

“Where Are They Now” Series: Tim Burke

Intro: This is the Work-At-Home-Heroes podcast. Your host, Caitlin Pyle, digs deep with people from all over the world who make money from home. Get ready to wake up to a world of possibility for freedom, flexibility, and a life you love.

Caitlin: Well, everybody, welcome back to another episode of the Work-At-Home Heroes podcast. We're back and we've decided to mix it up and bring you a series of 10 episodes, each with a different topic all related to working at home. Very similar to the first season, but this series is called “Where Are They Now,” where we are re-interviewing previously featured guests to explore their progress and hear their journey since we last spoke. You'll be able to find a link to the previous interview in the show notes and join us now as we follow up with our Work-At-Home-Heroes for season two. I'm here with Tim from our last season. Tim is ... his full name, we'll say, it sounds very official. Timothy Michael Burke. Welcome back to the show, Timothy.

Tim: Hi, Caitlin and I don't know. I'm not going to give you your middle name, so hi, Caitlin.

Caitlin: Great to have you back. Now, just to give you guys a background, Tim is a semi-retired radio news anchor. You can kind of already hear in his voice and if you were with us for our last episode, we talked a lot about that. He's been working from home, narrating and producing audiobooks and since we last spoke, he's been able to upgrade his home studio. He's got 54 books on the market with a lot more in the pipeline. He's been able to raise his rates, not as much as he'd like to. We'll go into that a little bit. He's swamped with work and he absolutely still loves what he does. So glad to have you back, Tim. It's been three years since you've been working from home, is that correct?

Tim: That's correct.

Caitlin: I remember last time you were earning about up to \$2,000 in every given month. Or no, that's now. That's now.

Tim: Yeah, that's now. Just to back up a little bit because when I filled out the form for this interview, I had 54 books. Right now I'm working on my 65th.

Caitlin: Wow. So just in that time, that's not been a lot of time. That's impressive.

Tim: Right. Like I mentioned before in the interview form that I'm swamped with work right now and loving every minute of it.

Caitlin: That's great. It's great to be swamped with something that you enjoy doing. I think that's the most important thing is that you enjoy what you're doing, because if you're just

doing something because you got to pay the bills, there's just more to life than that. So I implore you, if you're listening to this, to find something meaningful in your life that is ... and that is not money. I think a lot of people get confused and they think that they have enough money, they'll be able to add meaning into their lives. But mo' money, mo' problems. Right? Here at Work-At-Home Heroes, we say mo' skills, mo' money, but then you do have problems to deal with the more money you make. I'm trying to sell a house right now. I'm trying to downsize my life because when I was married I let my life get so big.

When I say my life, I mean the external things in my life got so big that now those things are weighing me down. So it's a lie what they tell you, the American dream. It's like get a house and get a dog and settle down and get a nice car and go on family vacations. To me that sounds so, so boring and I love talking to people like you on the show because it reminds me that I'm not alone and we get to remind all of our listeners that you're not alone if you're not satisfied with that American dream. So let's get into ... you're in Big Rapids still. It hasn't changed, is that correct? You're still Big Rapids?

Tim: Correct. I'm still in Big Rapids, Michigan.

Caitlin: You've learned a lot about marketing.

Tim: Well, I've learned a lot about the market in and of itself. The biggest thing I've learned about it is that the paradigm of ... well, there's two major things at play here. One is the popularity of audiobooks is just absolutely exploding. In fact, I read an article that in England this year, they're predicting that audiobook sales will outstrip ebook and print book sales for the first time ever.

Caitlin: Wow. Why do you think that is?

Tim: Well, a lot of it has to do with people have found out that they can do other things while they're listening to audiobooks.

Caitlin: Yeah, yeah. That whole multipurpose thing. I've been doing the same thing with podcasts and I've got a couple of audiobooks as well. It's really being able to spice up the mundaneness of life. Driving, dishes, getting ready in the morning, putting on something to listen to to stimulate your brain.

Tim: Plus there's been a number of studies done that I've read that say that -- and because a lot of people are hesitant about audiobooks because they're so used to the visual reading thing of an actual ebook or print book -- but the studies that were done, and I think it was from Carnegie Mellon University, but I'm not certain, don't quote me on that. But several studies have been done saying your brain doesn't know the difference. You get the same kind of information and the same comprehension from an audiobook as you do from a print book.

Caitlin: I would have to say there's got to be some exceptions to that. I guess it depends on where your head's at when you're listening to the audiobook. Because if I'm trying to do something else while I'm listening, then my attention isn't 100% in the audiobook and so I feel like I don't absorb it as much. Even when I watch movies, I put on the closed captions because I like to listen and read at the same time.

Tim: Yeah, and that's going to vary from person to person, but then again on the other side of that coin, I know a number of people who claim that when they are reading or when they're studying, they have the TV on at the same time.

Caitlin: Oh, yeah. I think that somehow calms them if they're not really paying attention.

Tim: You get that same split of attention, but my point though is that audiobooks are absolutely exploding. For instance, the first two weeks of this month, this is a record for me, I completed eight audiobooks.

Caitlin: Wow. That is a lot of work. Wow, congratulations.

Tim: Yes, and I think you can appreciate the amount of work that goes into an audiobook because I've had people say, "Oh, that must be a lot of fun. All you do is sit down in front of the microphone and read the book." Yeah, that's part of it.

Caitlin: Nope. I haven't even started on mine yet because of the work that goes into it and the time that it takes and the mood I have to be in, so I haven't even started. I actually have started, but I did one short round of recording and I'm like, "I cannot do this." To think I used to be able to sit and proofread for hours at a time. It's different. It's different.

Tim: One of the main companies out there that does produce audiobooks, ACX, which is the big dog in this market, for lack of a better term, they are owned by Amazon and Audible, but their calculations, they claim on their help sheets that most narrators, it takes a little over six hours worth of work to produce one hour of quality audio. It's not just sitting there reading. So there's a lot that goes into it aside from just being able to read well and having good character voices, et cetera, et cetera. Most narrators do all of their own editing work and mastering work and that takes a lot of time.

Caitlin: I can imagine, if you really want to create a quality product for your customers. I do remember last time we spoke that your main concern was getting enough work and so it really pleased me and makes me really excited to hear that it's less than two years later since we last spoke and now you're swamped and your desk is full. So it looks like you're going to be able to raise your prices again soon because you raised your prices a little bit to earn you some more money and you definitely ... if you're in that high demand, it's probably a good indicator that your prices are a little bit too low.

Tim: Yeah, and that's part of that whole paradigm issue that I referred to earlier. It used to be that if you were going to do an audiobook, you had to go rent a studio, you had an agent that represented you and because of the advent of home studios and companies like ACX, that whole paradigm has shifted. There are hundreds and hundreds and, I imagine, hundreds of thousands of narrators out there now. How you fit yourself into the market is an adventure in and of itself. I've been fortunate in that I've set up my own website, which helps a little bit, but it seems to be that most people hear some of my work somewhere, some of them go to my samples page on ACX, some of them go to my website, and then they approach me.

So it has been, I would say, at least a year since I have auditioned for a given book. I have rights holders and authors approaching me to do the work. Like I said, I need to kick my prices up but there's always that little bit of hesitation there because well, if I kick them up too much then I'm not going to get the amount of work I'm getting right now. But I've got to make that leap eventually. But here of recent, I've been so swamped with just doing what I've got because I haven't updated my website since August just because I haven't had the time, which is a good thing to have. But I need to back it off a little bit and do some more marketing of myself, get my website updated. I have never had any kind of voice lessons whatsoever and I want to --

Caitlin: That's so impressive. I mean, you've got that background in radio, but I mean, just listening to you talk, I was like, "Oh man, I'm already feeling pretty calm."

Tim: Well, it's not only the voice but what you do with it. I do want to, in the audiobook world, I want to get more into fiction. I do a lot of nonfiction, a lot of self-help books, history books, that type of thing. But fiction is A, more challenging, B, a lot more fun to do, and C, pays a lot more. But I've been blessed with getting a few fiction things that have worked out really well. If you don't mind, I'd like to --

Caitlin: Sure.

Tim: I got a review on a book that I did here back in August, actually it was. The book is called *The Changeling's Daughter* and it is written from the point of view of a 14-year-old girl. This is a young adult urban fantasy type thing, but it's a 14-year-old girl who discovered that she and her parents are actually goblins and she winds up going to the land of Hanafin and battling with goblins and all kinds of stuff.

But this wasn't one that I auditioned for. The author liked my voice for this thing and we got this review just here, I just got this couple of weeks ago actually. In the review, the woman who reviewed it said, "Timothy Burke's voice at first put me off just a bit due to the fact that he was voicing a young female, but his voice, after my initial qualms, held the emotions and intonations needed for this story. By the end of chapter two, you cease to hear Mr. Burke and you hear and love Brynn," which is the main character. "All of the voices and all the characters were done in such a way that you forget you are listening to one person speaking a story, but you are transported to the world where the story is real."

Caitlin: Yay. What a great review.

Tim: When I read that I almost fell off my chair.

Caitlin: That's an excellent review.

Tim: But that's the ... and I want to get more into voice acting, which I feel I need some professional coaching on. But I think I'm off to a good start when you can get reviews like that.

Caitlin: So let's talk about that coaching and taking that next step because I'm interested to know what's next for you now that I know where you were from the last episode and what progress you've been able to make in that time. Where are you going next? You're going to be taking these lessons?

Tim: Well, yeah, I need to. That's another challenge in and of itself because if you go out to an ACX site or ... Well, you couldn't do it on ACX, but I belong to a number of Facebook groups for narrators and whatnot. If you say, "I'm looking for a voice coach," you will get inundated. From what I've read and experiences of other narrators that I've talked to, any number of these people are the classic, "If you can't do, then teach."

Finding a person who is a good coach and worth the time and money to put into it is going to be a challenge in and of itself in my copious amounts of spare time. So yeah, that's my next step, is to start investigating that. Make contact with these people, see what kind of resumes they have in and of themselves and then pursue it from there. Because now I've got the finances with the income that I've got coming to be able to invest in that type of thing. But it's one step at a time.

Caitlin: Yeah, super smart that you're taking the income that you are earning and reinvesting that into what you're doing to grow to the next level. It's not shortsighted at all. I think that you've got a good balance, so you're enjoying what you're doing now, but you're still able to take some of that money and dedicate some time. It's a balance, isn't it? It's a balance between priorities and knowing that you've still got some future to ... everybody, hopefully, has some future to prepare for, but you're also very much enjoying the present without making it all about ... I think people get stuck in the past, which is fear, so it keeps them from getting started and from moving forward and seeing what tools are available for them right now. Tools and people who are willing to help and that love to help and that's their thing, that's their dance, that's what they like to do.

Then they can also get wrapped up in fears of the future and what might happen and that completely divides our attention away from the present. I actually ... not long before we started speaking, I wrote on my hand a reminder. I might get a tattoo. I don't have any tattoos but I might have to get one. It just says, "Present," because I've really realized recently that a huge source of my issue with anxiety is I'm thinking about what's going to happen later and how I'm

going to deal with it. The thing is we don't have the tools or the mental capacity to deal with problems until we're in the problem most of the time.

Tim: Well, exactly. Exactly. The present is really all we have. A good friend of mine once said this and it stuck in my head. He said, "Yesterday's history. Tomorrow's a mystery. Today is all we have."

Caitlin: That's why it's called the present. It's a gift, right? Sometimes it doesn't always feel like gifts because I mean ... and sometimes it's hard to say, "Okay, well let's just stay in the present," but we live in this construct of time and our lives are set up linearly in that we're born, we go to school, we learn stuff, we choose a career path. Maybe some of us are waking up to the fact that we don't necessarily want to exist in this construct, and so we're coming on the internet and finding podcasts, listening to audiobooks, looking for different ways to move out of that.

So it can be hard to stay in the present when your present is circumstances that you don't like. So if you want to affect your future and maybe have less fear about the future, then we don't have a choice but to take control over the present. It's really, really hard. Have you dealt with some fear as your business has been growing, especially so much in the last year and a half that you're so swamped now? Especially, also, as you've been seeking out more training and you've been venturing out and I can hear the confidence in your voice, but have you been dealing with any kind of fear as you've been growing?

Tim: Well, there's always the trepidation of what if, but that's precisely it. One of the things I try to keep myself grounded in, in a way of helping to keep myself in the present, and realizing that the present is the only time I can really do anything. Even when I'm thinking and planning for the future, I'm doing that now, and that's in the present. The future isn't here yet. I can't deal with something that isn't here. Don't get me wrong. Yes, we need to make plans, but that doesn't mean I have to live in that future with all these what ifs. The only thing I can deal with is what's right here and now.

Caitlin: Exactly. Sometimes we have to just swallow our pride and say, "Okay, I'm going to deal with this," and if we don't like it, we're the only ones who can change it. That doesn't mean that we can't call on our support system. Our family, friends, and say, "Hey, I'm really dealing with some stuff right now. Can you help in XYZ area?" I think that's actually a good thing to have a network of people that you can trust, that you can be open and honest with about things that are happening, whether it's in your business or personal life. You need to have that, otherwise it's a lonely, lonely world working at home.

Tim: Absolutely. I make a joke about it because my audio booth is lined with acoustic foam. People ask me, "What are you doing now that you don't work in radio anymore?" I love the look on their faces when I tell them, "Well, I spend most of my days in a small padded room talking to people who aren't there."

Caitlin: I love that so much. That's funny.

Tim: Which is what I'm doing. You talk about that, trying to work from the present, and that's going to be an interesting ... Later on this evening, I have a video conference with a young lady who approached me and asked me to mentor her in the world of narration, which is ... Well, it gives you pause when you have to stop and think about how much do I really know because I'm sure she's going to come up with stuff that I'm going to have to tell her, "Okay, I'll get back to you on that." But one of the things I will tell her -- and this is something that I have actually posted on the wall of my studio -- It's a quote from Calvin Coolidge, our president, and it's about persistence.

What he said about it is, "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race." A lot of it is just stick-to-itiveness, not giving up because things didn't go well the way you wanted it to. For instance, when I first started in this business, you mentioned that I'm ex-radio guy and I sound like a radio guy.

Caitlin: You totally do, you totally do.

Tim: The number of auditions that I was turned down for and was told it was because I sound too professional and too polished.

Caitlin: Wow.

Tim: Because a lot of times for a book they don't want somebody that sounds like this. They want somebody that sounds like the guy or girl next door. That's another thing I try to emphasize to people who want to get into narration is keep in mind that no one voice fits everything and there are hundreds, literally hundreds of thousands of authors out there looking for somebody to turn their story into an audiobook. So you just have to dive in. My experience so far has been the market will help tell you what you're good at. That's why I ended up with, even though I love the fiction stuff, but the majority of my work so far has been nonfiction because I can sound convincing on a given subject, even if I don't know anything about it.

Caitlin: You definitely sound like you do. That's so true. That's so true. Speaks to the human mind too, is that you can be a complete novice in the subject area, but because of the way your voice sounds ... It's really like how I interpret British and Australian people as being smarter than American people because of their accent. -- phenomena.

Tim: Yeah, your brain tends to think that way. It's also whenever I'm narrating a book, whether I agree with the book, whether I think it's a bunch of garbage, I try to keep in mind that

the author is really enthusiastic about this. Otherwise they wouldn't have written the book. So I try to keep that enthusiasm in mind. Plus, then there's things ... I just want to let you know about this one too because yeah, I'm getting a lot of work, but I just recently got ... there's an outfit out of England that had contacted me and they have me doing ... they asked me to do one and I said, "Okay, yeah, I'll do it." The classic trashy romance novels.

Caitlin: Ooh.

Tim: They asked me to do ... and I guess they liked the last one I had. They sent me a bundle of five of these things to do and I don't care for them. I'm not real fond of erotica or doing it, but they pay me pretty well for it. It's a new experience. So as a narrator, I wish that I was in a position where I could just pick and choose what I wanted to do. But I'm in the position right now where I will -- another friend of mine told me this. As far as my attitude toward what I do, I am not an artiste. I'm kind of like a mercenary. I'll take what's there. Maybe someday I will get to the point where I can pick and choose and do the things that I like, rather than things that I don't particularly care for. But right now A, it's helping the bills, and B, it's giving me a lot of experience.

Caitlin: I think that's super valuable. Plus, with that extra money you can use to invest in the classes that you need to take you to that next level and you're certainly making progress. I can see just between the last interview and this one, I mean you've quadrupled your income. You have more work than you can handle. You don't have to worry so much about where the work's going to come from and your biggest problem is that you're not charging enough. I think that sounds great to me and I wanted to go back to that quote you share from President Coolidge where you're talking about pressing on, and then it popped into my head about how sometimes giving up feels like the only option, but I think it's because we think it's the easiest option to just go back to the way things were because this pressing on stuff is so, so hard.

But giving up would make things more difficult and even more frustrating than pressing on. Even if you feel like you're not making any progress, if you're not giving up, that's progress. Because a lot of people give up every day. I mean, I don't want to get into the dark realms, but suicide happens every day because people literally give up on living. I think there's a lot of pressures. I think that there's a lot of constructs in American society that psychologically have affected us in ways that we are just now beginning to see the long term effects of. Like social media, what? It's only been around for 15, 20 years. I remember in high school it first started to come out and there was pictures of all of us on the internet where we were literally judging if we were hot or not.

I don't know if you remember those websites. It might be a different generation. But I was literally on a website when I was like 14 or 15 years old where people can rate me. I was like, "What?" I want to say, R-A-T-E, because I realize that people might have interpreted that incorrectly. But yeah, that's narration for you in audio. You have to make sure you say things succinctly so people can't misinterpret you. But my point is there was so much out there as I

was growing up and things have changed so much and productivity is heralded. Hustle is heralded as these ideals that if you're going to be working for yourself or you're going to be an entrepreneur, you're going to have your own business, podcasts, whatever it is that you're doing, that you've got to go full throttle, 100%, it becomes your life.

I've been there. I don't like it. I thought I liked it when I was in there because it feels fun to be busy and doing so many interviews and you're just racing through your day. There was some adrenaline attached to it because it's fun to talk to people and I always get nervous when I talk to people, but then I'm having fun when I'm doing it and then when it was over, it's like, "Oh, I'm tired. I've got another one." It's just like this hamster wheel. It's literally a hamster wheel. So something that I've made a point of this year is to be more intentional with how I'm spending my time. Do I feel obligated to spend my time trying to make more money or am I pushing myself to do things that don't make me any money but are helping me grow as a person or help me understand myself better or helping someone else without any expectation in return?

Because I mean these American ideals that they get slammed in your head, this hamster wheel that is celebrated, it's just going to suck life out of you. It's not going to give life. It's a lie. It's a big mirage that we've been sold. That's a big part of what my book talks about, it's what we talk about on the show a lot, is escaping from that hamster wheel of other-imposed control, and then our own self-imposed control because we bought into these constructs that society has laid on us to say, the more we do, the more money they make, the better life is going to be. Because that is just not true. I've been there, I've done that. I've been where I've had very little and I've been struggling and I've been to where I've had more money than I know what to do with, and then I lost it all, and I've had to start over. Not completely over, but going through a divorce.

I lost \$2 million in my divorce. I ended up with less money in the bank than I had when I first got married, which was not very much. I had enough just to run the company for the next month and I mean, there was a lot was a lot of fear there. I'm not going to lie and say I was full of faith that everything was going to be fine and in a way I knew everything was going to be fine, but I spent a lot of time thinking, "What if it's not?" That's that whole fear mindset of ... it's the opposite of anxiety. I think it's related, but I think there's fear of the future and anxiety is more with regret about like, "Okay, because of what I've done in the past is it can inform what I'm doing in the future." Not necessarily because all about what you're doing in the present and we have control over that moment alone. We have no control over anything that happened in the past and we have no control over anything that's not happened yet. We only have control over what's happening right now.

Tim: Exactly. That whole construct that you were talking about where in our society, unfortunately too many times I see success equals money. I don't buy into that anymore because I am not making scads of money. In fact, if it weren't for the social security that I'm collecting, I could not live on audiobooks alone, but there's a lot to be said to be getting up in the morning and looking forward to going into my audio booth and working on that next book or doing a little bit of marketing because I love what I'm doing as opposed to when I was in the

radio business and basically on call 24/7 like you were talking about. Yeah, for a while it was exciting and you're on the air and people recognize you. But after a while it's just like, "I'm burning myself out and where is it taking me?"

Caitlin: What about the daily joy? Are you enjoying the moments of your day or are you just focusing on the number in the bank or what car you drive or what people are thinking or how people interpret you? Or are you finding joy in the very small moments of your day looking forward to going into your audio booth? I think that's beautiful to feel joy and excitement about being able to do that.

Well, we are out of time, Tim. I just want to say thank you so much for being back on the show and for sharing your wisdom with us and for sharing your updates with us. Where can people reach you? I know we're going to tag you in the group as we did last time and people can go and find you on the website and I'll go into that in just a second. But if you want to give your website or the best way that people can get in touch with you to keep in ... ask questions.

Tim: Yeah, the easiest way would be through my website, which is relatively easy to remember. It's called spokenwordcreation.com.

Caitlin: That is a very easy to remember. Spokenwordcreation.com, and you can find him in the Work-At-Home Heroes Facebook group. Go ahead.

Tim: Yeah, and there's a contact page on the website that will forward any message you have to me and then we can get back in touch with each other by email, phone, whatever you like.

Caitlin: Well, thank you so much for being so willing to help out our audience by being available in that way. Folks at home, you heard me briefly mention my book, *Work At Home*, where we bust through the myths about what it really is and the lies that we've been told, how to break free from those lies. You can level up your mindset and your skills so you can actually take control of your income and launch a business. It's three steps and you get the first five chapters of that book -- It's called *Work At Home* -- You can get those chapters for free by going to workathomeschool.com/book, and if you like and follow this podcast, please leave us a review on your preferred podcast platform like iTunes or whatever. It helps us reach more people and bring you more great content like this episode.

Finally, you can find more episodes of the show at workathomeschool.com/podcast. Again, Tim, thank you so much for being back with us on Work-At-Home Heroes.

Tim: Thank you for having me again, and I hope we will be talking again in the future.