

A writers' story: Collaborating long-distance on a bio of Greg Giraldo
Transcript (October 2019)

Wayne (W.J.)

My name is Wayne Jones. I'm University Librarian at Carleton University. But I'm also the co-author, with Matt Balaker, with a book that we worked on called Greg Giraldo. A comedian's story. Matt and I are here to talk about it a little bit. Matt, the project as a whole, how did it all get started?

Matt Balaker (M.B.)

Well, it was actually before you and I met. It was around 2014, November I believe, and I was at a job which I'm not longer there you can connect the dots. But I was on break and went to Amazon hoping to find a book about Greg Giraldo. And after doing a couple of searches, realized that there weren't any and that was my "Ah ha" moment. So, I it might be a good idea to start this venture.

W.J.

You know it would be good to send you to the Middle East for peace. You could go over and say, "Hey, there's no peace here. I should work with Jared Kushner to bring peace here.

M.B.

I think that would be a disaster.

W.J.

For some reason, this just happened to be a time when in my life when I was going through various kick starter projects and funding them. They were usually small things and I came across, I don't how, know what searching I was doing, I probably searched comedy or something, and Greg Giraldo has always been one of my favourite comedians of all time, and I saw this here and I remember having this thought, "Why didn't anyone tell me about this?" And I remember immediately funding the top-level prize, thing, wit was, I just had to see the product or help the product to get through. And then we started to talk, you were, you know, saying you know, "If you wanted to be involved ...". And one thing led to another over the course of several months, and then it was a real thrill for me when you, when you sent me an email asking me if I would be your co-author. That was just, just super great. And that was about three-and-a-half years ago.

M.B.

Yeah, well it, it was a relief to me. I don't know we listed on the kick starter campaign but getting assistance, like a co-author role, was something that I really wanted to do and so maybe it was fate or just good fortune we were very lucky that you were on Kick Starter that day.

W.J.

And I appreciate all the help you gave me with my spelling. That was, that was very good. [Jeff laughs.] And also, too, I know a couple of people, when we've been at various events have asked us, "You're in Canada, eh? and your co-author is in, Matt is in California, how did you manage that?" How did we manage that? Maybe you can say that.

M.B.

Well, lots of help through Dropbox but also, I mean with emails and a pretty decent cell phone plan, which I've since learned I could have gone international to save some money but I think emails. Other than a time change happens in the States, it really wasn't much an impediment. What do you think Wayne?

W.J.

I really felt the same way. Only once or twice did we make the mistake of, we were both working on the document on the same time and Dropbox doesn't work like that. You know, Google Docs does. But I never, ever found it an impediment. In fact, we had our, our actually quite big corpus of information there, not only the document we were working on, but for people who haven't read the book yet or seen it, it's based over sixty interviews that we did. Matt did most of the interviews with family, comedians, managers, a couple of fans, various other peoples, journalists in the business. So that was all stored and organized, all on the Dropbox site. I always felt it was quite handy because if I had to find the latest whatever, I didn't have to search through email to find that or "Did I put that over here or is that Gmail or my natural account?" It was all on the Dropbox site.

M.B.

Yeah, and there was also a little bit of security knowing that it was saved on the cloud, I mean, there could also be breaches but years ago, my eldest brother worked on a book in collaboration with a professor and I think they each had to save separate files locally and periodically they would print it out to have a physical copy but I think it's, it's a lot easier in this day and age.

W.J.

I love the fact that we can now say that, "Oh wow, they had to print it out. How quaint that was. Those were the days." I was, I'm a little bit of a freak for this so I actually used to save it in my Gmail and also save it in my personal email that I have too. I just thought, I don't know, I just imagined the Cloud exploding or something or ...

M.B.

I did too. You know, there was always fear of hackers or something would happen, where we'd lose something, and I always wanted something locally. But it was nice to have different levels of backup.

W.J.

Is there any truth to the rumour that somehow the Russians hacked in and saw it before we did?

M.B.

I cannot comment on that.

W.J.

The other cool we got to do, Matt has been interviewed by several either podcasters or comedians or various people in the industry in, I guess mostly in the U.S. and I've been interviewed a little bit in Canada and when we went to launch our book at the Fat Black Pussycat, which is a sister club of the, of the Comedy Cellar in New York City, I was just so pleased at the way that worked out. For those of who don't know, if you haven't read the book and of course you should at some point purchase and read the book [Jeff, "Of course"], Greg Giraldo is a comedian who used, he's a fully trained lawyer from, you know he went to Harvard Law School, but he eventually basically, I mean it sounds like a made-up story, but dropped all that so that he could be a stand-up comedian. And this was in the early nineties. And around that time, the he was based in New York City then, you know sort of the comedy club or one of the premier club, comedy clubs, that was that would give newcomers some stage time, was called the Comedy Cellar. So Matt and I, will speak for Matt, and say we were super happy when the Comedy Cellar, said, well you know, they were in love with Greg back then and they knew that we this book and that they would do a launch for us there, have an event basically based on the whole thing. Maybe you can talk with some of the stuff that happened that night, Matt.

M.B.

Yeah, I think that was, was the perfect place to launch because that was where he really found his footing as a comedian, make, working on new bits at the Comedy Cellar. So that worked out much better than planned. And it was a little dicey because just hours or even minutes before this show, which you know we sort of billed as an Irish wake where people would just come up and share stories about Greg Giraldo and we would do that as well ..

W.J.

You know, it sort of worked out better than planned. You know, what I was really worried about I guess was that, you know, only a couple of people would show up and it would be really nice to talk to a couple of super fans and everything and, but it wouldn't so to speak amount to much. But we ended up, that the, that the folks there that organized, that gave us this beautiful room that was not just fort of you know a room with chairs kind of thing but there were couches in corners, and there was a little balcony, there was soft seating, it was kind of red light. Of course, it had a stage where comedians could perform and also about fifty or sixty people showed up, there was a line up to get up in and the, the four hundred million cherries on top of this great sundae, some, some of our favourite comedians just showed up to do a bit or to talk about Greg Giraldo. Dave Fetelle, was, that was a treat for me and there were various people who gave tributes or told jokes or and the great Colin Quinn who wrote the

foreword to our book actually told some of Greg's jokes and those, those ten years or fifteen years later, [Jeff laughs] still went over pretty well.

M.B.

Yeah, and we have to really give credit to MaryAnne Giraldo, his wife, because without her I don't think those comedians would have showed up. So, we have to definitely give her, her due. And also, great to meet her and the kids there. But it was just, one of those things, it was so fortunate that they showed up and it was much better than had we spent months and months planning it.

W.J.

No, you're quite right and maybe, if not for her influence, you know we might have ended up with that thing I feared where four people showed up and you and I would have a good chat [Jeff laughs] with them kind of thing right? By the way, the kids you are referring to are, of course, Greg had three children with MaryAnne and they're all in their, what, mid to late teens, now?

M.B.

Yeah, I think the oldest is born in 2000 so yeah, so he's, he's a young adult and then the others are mid to late teens.

W.J.

And Martha, the editor of the magazine that we're doing for, had a very specific question for us that I'm just going to read, just to prove that as a librarian, even though I'm senior administrator, that I can still read, that I am still literate. "If the subject of your book, that is Greg Giraldo, was alive today, what do you and I Matt, think that he would say about the story we have told about him?"

M.B.

I'd say, "Why did you spend so much time on this?"

W.J.

Ah, yeah, probably right, he is a comedian so that's what he's supposed to do, he's not supposed to answer seriously.

M.B.

What, what do you think? I'd like to get your thoughts on what he would say [Wayne laughs], or what you think he would say?

W.J.

You're quite right, I wouldn't want him to say something like, "Well, yeah I think your, your footnotes don't seem to conform to either the Chicago style or the APA style [Jeff laughs]. So, I think, I think there's be a long diatribe about for sure, which would be much appreciated by a lot of comedians. That's a really good question. Knowing what we know about, a little about, you know what we could glean about his psychology, I bet one of his reactions, I hesitate to call it false modesty, but he would be probably

shocked that a book was written about him because one of the psychological things he suffered from, was really not sort of not thinking highly of himself in a certain kind of way, thinking he was a fraud, which was completely false as the evidence showed. So, he had a lot of psychological [Jeff, "yeah"] turmoil. So for him to imagine, you know, four years ago and let's say he were still alive then and someone announced that, "We're writing a book about you," he would, you know I would imagine his reaction being, "What do you mean? What are you, what are you going to be writing about? I went to law school, I dropped out, now I'm a comedian. What's to say, right?"

M.B.

Yeah, I think you're right. And also when you interviewed Connor, the journalist that saw him at the comedy show, after the Letterman appearance, [Wayne, "Connor Hogan that was"], he mentioned that when he did a story on Greg, that Greg wrote him a very thoughtful email afterwards, and seemed to really appreciate it. So, I think you're right, like on one hand, you're kind of like, "What's the point of writing a story where there is no story." I, I think that after some introspection, he would, he'd have a lot of appreciation. I think he would like it.

W.J.

Yeah, I think so and I feel in a way it leads to what you think about the sort of the various clichés you, one thinks, or others think about comedians. On one end of the spectrum, is that "Oh, they're a comedian, therefore they're always funny, they're always happy, you know, they go bed [Jeff laughs] with a smile on their face, they wear pressed pajamas. And on the other end, that they're just creepy drug addicts and alcoholics, that are just getting up there and mocking people." And yes, there are, I could probably name a comedian for each of those ends of the spectrum but there's a whole range in there and Greg actually, I can easily see something like an easy, sort of a joke, just like you made but eventually him looking you straight in the face, or maybe more likely, writing something down and saying you know how appreciative he was for the book and "I thought you treated it fairly."

We hope we did anyway, we certainly heard that from a lot of reviewers. You know, that he would have that combination of things where his natural joke would be in a way self-deprecatory. But when he really looked at it he would probably be, I hope, he would be very appreciative, cause, I will speak for both of us confidentially, and say we tried extremely hard to make this not only a very readable book but also something that was, what I would call authoritative in the sense that broadly and comprehensively researched. We didn't just talk to two people and drag a bunch off the internet. We, we got our facts.

M.B.

I agree.

W.J.

What's your final word Matt? What's the plea to people about why they should buy this book?

M.B.

Ah because I have two kids [Wayne laughs] that are depending [Wayne laughs] food and shelter.

W.J. [Wayne laughs.] So what Matt is saying in summary is that unless you hate children, you should be buying this book [Jeff laughs.]. I think, I think that's the summary there. Yeah, so if people want to buy the book, it is by Wayne Jones, that's me, and Matt Balaker, B-a-l-a-k-e-r, and the book is called Greg Giraldo. A comedian's story. And you can get it, if you googled it like that or if you go on Amazon, you could certainly find copies. And also, you can, if you want a copy in full colour, signed by the authors or at least one of the authors anyway, you can get that too. And just go to gregiraldobook.com and you can find that.

Thanks, Matt, for doing this from California and here I am sitting in my office in Ottawa and that's a good illustration of how hard the Dropbox collaboration was. These things can happen [Jeff laughs]. These things can happen pretty easily.

M.B.

Thanks Wayne.