

Business of Story Podcast with Justin Trevor Winters - Why All Content Marketers are Storytelling Screenwriters

Park: Hello, everyone and welcome to The Business of Story. I'm Park Howell. Today we have another really interesting guest that helps us explore that intersection of Hollywood storytelling artist with commerce content marketing in business.

And why I really like today's guest is because I think I would love to have been in Hollywood, maybe it started way back then, maybe if I had the guts. I did actually travel there with a friend of mine from Seattle. Being a bumpkin out of Seattle, when I got there right after I graduated from Wazzu, I was completely overwhelmed with the city, with Hollywood and it just blew my mind and I had to get out of there. So I ended up close by in Phoenix, Arizona running an ad agency.

But Hollywood has always fascinated me for a number of different reasons. I love movies, of course, but I'm really fascinated by why do they work? Screenwriting, we've had on this program Robert McKee, the foremost screenwriting coach legend. We've had Lisa Cron, who teaches authors and writers and screenwriters.

I have learned so much from these people and they are always so open and generous with their time and their talents that we've been able to use the tricks of the trade from Hollywood and screenwriting and producing in our work here at Park & Company as we work with clients really around the world doing this.

So today it's particularly interesting for me because we've got a young writer here who has his first movie under his belt. It's produced, just waiting for distribution. But this gentleman has had an amazing experience in Hollywood and he's here today to share with us his road, how he found himself here in Arizona while still working in LA trying to get a movie distributed that now has been produced with some pretty big names in it, teaching at Arizona State University or will be teaching at Arizona State University here in spring, a screenwriting course.

He just has some tremendous insights of what's happening in Hollywood, in movie production and distribution and how it is dramatically changing, how TV has dramatically changed and how that impacts all of us in our content marketing and branding world.

So, without further ado, I would like to welcome to the show Justin Trevor Winters. Welcome, Justin.

Justin: Thank you very much, Park. It's very wonderful to be here. I'm very honored.

Park: Well, it's great having you here. I've got to tell folks how we actually met. I was literally over at a Massage Envy waiting for my massage about six months ago and I picked up a local lifestyle magazine, "Uptown" Magazine, and you were gracing the cover of this magazine and it said, I can't remember what the whole title was, but a Hollywood screenwriter moved to Arizona."

And I was reading through the article while I was waiting for my masseuse and I thought, "Man, I've got to reach out to this guy. This is really cool that he's in town. I would like to talk to him about what does he know that Hollywood knows that we could all know." And that was a Saturday. I sent you a note, I think, literally from my iPhone before I went in and you responded like 6:00 that evening and that we got together the following Monday and we've become fast friends ever since.

So it's great to have you here. I know what you're going to share with our audience today and I'm so excited about it because you are right in the heart of entertainment distribution and the sea change that is taking place and how storytellers are still probably the most sought after commodity in Hollywood. And dare I say that storytellers are probably the most sought-after commodity in marketing and branding and content marketing. So welcome again and tell us a little bit about your background, Justin.

Justin: Sure. Do we have a couple hours? Let's see . . . Where to start? I went to film school at UC Santa Barbara, which is a wonderful, wonderful program up there. I studied film primarily with an emphasis in production and screenwriting. So I got my foundation there. UC Santa Barbara is primarily known for being theory-based and history-based. So I watched a lot of films. I watched a lot of television. I got a good history of the process of filmmaking and storytelling.

So I spent four years there and left and went down to Los Angeles. I always knew that I wanted to be a screenwriter, had that creative bone or bones in my body. I got down to Los Angeles and recognized that there were a lot of people just like me, trying to achieve screenwriting and quickly also learned that it was not just the creative process that was important about screenwriting, but it was actually the business side of screenwriting. After all, it is show business, emphasis on the business, especially these days.

So one of the first jobs that I had while in Los Angeles was working at a talent and literary agency, Innovative Artists. While I was there, I was assisting the head of the lit department, an agent who was representing some very big clients in town, anywhere from Kathryn Bigelow, who's known for "Hurt Locker" and "Zero Dark Thirty," Peter Bogdanovich, who's obviously an amazing writer/director who's been around for a very long time. If you haven't seen "Paper Moon," one of his classics, I highly recommend it.

Stuart Beattie as well was one of our clients, who wrote a little movie called "Pirates of the Caribbean." He created the Captain Jack Sparrow character, a phenomenally talented writer who we found actually out of the UCLA Extension Writer's Program in Los Angeles.

But yeah, while I was there as an assistant to the head of the lit department. My job was reading scripts, doing coverage, getting a better understanding of storytelling. So as a screenwriter, it was such a great foundation to learn that process.

Park: You know, I went to Robert McKee's famous, famous story screenwriting course in LA a few years ago. I joined our son, Parker, there. He went for the Hollywood side, but I went for the business side of it. There were 250 people sitting in that crowd and he said only one of them would actually get a script to see the light of day and they would have to go through the likes of you, right?

Justin: Yes.

Park: What did that look like? What did you mean when you say screenwriting coverage and what do you look for in good writing, good storytelling?

Justin: Sure. I would say Robert was probably being optimistic and generous by saying even one person, sadly. I think it's such a cutthroat industry and so challenging. I think the last numbers that came in were, if we're talking strictly features, 60,000 scripts are registered with the WGA, which is the Writer's Guild of America, every year. Six hundred of those get made or produced in some way, shape or form. So that's 1%. But you have to look at what that breaks down exponentially as.

So scripts are constantly being registered and not being made. So the percentage game of actually getting your project done is lower and lower every year and the people who are getting projects done usually either have

connections in the industry already or are writers that have been writers for years.

But part of my job at Innovative Artists and getting back to your question about coverage was coverage is a very important thing that happens in a literary agency. At agencies, you have scripts that come in not only from the clients you represent but also from networks or studios that are looking to staff up writers, which means they want to get writers to write on those projects or material coming from other writers that want representation. There are just a lot of different areas that these scripts are coming from. They land on agent's desk and they're expected to read them and decide whether or not it's a project they want to work on.

So coverage is as it sounds. You're covering the project. You've covering the script. So rather than the agent having to read 100, 120 pages of a script, you condense the idea down to a page. So it's a page summary. And then you also add a lot of other elements to that, such as what's the genre, who's the writer, what are their credits, what's the basic story, what are the character breakdowns. That's sort of the creative side of it.

Then you get into the business side of it, which is does this potentially have marketability. What are the demographics? What is the appeal? Is it well written and can we make money? Like I said, again, at the end of the day, it's show business. And is this a project that we want to do? A lot of those are either no, we don't or yes, we do or an in between like a consider.

So it's either pass or consider or yes, go full guns blazing and take this project, which is very, very rare, I would say. I probably read about 1,000 scripts at least when I was at Innovative. I think I may have recommended a dozen scripts and I think we ended up representing one writer from those and I don't know that we had any of those projects actually make it to screen, unfortunately. That's kind of how those percentages break down.

It's sad. I don't want it to be that way, trust me. When I was there, everything I wanted to read, I went in with eternal optimism. I wanted them to be great scripts. I wanted it to be the diamond in the rough. I wanted it to get produced and made, but, unfortunately, it just wasn't the case.

Park: Well, and I think in our line of work, we're posting blogs and we're on LinkedIn and Medium and we're trying to be heard out there and so often we're not. It's kind of that same parallel that here I've poured my heart and soul into this

script and it goes into no man's land and anyone can be reviewing that and tossing it aside and you just don't know from a writer's standpoint.

Our son, again, Parker, when he was at Chapman, I think it was his junior year, he worked with Sara Risher, a producer from "Nightmare on Elm Street" and the "New Nightmare." She had that whole franchise. Anyway, he was a coverage reader for her. He called me up one day and he goes, "Man, this was crap and this was crap. I saw a good one the other day."

I finally said, "Son, you're like 20 years old. Who are you to throw out this guy's life or gal's life work?" He goes, "Hey, man, I'm the demo. I don't know. I'm just reading it. If it's any good, it gets bumped up. If I don't think it's any good, that's the way it goes." That just really surprised me. You just don't know where your heart and soul is going and who's looking at it.

Justin: It's very interesting to see who the gatekeepers are. The reality of it is when you break down the agency world, the development world, production studios, production companies, a lot of times that reader is going to be the 20-something intern or newly hired out of college employee. So look, when I was at Innovative artists, I was fresh out of college as well.

The irony is I believed that I had the answers. I think a lot of times these readers do. They believe that they deserve to be the gatekeepers and hold those keys. So at the end of the day, I still feel that if it's on the page, it doesn't matter who reads it. They're going to respond to it. So as long as you can tell a good story, you'll get through that gate and hopefully be inspiring those gatekeepers.

Park: Before we take a break, tell us, is there anything from all of that reading that you went through, are there one, two or three elements that really stand out in a great story that you just know it when you see it in a script?

Justin: Well, yes. I think there are a lot of elements. I think it would be hard to break it down into three. I would say the eye-opening thing for me in moving to Los Angeles in the first place wanting to be a screenwriter was I was convinced that it was going to be 100% creative. I was an idealist. I thought as long as you tell a fascinating, creative story, you can get it done.

But, unfortunately, again, going back to it, it's so much more about . . . I don't think you should ever sacrifice the integrity of your story. But you need to keep

in mind that at the end of the day it is a business and think about those marketing elements.

So I would say one very important thing is just to recognize that you need to tell a story potentially that's going to reach a mass audience. It can't be a niche audience any longer. You can if you want to do indie films, but if you want to be successful and get a lot of people on board, you really have to think about what your demographic is and keep those in mind when you're telling the story.

Again, don't sacrifice the integrity of the story. You can tell whatever you want. But just keep in mind who you're trying to tell it for. So I think that's probably one of the more eye-opening things that I recognized there.

Otherwise, I think that theme and bigger picture is very important. I've read a lot of scripts that, just to use an example, have come from comedians. The scenes are hilarious and I'm laughing so hard. I'm laughing so much I'm crying almost. But the overall story I just don't care about it. What's more important is can we relate on a humanistic level. Don't just tell me jokes. Don't just make me laugh. Don't just make me cry. But make me feel something on a humanistic level. I would say that's important.

And then the last thing I would say is a breakdown of characters. What do you we want when we go to the movies? What do we want when we watch TV or dial into our devices to watch different things? We want to see ourselves on the screen. We want to be able to relate to someone.

So give us a character that we can relate to, that we can sympathize with, that we can root for, that we want to see their arc until the very end and if you can do that or all three things of those you'll be successful and we'll follow you from the beginning until the end and, hopefully, we'll see your product on some medium, screen, phone, computer, whatever that is.

Park: Well, where I've seen this work really, really well with brand work or content marketing are people just the opposite, instead of appealing to everybody, finding that niche, but then tell a story that has character arc in it and that is specific to that audience but then understand and connect with, live vicariously through that character, even if it's a business to business post, it's the same sort of concept instead of just blathering on and on about features and benefits of a business offering.

Introduce a character into it that that the reader or that viewer if it's a YouTube video or whatever, can connect with, much like you guys all know in Hollywood, and then take them, show them the process that you're trying to "sell them." So telling to sell. It is just really, really powerful.

I think the one thing about us in the marketing business and copywriters or whatever are not necessarily trained. They're usually trained, kind of like what you were talking about, that funny, comic shtick, great visual, great headline and then pay it off. That works really well in print medium. But when we get in online content, we kind of need to caress and pull that audience along a little bit more and Hollywood, what you all know over there is just ripe with answers on how to do that.

Justin: Indeed. I think the thing is with, as I've mentioned before, the jokes that can be funny, we still want something we can walk away with and remember. The best thing you can do as a storyteller whether it's the end of a movie, a TV show, a commercial is to have people talk about it.

Park: Absolutely.

Justin: And continue that conversation. I think if you can do that, you've found success.

Park: Well, Justin, we're going to take a break, but when we come back, I want to talk about your new movie that you've survived it. You got a script that got through everybody. They've made the movie. Richard Dreyfuss, Danny Glover, one of my favorites, "Napoleon Dynamite."

Justin: Jon Heder. Yes.

Park: Jon Heder is in there and Masterson. Is that right?

Justin: Danny Masterson. Yes. Very talented.

Park: Danny Masterson. So when we come back from this word from our sponsors, let's talk a little bit about the movie and where it is and when we can expect to see it out and then, also, after that we're going to talk about the work you will be doing in teaching writers, young writers, and what you're seeing changing in Hollywood that us marketers need to be paying attention to because a lot of that stuff is changing simultaneously in our world as well.

Justin: Great. Looking forward to it.

Park: We'll be right back.

Park: Welcome back to Business of Story and our guest today, Hollywood screenwriter Justin Winters. Justin, during that break, you and I had a chance to talk a little bit more about the niche market. Can you expand on that for our listeners because they weren't with us?

Justin: Yes, of course. We were talking before about reaching the masses in some capacity with the storytelling, but also meeting niche markets. What's interesting when you look at the industry as a whole, especially in representing writers and representing storytellers is that the storytellers become the niche. So an agent or manager that's representing a writer is going to represent a writer that's good usually at one thing.

You can't necessarily be the jack of all trades. So they will have a drama writer. They will have a comedy writer. They will have a science fiction writer or horror. Every genre of the major seven genres they will have a writer in that category. So they are the ones who are specializing in that genre and that type of storytelling. So that is kind of the niche genre storytelling that you get into. Within those, agents will have upwards of 20-40 clients that they'll represent.

Park: Writers when you say "clients?"

Justin: Writer. Yes. Which can be challenging because if every writer has 5 or 10 projects, then 40 times 5, 40 times 10 . . . But they will try to pigeonhole those clients or those writers they have into specific categories of what it is that they write.

So a story that I've actually shared with you before, Park, which is a fascinating story, is about Stuart Beattie, who I had mentioned before. Stuart is a very talented writer. He was a student at UCLA Extension Writer's Program, which is a great writing program out of Los Angeles. He had written a feature called "Joey," which had won him a few awards and we picked him up at Innovative Artists.

We were trying to figure out what kind of storyteller he was. He was very into action-style, drama-style films. He had written a project about a pirate. It was very, very well-written. It was on the page. So we started shopping him around literally as "The Pirate Guy."

Park: That was his niche.

Justin: That was his niche. We would call production companies. We would call networks and we would call producers and say, "Are you looking for a pirate movie? We've got The Pirate Guy."

Park: Parrot, eye patch, peg leg.

Justin: You have to remember this was before "Pirates of the Caribbean," which is what that film eventually became. So we would pitch him as that niche, that pirate niche and everyone is like, "Pirate? What do I want to tell a pirate story for?" Now it's like people obviously have tuned into the little movie "Pirates of the Caribbean." So that's where we started to get his projects off the ground.

A lot of times, yes, you do try and find that niche in storytelling as a writer and that genre that you're very good at. For me personally, that's drama, dramedy, if you will. Maybe that's a segue into talking about my film that's coming out actually.

Park: And real quick before we do that, Blake Snyder, to me, in that niche, now, he's since passed away, but apparently he sold more family movie screenplays to Disney than anybody did and any screenwriter in the 80s. He's got, of course, a great book, "Save the Cat." It was one of the first books I read about story, storytelling and story structure. He was self-proclaimed, "I own this niche," in the family world.

I have just gotten so much from that book. I high recommend it to any of our listeners if you want to have an insight into how his approach to writing. I loved his line too that the ideal screenplay is 110 pages long, the same ideal weight of a jockey, 110 pounds, apparently. So really, really great stuff. But a good book if you're a content marketer looking to understand story structure in a very fun way.

He also has the follow-up book, "Save the Cat Goes to the Movies." He has like 40 different movies in there and you can follow his 15-step beat sheet with every movie. A lot of people think it actually ruins the movie experience, but to me it makes it richer because you can really see what's going on and when a movie doesn't connect with you.

You can kind of go back, and not that it plays for every movie, but you can see maybe they missed something in the beat or they didn't have the character development or something needed to happen a little bit more extensively than it did. Anyway, I thought it was fascinating.

Justin: I agree. I am a big fan of Blake Snyder's and he actually had another follow-up book, which is "Save the Cat Strikes Back," which I recommend as well. I think what Blake did, there are two camps. Some people that really like his work and some people that don't like it as much. But I would say from a structural and formatting standpoint, "Save the Cat" is a brilliant piece of work that you should pick up, as you said, especially if you're a young, budding screenwriter.

This is something that I talk to my students about. At the end of the day, you can tell whatever story you want to tell. No one is making any rules about the story you can tell. But there is something called format and called structure. That's something that you can learn in "Save the Cat."

The metaphor is . . . actually, I'm going to give you a few because I love these. These are great. As a chef, you don't have new ingredients . . . wait, okay.

Park: Start again.

Justin: Cut that one. Sorry, what's our girl's name in sound?

Park: Jess.

Justin: Jess, I apologize.

Park: So we're going to have to come back. I'll give you a clap here and then find a place to edit it in there. Ready, three, two, one . . .

Justin: So the one thing that I tell my students in talking about format and structure and something that you really get out of "Save the Cat" by Blake Snyder is . . . and let me take this metaphor here for a few of them. As a chef, you're always using the same ingredients, but you can come up with something that tastes different and tastes amazing.

So those ingredients are the foundation or the structure. As a swimmer, you have to swim between the lines. The lanes that are there, that's your guidance.

That's your structure. That's your format. The last one I'll give you is you wouldn't paint a house or your bedroom before you built the house.

So you really need to understand structure and formatting. Blake was able to break that down in a very buddy-buddy type way that was very easy to understand and to apply in screenwriting. I think once you've mastered that from Blake, then go onto Robert McKee, who obviously was a guest on this show as well. He is incredibly intelligent and all of his books on screenwriting I highly recommend. So add those to your list. They will help you leaps and bounds as a writer or as a storyteller or in a lot of different areas.

Park: You know, I've got to tell you, back in 2011, we were producing a big event for a multinational company and it was out in Washington DC. They had their sales team coming in from 140 different countries and we had been producing this event for many years.

They come in Wednesday night. They're all dog-tired Thursday, but of course, Thursday was the event when we rolled out all the new product, rolled out the new marketing plans and systems. We would lose half the crowd because they were exhausted and they would head back to the room before we were halfway through the show. We were brainstorming with a client how we were going to launch this new stuff and keep people in the audience.

I had just literally finished the second reading, second time through on "Save the Cat." I busted out those 15 beats and I took the client right through it. We designed, believe it or not, a four-hour program based around the 15 beats of "Save the Cat." And it worked marvelously. We lost very few people and we even had folks come up after the presentation saying, "Wow, that was one of the best ones I've ever seen. I'm not really sure why, but that was amazing." It helped us give us that structure to do it.

So I thought, "Wow, a family genre beat sheet actually played to a multinational crowd in 10 different languages being translated from the stage." To me, that was a time when it really underscored how universal story, story structure and story format is.

Next story, your movie, it's so cool to have a movie out. Tell us about "Killing Winston Jones" and why did you have to kill him?

Justin: Yes. "Killing Winston Jones," as you mentioned, it's starring Richard Dreyfuss and Danny Glover and Jon Heder, who, yes, is known from "Napoleon

Dynamite,” but is extremely versatile and has done a lot of characters since, Danny Masterson, Lesley-Ann Brandt, who is an up and coming star, Tyler Labine, the list goes on and on. Aly Michalka, I'd get in trouble if I didn't them only because we're all friends now, like, “How come you left me out of that podcast?” Joely Fisher, got her too.

But no, it's a great ensemble piece. It was a wonderful experience for me. I was very lucky. It's directed by Joel David Moore. A lot of people know him from the acting world. He was in a film several years back called “Dodgeball” and he was in “Grandma's Boy” and he was in “Avatar.” He's a wonderfully talented actor/director.

Having worked with Jim Cameron on “Avatar,” I think that kind of fed into his desires to really focus on directing. I think he learned a lot from that. He directed a film called “Spiral,” which was a psychological thriller. We connected. He read “Killing Winston Jones” and really liked it. So we decided that we would develop it further together and it would be kind of his bigger directorial debut.

As I mentioned, it was a great experience for me because I developed a relationship with Joel, who once he read it, attached himself to act in it, direct it, produce it and all that and he dragged me along for the ride. So I was there for pre-production, production, post-production and now watching the distribution and marketing side of filmmaking.

So we're very excited with the finished product. It's tested incredibly well. Audiences are responding. They're laughing where we hoped they would laugh and they're crying . . .

Park: What's the story about?

Justin: So it's called “Killing Winston Jones,” as you mentioned. This is about an old, retired junior high gym teacher who finds out that they're building a new gymnasium at the school that he taught at his entire life. He desperately, desperately wants them to name this gym after him. He wants to leave this legacy.

The only problem is the principal, who is an ex-student of his, was a little overweight in junior high and never liked the PE program and hated Winston Jones and decides, “Not only am I not going to name it after you. But I'm going to name it in memoriam. So if you want it that bad, you have to pass away and I'll think about putting your name on the gym.”

Park: Now, is this out of personal experience? How in the world did you come up with this story?

Justin: Well, it's interesting. I was working at Innovative Artists and I was reading the trades one day. The trades are The Hollywood Reporter or Variety or Deadline. I highly recommend it for anyone who's in the industry, always read the trades so you're caught up on the business side of who's selling what and what's being made.

But I was reading the trades and I got to the back of Variety and there was a whole spread on an actress who had recently passed away. She was a star from the '50s primarily. She'd won a bunch of awards for different performances. I had never heard of her.

As I mentioned before, I went to school at UC Santa Barbara. I had a great foundation of film history. I thought I had watched almost every movie. I should have covered the '50s. But for some reason, I didn't know who she was and I thought to myself, "What do you have to do these days to leave a legacy?"

You were someone who was probably a household name in the '40s, '50s, '60s. She's passed away and now in the 2000s, I don't know who she is. She's passed away and her legacy didn't last. For some people it did. It started getting me to think about what you have to do these days to leave a legacy. I thought, "What about on a smaller level?"

And junior high had always been interesting to me because I feel like this is a development phase in your life. Everything is so important and life or death. You finally start dating the one person you want to date and they break up with you and your life is over or you get that one kiss and it changes your life. So the effervescence of who you are at that age, I think, has always been interesting to me. So I thought, "Maybe I design this story around something that happens in junior high."

And then I thought, "What is something you can leave a legacy as?" Do you want to get a street named after you? What is it you want to achieve? I thought about trying to get a name on a building or something, just wanting to be remembered as a teacher that was important at a junior high in the middle of nowhere where that will make you happy before you pass. So that's kind of where that story is from.

Park: I can totally relate to that. Growing up in Seattle, I went to Cameron Park Junior High. They had these two PE teachers, Kerwin and Diaz. And my brothers that preceded me there always talked about getting hacked by these guys. This was back in the day where they had the big paddles and they had the holes drilled into them and you little had to reach over and grab your ankles and then they'd just whack the shit out of you, basically.

I was actually coming out of parochial school. So I only spent one year in junior high. I grew up through St. Brendan's and then was thrust into the public school life. I remember fearing every day that one day I was going to mess up in the ninth grade in junior high and I was going to get hacked.

I remember like it was yesterday, the very last day. They were handing out hacks to people because it was the last day and people were screwing around. I was sure I was going to get it. I got by, didn't have to. I remember wiping my brow essentially, walking out of there thinking, "Oh my god, I survived the entire ninth grade without Kerwin or Diaz hacking me."

Justin: That's something that we try to tap into, I think. Everyone has memories of what happened in junior high, if it's PE class or math class or science class. We didn't put this story in a specific time period so it could be a little bit more universal. Some of the houses in the movie you would think are from the '50s. We don't have a lot of technology, but some things look like they're from the '80s and '90s. So hopefully a lot of people will relate to it.

But Dreyfuss plays Winston Jones. So he's the title character. Danny Masterson actually plays the lead, who is his son who is the glue of the story. He tries to keep this dysfunctional family together and get the name of the gym named after his dad.

But let me give me one more little thing to hopefully spark your interest so you're like, "Yeah, I might go see that in theaters." The Danny Glover character was the girls PE teacher. So when he finds out that if you die, you get your name on the gym, he starts competing with Winston Jones. So Danny Glover and Richard Dreyfuss start competing to see who can die first to get their name on the gym. So we've got that little "Grumpy Old Men" going thing for us.

Park: That's pretty twisted, actually.

Justin: Like I've said, it's tested well. People are laughing and crying at the same moment so, hopefully, that continues.

Park: Well, when we come back from this break, let's talk about when we might see it in the theaters. As we were talking before the broadcast here, things have really changed in distribution for film. So I'll be curious to hear your thoughts on that and how it impacts us as marketers and what we can learn from that. So we'll be right back with Justin Winters, a copywriter from Hollywood, has his new movie coming out, "Killing Winston Jones" with Richard Dreyfuss. When we come right back, we're going to learn about that and what you see for the future of content and storytelling.

Justin: Great.

Park: All right. Cranking right along here.

Justin: Is that okay? Are we covering everything you want to?

Park: Yeah. No, it's really good. We've got probably another 10 minutes to go. We're at 35. I try to keep it around 45-50 minutes.

Justin: Okay.

Park: Great stuff. This is really, really good. What I'll really be intrigued by is what are you sensing and seeing and how do you see it changing over there and then makes some leaps. How do you think that it impacts us marketers and branders and writers in general and what will you be teaching at ASU and that kind of thing.

Justin: I think probably talking about ASU and progressing into that just because I think in talking about the classes, I can get into what I was talking about before, which is what that future looks like potentially for students who are coming out.

Park: Yeah. All right. Here we go. Coming right back. Three, two, one . . .

Welcome back to the Business of Story with our guest today, Justin Trevor Winters that I keep getting it caught up in my mind with "Killing Winston Jones," Justin Trevor Winters. For whatever reason, I'm having a hard time processing that. But when is the movie coming out? You've got it done and it's in the can, right?

Justin: Yes. That's the million-dollar question. I think this is an independent film, a little indie film. So you want to make sure that you have marketing and distribution in place and strongest as possible. So you look at times of the year that would be a good time to release it. So now it's in the hands of those people who make those decisions.

The initial thought was we were going to be out in June, but then we pushed to November and now we're potentially pushing to next year. So it's all about, yeah, just finding the right time where we can get the most exposure and have the most success and getting back to the business side of it, make the most money for the people so we can go have fun and do the whole process all over again.

Park: How frustrating is that for you as the writer and creator of this?

Justin: I don't think frustrating is the word for it. I think maybe challenging. If you break down the amount of time it's taken from fade in for me, which is page one of writing for "Killing Winston Jones," it will have been over seven years to see it get to screen. It's a long and tedious process. I optioned the script four times, three or four times.

Park: What do you mean by optioned?

Justin: Optioned means you sell it to an entity, a producer, a production company, a studio and they have the option of making it. So a production company will option 30 scripts and they'll make two. If they don't make it, they put in a turnaround and after a certain amount of times you can get it back. So I optioned it a few times before it got made.

So it was a rollercoaster ride. There were ups and downs the entire time. It's been challenging. But I'm so happy. I think the integrity of the story is still there. I'm so excited for everyone to see it. It's just a matter of time. I'm keeping myself busy with so many other projects that I think about it all the time and I think about the day that it will be on the screen, but still it's a bit of an afterthought because I know it's going to happen sooner rather than later.

Park: So you've been teaching both over at UCLA and will be starting at ASU. What are you teaching and what do you tell your up and coming writers?

Justin: Yeah. I was teaching introduction to screenwriting at UCLA at their UCLA Extension Writer's Program, which is the program I mentioned before

that Stuart Beattie graduated from. A lot of very successful writers have come out of that program. So I was honored to be teaching over there.

I also did quite a bit of guest lecturing at UCLA proper as well as UC Santa Barbara and some of the other universities there and was finally given the opportunity to teach here at Arizona State, which I'm very excited about. It's their film and media studies program in conjunction with their English program. So they are very heavy into storytelling.

I met with the dean and I eventually met with the heads of the English department and the film and media studies program and they're wanting to start doing some fun, new exciting things to get opportunities for their students, their graduating students and set them on the right path to achieve all their goals and dreams that they want to when they move to Los Angeles. Why wouldn't they? The proximity to Los Angeles, an hour flight or a five-hour, six-hour drive.

So at Arizona, we've decided that I will be teaching writing for television this spring as well as story analysis for film and television. Eventually, I think we might develop some other courses, probably some in advanced screenwriting and advanced storytelling across mediums because in talking about the future and getting into the future of storytelling, I really want to explore that arena and make sure that we're covering it for the students because everything is just changing at such a rapid rate.

You talk about the new large demographic for storytellers is the millennial generation and they're wanting to watch what they want when they want where they want and how they want to do it. So a lot of times it's on the bus on their way to work on their cell phone with their headphones in or something and that's how they're going to watch the material they're interested in watching. It's no longer just going to a movie theater and tuning into their favorite show.

So a little bit in the story analysis class that I'm teaching, again, it's the foundation of storytelling, so format and structuring first and foremost so we know how to tell a compelling story and then getting into ideas, how to come up with that creative idea that people haven't maybe come up with or finding an idea that's really worked and tweaking it so that it's your own, changing that recipe so that dinner is a little different and your own.

And then getting into the medium of that storytelling, the platform of that storytelling, film television, cell phone, digital, web series, whatever that looks like.

Park: Does story change from a creative standpoint whether it's going to be on a big screen or whether it's going to be in a screen in the palm of your hand? Do you have to approach it differently or is basic story structure basic story structure?

Justin: I think there are different camps on that and answering that question. For me, I think storytelling is storytelling. There more often than not is going to be a beginning, middle and end, whether it's ten seconds long or, I guess, let's use Vine as an example. If you know YouTube videos, if you know Vine videos, these are videos that are seven seconds long or whatever it is.

Park: Six seconds, yeah.

Justin: You have to tell some sort of story. A lot of them will be practical jokes or this and that. But there are reasons why some of those go viral and a lot of times it's because they're telling a very interesting, compelling story in seven seconds. So you have to learn how to tell it if its' seven seconds or if it's 90 minutes or two hours or whatever that looks like. So I think storytelling really is storytelling at the end of it.

Park: And what would you tell our listeners that you've learned through all those scripts and writing from your Hollywood perspective of how can we as business leaders and communicators be better at what we do? Are there are a couple three tips that you can share with us?

Justin: Yeah. I would say one thing is writing is rewriting. So never be afraid of changing what you have. As bulletproof as you think it is or as good as you think it is, be able to collaborate and listen to other people because constructive criticism, although it will seem like your worst enemy, is the best asset you have.

And the thing is you're going to have that canvas and you're going to paint a painting and then 20 people are going to show up with paint brushes and they're going to want to paint all over it and you're going to tear your hair out and it's going to kill you, but that is part of the process. So I would say always be open to evolving, changing, revising until you get it to a place where you're getting the response that you want. So never settle, always look for achieving, especially in advertising, achieving the biggest response possible.

Getting back to what we were talking about with niches, look at a small film like, "Little Miss Sunshine." This was a film that was made for a couple million dollars. They were expecting to hit the indie market, maybe make a couple million dollars in sales. This was a global phenomenon. Everyone watched it. Everyone loved it. It made millions and millions of dollars because the story was well written. It was good storytelling at the end of the day. So as niche as you want to be and figuring out exactly who your demo is, you still focus on them, but recognize if you do it well, everyone is going to relate to it.

Park: What makes for a good story?

Justin: That is a very good question.

Park: In the most simplest of terms.

Justin: You're just trying to trip me up. I think it's relatability. Again, we tune into a radio broadcast or a podcast, we watch our favorite TV show. We watch our favorite movie, our favorite web series because we see ourselves in one or more of those characters. We project ourselves on the screen and, therefore, we go along with the ride. So I think the biggest thing is just allowing your viewer or your reader or whoever is taking in your content to relate to it and to buy it to it and root for whomever it is that they relate to.

Park: Yeah. Really, the main character of that story is a proxy for us, is it not? That we are sitting there watching Luke Skywalker do his thing and we are living vicariously through Luke. So when he goes to fight Darth Vader, he's going through trouble. We get to try it on in the safety and comfort of our own seat. But we have that relatability, I guess.

Justin: Yeah. I agree. You can break down so many different types of story. As of late, there's been a big push with the antihero. You look at shows like "Breaking Bad" and the Walter White character where we're literally following the story and most often rooting for a guy who's selling methamphetamines and taking other people's lives.

But it's because we can understand at the core what is the theme or the bigger picture of that show. It's about a guy who's been diagnosed with terminal illness that desperately wants to leave money behind so that his family can survive. He has a handicapped child that he wants to be able to have finances left behind so that they can afford to take care of him.

So at the heart of it, we understand his plight. Where he goes from there, his trajectory and his arc is just ridiculous. But we still tune in week to week because we want to see if he's going to achieve it or not because we relate on some level.

Park: Have you seen "Nightcrawler" with Jake Gyllenhaal?

Justin: I have seen "Nightcrawler." Yes.

Park: I watched it a second time. Parker again was in town and we dissected it when he was here. That is, to me, one of the more brilliant indie movies I've seen in a while. But talking about a dark hero, an antihero that you're not pulling for, then you are pulling for and then you're not pulling for. He just completely sucks you into the story. To me, anyway, I thought it was really brilliant storytelling and writing.

Justin: Yeah. I think that's an example of another area of storytelling that is extremely important, which is the world that you create. That is the world of night crawling. It's these guys that go out and literally look for accidents to happen so they cover it and give it to the news. That's a fascinating story.

I've created worlds around the black market organ trade, which is a very dark and disturbing area, but it's a world. You can visualize when you hear it. I've written stories about human trafficking and sex trafficking. Again, it's a very dark world, but you understand that world. So I think if you can create a very interesting world that's compelling that can pull people in, that's also going to help you in your storytelling.

Park: And in "Nightcrawler" I think it helps to be at the top of your game if you're a psychopath as well. Gyllenhaal does a pretty good job with that character.

Justin: That is the definition of a pure psychopath. I'm pretty sure they hit all 18 traits of psychopath or whatever it is.

Park: Yeah. It's really, really well done. Thank you, Justin, for coming today and being on Business of Story. This has been fantastic. I appreciate you moving your schedule around as you're back over to Hollywood. How often do you jump back and forth between Phoenix and LA?

Justin: Weekly.

Park: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah. I'm over there quite often.

Park: Didn't you say you had like 16 different things in some form of production? TV and . .

Justin: Yeah. Last time my agent and I counted, I think it was around 16 projects in different areas of development. Again, it's just important to have a lot of different lures in the water and see what you can get done, especially television, film. We broke down the numbers before, 600 out of 60,000. You've got to have a lot out there so you can try to get at least one of those made. It pulls me back quite often, development meetings and what not.

Well, Justin, I know you're really busy, so thanks for coming by. But tell us about some of the other things that you've got going on. You've got . . . let me start that again. Jess, one more time. Three, two, one . . .

Well, Justin, you've got a lot on your plate and you're teaching, you've got your film coming out. You also do a lot online for educating folks through some videos that you've done. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Justin: Yeah. I'd love to. I contribute to a few different entities, one of which is FilmCourage.com, which I highly recommend checking out. Primarily what they do are interviews. I've done quite an extensive interview with them as well on screenwriting, directing, acting, kind of the entire business of the entertainment industry.

They do it very, very well. They're starting to now interview A-list actors and they're really starting to take off. Their foundation is just being able to offer insight into the industry and also inspire young artists and artists of all ages, actually, to achieve their goals and their aspirations in the industry.

Park: That was FilmCourage.com?

Justin: FilmCourage.com. It's David Branin and Karen Worden who run the site. Again, I can't plug it enough. It's a great site.

I'm also working with John Rhodes over at ScreenCraft.org, which has a bunch of different layers. Actually, they offer screenwriting competitions. They also offer

screenwriting fellowships. They also do big panels with producers, writers, directors, studio executives in the industry that you can check out in Los Angeles. And I've contributed a few different articles to them as well. And so I recommend checking them out. And then ISA also, which is the International Screenwriters Association. Max Timm over there, I've been working with him recently as well. So those are all great places.

Park: And do you have to be a screenwriter to really appreciate these resources? Is it really good for anybody in the storytelling business?

Justin: Again, yes, it's a huge asset to anyone who wants to tell a story in any capacity. I think we use kind of screenwriting as an umbrella term. Really, at the end of the day, it's just storytelling.

Park: It really is.

Justin: We're not just screenwriters. We're storytellers. We're writing for the screen, but we're writing for TVs, we're writing for computers, we're writing for digital, advertising, all that stuff. So it's all there for you. It's a great resource. I would check those out.

Park: Great. And then the final question: can we see "Killing Winston Jones," a trailer somewhere? How can the viewers go and take a look at what you've got going?

Justin: Yes. The trailer should be up very soon, actually, hopefully, while you're listening to this the trailer will be up. I would just say the easiest way is probably Google search "Killing Winston Jones," you'll get a bunch more information. Or, for you film buffs and nerds out there, IMDB, which is Internet Movie Database, IMDB.com has all the information. It tells about the actors and the story and the writers and directors and all that.

Park: I love the movie poster, by the way, with Richard Dreyfuss holding the TV set, standing knee deep in the water in his bathtub just waiting to do the deed.

Justin: Yes. If there's any reason to Google search it, it is that, the eventual billboard and movie poster, yes, is Richard Dreyfuss in a bathtub about to kill himself naked, holding a TV set. So if that doesn't get you there, I don't know what's going to get you there.

Park: Well, thank you for taking the time to be with us. I know our listeners will really love this particular program. And thank you all for tuning into Business of Story. Be with us next week. We were going every other week, but now we're up once a week because you all have asked for it. So it's fantastic. I appreciate it. If you are listening to us through iTunes, please go on and give us a rating and give us your insights and certainly share it with your world. And if you'd like some free storytelling tools, go to BusinessOfStory.com.

In fact, I've got a brand new one up there that just went up last week, which takes you through our 10-step story cycle process. It's a free download. With it, I've included videos and other resources so that you can see each chapter of the story cycle process and how you can use it for your own personal story, but, more importantly, tying that into your brand story. So go to BusinessOfStory.com, go to the tools. It's at the top of the tools section. It says new there. It's your new online storytelling tool. Hopefully, you'll find it very helpful and I'd love to hear your thoughts on it.

While you're on the site, you can shoot me a note as well. I also want to remind you, if you're interested in what you're hearing and would like to know more about our process of Business of Story, we are available. I'm available for speaking engagements, workshops, one on ones with clients or we bring in groups of folks and do storytelling workshops and do them here in our office in Phoenix, Arizona or certainly travel around the country to do that as well.

And if you are trying to get your brand story dialed in and really understand what it's all about. That's really what the story cycle process is all designed for. I would love to help you in that process. So you can reach me through BusinessOfStory.com or shoot me an email at Park@ParkAndCo.com.

Thanks again for listening and we will back with you with another great guest next week. Take care.