

Tom Cade: Hello, this is the news from Washington Golf. And this is Tom Cade. I am the senior director of communications for Washington Golf and joining us today is Jeff Wallach from Portland, Oregon. Jeff is a long time, many, many years long time, golf journalist and writer. He has recently published his first novel, fiction novel, called Mr. Wizard. Very happy to have Jeff with us today.

Jeff Wallach: Hey Tom. Thanks. Good to be with you.

Tom Cade: Yeah, thanks again, Jeff. I have known you a little bit and [inaudible 00:00:40] first is just talk about some of your background and how you got into this writing business and what you've been doing for the last 35 years. I've known you a little bit, but my first question is I see that you are from the East Coast originally. Grew up in New York, yeah?

Jeff Wallach: Correct.

Tom Cade: Went to school over there and master's degree from Brown University. That leads to my first question, what brought you out West?

Jeff Wallach: Well, it was time for a change for me having been in New York for most of my life and love the mountains. Love the outdoors. Had an opportunity to come out in 1985 for the first time and got in a big truck and drove all my stuff out here and kind of never looked back.

Tom Cade: Have you always been based in Portland since you got out here?

Jeff Wallach: I have been, yes. Yeah. I've made this home now for over 25 years.

Tom Cade: Yeah. So 25 years. So you were writing at the time working as a journalist or what was happening in your life?

Jeff Wallach: When I first moved out here, it was shortly after I did a graduate program in fiction writing, which turned out to be not the most practical thing you could go to graduate school for.

I came out for a job up at the Lewis and Clark College where I was running a dormitory for them and working in their outdoor program and doing some writing for the administration. Then I kicked off my freelance career from there because I had a place to live and my meals were taken care of, so it was a good way to start in a career that is a tough one to start and a tough one to make a living at.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Okay. Were you interested in golf as a child? Cause I know you've done a ton of golf writing. As far as I know, That's all I know you as. I know you've done other writing, but from my standpoint, that's how I know you is from the golf writing. How did you get into that part of it? Did you play golf as a kid? Did you play golf later in life? Or how did how'd that happen?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah, I started playing golf probably around 11 or 12 years old. That was the kind of thing where somebody's mom would drive four of us over to the local muni in the morning, drop us off and eight or 10 hours later, someone else's mom would come back and pick us up and take us all home. I've always had a love of the game and when I started my freelance career working for magazines, I wrote for science magazines and business magazines and outdoor magazines. For some reason the golf magazines called me back with assignments more than any of the other types of magazines. It was an accidental specialty, but it was one that has rewarded me so much over the years in terms of the places that I've gotten to go to write about the sport and the people I've met through it.

Tom Cade: All right. Nice. So some of the non-fiction work that you've done aside from your journalism and magazines, you've done several books.

Jeff Wallach: I have.

Tom Cade: Yeah. One is Beyond the Fairway. This one looks to be more than just about golf. It's about the inner life of golf or what?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah. It was a way of taking a lot of my offbeat travel experiences where I wrote specifically about the golf and pulling the curtain back and looking at what was happening in some of these places. When I went to cover golf travel in Thailand, or I played in Nepal and some other unusual places, the Ivory Coast in Africa, and it was always more of adventure travel to me when I was doing it. Even though most of what I got to write about it was only about the golf. So the first book was more or less the stories behind the stories.

Tom Cade: I don't know what order these books came out, but then another one that you did was Driven to Extremes. Why don't you tell a little bit about that book?

Jeff Wallach: That was a book where, in the first part of the book, I went and studied with four or five, what you might refer to as alternative golf instructors. There's a chapter in there about when I worked with Tim Gallway who wrote Inner Golf and spend a day with him and he was my coach. The fun part about that story was that I actually fired him as my coach during the day, which I think surprised him a great deal. Then we kind of reconciled the things that we were working and I rehired him for the day. We had dinner together and laughed about the whole thing. There were some other instructors I worked with, Chuck Hogan, who was based in Oregon at the time who was sort of an inner teacher and some other of the offbeat instructors that most people wouldn't come across if they just signed up to go to a Golf Digest school.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Very cool. Another book is Best Places to Golf, Northwest, which I did not know you did that one. Just covering courses and destinations in the Northwest?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah. That was more of a traditional, typical guidebook that broke the West up into a few regions. So I think we did one on Vancouver, BC and Environs, and we did something around Seattle, something around Bend, Portland, Salt Lake City, just a destination that would have a cluster of great golf courses. We wrote a little bit about the experience and describe the courses and then it had all of the typical guidebook information like costs and phone numbers and things like that.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. One more non-fiction book here. I was surprised to see this one here, but it says the book is What the River Says. About your experiences as a professional river guide.

Jeff Wallach: Right.

Tom Cade: Now, where did this come from?

Jeff Wallach: When I was working at Lewis and Clark College, when I first moved here, the director of their outdoor program trained me to work for him as a river guide. From there I went and worked for a company called Northwest Dories in Idaho. I'd go back there every summer. Probably did it for about 15 years and guide river trips on the Salmon River and the Snake River up in Idaho.

Tom Cade: Oh, wow. I was just poking around a little bit on your information here and I came across that and it just really surprised me, but that's a pretty varied background that you have that's for sure.

Jeff Wallach: It's been an adventure from the start.

Tom Cade: Yeah. How many years you've been a professional writer, you suppose?

Jeff Wallach: I think I must've started in around 1985 or 1986. I got out of grad school in '84 and did some contract work for different organizations. I was a writer for the Bonneville Power Administration in the Department of Energy. I did that for a couple of years. I've had some corporate clients I've done ghost writing. Yeah. It's been a varied menu.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Okay. So this latest book, which is just published this month, as I understand it, Mr. Wizard. Your first novel.

Jeff Wallach: Correct.

Tom Cade: Your first fiction book.

Jeff Wallach: Yeah.

Tom Cade: My first question, I keep being told that it's a golf book, but I think it's more than that obviously. I think it happens a lot on the golf course and happens around

golf, but let me ask you, in three or four sentences, what's the book about? Let us know.

Jeff Wallach: The book is a genetic treasure hunt of sorts. Where two brothers learn, via DNA testing, that the person they thought was their father was not their father. So they take off following a collection of clues that may or may not have been left by their mother to try to discover who their fathers were. The boys grow up in New York, on Long Island in the seventies. They play golf there, they play golf throughout their lives. Then the second half of the book, as they're trying to find their way to who their father was, they travel over to Ireland and there's a number of scenes in and around golf courses and clubs and pubs in Ireland.

Tom Cade: Lots of familiar golf courses that you mentioned in the book? Irish courses?

Jeff Wallach: Well, no, not really. It's a fictitious golf course where most of the golf action takes place. Although, people who've played over there might recognize characteristics of it from courses that they've actually been on. So I would say it's an amalgamation of well known courses, but not one specific actual place.

Tom Cade: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So had this idea for a fiction book, been percolating for a while, with you, something you've been toying with and just now getting around to it, or how did this come about?

Jeff Wallach: Well, it was interesting. I started out with a short story that I'd been working on and off for many years and I sent it to Michael Curtis, who's the fiction editor at The Atlantic. Michael had been kind enough to read some of my fiction early on in my career and was always very generous with his comments, even though he never bought anything. I sent him the story and he said he really liked it, but it didn't seem quite finished to him. So I went back to work to make it a little longer and suddenly six months later I had a 300 page book. Sent it back to Michael, who was still very generous with his time. He was very helpful in the process of getting it published.

Tom Cade: I think that experience of publishing and going through that whole process and editing, that's a lot of the process of this [inaudible 00:11:09] that people don't see, correct?

Jeff Wallach: It is. I can't underestimate my description of how difficult it is to publish fiction in the current environment. With bookstores going out of business, the number of publications that are being put out by people who are self publishing or publishing with small publishers like mine and the difficulty of getting any kind of coverage at all. I read something recently on the Publisher's Weekly website that said the average book published in America sells 250 copies. So this is not a retirement plan.

Tom Cade: Wow. It like you've got this book available, Mr. Wizard, in several different places. So I know that you've been out there working hard at it. One is on your

own website, which is JeffWallach.com. Can people buy the book on your website?

Jeff Wallach: They can, if they go on the website right on the landing page, there's a button to hit. It takes you right to the publisher. You buy it directly from the publisher, which is the best way somebody can support writers and publishers, especially small literary publishers.

Tom Cade: Other than your website, where else would people want to go then? It's published by Open Books, correct?

Jeff Wallach: Correct, but I could get it on Amazon. Amazon or Open Books are also places where they could buy an ebook that will be sent to their email addresses almost instantaneously.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Ebook actually is a good way to go. I would think that with your kind of book where there's not much graphics and illustrations that's easily transferable to any book, correct?

Jeff Wallach: Absolutely. It'd be easy to read.

Tom Cade: Yeah. So I've heard, Jeff, some people say that fiction writing is very difficult because there's so many variables in it and goes in so many different ways because you're kind of making up the history of the book. You may have certain facts to go by, but really you're kind of on your own out there creating an entirely new world and that can be daunting and intimidating to some writers. How did you find this?

Jeff Wallach: It's funny that you asked that question and it's a great question because as a journalist, obviously, you have to go out and find the facts. You have to learn what happened and get exactly right that somebody said about something. That's both the challenge of writing non-fiction and also part of their requirement. It's easy from the standpoint that you don't have to make anything up and also disappointing from the standpoint that you don't get to make anything up.

Fiction is the opposite. You can have a character say whatever you want them to say, and if it doesn't sound right, you can change it. If the facts don't lay out the way you want them to, you just get to change the facts. It was difficult in that there's a world that's wide open with no limitations on how something can happen, but it's also liberating in that you can make it come out any way that you want.

Tom Cade: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That's a good way to put that. For this book, who would it appeal to? What kind of reader?

Jeff Wallach: I think there's a few different groups of people that would be interested. People who are interested in ancestry and DNA testing, I think would find some fascinating things in it. Golfers should love it. People who have traveled to Ireland or want to travel to Ireland or who are Irish should like it. There's some Jewish ancestry in it as well and I think readers of what they would call literary fiction would also find it.

Tom Cade: Another question is, how did you come up with the title, Mr. Wizard?

Jeff Wallach: The title refers to a card trick that the mother teaches to the two sons early on in the book. It's sort of a metaphor for how she's lived her life. There's a riddle there to be figured out. That's not unlike the riddle the boys are trying to figure the answer to, regarding who their father was.

Tom Cade: The book takes place in Long Island in the seventies, and you grew up in Long Island in the seventies. Is there any sort of autobiography aspect to this book a little bit? I imagine there is an every piece of fiction people draw from their experiences when they put something down on paper.

Jeff Wallach: Yeah. Also, a great question. When you make things up, you have to base them on experiences that you've actually had. There are both real things from my childhood in this book, the schools that I went to are named in there, there are landmarks that people who knew the area would recognize and go, "Oh yeah, that's Wall's Bakery. I know Wall's Bakery" or "That's the Duck Pond. I used to drive by there all the time." Then there are also times and places in the book where there's a location that needs to be there, but maybe my memory wasn't as great as it was regarding other destinations and so rather than try to describe something that I couldn't remember quite precisely, I would just make it up and give it a different name.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Okay. About the book itself, is it a mystery? Is it a suspense? Is it a family check in a book? How would you categorize?

Jeff Wallach: It's a family drama and it's also a mystery, not in the sense that anybody gets murdered, but there are a lot of connections and cause and effect that are revealed later in the book. There are some surprises in there. In fact, some of them surprised me when I was writing it.

Tom Cade: So I think I know what you mean by that, but why don't you explain to me what you mean by that? Let me just say that, I think when you write fiction your characters suddenly take you places that you didn't know they were going to go, but logically they got to go there. Is that, would you mean?

Jeff Wallach: That's exactly right. I've heard other writers talk about this in the past where the book determines how the book is written. Sometimes once you create a character or a situation, there's a natural way for it to resolve itself that may

have nothing to do with what your intentions were for it. It takes on a life of its own and it becomes a participant in the creation of the work.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Yeah. So was that a sort of a nice thing to discover in fiction writing? That part of it?

Jeff Wallach: It's part of what made the writing of this book so fun for me because I would come to work in the mornings every day, having some idea of the general direction that things were going in, but there was always a surprise around the corner. For me, even one or two very big surprises where something happens towards the end of the book, I didn't know it was going to happen when it happened. I looked at it and I thought, well, of course, that had to happen because I see how everything laid itself out, but I didn't know it was coming.

Tom Cade: Nice. Jeff, any last comments about the book? Again the book is titled Mr. Wizard. First fiction novel by Jeff Wallach. Any final thoughts, Jeff, on it?

Jeff Wallach: Just really fun talking to you, Tom. Thanks for the opportunity.

Tom Cade: Yeah. Thank you, Jeff, for taking the time and again, for those who want to check it out and purchase it, it's available on amazon.com or a JeffWallach.com. Thanks again, Jeff. Talk to you soon.

Jeff Wallach: You bet.

Tom Cade: Bye bye.