. If anyone tells you otherwise, they don't know what they are talking about. Or worse are lying and want your money.*

Gee that sounds a bit like a Debbie Downer. I love what I do. I love to meet people struggling the way I have. I love to give helpful tips or advice. I just hate when people are not told the truth. It is kind of like the people who go on American Idol, and all their family and friends have told them they are great singers when, in fact, they're horrible. ***We need a Simon Cowell for potential authors before they waste their time and money publishing something that has no chance of selling.*** *Or worse they get bashed with bone-crushing, one-star reviews. No one deserves that kind of pain.*

Q: What keeps you motivated to write?

The desire to get the stories out of my head. My wife scolds me for having too many three-chapter starts to a new book. But sometimes, I have an idea I don't want to lose and have to get it out. That's how Dara and Dupree came about. It was an idea I carried around in my head for years. One day I just wrote the first chapter. Then it was like a dam breaking. I wrote all 110K words in about a five-week period while on vacation.

THE REAL STATS

Q: How do *you* quantify success as an author?

Sales and reviews.

Being self-published, or as I prefer to be referred to as "an Independent Author" is a pitched battle for sales. It never stops. ***If you stop pitching, your sales will start to dwindle****. Fact. The name of the game is to promote, promote, promote. That doesn't mean just paid advertising. It means repetitive messaging. "Here's my book, you'll love it, buy it today." Like I said earlier, I wasn't raised to brag about myself, or what I had done. Bad form. BUT I cast that aside long ago. The trick is to deliver the message without sounding like a puffed-up jerk!*

If you are a consumer in the 21st century, you read reviews. I always read the One Star review first. Sort out the haters, and you can see the worst-case scenario. Then read the Five Star, satisfied customers. If I'm going to buy a widget and one has 2 reviews, and the other has 30, all things being equal, which one am I going to buy?

I want to buy a book. Book A has less than 5 reviews. Book B has 100+. Unless it is a brand-new release, I'm passing on Book A. Is that wrong, harsh, unfair? Who cares, I am part of your market. It is what people do.

Tough love here.

If you can't get 10 reviews from family, friends, fellow church members, your bowling team, your wife's Bunco group, people you work with, or whoever you rub shoulders with and can speak to as a friend, then you have real problems in the book business.

Granted Amazon has cracked down on reviews lately. BUT there are some tried and true ways to get reviews.

1. *Ask!*
2. *Give a gift card for a copy of your eBook. Less the 70% royalty you're out $1.20 (You better not sell for less than 3.99 unless you're under a hundred pages! Or over 4.99, you are not Stephen King!)*

3. *Tell them you need it by X day. If they say they can't, drop it, give the card to someone else. Stress it is really important for your success. If they say no mark them off your Christmas card list!*
4. *Call them two days before X. Tell them it is really important again. Amazon bases a lot of free promotion on the number of reviews.*
5. *Tell them NOT to call you by name, or let on they know you! Tell them to just leave a comment, don't call it a review, it sounds too much like an essay. Only one sentence will do.*
6. *Call them the day after X and make sure they did it.*
7. *If not, tell them to do it now. Write it on what they've read. "I liked it." and 5 stars will do. I'll wait. Remember shame and guilt is a powerful tool. Ask your mom.*
8. *Can't do it? Then the book business may not be for you.*

When Diamonds and Cole came out, I was determined to get on BookBub. Someone told me they won't consider accepting you without 30 reviews. That was my goal. I spent 50 bucks on gift cards and got 32 reviews. ***It is a business, and you are your #1 salesperson.***

Q: Are the books of self-published authors just our gift to the world or can we really make money?

Again, it depends on the quality of the product. I met one of my good friends Wayne Zurl, a fellow author (shameless plug for his great books) on a site called The Next Big Author. It is a community of writers who post their work and get it ripped to shreds. Great training ground. It does, however, give you honest, unbiased feedback on what you have written. I'm sure there are others. If you can't take the heat in a situation like that, you are in the wrong business.

If you aren't interested in money, go to CreateSpace or some other print to order service, and get enough copies for family and friends. If your book is "Clever Things My Uncle Bill Said" or "The Johnson Family's Move West" the odds are the market is really limited, and a few copies will do the trick. Better yet, get it formatted for eBook and give copies to family and friends on a thumb drive.

To make money, however, you have to spend money. If you are serious about self-publishing and want a return on your investment, get a good proofreader, an even better cover artist, (HINT: Don't use canned art and a plug in your title service) and be prepared to buy some well-placed ads. There are great cover people for $200 or less. Heck, even Fiverr has people who do a better than average job. Don't be bashful, if you don't like it or it looks cheap, say so!

Can it be done? ABSOLUTELY! My wife and I just purchased a vacation home on a lake in Washington State. We made the down payment with my book royalties. Since day one, I have never spent a cent on anything, but book expenses; left it all in the savings account. That's just me. What you do with your money is up to you but remember it is a business and businesses need capital.

Q: What tricks of the trade can you share with us that contributed to your success as a published author?

Take criticism to heart. I began with my first three covers not looking like they belonged to a successful author. If you can truly say, "That doesn't look like all the other self-published covers." you are probably in a good place. Don't have the money? Wait. Like they say, you only get one chance to make a first impression.

If you have a series, make the first volume free. My book, Diamonds and Cole, is my loss leader. People like it they buy the series. If they don't, they are way less apt to leave a bad review if it's free!

There are lots of sites that will promote your book to their readers for free or really, really cheap. That's how I built my fan base. Hook 'em with the free one, and they'll buy the series. So, make sure that the first book has a beautiful cover, free of errors, and a great story.

There are a lot of theories whether to go exclusively with Amazon or "go wide" (iTunes, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, Smashwords, etc.) after close examination, and testing it twice, I am convinced that wide is the way to go. But that is a subject for another day. Trust me on this one.

MORE REAL STATS

- How many readers do you have on your email list? ***6800+***
- What is the largest number of books you've sold in one day? ***48,000+***
- What is the next milestone you are shooting for in book sales? ***Diamonds and Cole has been downloaded 450K+ times. So 500K would be exciting!***
- How much do you spend a month on advertising? ***$500-700***
- How many books do you sell in the first week of launching a new release? ***500-800***

JUST FOR KICKS

Q: If you could chat with any author, past or present, who would it be, where would you meet and what would you discuss?

That's easy! Charles Dickens and Robertson Davies, my two favorite authors. We would have to meet in a pub in London, and I would love to ask them what I could do to bring my characters to life the way they do.

Q: What are you currently reading?

Truthfully, I am reading the new book that I just finished writing! It's called Dead Beat, and it is book #1 in a new series. Dead On Arrival, Dead Duck, Dead Head, and Dead Hand; see a pattern developing?

I've also been reading, [Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life by Scott M. Marshall](). I am a lifelong (since age 12) fan of Bob Dylan and his becoming a Christian is a source of encouragement or scorn depending on who you talk to. This book is the most insightful examination of Dylan, his faith, and spiritual journey I have read so far. It draws from Bob's own words and his continued reference to his faith in his songs.

We asked Micheal if he would like to tell you anything else before we go.

The market is flooded, deluged, overrun, bombarded, and buried in books from people that have written something and thrown it out there. (the covers are awful, the writing is poor) just because somebody said, "You should write a book." News Flash #2, your mom is going to love anything you do, and your friends don't want to hurt your feelings.

Network! Trade manuscripts with an author who isn't afraid of hurting your feeling or giving you constructive criticism. Then do it again, and a third time. Compare what they say. You can get rich in Las Vegas picking two out of three! What they say in common, take it to heart.
Stay true to your vision, set goals, then write, write, and write some more.
We are beyond thankful for Micheal's willingness to share his wisdom, insight and incredible tips and advice with us. His desire to pay it forward is such a gift!

Keep in touch with Micheal Maxwell
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