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DURATION

1h 48m 21s

2 SPEAKERS

Karen Commins

Drew Commins

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:05] Karen Commins**

Hi, everybody. Thanks so much for joining us. If you don't know me, I'm Karen Commins. I'm the owner of NarratorsRoadmap.com And I'm a fellow narrator. And with me tonight is my husband Drew. Who.

[00:00:17]

Hello.

[00:00:17] Karen Commins

I'm not sure if I'll be able to get his video on because I turned all the videos off and and turned the microphones off. And, um, anyway, Drew is going to be helping me tonight. He helps me with all things. He does a lot of back end things on the site that all the administration of the accounts and, and things of that nature. And he'll be monitoring the chat. So if you have questions, drop them in the chat. Because once I start this, I won't be able to see the chat. And so he's going to help me with that. Let me share my screen. So you should be seeing the webinar slide on the screen. And Drew, if you can let me know if that's what you're seeing, then I can.

[00:01:13] Drew Commins

I do uh, and and I'm also seeing the annotate. No, I'm not seeing the annotate button now, but it seems to come and go. Okay.

[00:01:21] Karen Commins

But you're seeing the slides and that's what everybody needs.

[00:01:24] Drew Commins

I do.

[00:01:24] Karen Commins

So we can do great. Thank you so much. We can get underway. I want to first thank you all for being members of narrator's Roadmap. It's become my life's work in a way, and it's very gratifying that so many people have signed up and are finding value in it and finding it useful and helping you move forward as a narrator at whatever level you're at. And I really appreciate all the great questions that people submitted on my form. I've tried to wrap all of these into the presentation, but there's some that we're just going to go through as questions. And drew, I think I said, but maybe I was muted. So I don't know. But drew is going to be monitoring the chat. So if you have questions put them in the chat and we'll get to them at the end. But right now I can't can't see the chat. So I just ask you to put them there. As you know, because you're members of the site, I created and I've also linked to just a wealth of information about many things about narration, but particularly about public domain audiobooks, because they've become my passion. I get a lot of questions about it in email, and I see a lot of conversations online and there's misinformation floating about, or people have a lot of confusion. So I'm hoping that this webinar will kind of streamline things for you, help clarify things not only about public domain books, but about the flip side of that which is self publishing, because there's no point in doing the book if you can't actually get it to market.

[00:03:03] Karen Commins

So this starts and builds on the Create Your Own Path course that I had done that's available on the site. So the Create Your Own Path course is under the Video Courses section. And then when you when you click there, you'll see tabs for different video courses and the main screen is on create your own path and there are two modules there. One is about public domain and one is about publishing your audiobooks. And there's a lot of information there and I encourage you to go through those. But like I said, I've got different information tonight and it builds on it. And like I say, I want to kind of streamline things for you because I know it's a lot and it can be overwhelming. And I want to also mention this prospecting one is one you may also want to look at, if you haven't already. We're not going to be talking about that tonight, but know that when you're working with indie authors, a lot of their questions are about distribution. And so I think our section on self-publishing is going to also help you when you're working with your indie authors. So like I said, we're going to talk about two things: public domain books and self publishing, and how they go together.

[00:04:22] Karen Commins

And when I speak of self publishing, I'm really meaning of when YOU are publishing the audiobook rather than working for a producer or a company that has that role. So often as a narrator, we're hired by somebody else and all we do is narrate the book. Sometimes if we're working with an indie author, we also produce the book because we're getting editors and proofers to finalize the retail files. But we're not creating the cover art. We're not writing the description. We're not responsible for marketing the book, and we're not responsible for actually getting it into online retailer shelves. So when I say self publishing, I mean, you're taking in that whole aspect of getting the book out to retail. So first I'm going to start with public domain. And it helps to know what it is and what it isn't. Uh. So I've got this definition of what public domain is. It's really where you think about it as the copyright has expired. And there are many reasons that the copyright has expired, and we're going to talk about that. But public domain books are a goldmine because they belong to all of us, and anybody can do anything they want to with a public domain book. And you don't have to get anybody's permission to do it. You don't have to license the rights. You don't have to pay any royalties from that audiobook.

[00:06:00] Karen Commins

You can just claim it and record it, produce it, put it out for sale, and collect all the money yourself. And I love public domain books and I don't have time to go into why, but I have on my Public Domain Narration Headquarters, which is linked on the course, and I'll also link it with this webinar resource. I list ten reasons that I really, really love public domain audiobooks. And one of them is they're, you know, they're very well written. And the biggest one, though, is that I get all the money. And that's a very powerful thing. So this sounds really exciting, right? But then how do you know that book that you're interested in is in the public domain? It's that the copyright expired. Okay, well, great. That tells you nothing. How do you know if the copyright has expired? So first of all, I've got to tell you that I'm mainly talking about US copyright laws because the copyright laws do vary around the world. And so my whole knowledge and point of focus is with US laws. But like one thing that I've seen that people say is, oh, well, if it's a hundred years old, it's public domain. That's true, but that's not the full story. And that's not even necessarily where the treasure trove of really great books is. There are millions of books that were published. And what we have to do is we have to research these books.

[00:07:43] Karen Commins

You have to figure out what the copyright status is, because there were there were millions and millions of books published that are in the public domain, and they're wonderful books to record. But before we talk about research, here's some ground rules. Here's some like what I call rules of thumb. So right this minute, everything that was published in the US in 1928 or before is public domain. So 1928 was only 96 years ago. So you see, even this thing about the 100 years doesn't hold up. So that's that's rule number one. Everything 1928 or before is public domain. Rule number two. Everything published in the US in 1929 will be public domain on January 1st, 2025. So this means that you could look for a 1929 book right now, and you could spend the rest of this year recording it and getting it ready so that you could publish it on January 1st, because it will be public domain then.

[00:08:59] Karen Commins

There's a list on Goodreads of books that are still popular with people that sorted by years. And like I said, I'm going to have a resource list that I'll post with this webinar. And, you know, I love to link and I will link to that Goodreads list where you can start looking at those 1929 books. It's currently, it's already linked in the resources with the Create Your Own Path video course that's already on the site. But like I said, I'll include it in the resources for the webinar.

[00:09:27] Karen Commins

And then the third rule of thumb to keep in mind: every January 1st, the next year enters the public domain. That means that books published in the US in 1930 will become public domain on January 1st, 1926, and so on. And then the other rule is if it was in or after 1964, think of it as being copyrighted. There are some exceptions to that. We don't want to get into exceptions. We just want to know where are the good books?!

[00:10:05] Karen Commins

So if you look at the copyright and it says 1964. Move on. It's not public domain. You could still do that book, but you would have to license the rights. And just as an aside, if you're interested in licensing the rights, I did do a webinar with an attorney, Jessica Kaye, who's also a Grammy-winning audiobook director, and she's also a long time audiobook distributor. She's been in the audiobook industry probably as long as anybody. And she did a webinar with me all about licensing audio rights. And so if that interests you, if you find a current book that's still copyrighted, you still might be able to do it, but you would have to license the rights. And if you're interested, I'll have a link for that webinar. And it's already linked in the Create Your Own Path course.

[00:10:58] Karen Commins

But we don't want to talk about things that are copyrighted tonight. We want to talk about public domain. Well, you may have noticed I gave you 1928 and coming up 1929 and on the other end, 1964. What about all those millions of books that were published in those mid-century years, between 1929 and 1963? Well, my friends, that's where you might find the buried treasure! There have been various studies, but I saw one report that as much as 74% of the books in that time period moved into the public domain. And without trying to complicate it too much, I'll just say that the copyright law has changed over time. So originally you had 28 years as your copyright term, and if you wanted to, then they said, well, that's just not long enough. I haven't made enough money from my work. So Congress changed the law. They said, okay, well, we'll extend it if you renew it by the end of the 28th year. Before that happens, we'll let you renew that copyright. Copyright, and it'll extend it for another 28 years. And then there were more changes and more changes till it finally became 95 years, which is why I said the years that were 96 years ago, 1928 is public domain this year. So it lasts through the end of the year. So 1928 plus 95 plus that one for the full year of 1928 brings us to 2024. So that's how it happened. But the thing is, if you didn't renew and you had to do it by the end of the 28th year.

[00:12:48] Karen Commins

So if that didn't happen, the work is now in the public domain and it belongs to all of us and anybody can record it. And those are the ones that I like the best. I mean, I have done some that are pre 1928, but the ones I've been doing more recently have been -- in fact, I published one last week that was originally printed in 1963. And it's public domain because they didn't renew their copyright. And so I got to do the audiobook.

[00:13:25] Karen Commins

There are four sites that I look at to check to see whether a copyright has been renewed. And like I say, I'll link to these and they are already linked on the create your own path. But I know there's a lot of stuff there. So as I said, I'm trying to streamline things. So the first one I look at is the Stanford Renewal Copyright Renewal database. And the thing is, if you find a renewal on any one of these databases, you have to stop. It's still copyrighted. And then you're to the point of, do I want to license this book, or do I want to move on and maybe find another public domain book that I could do? So Stanford is one. Google has scanned all these copyright entries. The thing is that it used to be in these little hardbound books, and you had to go to Washington, DC, where the Copyright Office is to look at their index cards and their little books to see what was copyrighted or if there had been a renewal.

[00:14:25] Karen Commins

Well, Google's been scanning things like crazy, and one thing they've scanned is those books of copyright entries and renewals. And I've got a link of where you can plug in your book and see if Google can find it. I also look at the New York Public Library database of copyright renewals, and I like it a lot because it will kind of show you the original one to. And finally I look at the US Copyright Office Pilot system, which is a new system that the Copyright Office has that gives a lot more detail than their previous system did. And these things will all be linked on your resources list. But I and I did go into a bit more explanation in the create your own path as far as what you're looking at. But one thing to be aware of is that the first of the first edition of a book could be public domain, while a later edition is copyrighted. Because if you discover that it wasn't renewed, the later copyright only applies to NEW material. It doesn't apply to the original text. But there's one more place I. I've learned that I have to look. So if you don't find a renewal and any of those places. See if there's an Amazon edition that has a look inside and look inside that book at the copyright page.

[00:15:57] Karen Commins

Because I was so excited, I found what was just a gold golden book, and I gave it to another narrator to do, and they were excited about it. And then I don't know why, but I looked on the copyright page of an Amazon edition. And there I saw a renewal. And this is how it'll look. It'll say the copyright was renewed. In 1959, and I blurred out all the stuff about the book because that's not important. But the original book was printed in 1959 and then it was renewed. They say. I don't -- I'm not sure that it actually was, but because this is there, I had to call my friend and say, don't stop, don't do that book because. It's possible it actually really was renewed.

[00:16:56] Karen Commins

There's a couple of things. And this is what I was just saying about this, says this paperback edition of was a reprint of the unabridged republication of the edition, first published in 1959, with the addition of a new foreword. Well, the copyright if in fact, it was not renewed, the copyright would only apply to that new foreword. It would not apply to the original text if it wasn't renewed, but we think this one is. So put it aside and see if there's not another book to do. And being at the very least seeing that tells me, well, we need to do more research.

[00:17:40] Karen Commins

You know, maybe we need to contact this person who's listed and say, can you prove to me it was renewed? Um, because it isn't something I wanted to do. I'm not I'm not following up on it. If it were one that I were recording, I'd probably, uh, spend a little more time on it.

[00:18:00] Karen Commins

So we've talked about researching the copyright date to determine whether a book is in the public domain. And I received several questions about finding books to do that I wanted to talk about. So I love these two questions together. Where do you find manuscripts and how would one search for them in a genre if you don't really have a specific title in mind? And most of the ones I've done, I didn't have a specific title in mind. It was just something I went and found. And I will say that, uh, with a little bit of bias, that I think the resources for the create Your Own path are a really great place to start because I've hand curated all these collections these years, these subjects, a number of authors and all of these works are considered to be public domain. So you could go to the biographies and memoirs list, and there are hundreds of books there. And you could just scroll down the list and see, is that is there anything there that, uh, is something that you wanted to do or something that you're interested in? So I think that's a pretty good place to start.

[00:19:17] Karen Commins

Um, I also wanted to comment that. I. All those collections were from HathiTrust, which is a consortium of colleges, and I have an account there because actually it's Drew's account because his alumni College alumnus office let him still log in to this system. Google has been scanning at all these college libraries. And so all these libraries, they have like 16 million texts or something. I mean, not all of them are public domain. Some of them are just historical books that were scanned. And of course, there's been a lot of legal challenges to Google scanning, but a lot of them are public domain. And I found some wonderful books there. But what I told members in a newsletter and I want to tell you all now, so you hear it from me now, if you can't download that book yourself, like if you cannot get a college account to be able to log in to HathiTrust, send me an email. Don't send it to me on Facebook Messenger, but send me an actual email and give me the link to the book, and I'll download the PDF for you, because I'm excited to think that you found a book that you want to do, and they're like, I say, there are millions of them. And so I think that's a pretty good place to start.

[00:20:46] Karen Commins

Also, on the public domain resources in my Create Your Own Path I list, I've linked to several other sites that have a whole bunch of public domain lists themselves of other places that you might want to work look at, because there's so much material out there, it can be overwhelming of where do you even start? And that's why I part of why I've curated these collections.

[00:21:15] Karen Commins

Part of the reason, though, is because -- so every year I go look and see, well, what's new? Because is there anything here I want to do? And if I'm going to look for me, I'll make the list and try to help everybody do more of this kind of work.

[00:21:36] Karen Commins

Are there particular genres that are more popular than others? Whether it's public domain or it's commercially available now. Romance, mystery and sci fi fantasy are the biggest selling categories. But I love biographies and history. That's what I read for fun. That's what when I'm going to bed, that's what I'm reading. So that's what I narrate. Back in the early 1900s when the Industrial Revolution got going and there were more books commonly available to people, there were a lot of biographies then, because I guess they found that's what people wanted to read, or they thought it would elevate people. I don't know, but it does seem like back in the early 1900s, I find a lot more biographies than the other categories, but the other categories are there.

[00:22:34] Karen Commins

How many children's books have stood the test of time? I don't know. I haven't seen any research on that topic, but there are many books, millions of books that are old books in all categories that are still enjoyed today. And in fact, I did find a children's book from a very popular author. The book was not in audio, but it's in the public domain. So I sent it to a narrator who loves those kind of books, and she is very happily recording it. And as I mentioned a minute ago, you can kind of hedge your bets by looking on the Goodreads list of books for a particular year and see what is interesting to people still, because. The Goodreads list. This is people actually putting them on the list of things they're still interested in. You'll still see reviews on them, and so that can give you a good idea of maybe this is something that people would also enjoy an audiobook. I would also check Amazon reviews and good read reviews when you can find them, because they'll point out how well the book may hold up. They'll point out problems with triggering language or scenes, or that it's just so quaint or something that people think it's really lame or stupid now. So you'll you'll see those kind of comments in the reviews and on the create your own path resources. There's a link that her name is, uh, Linda Aragon, and she wrote a blog called Great Performances, and she reviewed the top ten books of every year for the whole 1900s.

[00:24:21] Karen Commins

So all those books that are 1928 and earlier, she reviewed the top ten of all of them. And she talks about do they still hold up and. She graded them too, so that could also be a good resource. There's a whole library of children's books, though. To go back to this question. And, uh, you just really have to, whether it's a children's book or another one, you just really have to look at it and see, is this something that's still interests me? Is this something that I think a modern audience would want to hear?

[00:25:00] Karen Commins

Have I ever considered pitching a public domain project to a publisher? And if so, what was their response? I've never had a reason to want to do that, because I'd rather publish them myself and keep all the royalties that I earned forever. But I do have an idea for a multicast that would be prohibitively expensive to me, and I don't think it would earn out. And so I think if it wouldn't earn out for me, I don't think it would earn out for them either. And that makes it a harder pitch to do. But from what I've observed, the publishers are mainly hiring celebrities when they're reissuing these public domains, and a celebrity narrating a book does get people to buy it. They might not buy it if you or I did it.

[00:25:53] Karen Commins

How do you judge how likely a PD book it will sell? You know, there's no way to guess or know how well the audiobook will sell. And that's in my mind, all the more reason for you to do the work that you want to do. The genres you love or the ones you want to get some work in because this is a great way to build your portfolio. But to me, there's an intrinsic reward in adding that quality book to your portfolio. And it gives you something to talk about with publishers and producers on social media or when you meet them at events. I look at public domain books very much like royalty share books, except I'm not sharing any royalties, but I do. I look at the ratings and reviews on a book if they're there, and most of the PD books that I've done, though, are out of print and they're not gaining reviews and ratings anymore. But I have been very pleasantly surprised by several of them, many of them actually. And I can tell you, I, I earn royalties every month. Uh, some have more than earned out, some haven't earned out, some may never earn out. That's the thing, because you just don't know. But what you want is ones that sell consistently enough to make up for the ones that don't. And it's not just public domain. This is true in commercial audiobooks as well.

[00:27:22] Karen Commins

I heard Jane Love, who is with the SAG-Aftra union, make the comment that most audiobooks don't earn out, and I don't know if that's quite true. I tend to think it is that most of them are not making the money back, but the ones that are making the money back pay for the whole enterprise. And you know, there is obviously plenty of money to be made because publishers keep hiring more producers. Even in the age of AI, I keep seeing these publishers bringing on new producers, so that tells me they're making money and they want to make more money. So if I could tell how likely it was to sell, you know, I'd probably be sitting on a mountainside somewhere and letting people come to me, and I would tell them all the answers of the universe. I wish I had that answer.

[00:28:23] Karen Commins

How do you secure rights to out-of-print books? And I alluded to this earlier that when researching the copyright date, I often find that it was renewed, and I've also seen books that are more current. They were published after 1964 that I know are still copyrighted. And so there again, I would refer you back to the webinar I did with Jessica Kaye to learn how to license rights. I've also got a blog article that I did about copyrighted books, and it's kind of a flow chart of what has to happen. So I'll include a link to that in the resources with the webinar as well.

[00:29:06] Karen Commins

And I'm going to post this on the site probably, probably next week, but it probably won't be in time for Monday's newsletter. But I just want you to all feel assured if you miss something, if you have to drop out and do something else, I totally understand, but it will be available on the site probably next week.

[00:29:32] Karen Commins

So moving on down the road. So let's say you found this great public domain book. There's two things you need to do during prep that you will never do when you are working with a commercial publisher or producer. And the first thing you're going to do. Just choose your distributors. And that's the whole second part of our webinar tonight is talking about distributing and getting it to retail. But I just want you to know, this is the point in time that you need to make that decision. It may seem like you're putting the cart before the horse, but you need to know how you're going to do it before you spend the time and money to record it and potentially get it edited, proofed, and mastered. Excuse me. I'm feeling a tickle in my throat. So I just want you to know you need to make that decision before you record the first word. And we're going to talk about distribution in a few minutes. But the other thing you're going to do, and this is one thing I just love about public domain books.

[00:30:48] Karen Commins

I can update the text. I can change anything I want to. I can add words, I can remove words, I can combine text. You can do anything you want to. It's only limited by your creativity and imagination. And in the Create Your Own Path course. I talked about one of my favorite projects of all time is Bly vs Bisland. And one of the reasons it's my favorite is it was two different books, and I combined them together and put both of them on the same timeline. It was when Nellie Bly was racing around the world. She was wanting to beat Phileas Fogg from Jules Verne's book *Around the World in 80 Days*, and Elizabeth Bisland went on a solo trip trying to beat Nellie. Nellie got on a boat in the morning, going east to England. And Elizabeth got on a train that night, going west to San Francisco. And they both did this solo trip, and they both wrote a book about it. And so I took their books and I combined them, and I made a new book that I now own the copyright to. And I have the audiobook, and I hired another narrator to cooperate with me. And I loved that whole project. And in fact, I'm working on another big mashup with even more books! But I digress, because I get very wound up on public domain books and all the things you could do.

[00:32:23] Karen Commins

But let me show you a few ways that I very commonly edit text just in ANY book, not just when I'm doing a big mashup project. So you may not be able to read this, but this was my journal from April 20th, 2019. I was had just started reading *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* by Ruth Painter Randall. And I noticed that — This is what I wrote. There were some buildings that she said were still standing, and that might have been true in 1953 when this book was published. But it might not be true now. So I went and looked. I did some research of the buildings that she talked about. And because I want my audiobooks to be entertaining and also to be factually correct, I updated the text. I changed the text. So I said that the old coach went lumbering up through the dark to a large stately house on the hill where the Michael J. Howlett building, formerly known as the Centennial Building, now stands. Because that was public domain, I could make that change, and I didn't have to ask anybody's permission. I could just do it. And I think that adds value to it. It makes it more interesting and credible to a listener, I think, if it's correct.

[00:34:00] Karen Commins

This is one of my pet peeves. I cannot stand for women to be known as their husband's name!

[00:34:08] Karen Commins

Anybody who knows me knows I am Karen Commins. I am not Mrs. Drew Commins. I have my own identity. I have my own accomplishments, and so did all those women throughout history. And so every chance I get in a nonfiction public domain book, I go and find what was her real name. And I put it in the book, and that's what I read. Yes, I feel very strongly on this point. And and I because I read a lot of biographies. This is one change that I seem to be making all the time.

[00:34:46] Karen Commins

But I've also removed sentences when the author wrote something that I thought was very demeaning to women. I have two examples. This. They both came from the same book. And she writes that the hero of the book is a romance. And it was he they were talking about. She was talking about flappers who she did not have a good opinion of at all. So. This, these two three sentences, he would not lift a hand for one of those. They deserved what they got. It was what they seemed to want. Well. That may have been okay in her print book in 1927, but in my audio book it's not okay, and I didn't say it. It's not there in the same book. She. She wrote that this one girl was no good unless one wanted to play golf every living minute. And she was so unearthly perfect in the game, no one could beat her.

[00:35:51] Karen Commins

It really was unwomanly for a girl always to want to excel. Well, that's a bunch of nonsense, and I'm not going to say it, and I'm not going to put it out in the audiobook. So this book that I did last week that I just published last week was Bamie: Theodore Roosevelt's remarkable sister. And his daughter said that if Bamie had been a man, Bamie probably would have been president rather than Theodore. And it was a great biography, but there were some passages in there that I took out, not for reasons like this, but they were totally extraneous to the biography, like there was about a page that because this book was published in, like I say, I think it was 63 is either 62 or 63. The Kennedys were in office at the time. So this author decided, well, let's compare Teddy Roosevelt's family and the Kennedys. It has nothing to do with anything. So I scratched it out and we didn't read it. And then there was also a scene where Bamie's husband was an admiral in the Navy, and he was involved in some sort of court case. And this really got in the minutiae of that case, and it went on for pages. I deleted about two and a half pages of that, because it was just so extraneous to the rest of the book. Reading it, I'm like, what is all this doing here? And I think if I were listening to it, I would be asking the same question why is she telling me all this? So I got rid of it.

[00:37:27] Karen Commins

But you have to be careful when you're removing large sections of text, because if you're going through which we're going to talk about that, recording cannot deviate from the text by more than 3% in order to match Whispersync. But this is not as hard a thing as you might think, because you can remove 3000 words from 100,000 word book and still match. But I just want to make you aware of this concern. So you're not just. Totally taking things out and then try to publish it and it gets kicked back because they they don't think it matches. And this is this is an ACX requirement. This is not true if you're planning to distribute with somebody else. Which is again why I said you need when you're prepping the book, decide how you're going to distribute it.

[00:38:25] Karen Commins

So few more questions that I wanted to talk about when we talk about altering the text. Uh, you know, there can be really problematic passages with language references, situations. The chief objective of the book is to be entertaining. And like I say, I also want it to be factual. So I make decisions about the text with those goals in mind, and also my desire to add clarity for the listener. The author's words, of course, do reflect the time period in which the book was written.

[00:39:02] Karen Commins

But I don't feel bad about changing or removing words to suit a modern audience, because the author's words still exist in that original print edition. I don't think I'm taking anything away from history and making that kind of change. If there are a lot of objectionable words or situations, I make a decision whether to update them or remove them. You know, one thing that's really prevalent in older books is just this casual, ingrained, racist language, like calling a person a colored person, and it usually has no bearing on the story. It doesn't have any meaning of they're just using that to describe the person, rather than saying they were wearing a red shirt, they were a colored person. I mean, it was just so casual and ingrained. People didn't even think about it. So I do look at the intent of why it's there. I've taken words like that out because it didn't matter whether they were a Caucasian or an African American. In that situation, you really have to look at the situation to see if the descriptors needed. Sometimes I've updated it to a more modern word, like if it is needed, I'll say that was an African American person. But if it's just overloaded with this kind of stuff, uh, I would add a disclaimer in the sales description saying this type of material is in this book. And I read a blog that, um, Rebecca Lee wrote about this, that in her view, it was almost like book banning, and she offered some other points.

[00:40:45] Karen Commins

And so I'm going to link to that in the resources too, so you'll be able to get more info about it.

[00:40:53] Karen Commins

So at this point, you've prepped it, you've updated the language, you are ready to go. You're going to record, edit, proof, master the audiobook. This is just like when you work with indie authors on ACX; you're the producer of the audiobook. It's up to you to ensure these four phases are completed and completed. Well, now some people do all this themselves. And back when I started, I did edit some of my books, but I'm not earning money when I edit a book. I earn money getting it out to retail or, you know, some mainly narrating it. So I encourage you to outsource the editing and the proofing and mastering steps. And there are directories on NarratorsRoadmap for editors and proofers. And it's in the Audiobook Village section, so you'll find lots of people who can help you with those particular roles. Authors sometimes ask me, well, I have a voice for radio and I'm thinking about doing my audiobook, and I know there's a lot of technical things with it, but would I be rather better served having someone else narrate it? Should a professional narrator narrate it? I'm going to sound biased in a terribly self-serving way.

[00:42:19] Karen Commins

But of course, I encourage authors to hire professional narrators, especially for your fiction books, because there's acting involved in every book we do, whether it's nonfiction or fiction, and a professional narrator has had training to help us realize what it is that the author is trying to serve up in that book and take the listener with us. And so I really encourage authors to hire professional narrators when they can. I wrote an article, of course, called *Should an Author Narrate Her Own Book?* And I discuss on whether it's nonfiction or fiction. You might make a different decision if it's nonfiction. Listeners do tend to enjoy hearing the author speak their words. Uh, as much as they do a narrator sometimes. And so that's something to consider. But there's a lot of -- as all the narrators will tell you -- there are so many technical considerations of doing an audiobook and doing it justice that I've read from so many authors who recorded their book that they just found it an exhausting process, and they hated every word they wrote, and they wished they'd hired somebody else. But I'll add that article to the the resource list, and that will give you something else to think about.

[00:43:56] Karen Commins

So we've talked about finding public domain books and getting it ready to distribute. Now we're at that big question of self publishing. I'm going to switch gears and talk about self publishing. This is the thing I think everybody wants to know.

[00:44:14] Karen Commins

Part of self publishing means you're also responsible for that cover art and writing the sales description. You know we DO judge books by their cover. You don't want to just put some tacky thing there. You could create your own; I often create my own. You could hire a cover designer. And I got to tell you. So like I did a book that was published in either -- I can't remember which year I did it, it was either 1927 or 28. Once that book was public domain, the cover art became public domain too. And so I actually published my audiobook -- I've done two of them now -- where I used the original cover art. Drew is a Photoshop whiz, and he resized the the original rectangular cover into a nice square cover for me. And so people can tell looking at it like it's a vintage book because they can tell by the cover art. So t hat's even another option. Um, I have a cover designer linked on the Welcome Center page of *NarratorsRoadmap*, and my *Public Domain Narration Headquarters* post links to all my articles. I have a huge section there about the cover art and graphics. I feel like I'm a broken record. Of course I will add those to your resource list so you'll have them handy. like I had another thought I wanted to tell you about cover art. Maybe it'll come to me in a minute and maybe not.

[00:45:58] Karen Commins

When we talked about prepping the book and I said, I promised we'd talk about distribution, well, that time is here. This is the biggest decision you're going to have to make as a publisher is how you're going to distribute your book. And I'm constantly seeing questions from narrators and authors about distributors. And when people say, well, who's the best distributor? My answer is always, it depends. I've used different distributors for different books for different reasons. So to aid in this decision, I created an *Audiobook Distributors Comparison Guide*, in which I compare six distributors across 22 criteria. You'll find it by clicking on the Knowledge Base. And then going down to the Post-Production category. And there it is. Click there. It's a members-only thing. There's so much free content on the site, but this is one thing that only is available to you as a member. And the top of. Of it. I mean, it takes you to an article where I talk about it depends. It depends. Do you have an Amazon edition? Do you? What's your payment frequency? What threshold are you looking at? There's so many criteria that you could use to decide who you want to distribute your book. And so at the bottom of that article is the actual link to the chart. And when you click that link, it has my recommendations at the top. But I did want you to see this is what the chart looks like.

[00:47:42] Karen Commins

And I have used all these distributors except *Authors Republic*, but I've used *ACX*, *Audiobooks Unleashed*, *Big Happy Family Audio*, *Findaway*, and *Spoken Realms*. This chart is very helpful when you're working with an indie author, because so often they are looking to us as the narrator to tell them how they should distribute their book. And so with this chart, you'll be able to at least answer their questions or give them ideas of what it is they want to do. And I'm. These are obviously not the only distributors you could go through. I'm working on an updated, expanded chart. For instance, I don't list *Blackstone* here, but I know several narrators who have had really good experiences with them, in part because *Blackstone* created the cover art. So if cover art seems like a really big obstacle to you, *Blackstone* would probably be a good distributor you'd want to look at. But it's. I don't have that yet. But I did want to throw that out, especially for that reason. And at the top of the of the page where the chart is. I have my recommendations and this is how it starts. But like I said, because I've used different ones, what I would do for any project that I possibly could is I would upload the book to asks on an *Exclusive* basis, and then maybe load it to *Findaway* later when I go *Non-Exclusive*.

[00:49:26] Karen Commins

So let me explain what I'm talking about. The thing people hate about ACX is you have to. Say, if you say I'm going Exclusive, you can only sell it on Audible, Amazon and Apple. These are the only three places that audiobook is going to go. And if you're a contemporary author, you want your audiobook everywhere. You want it on Overdrive for libraries, you want it on Audiobooks.com, which is another retail site. You want it every place you can get it, and Exclusive is not going to let you do that. You can't sell it on your website; you can't sell it any other site outside of those three that Audible distributes to: Audible, Amazon and Apple. Now what Audible gives you for this? Is and let me, let me just go forward a little bit because I think this will help. Uh, bring the point home that ACX is owned by Audible, which is owned by Amazon. Audible is still the world's largest distributor of audiobooks, and they created ACX in 2011 because they needed to get more products to sell. So ACX is the distribution branch for Audible. But Audible is owned by Amazon. So Amazon says every transaction that happens on ACX has to connect to Amazon. So we're not going to allow anybody to just distribute an audiobook to Audible unless they also have some edition on Amazon. It doesn't matter if it's Kindle or hardback or paperback, it has to be on Amazon.

[00:51:25] Karen Commins

We're going to talk about that more in a minute. But I just wanted you to see this relationship so you get a better sense of why this is. So going back. It's Audible. So when I say ACX, I'm going to use ACX and Audible probably interchangeably because ACX is Audible's distribution arm if you want to sell your book on Audible. You can get there without going through ACX, but we're just talking about ACX at the moment, and I'll talk about the others in a second.

[00:52:05] Karen Commins

So in order to get your book on Audible through ACX, you have to pick: do you want an Exclusive or do you want Non-Exclusive? And what this means is if you have Exclusive where it's only going to those three sites, Audible will pay you 40% in royalties. If you go Non-Exclusive where it's on those three sites, but then you could sell it anywhere else you want to, you could sell it on your website, you could sell it on Audiobooks.com -- wherever else you want it to sell. You could sell it on Craigslist if that's what you wanted to do. Or eBay. Non-Exclusive pays you Audible royalties of 25%, and you have to make that decision. It used to be that you couldn't change your mind for seven years once you picked Exclusive. You were stuck with it for seven years.

[00:53:04] Karen Commins

But with the rise of competition, Audible realized they had to do something to keep people happy. So they changed the rules. And now, after 90 days, you can change from Exclusive to Non-Exclusive. And you might want to do that. And so for me, with public domain books that 40% from Audible is better than I'm getting elsewhere. So the books that I distributed through Findaway. I, you know, Findaway is a middleman. So Audible pays them. Findaway takes the cut and then Findaway gives me the rest. And that's true with the other distributors too. So I love to go through ACX for Exclusive for at least 90 days and maybe I change my mind and then go Non-Exclusive later. And if I do then I'll load it to Findaway.

[00:54:06] Karen Commins

Now, you should be aware. You think, well, this ACX needs an Amazon book, uh, this a problem? And I'm going to talk to you about that problem because I've got a solution for it. But Findaway also goes through ACX to get to Audible. So even if you think, oh, I don't have an Amazon version, I'm just going to go through Findaway, that's not going to work. So if you don't have an Amazon version you can't use ACX, and you can't use Findaway.

[00:54:39] Karen Commins

But you can use Big Happy Family. You can use Spoken Realms. You can, or I'm not even sure if you can anymore use Audiobooks Unleashed. I actually think they've stopped their distribution arm, but you could go through Authors Republic, you could go to Blackstone, as I mentioned. So there are other options. But just think that they are all middlemen. So they get it to the distributors, but they're going to take a cut before they send any of it to you. And I know it can be very confusing, and that's why I've got all this information here and in the chart. I think when you spend some time looking at all of that there, it becomes clearer and your decisions are easier to make. So like I've published with Big Happy Family several times, and it was an easy process because I didn't have an Amazon edition. I had to submit a sample on the first book. Jessica Kay, as I mentioned, owns that company, and she's had it for, you know, two decades or something. I had to submit a sample from the first book just so she could be assured that my audio quality was as it needed to be. And then as I've wanted to add additional books, I just said, I want to update my distribution agreement to include this book, and I've uploaded the files on Dropbox and filled out a form, and that's all I had to do. So I like the ease and simplicity of Big Happy Family in that situation. I like they pay me quarterly.

[00:56:28] Karen Commins

One reason I love ACX is they pay me every month, Findaway, pays me every month. And so that's part of the reason that. I use those two every chance I can. That is my preferred way to distribute. Findaway also goes to Apple. And if somebody buys and -- I don't care that I have if I have two of the same book on Apple, because if somebody buys the one from Findaway, I get 45% royalties. I've sometimes made \$8 on a single sale from either Apple or Google Play, and I get those through. Findaway. Findaway also gets me into Overdrive and Hoopla and a number of other library systems.

[00:57:17] Karen Commins

But I have to tell you, just because my books there doesn't mean it's actually in a library, because all the libraries have their own budgets and they decide which books they're going to have as their online catalog based on what their constituents are telling them they want. So it's there. But as far as I know, none of my audiobooks are in my libraries. And in fact, that's something I want to do, is work with my local county's library system and see what is it going to take for at least my own home libraries to carry my audiobooks. So I did want you to be aware of that difference. But. When I published through ACX and I'm getting my 40% royalty, the other thing that they give me if I go Exclusive is Audible download codes.

[00:58:14] Karen Commins

And Audible download codes are very useful in marketing your audiobook because people are familiar with Audible, and it's easy for them you to put the code with somebody and then be able to download your book. Other systems will give you codes to other things that people aren't so familiar with, so they're kind of suspicious of them. And again, that's another reason that I like going through ACX.

[00:58:45]

So to sum up, Exclusive gives me download codes. They pay me every month. They they get my books on Audible pretty quickly. They've gotten them. They're in fact the one I published last week. They got it there the next day where with other distributors, I've seen a bigger lag time from the time I submit the book to the time it shows up on Audible. And I can change that after 90 days if I want to extend my reach. So for me, it makes complete sense and it gives me the most because I can maximize that and go to Findaway if I decide I want to. And there's that. I'll go back to that, but so I. I said,

[00:59:39]

I have a solution to this thing with the Amazon edition. I have made Kindle books. I've made 3 Kindle books in my life. I do not like making Kindle books. It's time consuming. I'm. I'm never really sure how it's looking or if I'm formatting it right.

[00:59:58] Karen Commins

And again, this is like editing my book. I'm not getting paid for making this Kindle ebook, and the only reason I wanted it was to be able to claim an edition on ACX to start the process. Because remember, ACX is owned by Audible, is owned by Amazon. And so they're all in the same ecosystem. And you have to have that Amazon edition. So I started asking rights holders who had a Kindle edition if I could use their book because they're not going to make an audiobook; what do they care? And I had a number of them say yes to me. Well, then I took it a step further because there was one that I had worked with a couple of times, and I asked him recently, hey, are you still making Kindle books of public domain books? And if you are, are you willing to make some for me that I'm requesting for you? Well, the answer to both those questions was yes.

[01:01:00] Karen Commins

I am thrilled to say that I now have a partnership with this rights holder who makes Kindle books from public domain text, and he's willing to create Kindle books for me on behalf of all NarratorsRoadmap members! The book that I said I published last week, Bamie: Theodore Roosevelt's remarkable Sister. It was his Kindle book that I claimed to start the process. And I there's several people who've already taken advantage of this.

[01:01:33] Karen Commins

And in fact, a couple of you I need to get back with you because he's prepared the Kindle book and I haven't told you. Sorry. And, uh, a couple of you need to send me descriptions. I mean, he does need a few things and these are detailed (my screen wasn't going forward) in the Publishing Resources of the Create Your Own Path course on NarratorsRoadmap. I have this. I have this email template if you want to ask another Kindle rights holder, I linked to a template that I used and successfully of "Hey, I saw you have this book, can I?" -- I don't say, "can I use your audio rights?" I just ask, "can I pair my audiobook with you on your Amazon page? And nothing happens with your book, but you might see some extra money from people who buy my audiobook". They either won't answer or they'll say, sure.

[01:02:38] Karen Commins

With this partnership that I have, you can email me these things. The title link where it is on HathiTrust if you found it there. And I'd like people to be sure that it is in the public domain. HathiTrust thinks they are, but I think everyone needs to do your due diligence and check those renewal sites to be sure that it actually is public domain. See if it has an existing Kindle edition, because the thing that he's really interested in is being able to create a Kindle edition when there wasn't one.

[01:03:14] Karen Commins

If there already is one, then that's competition for him, and less likely that he'll create the ebook. So like I say, these are this is all from the Create Your Own Path Resources under Publishing.

[01:03:29] Karen Commins

But I've been talking about ACX and I wanted to actually walk you through the ACX screens. So when you're here at ACX and you're ready to claim this book. So let's say you've worked with my rights holder. He's made a book for you. And you're ready to claim his Amazon edition so that you can go through the audiobook process and distribute through ACX -- probably Exclusive, but you can go Non-Exclusive and upload to Findaway right now if you want to do. It is totally up to you, but whatever you've decided you're ready to go through ACX.

[01:04:10] Karen Commins

When you're sitting here at this screen and you're ready to get started, be sure you have time for this step because there's many clicks and screens and entering stuff, so be sure you have at least 30 minutes before you start to claim a book and already have that decision of whether you're going Exclusive or Non-Exclusive. Because it comes up as a screen and you have to decide before you can go any further.

[01:04:37] Karen Commins

So at this point. To get started, you need an email address that's different from your narrator account. That's the only thing that has to be different. You can use the same tax ID, but you're going to have to have two email addresses on ACX.

[01:04:56] Karen Commins

One is a narrator and then one as a rights holder because you see different things as each role. So to get we're going to get started and we'll sign in with the rights holder address. Now you may have to create one on Amazon to get to that point. But once you've signed in with your rights holder email address, you want to go to this my project screen. And for me it comes up automatically. And I think it probably always does. But if it doesn't, this is where you want to be.

[01:05:31] Karen Commins

Go to My Projects. You see, I don't have any titles there, but I have, I could claim. So you're either going to click the Plus or the button. They go to the same thing for you to claim a title. And if you had actually published your own Amazon edition, whether it's hardback, paperback, Kindle doesn't matter. But if you had published it and your name is there, then it finds it for you automatically. Like this one. Fanny Herself is a Kindle ebook I actually published and I claimed it. I've already made the audiobook so it doesn't find anything automatically for me, so I need to search for it. And the way I'm going to search for it is with the Amazon Standard Identification Number or the ASIN in the search box. So and it would probably help if you already had done this step before we got here.

[01:06:31] Karen Commins

But I went to Amazon and I found this book. This is one I'm going to publish next. This is a Kindle eBook that he made for me. I wrote this description. This is definitely my book, but, uh, it's a ten digit number. So you see all this stuff with the description, you have to keep scrolling down on the Amazon page till you see the ASIN in the product details section, and it's going to be this 10-digit number. Well, it's not ten digits. It's mixture of letters and numbers, but it's 10 characters.

[01:07:08] Karen Commins

So you're going to copy this by highlighting it as I have here. And then do a control-C on a PC or a command-C on a Mac, and then you're going to go back to your screen where we were. And you're going to paste that ASIN in this search box. When you paste with a control-V on PC and or a control command M, I'm sorry, command-V on a Mac. And as soon as that's in there, the system is going to search for the addition and it's going to show it to you.

[01:07:40] Karen Commins

Now, you see, this is the book that I just was looking at on ACX, and mine is saying Claim Title. But when he first put it up there and I first looked at it, it said, this has already done, this is already taken.

[01:07:58] Karen Commins

So I had to contact support. And the point I want to get to is if it does not say Claim Title right here, you're going to have to write to ACX support. Tell them you have permission from the rights holder to claim that edition of the book and ask them to unlock it for you.

[01:08:16] Karen Commins

And that's one of the two differences that an author would follow if you're helping authors. Because like I say, this all applies to them too. Because an author would have had the book there under their name, and it would have shown up. Um, the other difference is when we get to this screen that the author would enter her name as copyright holder. But I just wanted to point out again that by publishing through ACX, you're in a better position to help the authors you work with do the same thing.

[01:08:53] Karen Commins

So once you see your edition is here, it says Claim Title. Click the button and claim that title. You think, oh I'm done. No, you're not done. There's more to do. An author would probably choose this first option of work with a producer to narrate and record my audiobook project. This is not us. We're self-publishing the whole thing. We're going to have a DIY. Uh, project here. We're going to Use My Own Audio Files. So you'll select that radio button and click the button to claim the title.

[01:09:32] Karen Commins

Well, you're still not done. More questions. This is why I said you need time for this step. The first question it asks you is your territory. This is your sales territory, and I invariably choose World. And now I have to tell you, I'm not a lawyer. And there can be a very uncommon instance when a book is public domain in the United States, but it's still copyrighted elsewhere. And obviously those exceptions are beyond what we can talk about tonight. There are other options for territory, like if you feel any bit of nervousness, you could make this territory just United States. But the reason I say I'm not a lawyer is because I evaluate the risk of the thing. I think somebody, if it was still copyrighted in another country, the copyright owner has to know that audiobook is there. They have to care it's there. They have to contact me about it. And if they did get to that point, they're not going to sue me. They're just going to ask me to take it down. And I could do that. So to me that's not any risk. Plus I get a lot of sales from Germany. Germany is a very literate book, happy country. And so I definitely want to include Germany in my sales market. So I always put world for the territory. And after you make your choice there, you're going to scroll down because there's some more options. Now remember I said you need to know whether you're going to be Exclusive or Non-Exclusive.

[01:11:15] Karen Commins

And here's where you make that decision. So you get 40% on those three sites. But that's it. Or you get 25% and you could distribute you could distribute it. It's allowed. You would be doing the work to get anywhere else. ACX is not going to do anything other than Audible, amazon and it says iTunes, but it's really Apple Books now. So I'm choosing the 40% distribution for at least 90 days because I want those promo codes. And then after 90 days, I'll decide. And if I want to make it Non-Exclusive, then I'll write to ACX support and tell them so.

[01:11:59] Karen Commins

You have to choose the language that you recorded in and note it says you will not be able to change any information on this page once you continue to the next step. So that's why you really need to think about what you want here. Because if you decide later you want to change it, you have to tell them. Write to support, ask them to delete the project, and start all over with it. I hate wasting time, so I don't like to do that.

[01:12:29] Karen Commins

Once we continue, we see their Audiobook License and Distribution Agreement. And it. Should be down below here that you could read it and I encourage you to read it. It's the same thing they've had. So you know, once you've done one, you don't have to read it every time, but you have to indicate what the check marks check box that you have, read it and agree and continue.

[01:13:04] Karen Commins

I do want to point out. So like this particular one, see how it's got these years in the title 1838 to 1927? I don't really want that there. And the Kindle rightsholder would have changed that for me, but I didn't know he'd done it till I went to claim the title so I could make these screenshots, but. I want you to know you cannot change the title. So if there's a problem with the title, you cannot change it while the audiobook is in production. You have to wait till it actually is on Audible's site and then write to ACX and say, Will you change the title? I mean, they'll do it. It's just an annoying thing to me that I can't make that change at this point. So we'll agree and continue here.

[01:13:57] Karen Commins

And it pulls in. If you had a the auto. So it pulls in the the description that it found for the edition that you claimed on Amazon. And so all of this matches the description on the Amazon page that we were looking at. But you can make any changes here that you want to. So like if you were working with a different rights holder and you didn't write the description in the first place, you may want to say something completely different than they did.

[01:14:26] Karen Commins

And I've done that before. So you can make any changes to the description. You just can't change the title. And you scroll down and then there's some more questions. You want to choose the category. Is it fiction or nonfiction? And then you want to pick the best genre for it. And you only get this one choice at this point. There's a way to write to support and ask them for other categories, but I haven't really done that. So. Just know that you're going to pick this.

[01:14:59] Karen Commins

And then if I can just vent a second, sometimes they seem to put it in some other category and I don't know why. I don't know why. If I had to fill this out here, it might end up in a category other than what I wanted it to be. Just know that happens and you're not alone. For the copyright owner because it's a public domain book. I just put Public Domain and the original year. Sometimes I've even put PD here and and it takes it. But the original copyright year. I copyright them as my company name. You can put your name or you can put my company name. That'd be good. I'd like that. And then the audio copyright year. So your book that you're doing and you're going to publish now you'd put 2024.

[01:15:49] Karen Commins

And there's more. So you keep scrolling down. Enter the narrator's, the one or more narrators if you have them.

[01:15:56] Karen Commins

Obviously, if you have more than one, you put commas between them and the publisher name, which again is my company.

[01:16:05] Karen Commins

I love to add this information. The reviews and awards. I whoops. I wrote an article about finding critics' reviews, and I'll link to it in the webinar resources. But I actually go back and research what critics said when this book came out. And I add some of the good ones in this box, because they'll show up on the Audible page. So when listeners are looking at what do they want to read, they see, oh, a daring story of a daring woman. They're like, hmm, that might be something I need to hear. Now, I will tell you, too. It's happened more than once that I've entered something in this critic's box, and it didn't make it to the Audible sales page, so I had to write to ACX support and say, "hey, can you add my critics' comments to my page? Thank you." And they do. Uh, again, I don't know why I, I feel like, you know, ACX has always been such a very small unit within Audible, and I think that it still is. And there's been such a crush of people publishing books. I think they just get overwhelmed. And that's why these things happen. So if it does happen, it's just a minor aggravation, but it can be easily fixed.

[01:17:30] Karen Commins

So because I had a Kindle book, it offers me the chance to pull in the table of contents from the Kindle because it can read the text of a Kindle eBook, and this saves you time from typing in all the chapter names later. So if you want to import from the Table of Contents in the Amazon eBook, you're going to go ahead and click there. And then you get a warning. So if you had made any changes to the book and are redoing it, this was going to change it and start over. We haven't done anything yet. We're just now trying to claim this title, so we'll just say yes, import them. And you see it filled in all the things that were in the Table of Contents, including Table of Contents, Dedication, Illustrations, Forward, and then all the chapter names. So you want to, at this point, remove any part of the book you're not going to record. Like we never record the Table of Contents, and we never record Illustrations. And you would just put your cursor in the box and highlight lines to delete it and press the delete key to get rid of them. You could also make any changes, like if you notice something was misspelled, you could just change make change that you needed. And so. You'll scroll down and once you're finished. You will. Hit this button. Complete title profile when you finished all the edits to your Table of Contents.

[01:19:12] Karen Commins

And at this happy point, your title setup is complete. (insert cheering crowd sound here!) This should look very familiar to you. If you've done work with authors or publishers who've used ACX, because you'll upload your audio files here the same way you would with any of those books. You as the publisher, though, are going to have to upload your cover art at this point. Well, or, you know, before you, you press, I'm done. Uh, and because I did just claim this book, in order to put this set of slides together, I haven't clicked. I'm done. So I don't have that screen for you to see, but I think most of us are familiar with that. That process that will you upload all the audio files? And then at this point, this is really our I'm done as a rights holder to submit audio book for review. And then once it. Does that. They do everything and they say, asks says they will get your book on Audible within ten. And I want to say business, not calendar business days. But I have found it to be much faster than ten days once I do this. Submit audio book for review. And then once they get it on their site.

[01:20:47] Karen Commins

Your next step as a publisher is to market it. Now, marketing as we know, could be a whole other webinar to itself. And I've got an audio book marketing cheat sheet where I've listed a whole bunch of topics and and tactics and sites of it's kind of a menu of things that you could do.

[01:21:11] Karen Commins

And I have to say, I don't really do too much in the way of marketing my audiobooks, because I'm too busy narrating and producing the next one and also adding content to narrators roadmap. But one thing that I heartily recommend you do for the books that you publish is have a promotions calendar of things that are tied to the book. So even if I'm not creating a new audiobook, I always have something that I can promote and it seems like it's new to other people.

[01:21:42] Karen Commins

Earlier I mentioned Bly vs Bisland. They started this race around the world in mid-November 1889, and so every time November -- I think it was 14th -- comes around. I can promote that audiobook as if it's some new thing. When Nellie Bly -- her real name is Elizabeth Cochrane -- she passed on -- I want to say in May -- and Elizabeth Bissland, whatever they she passed away, these again are days that I can promote that audiobook because it's connected. And, you know, once you create one set of marketing assets or you have somebody create them for you, then you can use them every year when that comes around.

[01:22:30] Karen Commins

There are all kind of companies popping up who can help you with marketing, and one that I have not used her, but I think she would be excellent at it is it's the sites called Home Cooked Books, and it's run by Karen White, who narrated hundreds and hundreds of books, won awards.

[01:22:50] Karen Commins

But she's now retired from narrating and she's become an author. She's known now as Karen Gray, but she runs this site home cooked books and to help authors market their audiobook. And so I would point you to look at her if you're interested in having somebody help you with that point.

[01:23:13] Karen Commins

And so getting to the end of this and I know this is a lot of info and it's I feel like kind of skimming the surface. But a question that I, I received on the form. But I actually see this a lot, you know, if you're fairly new starting out, is is this really something you should be doing? Should you with everything else you're doing, training and reach outs? And this is true for whatever level you're at, really. It's not whether you're new or you've done 300 books. We're all having to do these things. We're all having to hustle for the next job. But I think it it. Can certainly feel overwhelming at any point, and especially if you're newer. So is this really something I should be doing? And I used to think that newcomers should wait before they self publish public domain books until they were, you know, had at least done a handful for somebody else because there are more steps involved. Like I said, you have to have the cover art, you have to decide about the distribution, you have to market it.

[01:24:24] Karen Commins

But, you know, I've really changed my stance on this. And in fact, I was on the Audiobooks at Sea Cruise, and I heard Sean Pratt, who's done a thousand books and won so many awards, and he's coached people I think we probably all know of Sean, and even Sean said, I think all narrators should be doing public domain books. I keep hearing from very well established narrators that they're in dry spells, they're hustling for work, and there's a lot of changes happening in the industry. One great thing about a public domain book is you're not on somebody else's schedule. You can do that whenever you've got time to do it. It fills those holes in your schedule and you continue building your skills and your portfolio. And then plus, did I mention royalties? I think I did. I earn royalties every month. And Jennifer Jill Araya has a great term for this that she calls it asynchronous instead of passive income. Because I did work to make this money. It's just the money is not coming to me at the time the work was completed, but I earned royalties every month. Like I said, some have earned out and some may never earn out. But the thing is, they're all selling. They're all giving me things to promote. They're all work I'm proud of. And I mentioned my Public Domain Narration Headquarters page, and that's where I have all the things linked.

[01:25:55] Karen Commins

I have a lot of Q&A in the comments on that page, but I list ten reasons that I love love, love, love, love, public domain books and self publishing. And I would encourage you, if you have any interest, to look through that list and see how you feel, and see if it is something that you think you want to pursue. And so I really appreciate so much all of you coming and all of your attention tonight. And like I said, the questions that you submitted and I'm going to post all of this on the site soon. Uh, hopefully next week. And when I do, I'll put it in the Monday newsletter, so it probably won't be there on Monday the 20th. So let's see, what's the one after that June something you'll see the announcement. But uh, where it's going to be is in the same video courses. I'm going to add another tab for webinars. So you may be looking at the create your Own path resources and see the webinar appear there even before I have a chance to put it in the newsletter.

[01:27:06] Karen Commins

Now we're to the questions point, Drew, were there questions in the chat? And I'm going to end this so I can get my. Get my screen back. Uh oh. He got muted again. Let's see. One moment, please. He was talking to me earlier and and he just called down that he is muted and I'm trying. To unmute him. Um. Oh, there we go. Sorry about that. Thank you. Ah. Thank you.

[01:27:57] Drew Commins

Yeah, yeah, there's a bunch of questions.

[01:27:59] Karen Commins

Um, well, hopefully I have answers, but I. I'll just tell you, I used to work in information technology, and I was a senior analyst, and people would come to me with questions and I would like to say, well, if I don't know something, I'll make it up. So all right. So I'll let you know if I'm making it up. Go ahead.

[01:28:19] Drew Commins

How do you want me to do this? Do you want me to just paste it in the chat, or do you want me to text it to you or what?

[01:28:24] Karen Commins

No, just tell me. Yeah, I think, okay. This easiest thing.

[01:28:27] Drew Commins

So, uh. And I'm sorry if I mispronounced some of these names. Carol Abney said if a copyright expires, can the rights holders then not renew after the fact once it's fallen into public domain? Or are they screwed? If they don't do it before it expires, they're screwed.

[01:28:44] Karen Commins

Well, okay. If they didn't renew, that's it. Clocks up, time's up, and they have no right to it any more. And anybody can do whatever they want.

[01:28:57] Drew Commins

Okay. And Annette Oliviero wants to know where do we find the list?

[01:29:01] Karen Commins

Wait wait wait. But before we go on. Before. So I think it's Peter Pan is one of those weird circumstances that it's like a copyright forever in England. I think that's the one that's like some hospital there owns it. So. Let's just say, like if you're thinking of Peter Pan, maybe do something else, but otherwise everybody there if it falls into public domain, the rights holder can't get it back.

[01:29:32] Drew Commins

Okay, so Annette, I'll Oliviera wrote where do we find the list you showed, which was the list of all the places to research, um, copyrights and use that's in, um, well, the, uh, it's on the website, as.

[01:29:49] Karen Commins

I showed, I'm going to create a list of links that I will post with this webinar on the site. So it.

[01:29:58] Drew Commins

Yeah, I think it was where you do the research.

[01:30:01] Karen Commins

They're already linked in the Create Your Own Path Resources. But I'm going to have a separate resource just for this webinar to talk. So the things will be easier to find. So I haven't done that yet.

[01:30:15] Drew Commins

All right, Michelle Williams so do we need to check all these sites for copyright? And if the title we're interested in doesn't show up on any of these sites, are we good to proceed?

[01:30:24] Karen Commins

Yes and yes. As long as you look at the Amazon, Look Inside and be sure it doesn't have a renewal there too. But if I can't find it on those four sites and I can't find it in an Amazon Look Inside, I record it.

[01:30:41] Drew Commins

Okay. Sean Cordry, do we need to publish an e-book version of the book prior to doing an audiobook?

[01:30:46] Karen Commins

That probably came in before I talked about my partnership with my rights holder friend.

[01:30:52] Drew Commins

It did, and but I was also thinking, it depends, right? Doesn't it depend? Because if you're not publishing it on ACX, you don't need to.

[01:30:58] Karen Commins

That's absolutely right. You're absolutely right, Drew, that if you're not going through ACX, you don't need an e-book. I should -- let me back up. If you're not going through ACX or Findaway because Findaway goes through ACX to publish to Audible. So if you're not using either of those two sites, you don't even have to care about an e-book. So every time I've published a book with Big Happy Family, I don't have an e-book. All I do is have to create my files and send them, uh, with the form to Jessica's person.

[01:31:31] Drew Commins

And here's one that probably is going to need a lot longer answer Catherine McCann wants to know how do we protect ourselves from AI if we're not in a union or on a projected contract?

[01:31:44] Karen Commins

Uh, that's not one I can answer tonight. I mean, the simplest thing I can say is we all have to stay good and get better, because a lot of the AI voices are. Uh, good, uh, as far as they go. But the thing is, AI can't understand subtext. AI can't deliver emotion properly. AI is not human. It doesn't have a human-lived experience. So it cannot tell a story as well as a human can. So we need to keep taking training and improving ourselves and our craft and being the best actor and narrator we can to show our humanness so that there would be no other choice than an actual human narrator instead of AI. That's the best way I can answer that.

[01:32:42] Drew Commins

All right. Deborah Cosnett. If you change the text sufficiently, can you copyright the updated version?

[01:32:48] Karen Commins

Yes. And actually I know someone who did that. If they had done a lot of annotations to a Jules Verne book, and they had done such significant research on their annotations that their book became a completely different book, and they copyrighted it. And you would go to the copyright Office. And I want to say it's \$35. It's not an outrageous sum of money to get that copyright. But yes, you absolutely can. And so, like when I mashed up Bly and Bisland for Bly vs Bisland, I have the copyright on that text as well as the audiobook. So yes. If you make significant changes, you can copyright a public domain, an originally public domain text, because it's now your text.

[01:33:45] Drew Commins

Okay. Jim Patton wants to know how much change entitles you to publish via Amazon ebooks than Audible.

[01:33:52] Karen Commins

I'm sorry. Say that again. What?

[01:33:55] Drew Commins

How much change? How? How much can you, I guess how much can you change a book? Right, Jim, if you're still there, um, entitles you to publish via Amazon ebooks and then go to Audible.

[01:34:08] Karen Commins

Oh. Oh, um, well, you have to distinguish it. If it's public domain, you have to distinguish it in one of three ways, or a combination. You have to annotate it, illustrate it, or translate it. So you can't just add an introduction and say, oh, that's a new edition. You have to do something substantive to change that text to distinguish it from the other editions of that text that are still there. I think that's what the question is. And so it's only one of those or a combination of those three ways. And with the illustrations you had to have, I want to say ten, you had to have at least ten illustrations. So like for Fanny Herself, which you may have seen on my screen, is one that I did claim, you know, some some time back I found the original illustrations that had been published in the magazine, because it actually came out as a serial story to start with. So I found those original illustrations and I put those in my ebook, and that's how I got it through Kindle Publishing to Amazon. But I hate making ebooks, and I would rather get somebody else to do that.

[01:35:21] Drew Commins

And Jim is saying the question is what is substantive?

[01:35:25] Karen Commins

Well for illustrations, it's ten. Translation. It has to be original. Annotation. It has to be original research. I mean, like I say, when I've made ebooks, I used the illustration route. So okay, I don't know what they do if you annotated it, if there's somebody actually looking at how much you do, I don't know.

[01:35:49] Drew Commins

All right. Uh, Julia Simpson says, can't you update and change language in an ebook which matches the audiobook? So I guess she's asking, uh. Can you change the book to match the audio? And.

[01:36:08] Karen Commins

Oh well, yes. And actually, so when I've worked for publishers, I have made in, with their permission, a couple of changes. But, um, one time somebody said the Olympics for 1996 were in a different city. Well, they were in Atlanta. I live here, I happen to know that. And so I told the publisher, that's a definite mistake, and I feel like it's a value-add when I'm working with an indie author or a publisher, if I see typos in the text, I mean, I obviously fix them when I'm recording. I mean, if it's something that, like the a listener wouldn't know, like if you're if it's a homophone and the listener is not going to know that they misspelled the word. But when I see stuff like that, I have given them a list back so that they could update the print version. And I, I think indie authors tend to -- that tends to happen more with indie authors because publishers have had usually, I think, a more stringent editing process, where indie authors may not have. And so when I found obvious typos -- and I've discussed this with them ahead of time, I mean, you cannot make changes as you're recording. We have to be true to the text that's there. But if you're working with an indie author, you can say, if I find an obvious mistake, do you want me to go ahead and fix it? So the audiobook is correct and the ones I've worked with have said yes, oh gosh, I'd be grateful for that. So, uh, you can. But so as the narrator, it's not my responsibility to make sure that text is correct, though, if I'm working for somebody else and if it's mine, I would make the text correct before I narrated the book. Um, I've always make the text right, and then my recording script is correct. I hope that answers the question.

[01:38:14] Drew Commins

Uh, all right, uh, Sean Cordry asks if I or I've come across some authors who sell the audiobook off their own website, but not Audible. How do they do that?

[01:38:26] Karen Commins

Well, they're not distributing through Audible. And so if they own the audio files, they can sell it however they want to. There's a great Facebook group called Marketing Audiobooks Wide that's run by an author, Rebecca Heffner, that has a lot of those kind of tactics in there. I mean, I see authors talking about a site called Payhip that somehow allows them to take money and also downloads the files or BookFunnel, I think is another one. So if the author has paid for the narration and they own the audio files, then they have the choice of how they want to distribute it, and if they don't want to distribute it to Audible and leave all that money on the table, they can do that. And I think a lot of authors, I'm seeing more and more authors saying, well, I don't need Audible to publish it, and I have a fan base. And so I'm actually not leaving money on the table. I'm earning more money to have people come directly to me because, uh, they'll get on TikTok and that's very popular. They have a TikTok shop and they're doing fulfillment that way. And so I'm seeing more authors going completely independent and not cutting instead of Audible, cutting them out of royalties. It's they are cutting Audible out of royalties because a lot of them are very unhappy. 40% means that Audible is keeping 60%. And it's like, what are they doing to earn that 60%? The author thinks, I wrote the book. I paid a narrator to do the audiobook. What are you actually doing for me, Audible? And if the answer is nothing, then they're using these sites to sell it themselves and earning more money.

[01:40:24] Drew Commins

All right, so, um. Annette wants to know how do you use download codes to market books?

[01:40:34] Karen Commins

Well listeners will. Off. You know, the traditional thing is I give you a download code and I'd appreciate an honest review and you can't make them leave a review. But I think most people. Feel compelled, or that they want to leave a review if they got a download code. But you can give them however you want to. I mean, there's there are sites where you can pay to have a listing and. Uh, audiobook listeners go to these sites audiobook boom is or uh, no, it's not called that now it's called. Oh I forgot. Well, anyway, it's on my audiobook marketing cheat sheet. There are sites that. You can get a listing, pay some nominal fee, and you have a listing, and it will distribute codes to people who request them for reviews. So that's one way you could have a some kind of newsletter, or you could give them out on Facebook or Twitter. I mean, there's different ways that people give the codes out. I actually gave a couple of codes to Bamie, to family members of hers who I had contacted about how she pronounced her name. So it it's very nice to be able to give that code to people who request it. And there are different ways to do that. And like I say, I have I have links to several sites on my Audiobook Marketing Cheat Sheet.

[01:42:06] Drew Commins

And do you have the chat up and you see the chat now?

[01:42:09] Karen Commins

Uh, I could maybe.

[01:42:12] Drew Commins

Yeah. Because Greg, the audiobook codes.

[01:42:16] Karen Commins

I'm sorry. What?

[01:42:18] Drew Commins

You can see some of the follow up messages that are coming into these questions, like Sean. Uh oh.

[01:42:23] Karen Commins

Yeah. Logistics, audiobook codes. Yes. That's one. Thank you. Yeah. And somebody that went to BookFunnel and PayHip. So. Yeah. So um, yeah, yeah. I appreciate people adding in.

[01:42:42] Drew Commins

Um, okay, so the next one, Scott McKinley says the narrator can't upload the cover art, only the rights holder. Have you had any trouble with the rights person not doing so?

[01:42:55] Karen Commins

Well, that's if I'm working with an indie author. And the answer is no. If I'm self publishing, I am the rights holder. And of course, I upload my cover art.

[01:43:05] Drew Commins

Okay. Uh, and finally, Deborah Cosnett wants to say, say I wanted to do a audiobooks for a series of public domain short, I guess, science fiction stories from the 40s and 50s. What would be the easiest non Kindle platform to release them on?

[01:43:26] Karen Commins

Well, Kindle would be the text, and I don't really know where people would release the text because. I only care about audio. And okay, you could you could release those individually with Audible. You could combine them into a compilation.

[01:43:47] Drew Commins

And it seems like you could do them. You could distribute them through. Uh Findaway, right.? Or whoever does it, you don't need a Kindle edition. Um.

[01:43:58] Karen Commins

Well, you could do.

[01:43:59] Drew Commins

Them on ACX.

[01:43:59] Karen Commins

They would Findaway still needs that Amazon edition because they go through ACX.

[01:44:06] Drew Commins

So what was the other one that didn't need it though?

[01:44:08] Karen Commins

Uh, Big Happy Family doesn't need it. Spoken Realms okay. Doesn't need it. Okay.

[01:44:14] Drew Commins

So those two, you could still publish it on ACX, but not on, but not need to have the um.

[01:44:20] Karen Commins

Oh she's. Yeah. She says she meant audio only. Um, so yeah. You could. You could release them. I know Spoken Realms has done a lot of work that way. Uh, you have to get on Spoken Realms narrator roster, and there's a form. I believe he has a form that you fill out to make that happen, but they've they've done a lot that way. A lot of narrators have published individual stories that way. In fact, my only science fiction piece was one that I published through Spoken Realms many years ago. So that's one way to do it. But the other way is, I mean, you could combine them. See, the thing is. If, if, if people are looking to spend their money, they want a longer book. And so I mean, there is a market for short stories, don't get me wrong, but I think listeners are still looking for some book that's at least six hours because they're spending money for it. So I would probably combine those short short stories into my own anthology and publish that.

[01:45:33] Drew Commins

Okay, so that's it for the questions that I pulled off the chat. And I don't know, uh, Deborah mentioned something. It sounds like she could.

[01:45:41] Karen Commins

Yeah, you could you if one doesn't exist, you could create your own edition, or you could, uh. Um. Potentially. Well, I don't know. I don't want to volunteer my partner, because I don't know if he would do that, but he might. It never hurts to ask. So that that would be another approach you might think about.

[01:46:06] Drew Commins

Okay, that's it then.

[01:46:09] Karen Commins

Well, I just appreciate so much all of your attention and all of your time and energy, and I will be posting the webinar and the resources hopefully next week. And. You know if you need something. In the meantime. My email is Karen@NarratorsRoadmap.com. Or if you need anything about your account, you can contact Drew. He's the one who handles all of those sorts of questions. And we're just very --.

[01:46:38] Drew Commins

Drew at NarratorsRoadmap.com.

[01:46:39] Karen Commins

Yeah. Yes. Thank you. But we're just very grateful to all of you. And I hope you've found this to be informative and helpful in moving forward in your career.

[01:46:54] Drew Commins

James wants to know if there's a prize for guessing how many Eiffel Towers are on your screen.

[01:46:59] Karen Commins

Uh, on my screen?

[01:47:02] Drew Commins

Well, on your background and now on your screen, because you've got one around your neck and.

[01:47:09] Karen Commins

Oh, well, yeah. Okay. That's probably the only one on my screen because I actually don't have any on my screen at the moment. So, um.

[01:47:17] Drew Commins

I think he's referring to the background.

[01:47:18] Karen Commins

A good. Um, yeah, I probably should have thought of prizes, but I. I was so busy making the slideshow I forgot about prizes. So. I guess there aren't any. But if that is all the questions, then I am going to end the meeting and I'm hoping all this has recorded it. If not, I'll have to record a new one. But it it, uh, I hope it is and.

[01:47:49] Drew Commins

Still says it's recording, so. Yeah.

[01:47:51] Karen Commins

Oh, that sounds like a relief. Well, again, thank you so much for your time this evening and for all your support through the years. And this is my first, but I hope it's not the last webinar for all the NarratorsRoadmap members. So thank you so much. Have a great rest of the week and look for the regular email on Monday. Thanks so much. And I'm going to close it out now.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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