

Tom Cade: Hello everyone. This is Pod for the Course, and I'm Tom Cade, the director of communications for Washington Golf. Today we have with us, Jeff Wallach. And I know him as a golf writer but he's also written numerous other items about other subject matters. Other than golf, he's written nearly 1,000 articles for publications such as the New York Times, the Oregonian newspaper, Sports Illustrated, Men's Journal and on and on. He's the author of five non-fiction books. And one of them I know is the history book of Eugene Country Club. And Jeff is a repeat guest with us here on this podcast. Two years ago, Jeff was on here talking about his first book of fiction, which was called Mr. Wizard. And the reason for him being with us today is he's come out or is going to soon to publish a follow-up book to that, another fiction book called Everyone Here is from Somewhere Else, a title which I love. Jeff Wallach, thanks so much for being with us today.

Jeff Wallach: Thanks for having me, Tom. And you may be one of the few people in the world who know of that Eugene Country Club history book. So thanks for mentioning that.

Tom: You bet. So you've been a tad busy lately, sounds like, yeah?

Jeff Wallach: Yes, absolutely.

Tom: This let's talk real briefly about the background for this. Again, I mentioned your first book of fiction, which is Mr. Wizard. And this was a story of two brothers. If you talk a little bit about what they were up to?

Jeff Wallach: Sure. The first book was... I describe it as a sort of DNA treasure hunt. And not to give too much away up front, because I hope some of your listeners might pick up the book, but the brothers learned early in the book that the man they thought was their father wasn't. And the rest of the book involves their search for who their father was and essentially then who they are, and how they define who they are in terms of their ethnicity and their interests. The brothers play golf. Did they get their love of golf from their father? Is there a genetic marker for people who know how to execute the complicated motions of the golf swing? Things like that, so that was the premise of the first book.

Tom: Okay, so that was your first foray into a fiction work. And what prompted that with you?

Jeff Wallach: Well, I started my career as a fiction writer and did a master's program in creative writing back when I was in my 20s. And so that was always what I had hoped to do for a career. And then that being a difficult career path, I became a journalist for the next 35 years out of self-defense, because I needed to make a living and still wanted to be a writer. So I had a great career, which I really enjoyed writing non-fiction but writing novels was always what I wanted to do. So when I turned 55, I decided that I better hurry and get back to the original career plan.

Tom: This new work of fiction coming up here, Everyone Here is from Somewhere Else. As I see, it looks like it's going to be published... the official publishing date is St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. Is that correct?

Jeff Wallach: Correct. Yeah.

Tom: This is a prequel of Mr. Wizard or is it a sequel? What is it? It is the continuation of the story of these two brothers, correct?

Jeff Wallach: It is. It's both a prequel and a sequel in that we pick up where the first book left off and follow the brothers forward into the future and what their journey consists of. But at the same time, we go back and explore the pasts of some of the major characters. So for instance, the mother and the father and other people of that generation who are crucial to the story, we go back and learn more about their own pasts and see them when they were younger. For instance, the boy's mother dies on the first page of the first book. So I'm not giving too much away there. And we don't ever really learn too much about her past. Well, in the new book, we see her as a young girl starting in her early teens and see what some of the things that happened to her were that affect the action in the first book.

Tom: So these characters, they have glommed onto you a little bit. It seems like you've got a little more stories to tell about them. The first book wasn't quite enough. There was still something else there, yeah?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah. And I was a little surprised by it because when I finished the book, I started working on another project that had nothing to do with this first novel. And I realized that I had some more to say about these characters. And so if I had been maybe a more skilled novelist or I'd been a novelist who was in his 20s rather than his 50s when he wrote this, maybe the material from the second book would've been in the first book and it would've been a meatier book. But I didn't know when I was writing the first book that this other information was going to be so interesting to me and also so crucial to telling the full story.

Tom: In your experience as a journalist and a writer, what's the difference. Obviously, other than basic factual information, what's the difference between writing nonfiction and writing fiction?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah, that's a great question.

Tom: Just from a "sitting down at your desk" kind of a thing, what's the difference?

Jeff Wallach: In a way, journalism is easier because you don't have to make up any of the information and you don't have to make up the quotes. You sit down, you do your research, you interview people, that's the information you have to work with, so it's easier than fiction. But fiction is more fun because you get to make that stuff up. Sometimes, and I'm sure you know this as a journalist, you're

talking to a source and you wish they would say a certain type of thing or give you a quote with a certain level of passion or emotion, and sometimes you don't get that. Well, as a novelist, you just get to make up whatever you want the characters to have said. And so it always ends up the way you want it.

Tom: That's interesting. Again, the book is going to come out on St Patrick's Day. And I know that there's golf themes throughout this book, and Irish themes. A fiction book, you can create anything you want, place it anywhere you want, have any kind of character you want. Why did you choose these characters in this setting?

Jeff Wallach: Well, I would have to go back to the genesis of the original book was that I learned somewhat late in my life that I had some Scottish heritage, something I had never heard before. And so in the book, the Scottish heritage was converted to Irish heritage just because I was well acquainted with Ireland and I knew having taken trips over there about how fun the Irish were to be around and what great storytellers they were. So that transition happened but since in my own life, I discovered late that I had a heritage I didn't know, that became the impetus for the first book. And having a background in writing about golf for the last 35 years, it made sense to me and it was easy to imagine one of these characters was a golf pro. And so with the Irish setting and the golf in mind, a lot of the story unfolded from there.

Tom: You take enjoyment from writing fiction I'm assuming, yeah?

Jeff Wallach: I do. The first book was the most fun that I ever had writing in my long career. And I think partly because there were no deadlines, there were no word counts, there were no editors who could say what was acceptable or not acceptable in the story. And I just let my imagination go and it was kind of a fun ride and that's why I did the sequel.

Tom: So Mr. Wizard comes out in 2020. And is going along and you were promoting it and the book was selling. And then at what point did you realize, "you know what? I think there's something else to do with these characters." There was still a story to tell, but at what point within you did you realize, "oh, I got to write another one about this?"

Jeff Wallach: I think it was a combination of things. One was that the book that I started to write after that was not going so well. And it just didn't feel like the right thing for me to be pursuing. At the same time, I had some people who read Mr. Wizard say, well, what happens after the book ends? Where do these characters go? They had some specific questions about relationships between some of the characters that weren't completely resolved. And that combination of not being successful with the new project and people asking about these characters made me think about, well, where *did* they go? What *did* happen to them? And as soon as I started thinking about it, the story unfolded itself to me.

Tom: How long of a process is it from that realization, that, “okay, I need to write this other book with these same characters,” how long does it take to put it on paper and get it all out?

Jeff Wallach: For me, the first draft of both of these books came very quickly. I would say six to nine months and I had the story laid out. And I'm not a writer who sets an outline and is very concise with exactly what's going to happen. I write it one page at a time and I might know a few of the plot points that I have to include or maybe I know a little bit about the ending but I just let the book write itself. And so each of the books took about six to nine months to write that first draft and then another, maybe 18 months to write revisions. And the first book went through 12 or 13 different versions. Maybe I learned something in that process because the second one probably took only six or seven drafts although it took about the same amount of time.

Tom: While this is all going on in your mind and on your laptop, are you still working as a journalist for newspapers and magazines or what do you do otherwise?

Jeff Wallach: No. I've stopped most of that and part of it as you know being in this business, being a journalist especially a freelance journalist now is a lot different than it was when I was in the middle of my career. A lot of the magazines and newspapers that I worked for have either gone out of business or they have different business models. And as a career, in the old days you could really make a good living as a freelance journalist. Content had a high value and there weren't a lot of people who could produce it. And with the advent of the internet and blogs and all the plethora of websites that are out there, it's very difficult to make a living writing content for media. And so I gave that up... either I gave it up or it gave me up, being that so many of these markets went away. And so I was at a point in my career where I could afford to stop doing it.

Tom: With the market changing like that, stories still need to be told. And true stories need to be told, fiction stories need to be told, inspirational stories need to be told whether they're fiction or non-fiction. Where do you see this going? I mean, are we all going to narrow it down to social media posts or... I think the human desire for storytelling is still there. What shape is it going to look like, do you think? Where are we going?

Jeff Wallach: Yeah, that's a very powerful way to put it, Tom. And I think about this all the time because with the advent of so-called influencers, and I've been on media trips with these people and I get that this is a great way to communicate certain things. You snap a photo, you post it on Instagram, maybe you throw a caption on there. But I agree with you there are complex stories that need to be told that cannot be told via a series of selfies of an influencer or some other person visiting a site. And the only way to tell these stories is through lengthy content, whether it's writing or whether it's film or music. I'm disappointed that people's attention span seems to have shrunk to the point where they would rather look at a couple of photos that pop than read a long form magazine article where a

writer develops a story and researches it and applies the craft of writing that's been around for a few thousand years. And those stories, I think, are really important. And people seem to be less interested in these stories and that worries me.

Tom: That leads to really big questions about how we think about things, how we think about ourselves, how do we create a livable life, worthwhile life, things like that. Those are large stories to think about.

Jeff Wallach: Absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more on that. I think as people who create content ourselves, this is really important to us as writers and journalists and novelists. These stories are important and they can't be told via a snapshot. Now, there are some things that can be beautifully told, and I've seen Instagram posts that create a story in themselves but the complexity and the depth of those stories, we need a longer form to tell some of the more complicated stories.

Tom: Sure. Yeah. And that's maybe the draw of a novel such as for yourself, correct?

Jeff Wallach: Absolutely. Yeah. And even in the magazine business, I mean, when I started in the business, you'd get an assignment from a magazine and it would be 3,000 words or 3,500 words. And you would get little guidance because if an editor trusted you, they knew that you were the storyteller and you would find what it was that was interesting or important about a subject. And towards the end of my career, those 3,500 word stories became 800-word stories. And of those 800 words, 200 of them were what they call the "industry service." So here's a place that I went to visit and I wrote a story about it. Well, now you have to include three hotels and two restaurants and five websites. And so even of those 800 words that you've been given, 200 of them aren't really writing. They're more like just list of information. And so for somebody who cared about the craft of writing and storytelling, it became a business that was harder to be in.

Tom: Everyone Here is from Somewhere Else – it sounds like a title from a song lyric, so it's a great title. Where did you come up with that title?

Jeff Wallach: I'm not exactly sure. I think one of the characters in the book says something very similar to that line. And at the beginning, I was thinking of calling this the return of Mr. Wizard or Mr. Wizard Redux. And I thought I needed to move beyond that original title. And the second book is about brothers trying to find where they're from and what that means and what the influence of place is in determining who you are as a person. And so that came together as something that encapsulated the themes of the book.

Tom: So this second book about these characters, of course, brings up the question: is there going to be a third book?

Jeff Wallach: I had a feeling that question was coming. I'm working on something very different right now that has nothing to do with these characters or this subject matter. But if there's a third book, I know what it's about. And so I wouldn't be surprised if in a few years, I'm ready to come back and complete the trilogy and take these main characters through their later years. So I think if I live long enough, it might still be out there.

Tom: There you go. Again, we have with us Jeff Wallach, of Portland Oregon, who is going to soon release here on March 17th, his second fiction novel called Everyone Here is from Somewhere Else. It's the continuing story of the two brothers who were introduced to us in his first book two years ago in The Wizard. Jeff, where would someone be able to find this new book?

Jeff Wallach: The new book will publish on March 17th and readers can pre-order either from jeffwallach.com or from my publishers website, open-bks.com. And then about a month after publication, it'll become available on Amazon.

Tom: Okay. Very good. Again, Jeff Wallach, with his new book, Everyone Here is from Somewhere Else. Jeff, thanks so much for taking the time to be with us today. I appreciate it.

Jeff Wallach: It was a pleasure to talk to you, Tom.

Tom: Okay. Talk to you soon. Bye bye.