Being A Writer Podcast - Judy Piatkus

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**SPEAKERS**

Nelima Begum, Judy Piatkus

**Nelima Begum**

Good morning, Judy, welcome to the being roaster podcast, how are you today?

**Judy Piatkus**

it's lovely to be here, thank you so much for inviting me.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh we're thrilled to have you on here because you've got such incredible stories to tell and you've got such a great journey as well in the, in the book world so we're really excited to be able to talk to you because I think you bring something different to the podcast that we previously haven't had and it's kind of looking at the writing and the creative side of writing, alongside the business world which is a really interesting angle to come from. So, we'll jump straight in, because I'm eager to hear from you. So, some would say that writing can be more of a creative venture than a business one. What does the term writing entrepreneur mean to you and is it something you had in mind when starting your first business? I know the terminology is quite new, so whatever your interpretation is of it would be great.

**Judy Piatkus**

I love the idea of a writing entrepreneur, and I think what's interesting about a writing entrepreneur conceptually, in 2021, is that there are so many different ways to make a living now. And there are, there are so many opportunities, especially with all the new technology. So when I started my company Piatkus Books in 1979, the word startup wasn't even used I'm not sure if anybody invented or created that. Yeah, actually that could take us a long way down the road to innovative words innovative writing if, if people didn't stop talk about startups until fairly recently, then a writing entrepreneur has got tremendous potential.

**Nelima Begum**

 Yeah, definitely. So is it something you kind of, I mean, when, even though the terminology didn't exist and the term startup was still very new did you kind of have this idea that this was where you wanted to go with your pursuit of writing as a business?

**Judy Piatkus**

I knew I wanted to work with books for that meant that I wanted to work with words. And in the 1980s before all the wonderful technology that we have now, when you worked with books you really did work with words because people used typewriters, there were no computers, and everything was done by hand. You couldn't edit on screen. So writing entrepreneur would have been an interesting term, definitely in the 1980s. And I knew that I loved reading, and interestingly, I think when publishers had to reinvent themselves for handheld readers and all the new technology at the end of the first decade of this century, you know, around 2009/2010, I think a lot of people in publishing really struggled to work with their new digital colleagues, because they were so used to working with words and they'd come into publishing to work with words and books and weren't expecting to work with technology in the way that we all have now learned to.

**Nelima Begum**

Of course there are so many new programs and softwares now that are involved with publishing, and I imagine that, you know, back then, how you say you would typewriters and it was very much like craftsmanship almost to physically do it by hand to physically do everything by hand, as opposed to things on Word.

**Judy Piatkus**

Yeah, I mean, people began to get computerized publishers began to get computerized, in particular, I do know a bit about that, to around 1997/1998, because we had a consultant, outside the company, who said to us, you've got to get computerized because everybody else is. And interestingly, because of his wise advice, we were one of the first publishing companies to recognize that, or, publishing companies of our size, and to really get on with getting systems in place. So, by 2008/2009 when we went digital we did of course have computers, people were editing online, but nothing like the way that we all work digitally nowadays.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, especially in current circumstances where we're relying so heavily on technology and going digital.

**Judy Piatkus**

Absolutely, and especially for things like marketing. So social media, I think Facebook was started in, around 2005/2006, that's when Mark Zuckerberg launched it so social media has taken 15 years, to sort of begin to rule all our lives, and especially to be used by people in marketing in the ways that it's used now, and of course there will be lots more new developments in the next few years.

**Nelima Begum**

Of course, yeah I mean, the landscape of business and of publishing is always changing, so that's always exciting to see and obviously your own business has evolved, and seen a lot of development as well. So, going back to the beginning, which is always a good place to start, Piatkus Nooks was founded in your spare bedroom which is incredible considering just how iconic it is now and how it has its own brand. How did you get started?

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, it's interesting because we've almost gone full circle because so many businesses are being started now in people's bedrooms or their local coffee shops. Yeah, in the 1980s, though, it was very unusual and in fact there were various laws prohibiting the things that you could do in your home, and as the company grew bigger, I would get more deliveries during the day, and I actually began to worry that some of the neighbors would complain because I'd get quite large lorries coming from the printers, bringing me the first batch of books -

**Nelima Begum**

- How exciting though to have that in your own home!

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, I started off Piatkus Books, and we had we were in a for a very nice four bedroom house, and we graduated there from a flat, and after a couple of years, I actually did start in my bedroom. It was large enough to have a desk and a computer, and while I nearly said computer. What I actually meant was a Golf Ball typewriter, which was the last word in typewriters. So I sat there getting on with it. And then I hired an assistant to help with the admin, and she got a desk in the children's bedroom. And then we did actually decide to put a loft extension on the hat on, and that the house was very suited to it, it was lovely and airy. And we ended up with six desks in a room in the roof. And we, we were in the house for five years.

**Nelima Begum**

I mean it gives such a nice family feel to the business as well.

**Judy Piatkus**

It definitely was because the smaller children, my, my son and I was pregnant with my son when I started Piatkus Books. I had my older daughter Sonia, who has cerebral palsy, and, and then my younger daughter came along - Leah, and I remember when Leah was one or two she would often be found climbing the stairs to the roof if somebody wasn't watching her every minute (laughs).

**Nelima Begum**

That's great. Actually, I wanted to ask, seeing as your children kind of grew up around all of this, what did, and when they were young what did they think you did?Did they understand it completely or did they have their own ideas of what Mommy was doing with all these books and boxes of books in the house?

**Judy Piatkus**

Well throughout my time people say to me, how can I get my child to read. I can honestly say there was never a problem with my children because they understood what books were. And, I mean, and they got very excited because they could recognize the logo. The distinctive logo on which book was mummy's and which book was produced by someone else and why didn't mummy do children's books? Yes they did understand that I was involved in making books and of course we could go into book shops and there was a local bookshop, at the time in Loughton High Street, and we could go in there occasionally and see mommy's books on sale, so it wasn't difficult for them to understand. And because they grew up with it, I suspect they didn't really question it.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, I guess that was just their normal wasn't it to just have you working with books and to be around books and just recognize how it all worked, which is great.

**Judy Piatkus**

Yes, and of course, I was always reading, their father was always reading, so reading was just something we did. So instead of everybody nowadays, possibly, sitting around with their with their computers or their iPads or their phones in the same room, we could all sit in the same room reading or working in some cases.

**Nelima Begum**

That's incredible. That sounds, that's just such a lovely imagery as well to just picture a whole family in a room reading their books or looking at books or talking about them. Staying on the topic of the beginning, did you have a vision of what you wanted the brand to be and to stand for right from the get go, and how, if at all, did it evolve and adapt over time because obviously you would have changed and the things you picked up over time would have affected that as well. But did you have an idea from the get go?

**Judy Piatkus**

I knew, I knew before I got married, that I was going to want to be a working mother. And I knew that I probably wasn't suited to be at home all day looking after children. So when my first daughter was diagnosed as having cerebral palsy, I didn't feel guilty that because I'd already made the decision that I wanted to be a working mother and I, and I think I felt really grateful about that, because it wasn't as if I was torn, and it wasn't as if I was going out and leaving her however, because she does have disabilities, and she hasn't been able to walk or speak, she's always been in a wheelchair, I realized very soon after she was diagnosed that for us as a family to have a good quality of life, we would need to have money, and therefore, I was very motivated to earn a decent living. And so at first money was motivating me doing something more interesting when cleaning the house was motivating me. Anyway, I just wanted to read books all day because it was, it was the perfect job for someone who wants to read books all day. So as as the company grew bigger, we had to think of a strategy going forward, we'd started off publishing fiction, and when we began to publish non-fiction, because I realized that we would never be taken as seriously as a publishing company, if we only published fiction. So that was, that was a big venture, and then really my ambition became just to sell as many copies of every book as possible. And no, I've never been terribly good at vision. It was so simple I thought well it can't vision can't just be about that. But actually, it was, and eventually of course our books were selling all over the world.

**Nelima Begum**

That's wonderful, but it definitely does sound like it's, it's changed over time, and it's kind of just fit whatever the situation was at any given time so whether it was your family life or pursuing more financial stability or making a change in what you were publishing as well. It definitely sounds like it's evolved, which is great because it's, I guess it's nice to have it varied.

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, every company has to evolve. And because the pace of business was much slower in the 1980s which was our first decade. There was time for all of us to grow into our into our roles in a way, and to gain experience, because my colleagues and I, we had had not held significant high level positions in any other company, so we had to learn as we went along. And, and so this was very valuable. And while publishing is fairly slow, in some ways, in that you might decide what you want to publish you find an author to write the book - that can take them a year, it can take another nine months before you get out some books have to be published at different times of the year, you know, you might have a Christmas gift book or you might have a diet book, so they've got their own times. So, you would, have we would, we actually had time to learn on the job and to gain a lot of experience. And I would say things moved a lot faster in the 1990s, because we then began to have globalization, so we were lucky to have the 1980s and to be able to take our time learning really how to publish books well.

**Nelima Begum**

So you kind of had, I mean you have the luxury of time and space to kind of ease yourselves into it before this massive boom happened, which, you know, must have made it slightly easier for you in that you, like you say you had that time to just figure it out and really learn it well.

**Judy Piatkus**

Um, yes, and to learn about the finances to understand that every season we needed to have enough successful books to finance the next season, all kinds of things like that. And I think it's much, much harder for entrepreneurs now because the pace of change is so fast, especially with technology and social media. And now that the channels to market are much more complex. So, in the 80s and 90s books were sold through bookshops books were sold to libraries and books were sold via the book clubs which were hugely important. And some people listening may remember the massive advertisements on the back of the Sunday Color magazine supplements you'd get two massive books on gardening or a massive cookery book to encourage you to join a book club. Well as soon as Amazon launched in the UK, course the book club market couldn't survive, but that also meant that other companies began to go online, so that they could offer a choice to their customers, not every book had to be bought online via Amazon, and of course now, there are hundreds of different ways that you can buy books, and of course audio books are massive now but they weren't then, because you would have had to buy something you'd have to play on a machine at home. And so nowadays it's much, much harder for entrepreneurs, and anybody who manages business to keep up with change.

**Nelima Begum**

It's definitely a lot to stay on top of and, you know, I think they would, I mean you're constantly learning anyway but as you say the pace at which you're, you're learning nowadays is, is a lot faster and it's a lot more information you have to soak up as well.

**Judy Piatkus**

Definitely, definitely, and of course the other thing now is that, really, there aren't the same boundaries. So it was really interesting when I eventually sold the company which was in 2007, I remember a couple of weeks before, before the, the sale was completed, I needed to speak to the financial director one evening, and I didn't have, I was at home she was at her home. We had emails, of course, but we weren't, we weren't a company where people emailed each other during the evening, we'd always had very clear boundaries that we wouldn't do that. And I realized I didn't have her phone number, and it was shocking. It was shocking to me that I was at home and I actually couldn't call her. And I think that was really also a positive thing because when we left the office at the end of the day we didn't expect to be in touch with one another, except in an emergency. Whereas now, of course, it's company culture in a lot of organizations that people are expected to respond to emails, all kinds of times, and I don't think people work better for it. And I don't think it's respectful, so that also made everything a lot easier, and the fact that we that we had a very clear time when we might choose to work but weren't necessarily expected to work.

**Nelima Begum**

Absolutely, I think it's very interesting that you've begun to talk about work culture and how it's changed because we'll be coming to that later on but just slowly branching off from vision to now success, has your definition of success changed from when you first started in comparison to where you are now having worked on so many projects over your career?

**Judy Piatkus**

I think success is about having a happy life, and feeling comfortable and at ease with yourself, with the people around you. So there's success in business, and there were points during my publishing career, when we did celebrate specific successes, and sometimes people would congratulate us on being successful. But when you're an entrepreneur and you don't have any financial backing behind you, which we didn't, because we managed to remain independent. We didn't have any outside shareholders or outside finance. We knew only two well, that we were only as good as our next publishing season. So even though people would congratulate us, even though what we had built was successful, we always felt I certainly did, as if I were on the edge of a cliff. Any moment, I have to be very careful because the cliff could start giving away, and I think a lot of entrepreneurs feel like that unless they've got a lot of money in the bank.

**Nelima Begum**

Of course, no, definitelyI mean you need to you need to be stable with the numbers need to work out in your favor as well so it is definitely, not necessarily constant pressure but there is always a target that needs to be met, I think, especially if you're an entrepreneur.

**Judy Piatkus**

Well I think it's been shown very sadly in the last 18 months, that no one in business can ever know what outside forces may impact on a successful business. So we always had a plan B and a Plan C in case some things that we were planning to do didn't work out. And that was reassuring for us. You know we always had some ideas that we might fall back on if something happened and that we weren't expecting. And and very often it's not of your making it. If you're running a successful company, that usually means that the company as a whole works very well the people work very well together. The product is good the customers like it, but now I can always change very very fast. So, as an entrepreneur you have to be prepared, you have to be vigilant, all the time.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, definitely, as you said you always have to keep your eye on the ball and be ready to keep up with the next change or the next thing that might be happening. And you've certainly done that with your companies. You've held a number of roles over your career, sometimes several at one time. How have you caught compartmentalized your various hats, and how do you find balance in a busy life?

**Judy Piatkus**

Um, I think I've always gone after what I wanted to do. And if, if I I think we published books on mind body and spirit, and so of course I read many books about that, and I think I recognized, gradually, what it felt like to be intuitive, to have a gut feeling or if I had a hunch, and I got more confident, I became more confident in following my intuition or following those unexpected messages that all of us can have because they come from inside us, but it takes practice to get used to working with it. So if an idea popped into my head. and I thought that looks exciting where's that come from, I really want to go with it, then I would follow it up and see if there was a way of working with it. So that's how I managed to do my, my qualification in counseling. I started off doing it as a volunteer. I worked as a volunteer on a phone line, it wasn't the Samaritans, because I, I wanted something that would be of interest to me, that wasn't always about books and publishing, because, as our working day did end at half-past five officially, and we didn't have computers in the 90s, I did have some evenings to myself so I worked as a volunteer on a phone line I became a bereavement counselor, and then I thought it would be interesting to actually do a counseling course and I loved it so much. I went on to do a diploma in psychotherapy and psychodynamic counseling. And in my book I had ahead of Ahead Of Her Time. I do you write about the fact there were consequences, while I was studying my diploma because it did take my eye off the publishing ball. And I thought, Well, I've been doing it so long and the company's running so well and all those things were happening, but I did need to return to lead it, and that was quite a lesson. But I think if you really want to do something, you will find a way. And if you take everybody with you, if you've got a supportive family, if you've got supportive people working with you. You can always find a way to resolve the challenge.

**Nelima Begum**

Absolutely. I think having a good like strong network makes a world of difference as well.

**Judy Piatkus**

Everybody needs a support network. We have to work as a team we have to work collaboratively, the hierarchical way of managing people isn't working nowadays because the business world and the workplace is much too complex. We've all got to engage with one another and you can't have one person telling everybody what to do, because they won't understand subtle nuances - everything's too sophisticated.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean you've just you've briefly made mention of your memoir just now but it was published in April of this year, so congratulations, and it tells readers of your journey venturing into the business world and also becoming a publishing legend in the process and, you know, we've just talked about the balance of things and you pursuing something outside of publishing altogether. So the title was really interesting for me - how did you manage to not just stay on top of but keep ahead of market trends in the book world and become so forward thinking in the material you will publishing, as well as the work culture that you were cultivating within your company?

**Judy Piatkus**

And we were known for we were known for publishing lifestyle books. So we, we were always thinking, what's the next trend going to be in the way that we live. And very often those trends came from America. So we would go, I would go to New York and meet with publishers once a year, sometimes I went to the American Book Fair. There was the London book fair, there was the Frankfurt Book Fair, my colleagues went there as well. And I was always really interested in what American publishers were publishing and interested in exploring the new ideas, and very often a trend would take hold in America, and then my colleagues and I would speculate as to whether it would come to the UK, and sometimes we got it right, we would buy a couple of books, and look for someone in the UK to write a book in that area, sometimes we got it right. Other times the trend just didn't take hold in the UK, but we were always ready to try something new. And because we were always ready to take a chance if it didn't cost too much, we were constantly providing the magazines with newspapers, with interesting material to write about. So they got used to coming to us and finding out new topics, new ideas, and that got us well known in the publishing industry in the media area, as, being a place where people would find out what might be happening next so we didn't always get it right, but we enjoyed it. That was the other thing it was really interesting speculating about what the future might be like.

**Nelima Begum**

Fun to see if the predictions were right one - what a nice little office game. (Laughs)

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, we did recognize that the financial bubble was going to burst. And we did commission a book on the topic just shortly before I sold the company. And interestingly the book came out in 2009 it was just the week that Britain was on the brink because we had all the Icelandic banks with them, where they're going to go. And the book that we had published about the topic of whether the financial bubble would burst literally came out and within bookshops, that very week. And so I felt really proud that until the very end of my leadership of the company, we had got it right.

**Nelima Begum**

So, generally speaking, I know you said you look to the US for up and coming market trends, generally were they kind of on the money with it all like, did the same things pick up in the UK, most of the time or...

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, examples such as quite you esoteric topics like thinking about your inner child and codependency for people struggling with alcohol abuse and other addictions that was massive in America, early in the 1990s. And we did publish a few successful titles, but it never became such a massive talking point in the UK as it did there. And then when I would travel to our export markets in the 1990s most countries engaged with ideas about mind, body and spirit, and personal growth and personal development before we did in the UK, and my own particular theory about that was that the UK is not a nation of immigrants, not in the same way that America is in that immigrants, went to America, and built a nation and it was the same in Australia, where is it where is in England people can sometimes trace their ancestry back 1000 years. And I think that's me that made us at the time less of a 'can do' nation, you know, we, we weren't forced to rely on our own resources in the way that America, somewhere like America were also people travel around so many, many, many people have lived in several different cities in several parts of the country, so they're constantly having to sort of build support networks start again, find new homes, whereas in England we tend to be much more settled and much more stable. So, so we found all that very interesting. but but England was definitely more conservative in adopting topics like Feng Shui, or we're talking about past lives or, or, or lots of the esoterica that we were offering them if they wanted to read about it. I mean, in America, you go into a bookshop and on the front table you will find all these personal development and personal growth books, or as an England in a bookshop you're going to find history and military and politics, perhaps, is that so I think, sort of, even now that expresses the differences in what people are likely to be reading, thinking about, and how they approach their lives.

**Nelima Begum**

It's a really interesting way of looking at market trends and comparing the two as well. Staying on the topic of your memoir. You also mentioned that you were determined to be happy coming to work each day and in doing so create happiness for your team, some of whom were with you for 20 years. I know now, we talk a lot about work culture and wellness in the workplace, and there's a lot more focus on mental health as well and work life balance, but can you tell us more about that as you were starting your company and as you were running things as well, because it seems like you had outlined your work culture from very early on.

**Judy Piatkus**

I think it helped everybody who came in the office was coming to my house at least for the first few years, because we had a very relaxed informal atmosphere. However, before I'd started my own company, I'd worked with a partner, and there had been a period when we hadn't got on well, and as a result we decided to separate. So I decided that when I started my own business, I wanted to be happy coming to work every day. And that meant that everybody else was going to have to be happy, so that we all have an enjoyable time. And I think that was probably a really great learning. And I think also my daughter because she did have cerebral palsy, that always has been very significant for me because it meant that I couldn't take anything too seriously. She had had a very difficult start to her life and her life has been very, very difficult, because when you're non-verbal and you can't express your needs very easily, that has to be the hardest of all. And so therefore, anything that happened in my life aside from looking after her in the workplace, of course it was important, but it meant that I didn't take it all quite as seriously as I might have if Sonia wasn't in my life, so I did always try and just walk lightly through life in so far as I was able to, so it wasn't that I wasn't quite driven, and I wanted to get everything right and I was very professional, but I also wanted to enjoy my life. And I recognized how precious that was, and I wanted people to enjoy working in the company, and all those things were really important to me so we did always try and treat people the way we would like to be treated, which doesn't mean I managed it in every, in every case, all the time, but my intentions were always good. And I think you know when people work closely with you, and when you're the boss, they do watch everything you're doing, and people recognized that my colleagues and I had very clear values about the way that we wanted people to feel about the company.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, of course, I mean your team would naturally just adopt some of your habits and your working culture so it's really nice to hear that, you know, you guys made a very conscious effort to make it a great environment for everyone.

**Judy Piatkus**

No, we were making it a great environment for ourselves at the same time. So yes, of course we did, we didn't always agree, we could be quite outspoken, which I think took a bit of people getting used to if they'd come up on corporate positions. After a while, everybody realized that we were working together to try to sell and publish great books.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, and your commitment to happy work culture seems integrally connected to a sense of curiosity. This is so much in line with what our Being A Writer platform is about. So being open to curiosity Play and Learning. Is this in part what inspires you to set up the Conscious Cafe, and can you tell us a little about this?

**Judy Piatkus**

After I had the after I sell px books. I really was burnt out. I'd been working since I was 19, and now within the second half of my 50s, and apart from an occasional three week holiday, I had just worked all the time. and that meant weekends as well because I was reading. So for a couple of years I really didn't do very much, which was lovely. And I began to miss having really good conversations - the kind we have with authors about their books about consciousness and the mystical side of life, and I bought people together to see if they would enjoy meeting one another and having a conversation, which they did. And as a result, Conscious Cafe got started, and since then I've been running events and conversations for 10 years now, and for many years people would meet in my flat, people would bring friends, it gradually expanded, and there's a great camaraderie amongst people in the personal development area who met through Conscious Cafe, so I'm happy that Conscious Cafe has given us the opportunity to reflect on so many interesting topics and also to meet lovely people.

**Nelima Begum**

It's so great also you mention, that so many of your ventures or things that you've been doing, are connected to your home, at any given time, but that's really lovely and it's different too.

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, we, we had put our home on the market in 2006. And we got a buyer for it in February 2007 and at the same time, I was trying to sell the company, and we knew we had to move out in August, and the company got sold, and we haven't found anywhere to live and I hadn't been able to look for anywhere to rent, and it really was completely down to the wire, and then an estate agent sent me some details it was actually the week that we'd sold the company, the money was in the bank there on the screen, I could see this beautiful flat. We went to see it, It was empty, we bought it the same day.

**Nelima Begum**

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**Judy Piatkus**

It had a very big main room and I said to my husband, you know this is a big main room, we can't have to have lots of people we can't have it by ourselves. So I think, you know, the flat was obviously all set up so I could invite people from Conscious Cafe. But again, as I mentioned earlier, you know when you trust your intuition, then sometimes it makes life a lot easier. The flat was empty. I had written a list of what I wanted it from the new home. It feels every requirement on the list, so we just bought it.

**Nelima Begum**

And went for it.

**Judy Piatkus**

We went for it and I gotta tell you, this was 2007, we moved in 13 days later. So, although we didn't need a mortgage, we were still able to complete the paperwork in 13 days I don't know if you could do it now, I mean even if you had the money and the place was empty. I mean they've just be so many forms to fill in and so many times, you'd have to have everything checked and I think that's really sad.

**Nelima Begum**

13 days - that's incredible! You're just full of great stories!

**Judy Piatkus**

That is one of my favorite stories, definitely, we're still living there.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh lovely!. Oh it's great and I think there's something to be said about trusting your gut and your instincts as you said earlier, and just going for it.

**Judy Piatkus**

It takes practice, it takes practice, but everybody can do it. And it's sort of tapped into a higher consciousness, it's as if all the experiences that you've had in your life are unconsciously, sort of supporting you. When you get these intuitive feelings, so um, you know, it's as if you're all your all your life memories and the things that you know sort of stored inside you can't always check them easily, but suddenly they pop up.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. You're very open and honest about your triumphs and pitfalls and just your experiences overall. Could you maybe share with us one triumph and one pitfall that you feel have impacted you the most.

**Judy Piatkus**

Um, well pitfalls. It was always awful, the worst if we had to ask somebody to leave because we needed to make redundancies. Now, nothing is as bad as that, when you've got valued trusted capable colleagues, and for various reasons, you have to cut back or, or you do have to go in a different direction sometimes. And so I think that the time when we did have to make three people redundant was definitely the worst, and actually because of the consultancy period two of them came up with ideas for how they could continue working with us on a freelance basis, and we were able to continue working with them and that did work out so that so the outcome wasn't all negative. And I think, um, I think what I feel happy about is that we published books that opened people's minds to new ways of thinking. So it's not one specific success, it's just every time somebody said to us. I love that book, or it changed my life, or I really got a lot out of it. Then I felt happy that that was the work that we were engaged in.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh, that's brilliant. And it kind of just reignites your passion to and reminds you why you do what you do as well.

**Judy Piatkus**

I think all of us want to have a passion for why we do what we do because we spend so much of our time engaged in work, we all come in with talents, we've all got some kind of talent, we can't always use the talent that we would like to, in the workplace, but we only have one life so we do have to make every day count

**Nelima Begum**

On to the wring side of things. What was it like when the roles reversed and suddenly you were the one writing? Was the process of writing your memoir one that was made slightly easier given that you had a background in the industry, and you also an agent and publisher would be looking at?

**Judy Piatkus**

Well, it was, what happened was I intuitively, 2019 felt like the year when I was supposed to write something, and my project for the year was to write this book. And while I was writing it. I didn't think too much about publishing, I know it sounds ridiculous but I really didn't, because I was more focused on finishing the book. And then I got it copy-edited and then Jane Graham kindly took it on for me as an agent. And then, Watkins published it. And I think the most terrifying aspect of being an author was when Watkins began to send out all these advanced copies. And I realized, people are going to read it, and they're going to comment on it on social media, and that was terrifying.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, no it's it's definitely a very scary process because especially with memoir, we say because you've poured so much of yourself into it and there are elements that are so personal to you as well that you perhaps never thought you'd share but now you have so having that read by other people is definitely, it's definitely daunting.

**Judy Piatkus**

What I learned when I was the publisher, is that really you always want someone else to particularly well not someone else you want a good editor, ideally to review what you've written. And my colleague and I always reviewed each other's work. So, so I also learned from that process that you really don't know how other people are always going to respond when they read your work, and the memoir is really personal, because I wanted it to be helpful to people. So I wanted to talk about what didn't work, and I wanted to talk about how I felt because so often young entrepreneurs, during my whole life actually have come up and said how did you do it, what did it feel like, and I wanted people to have an understanding that it's really amazing to be an entrepreneur, and the highs are really high and the lows are really low, and it's like that all the time. You know, even when you have a stable business, you know, you obviously can have months of stability, but you're always working towards getting it right because if you don't get it right, your company's in trouble. And so I wanted it to be beneficial to entrepreneurs, and I wanted it to be helpful for people who are interested in books, because there are very few books that you can read, which are seen through the eyes of the publisher. The publisher - entrepreneur, shall we say,

**Nelima Begum**

Definitely and I think your memoir will certainly inspire a generation. We're actually, we're seeing an increase in the number of female entrepreneurs on the scene. What was the industry like when you first started, given that publishing is historically, quite a middle class white man's profession - I know where you know the industry is doing incredible work now, to diversify it as much as possible, and to make it more inclusive. But when you were on the scene, was it difficult to be a female-owned company?

**Judy Piatkus**

My, my colleagues were both men and women. It was definitely unusual for a woman to run a business at all. In the early 1980s, in fact, I've got a press cutting from the times it's a gossip column, and it says the most important person in my company is the nanny. I don't think that would be very newsworthy nowadays but it was at the time, so yes there were there were there were there were fewer companies, and there were fewer women running them and there were just a handful, and there have always been many women in publishing and I think that women have always held the balance in a way because there have been some absolutely wonderful successful literary agents, but there was a period in the 1990s when three of the largest corporate companies in this country were all run by women, and that was really very positive, very exciting. And of course we have had women running publishing companies in the UK here, and we've got lots of women in senior positions.

**Nelima Begum**

So now I wanted to do a few fun quickfire questions just to round off the conversation. So, very quickly, what's one thing that everyone should know when starting a business?

**Judy Piatkus**

The most important thing is to watch the money every single day, always know what your bank balance is and always know how much is outstanding to you, and especially any large invoices, and chase your money if it's not coming in, politely and pleasantly and professionally, but you've got to get your money in.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, and what's one thing that is inevitable in business?

**Judy Piatkus**

It's inevitable in business that not everything you do is going to work out, but if you don't try new things, then you won't find what you're really really good at, you won't stay in tune with the market, and your company will never be the great success that you probably dream of it being.

**Nelima Begum**

What's one thing that you that you've learned that you wish you'd known earlier?

**Judy Piatkus**

I would like to have been more curious, and so it's not that I'm not curious, but I don't ask enough questions, and I think if I just would take a little more time at an early stage, when I embark on a new project and ask more questions, I think I'll get more out of the project.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, that's really interesting, actually. Is there a phase, expression or mantra that you live by?

**Judy Piatkus**

Every problem has a solution. And even if the solution is that there isn't a solution there is, you would you would get to the point where you really couldn't find a solution. After working your way through looking at every possible solution. And sometimes the solution won't necessarily be obvious for a few days or even weeks, but there will be a solution.

**Nelima Begum**

There is one and sometimes it requires distance. A wonderful point to round off with Judy, thank you so much for joining us for this podcast - I know I learned a lot and I'm sure our listeners will really enjoy this too. It's been an absolute pleasure to speak to you.

**Judy Piatkus**

Thank you very much. It's been an absolute pleasure to be in conversation with you. Thank you.