

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 20: Dan Carlin

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Tim Ferriss: Welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show. Thank you for tuning in. I'm going to start with a quote. This one is from Steve Jobs. "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life." Good advice. The second thing I'm going to give you, to start off, is a probably useless way to remember how large Mount Fuji is, and that's 12,365 feet in terms of altitude. And the way you remember that is 12 months in the year, 365 days in a year. So you're welcome.

This episode features Dan Carlin. Dan Carlin is hugely impressive to me, which is obvious when you listen to my initial ramblings. I'm clearly nervous and I stumble over a bunch of words, which is hilarious. So I hope you enjoy that awkwardness. Dan has done many things in his life. He's been on radio, he's been on television.

But the way I came to know him is through *Hardcore History*, which is an incredible podcast and you should put aside, for the moment, any reservations or doubts you have about a podcast based on history. Of course this podcast, The Tim Ferriss show, is about deconstructing excellence. And if you listen to one episode of *Hardcore History*, you'll realize how absolutely stupendous and amazing Dan Carlin is.

So we get into, among other things, his early beginnings, stumbling in the beginning, first versions of the podcast, how he grew into it as a full time professional, his influences, his habits, his rituals, the things that he would do differently, the things that he would tell himself when he was 20 years old, and on and on. The point being to pull out tactics, routines, tools that you can use not only in podcasting but well outside of podcasting. It makes people who are good in a particular arena tend to have a lot in common with people who are the best in other arenas.

As always, this podcast is supported by you guys, so if you do like this podcast, please visit fourhourworkweek.com/books. That is the home of the Tim Ferriss book club where I list a handful of books that have had a huge impact on my life, my career, and I guarantee you'll be extremely impressed and happy with them. It's not too many, and they'll link through Tempur Amazon where you can

take a look at these various books and audio books. So it's fourhourworkweek.com/books. Without further ado, I hope you enjoy the podcast. Thanks for listening.

Tim Ferriss:

Welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss show, ladies and gentlemen. I have a treat for you. We have Dan Carlin on the phone.

And Dan, I have to tell you, I have had some fantastic folks on this podcast so far and I've met a lot of people in my life, and I have been so nervous about this particular conversation for weeks, now. Part of the reason is there are very few podcasts I actually listen to on a regular basis. And I'm hoping by the end of this conversation, everyone who listens to this will, at the very least, listen to one full episode of Hardcore History.

This is somewhat akin, given that I'm a novice in the podcast arena, to be getting in front of a crowd of tens or hundreds of thousands of people and trying to, say, have a pass with a famous NFL quarterback, or do a foul shot competition with a top NBA player, or something like that. I've been so impressed by the quality of your podcast, and we've talked about this before, recognizing the amount of time and energy that you put into each one of these.

We'll jump into things in a second, but just as context I had asked a number of my very close friends who are involved with audio production and podcasts, as well as video, what their favorite podcasts were. And almost without exception, Hardcore History was listed in the top three for every single person. And of course, the first question I asked myself was, how could a history podcast be one of the most popular podcasts out there? I remember downloading the very first episode that I heard of Hardcore History, which was the *Prophets of Doom*.

I looked at the length, and I think it's well over four hours, if I'm not mistaken. And I remember thinking to myself, I'm going to download this. I'm going to just get a taste for it for the first five to ten minutes to see if I can learn anything about the style, and then that's going to be it. I have digested now dozens and dozens of hours of your content. So first and foremost, thank you for putting so much effort into each of these episodes.

Dan Carlin:

I don't always know how to react to such nice things that people say. It's a fantastic compliment, and I always tell people that I would love everyone in their lives to get that feeling that

something you did was so well received by people. I feel very fortunate and a little like I stumbled into this, and like you can't even really take credit for it; you just fall into something that after you fall into it, seems like where you should have been all along.

So I feel like a really lucky guy to have stumbled into something that seems to be so well received. I appreciate that. And yeah, four hours, if you had told me when we started Hard Core History that I would have been doing four hour shows, I think I would have cancelled right then and there. So not only did I not want to listen to it, I didn't want to do it.

Tim Ferriss: That's actually where I was hoping to start, naturally, at the beginning and give people a little bit of background of how Hard Core History came to be.

Because I remember you mentioned in a previous conversation that it started off very, very differently so I'm curious to know how it came to be, and what your expectations were at the time. Because certainly it's become an entity onto itself and it's turned into something very, very big. How did it come together and how did it start off?

Dan Carlin: Maybe other podcasters listening to you will be able to relate to this. I've started a lot of shows in my life. A lot of them were radio shows and whatnot. And the one thing you learn when you start these shows is that all you can do is come up with a concept, and then try to take that concept where you think it should go initially.

And then once you do that, whatever you create is going to evolve. Some of that evolution is in your control, and some of it isn't in your control. I always say find your favorite TV series, take something like *Seinfeld*, for example, and then go look at the first five episodes. And you'll notice that it's not really *Seinfeld*, yet.

It hasn't evolved into what really works. But then eventually it finds its stride. So when you listen to our early episodes, they don't sound a lot like what we're doing, either. Length is a perfect example. There was a time when we were really scared of approaching an hour long program. I remember one time, I think it was with our *Apache Tears* episode, the one we did on the Apaches. We were approaching an hour, and then I got a finished product and it was one hour and 15 minutes, and I said, "We're cancelling this show. We have to dial it back. We can't do over an hour because no one will listen."

And so I think the fact that the audience had proven receptive gave us a feeling that there was some freedom here to go a little farther, and then a little farther and I'm shocked that everybody can listen to it that long. Editing it for us, we dread hearing it over and over again. So I'm really not on the same wavelength with a lot of the listeners.

Tim Ferriss: Speaking of someone who's written a 428 page book, then a 592 page book and then a 670-some-odd book...

Dan Carlin: Those are nightmares. It's the same thing; nightmares.

Tim Ferriss: It really does take on a life of its own. I'm really glad you brought up the *Seinfeld* example because I remember looking at, say, some of the current versions of podcasts when I was considering doing my own. Looking at some of your newer episodes, looking at some of the more polished Gerogen episodes, which are also monsters. Looking at many different types and then someone recommended that I go back and look at the first one or two episodes that Joe did on video, and they're hilariously amateur; really, really hilarious.

If I hadn't done that, I think I would have been too intimidated to get started because I would have falsely assumed that the polished format that you've arrived at is where you started, and that that reflects an intrinsic ability that I entirely lack, which could also still be true.

But what I'd love to know is with Hardcore History in particular, and we'll talk about the podcast and I also want to talk about history but were there any particular tipping points that helped you start to form it into what it is now? And I'm sure it's still evolving but were there any particular tipping points, whether it was in popularity, specific episodes, aha moments that come to mind for you, content or format-wise?

Dan Carlin: I think we had ideas when we started it of things we wanted to do. And then a couple shows into it, you could start to sense that these were elements that you should have in every single episode. So for example, somewhere along the line I'd always had these sort of Twilight Zone kind of ideas about history. And when we could start to say okay, every episode really is successful if it has some of those, some of the drama, some of the narrative.

You start to figure out what the ingredients in your creation are. And once that's the case, then it's not so much a formula as a checklist and you can say okay, every good episode that we do should have A, B, C, D, and E. And I'm not sure when you start that you're totally aware of that. You're still playing around with the ingredients and the mix. And we still do that. Each episode is going to start different because we want to put extra cumin in this one and less hot sauce in that one.

But at the same time, you don't really know what's working in the first few episodes. We did one called *Step Stories* early on, which is sort of a loose look at all the different people in the culture and the history of the giant flat area that starts in Eastern Europe and goes almost all the way to the Pacific Ocean. We did a show like that, and it was the first time I think we had hit the sweet spot with all those elements in it. And when you heard it, you just said that's significantly better than anything else that we've done.

That's when you sit there and say we've figured out how to do this, kind of, and we're going to not mass produce it but we're going to make sure that we do a better job in every later episode that incorporates all these things that we think have started to blend well.

Tim Ferriss:

I am currently re-listening to the *Wrath of the Khans*, which is an audio book or three worth of content in and of itself. It seems like, having polled my 500,000 or so people on Twitter, that that is one of the most popular series, so to speak. I'm curious to know if there are any episodes that you thought were going to be a huge hit that were not, or if there were any episodes that were completely out of left field a huge home run?

Dan Carlin:

It's nice to hear you say that because I think I left a little bit of my sanity with that *Wrath of the Khan* series.

The truth is the longer, multi part series where we take on some big issue and it takes four or six episodes, hours long each, and you have an audio book at the end to do are so challenging because you have all these loose threads that developed while you were doing the story. And then by the time you hit the middle of the series, you have to start tying those threads together. I'm in one of these things now. We're talking about the first World War and we're in episode four and all of a sudden the whole thing is unraveling in front of my face.

It does challenge your sanity a bit. I'm always surprised when the shows are well received. So I don't have anywhere I was going; oh, this is going to be a home run. I'm always sure I screwed up, one way or the other. So it never happens that I'm sure it's a hit. Oftentimes I release something and I just brace myself for what I'm sure is going to be this negative response. *Prophets of Doom*, that you liked, I did a thing at the end.

Tim Ferriss: I heard it, yeah.

Dan Carlin: It was like a disclaimer saying this didn't come out the way I wanted and people liked it anyway. That's usually what happens. I'm a little bit more of a perfectionist.

I was reading a book the other day on the Rolling Stones. They have this picture in it of their guitarist, Keith Richards, just hanging over this audio board. You can see that he's been up for days, and they're on like the hundredth take of this song and the album is overdue. And I thought to myself, it's not all that different than what we're doing here.

So I'm always sure that this next show we're going to release is going to destroy our brand forever, and that I'm never going to live up to the hype, and the sanity has been left in the studio somewhere. *Prophets of Doom* is a perfect example. The *Apache Tears* show, I think it was the first one, either we were near or over an hour. I was sure people were going to freak out about that. So pretty much every episode we release, I'm sure that's the end; we screwed it up.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned the aspect of tying loose ends together, and this is something I feel very familiar with just having put together books with multiple storylines and dozens of different components.

However, with the printed word, I have the luxury of being able to go back, copy and paste, cut out sections, translate them to other areas. But with audio, after you've recorded, say, two or three episodes, you really have to work with – I would imagine on some level – what you've already done. So I'd love to hear how on earth you prepare for these things, what the process currently looks like.

Because when I listened to the *Prophets of Doom*, and at the end, like you said, the disclaimer came out where you say that it didn't really turn out the way you expected it to or wanted to, that you actually recorded – and I have to just hear it from the horse's mouth, here – a complete version of that episode that you then

scrapped. I just couldn't fathom taking the time to record that and then scrap it and start over; it just blew my mind. So could you talk a little bit about the process? How do you research? How do you choose topics when you're going after an episode like this? Because it sounds very masterfully delivered.

So one of the thoughts that occurred to me, for instance, was how often do you stop? Like how long is a take, in other words, and so on and so forth. So I'd love for you to just discuss, if you would be open to it, kind of start to finish what the process looks like for putting one of these shows together.

Dan Carlin:

Let me back up because you talked about doing a book, and there are similarities when you do these really long podcasts and especially these series. We have a name for it in-house. I call it the Blue Room. The Blue Room is when you've heard the piece so often, and this happens with reading, too so I'm sure you have the same problems with books. Where you've now seen it so often that you lose the ability to absorb it the way a new listener would, or a new reader would.

And it destroys your ability to judge what you have. It's the only time I get jealous of the TV networks and stuff where they're able to bring in test audiences and show them something that they've put together and just say: okay, what's your reaction to this?

Because they have the same problem we do. They get the Blue Room but they have a chance to expose a few people to it and say: okay, is this good? We've lost all sense of direction on this. Now, the bad part of that is then the audience can start driving it, and you don't want that, either, from a creative sense. But when we hit where we are in this show now, I haven't the slightest idea of it even makes sense anymore.

Or like you'll hear something and you'll go: this sounds remarkably similar to something I think I sent seven hours ago in part 2. And like you said, at least it's easier to do that in the written sense but the same problem exists. So when you say how do you do these things, the reason it gets complicated where we are now is that I have to write some of that stuff down and say, "No, you talked about this already; don't talk about this again." As opposed to saying what I'm going to do. Don't cross the streams, like the y said in *Ghostbusters*. It's trying not to cross tangents and screens.

And the only part that's a saving grace in the episode we're doing now is that in the first World War, it's actually repetitive and it's

actually a part of the story. That's how people at the time felt. Like: oh, my God, it's the same movie over and over again. So if I make the listeners feel that way in the show... the copout is going to be able to say – and I'm going to say it – now you feel just like the people in the story. So if I sound repetitive, we were after that. So if you ask how I do it, I pick subjects that I already know about, and then I begin the research from there.

Because someone will say: can you please talk about the history of Southeast India, or something; and I'll say you don't want me to talk about that because I don't know anything about that. And you can't educate yourself to a reasonable standard in the short period of time we have. It's enough for me to pick a subject I know a lot about. I know a lot about the First World War, and I've read 50 books since we started this thing. On top of that, what's amazing to me is how much has changed since I thought I learned about these things.

Maybe the 1980s; I was really into that subject for a few years. And you go back and you think: well, there can't be much more about this 100-year-old subject. Since then, you couldn't be more wrong. There are books and revisions and new points of view and it's insane. So I pick these topics I already have a good foundation for. And by the way, you talk about throwing away shows, I threw away a show on the Greeks and the ancient Persians. I think I threw away one of the *Apache* shows.

So I've done this before. But when I pick something I know a bunch about, and I think about it... and this is the things that listeners never give me any time for. Because basically, I'm behind schedule when I start. And the listeners are always wondering what I'm doing. But you actually have to sit down a little bit and think. Just sit in the shower and go, what's weird about this story? That's when you come up with these weird sort of things. And those things are the pillars we sort of build the show around it.

I always say our style is jazz-like, or Led Zeppelin used to have a line for how they constructed their work. They said our format is tight but loose. And that's kind of how ours is, where there are these mileposts that I set that I want to get to. But within those mileposts I have all this room to go off –

Tim Ferriss: Improv.

Dan Carlin: Yeah, a guitar solo for a long period of time. Or, like tangents. If you can't stand tangents, you can't listen to my stuff. The tangents

are maybe the pillar of the show. We just go off on all these avenues. You couldn't structure it if you tried to write it out that way; it wouldn't work. But I think it does come across perhaps as disjointed sometimes, or maybe this solo has gone on too long and we need to get back to the format or whatever. But I do. I go into the studio with kind of a concept or an approach I want to try to make work, and it doesn't always work out.

Coffee used to work so much better for me in the old day. But I'll have a bunch of cups of coffee, I'll get in there and I'll just start talking about it. Usually, it's pretty good for awhile and then it breaks down at some point, and that's where I'll stop. Then I'll pick up from just before it broke down the session before, and we'll try to string something together. Now, sometimes I'll go and listen, and I'll go: oh, wow, we really left this part out. Or: oh, there's a mistake in there we have to fix. So there's going back and pulling the Rolling Stones in the studio obsessing over take 99 of one of their songs, and we do some of that now, too.

We do a lot more than we used to. Because when you're doing four and five hour episodes, you can't keep it straight so we're constantly re-listening to the stuff. It's become a lot more structured than it used to be. I used to be able to walk in there and say if we get lucky, I'll walk out of the studio with a whole Hardcore History show for you. That doesn't happen anymore. You sort of run out of gas, I guess is what I'm saying.

Tim Ferriss:

When you're planning a single episode, not a series but a single episode that could be two to four hours in length, how much of what I hear as a listener is scripted out, is written out in long form? What do your prompts look like, or your props, so to speak? Because I'm thinking about how I prepare for, say, a keynote presentation, a 60 minute keynote presentation. There are cases where I'll have portions that are verbatim that I'll memorize, just for delivery's sake, say at the beginning and the very end.

Then there are, in some cases, bullet points that I use to break a section into three parts so that it's easier to rehearse as well as nail repeatedly. But I've been mystified trying to figure out, just because I'm purely guessing, what you have in front of you when you're recording and generally speaking, how often do you take breaks? For instance, ten minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes? What does that look like these days when you're doing a single episode as opposed to series?

Dan Carlin: I hope you can tell that there is no script, because there is no script. We hope that's why it sounds natural like it does.

Tim Ferriss: The only reason I ask is because it sounds so polished without the "ums" and "ahs" that I'm accustomed to hearing from almost anyone that I've ever heard in long form conversation, that it just seemed like a super power to not have a script, I guess.

Dan Carlin: Let's understand that there's definitely editing going on, there. I'm sure that we've taken out some "ums" and things like that before. But I did radio for a dozen years before I did podcasts and I did television before then. "Ums" are a pretty basic thing you work on. It doesn't mean we're um-free, it just means that I'm less likely to pull an um than I might have been. And I always said we kind of had an advantage when we got into podcasting. First of all, we got in so early, it was a little like the Oklahoma land rush.

It was nice to get in there so early and kind of claim your little zone. But also, I wasn't learning how to do proper mike technique. I think I was starting at a little bit of an advantage. And so the "ums" fall into that category a little bit. We do write down, for example, if I've got a twisty idea that I want to make sure to include, I might write down the twisty idea and then post that up on the corkboard to remind myself that in this 20 minute segment today, you want to hit that idea. I also find what you call primary source accounts.

So somebody who was in the First World War, and they talk about what it's like in the trenches. And I'll know that I have that piece so I'll have a note that says page 246 of this book, and I'll have marked that guy's quote. And so I'll know I have that. But I don't know exactly when I'm going to get to it; I just know that somewhere in today's session you're probably going to run into the point where it's logical to put that primary source quote in.

So that's how I organize it. Otherwise, it's a free form sort of improvisational talk.

Tim Ferriss: God, it's amazing. I want to give people a couple of different options for places to start with Hardcore History. I'm seldom as impressed as I have been with the entire show.

Dan Carlin: Stop it, dude!

Tim Ferriss: I know; I'm making things awkward.

Dan Carlin: It's nice of you, I appreciate that but a lot of good people out there Tim.

Tim Ferriss: There are a lot of good people out there but I've sort of gotten stuck on Hardcore History so I feel like I have to satisfy that fix, first. One thing I think you do very, very well, and I'd like to ask you how much of this was learned over time, and also I'll get to the second part. But you do a very good job of pulling listeners into the episodes. The example that jumps to mind is you might have a description, say, in the case of *Wrath of the Khans* of some of the some of the historical context, some of the various cultures and step communities in different areas.

Then you'll say, imagine if you will, that you have an entire army comprised of circus trick archers. And then not only do they have bows, but the bows are 130 pound pole, which happens to mean more to me these days because I've been playing around with archery and I know how hard it is, at least for me, to repeatedly pull a 55 or 65 pound bow; so the fact that they could unleash 60 arrows a minute or whatever it was. But you pull people in with the "imagine if you were," and then doing hypotheticals with, of course, the Martians and so on.

The verbal delivery you have, which is very polished and of course you've done a lot of radio and a lot of television. But if someone feels self conscious about their own vocal delivery, and they want to podcast – maybe I'm projecting, here – but how would you suggest that people work on that skill and try to refine their delivery to get a little closer to what I would consider very, very professional in your case?

Dan Carlin: I appreciate you saying that because I came up in radio at a time, the tail end of what maybe you could call the "big voice" era. This won't mean anything to all of the young listeners but like a Gary Owens, deep, classical, almost stereotypical, old fashioned broadcaster style with the deep pipes, are the way the guys used to describe their voices. When I came up, I remember the boss at the radio station where I worked, at one time he actually suggested I have adenoid surgery or something to maybe get that deep voice that was the classic that they were looking for.

I not only didn't have that, I didn't want that. I just wanted to talk the way I talked. And then somewhere while I was doing that, that whole deep voice thing went out of fashion and everybody was looking for their own voice; a unique voice that sounded like no one else. And luckily, just having your own voice, as long as it

didn't grate like nails on a blackboard, which some people said mine did so it's an acquired taste, maybe; but having your own voice became the real performed format.

And all of a sudden, everybody is saying: gosh, it's so great you have your own voice, and all I'm thinking about is all those years that was the one thing everybody didn't want me to have. So when you say to a listener how do you get more polished and broadcaster-like, there's a process you're going to go through if you start podcasting or whatever, where you figure out what your voice is. And it shouldn't be something fake. It should be your voice but maybe you take it down a range, maybe.

Because we've all got a vocal range, right? From the highest you speak to the lowest you speak, there may be a sweet spot in there and it might not be the way you always talk, or you might want to talk in that tone more. I think personally, that there is no perfect voice. I think as long as you like it and you sound the way you want to sound, especially in this world. What I love about the podcasts and the internet is that there are so many potential people out there listening that if you just be yourself, you're going to attract listeners who like that.

And then you never have to fool around with trying to be someone else to please your audience because the people you've attracted are there because they like you already. I don't think you should try to develop some style other than just polish your own style. The "ums" are a perfect example but listen, I bet if you wanted to, you could weave that into your style where that's almost your thing, right?

We talk around here a lot about turning negatives into positives, or lemons into lemonade, or creatively taking a weak spot and making it a strong spot. I always was heavily in the red, as they say, when I was on the radio where I yelled so loud – and I still do – that the meter just jumps up into the red. They would say you need to speak in this one zone of loudness or you'll screw up the radio station's compression. After awhile, I just started writing liners for the big voice guy: here's Dan Carlin, he talks so loud, or whatever.

That's my style; I meant to do that. And as a matter of fact, if you do it, you're imitating me. So it's partly taking what you already do and saying no, no, this isn't a negative; this is the thing I bring to the table, buddy. I copyrighted that. I talk real loud, and then I

talk really quietly and if you have a problem with that, you don't understand what a good style is, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: I like that. I think I shall capitalize on that.

Dan Carlin: Right, just copyright your faults, man.

Tim Ferriss: You've reminded me of actually an experience that I had with writing the *Four Hour Workweek*. It was my first book, and I was very nervous about it. When I first started, and I'm not sure how many people know this, I wrote the first four or five chapters and I ended up throwing them all out because I was writing in this very pompous, sort of Ivy League style that I thought sounded very smart. And it came out stilted and it was very unattractive so I tossed it.

Then I tried to write in an amusing fashion. I thought I needed to be funny. So I was like, alright, I'll be funny; I should stop being so serious. And it came across very slapstick, Three Stooges. So yet again, I had to take these four or five chapters that I had spent weeks on and throw them out. Ultimately, I found my own voice which was really just discovering something that was latent and that people felt in conversation by having two glasses of wine and starting to write as if it was an email to two specific friends.

That is when I finally found the proper balance, which was intrinsically how I spoke to my close friends about serious subjects after a couple glasses of wine. And it also brings to mind a friend of mine named Gary Vaynerchuck who became well known after doing something called "Wine Library TV." If you look at the very first, say, ten episodes, especially the first few, he's really subdued.

And you learn later, of course, he's grown into himself and he has a very bombastic style but that's who Gary is. But it took him a long time to get there. Were there any points for you, aside from embracing this extremely flexible vocal range that you talked about, where you kind of got comfortable in your own shoes and were able to no longer conform to other expectations people had of what a good radio host or podcaster was?

Dan Carlin: If you go listen to even my earlier podcasts, the one thing you're going to notice is I talked faster. I was louder, I was more aggressive. And people go and listen to it now and say: God, when did you slow down? Or: I'm glad you slowed down, or something like that. And I always say it wasn't intentional; I just got older, and the coffee doesn't work as well. And yet, it slowed me down

to a level than more people are comfortable with than the way I used to be. But it wasn't intentional.

I would have been perfectly happy attracting whatever audience liked that style more. But I think there's a natural aging. I think you hear it with singers or anyone else, where the style doesn't change because the singer doesn't like singing the way they used to sing; just their voice is different, and their energy is different. And luckily for me, me getting older and slower and mellower is easy on more listeners, I guess, than the style I had when I was younger. I'll tell you what I miss as I get older.

I've gotten to the age now where sometimes I'll reach for some fact or something that's in my memory banks, and it takes longer to get than it used to. In the old days, I was so fast, and it wasn't just vocally; it was indicative of how fast my brain was working. And my mouth was trying to keep up with my brain. Now, my brain has slowed down. So I feel like an athlete who's past their prime. Who say: I used to be able to run a 4340, man, and now I can't do it anymore.

But the people like it slower so in a funny way, I've aged to a point where more people are comfortable listening to my middle age style than they were listening to me when they used to call me the "angry young wolf," if you can believe that.

Tim Ferriss: It could be worse.

Dan Carlin: That was one of the better nicknames. It gets a lot worse than that.

Tim Ferriss: That's a good nickname.

Dan Carlin: It gets a lot worse than that.

Tim Ferriss: Who are some of your favorite podcasters, or radio personalities, or people on audio? What I'd love to know are people who inspire you or people who you admire in the audio medium, as it were. They could be living, dead, current, up and coming; really doesn't matter. But I'd be curious to know who you've looked up to or admire in that world?

Dan Carlin: I appreciate you saying living, dead. Because here's the dirty little secret of my life, and it's very hard to explain to people. I do not consume much media anymore that is not text based.

So people will say, have you seen this show, or have you seen this movie, or have you listened to this podcast? And I can almost say with 100 percent certainty, no. And it's going to get me into trouble. I tell other people I'm going to rip off some well known movie or TV show theme or something someday without knowing that I've ripped it off. I almost did, once. I did this thing where I had this great comparison for this one episode we did.

Somebody who listened to it before I released it, thank goodness, had to tell me I was just giving the listeners the plot of *Avatar*, which was the big movie out then that I hadn't seen. And I thought, that's a great way to stumble into a copyright infringement or look like you're ripping somebody off. So I haven't really consumed media in a long time. And it's not on purpose. I'm not in a place in my life where I have that kind of time right now. But of course, we were all influenced by people.

In the same way you were talking about how much you like interviewing me, I like interviewing people. And I like to interview James Burke. We did in a show, the guy was the famous host of the *Connection* series, or the day the universe changed; an Irish guy.

And as someone with Irish genes myself, I had admired Burke from a long time ago and the way his wonderful mind thought, and the way he would string ideas together. We had Gwen Dyer on the program, a Canadian journalist who did a wonderful series when I was growing up on war that got me where I lived somewhere deeply. When I was a TV reporter, I was on a CBS affiliate.

And at CBS, the soul of Edward Murrow sort of runs deep so those of us who were serious about reporting, which was not all of us, that was a really important thing for people, especially in the tradition history minded kind of thing, to look up to and to shoot for. Sometimes you aspire to be things that you know you can never quite achieve, but the attempt to reach those heights, even if you fall short, is a good goal to set. So those are the kind of people that I look up to.

And I think a lot of times when we're doing especially the Hardcore History podcast, you look at people like Orson Wells and people who were involved in audio when audio was the main medium, and say that those people did a lot of things that we could recreate again. When you talk about a theater of the mind approach, little known fact. We used to do theater of the mind stuff on the older history shows. And if you listen really carefully, it's

crazy because we put this immense amount of effort; I can hardly even describe how much effort basically composing an audio score for these episodes.

But we wanted to make it optional so that you didn't have to hear the score if you didn't want to. Because we didn't know if it was a plus or a minus. We thought it might be a plus to the people who liked it, but a minus to the people who didn't. so we made it so quiet that you literally have to sit in a room and put your headphones on and crank it up, and get into it with candles on or whatever the listeners do, and then you can enjoy it.

But if you're in your car or on the bus, you won't hear it. And people loved that. It was all theater of the mind, and that's the way I loved it, too. If I could do it any way again, I would throw the optional theater of the mind stuff back in it. But it was like doing an episode after you'd already finished an episode. We'd have to do the show and then score the show. We already weren't getting shows out fast enough. At a certain point, we had to drop that. But if I could ever do it the way I want to again, I would go back to scoring the shows with sound effects, and little hums, and drones.

You can go back and listen; a bunch of our shows have all these – it's not quite put on the *Wizard of Oz* at the same time we start the podcast and you'll follow along, but we did a lot of fun stuff that I miss. In *Bubonic Nukes*, the one we did on the Black Plague, my favorite part of that whole episode is at the very end we're talking about how you may think that this is a long time ago but it might not be as long as you think.

And then we have this sound, really quiet in the background, of a laboratory beaker dropping. And then you'd hear a red alert going off as if the CDC lost a flu virus or something. So I used to love the potential of throwing in the Orson Wells theater of the mind type stuff. So when I look back on the greats of the past, at this point I'm almost looking back at them the way Led Zeppelin looked at bluesmen they could rip off; trying to find little techniques that they could steal that they used to do.

So I wouldn't say there are specific individuals as much as oh my gosh, that's a great show, or that's a great idea. So I'm not listening to a great song; I'm listening to a great riff and going: oh, I love that little drumbeat right in there; I could rip that off. So right now, that's more influential to me than any particular broadcast. Yeah, I loved so much growing up, obviously.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned text. I am a really avid reader, love books, always have. It's clear that you do a ton of research for these shows. A couple of questions related to books. What is the book that you've given most as a gift to other people? Or books.

Dan Carlin: Oh, my goodness. You know, I have to tell you the truth. I don't do that, either. And people say to me all the time: can you recommend a book for A, B, or C? And I rarely do because I'm not reading general stuff, a lot of times. I'm reading really weird sort of books. Like you get into this World War I subject that I'm into now. So then you're finding these weird little things that aren't going to mean anything to someone unless they've read some of the other books that I read before that.

So my stuff is not real useful to people. I'm trying to think what, if anything, I gave to anyone. I'm a really horrible gift giver, too, Tim. Thanks for exposing all of my weaknesses here publicly. That's why my wife is so fantastic at gift giving; she makes up for me. I'm going to have to pass on that question.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, no problem.

Dan Carlin: I don't know the answer. Bad gift giver; that's my answer.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, let's take a different tack. Do you have any favorite documentaries or movies? I know you don't consume a lot of media these days but what I'm trying to figure out, and maybe this is a separate question, but what made you so fascinated in history/ I know you've studied it before, but for a lot of people, they take the viewpoint that history is in the past, I don't feel like getting into esoteric aspects of old civilizations when I should be focusing on A, B, C, D, or E. Of course, there's a lot of practicality, I think, in studying quite a bit of history which tends to repeat itself.

But I'm trying to identify for someone, aside from listening to the podcast, of course, which I think is the easiest answer, to get someone hooked on history, even indirectly; are there any documentaries, movies, books, anything that come to mind?

Dan Carlin: That's a bunch of different questions.

Tim Ferriss: It is it is. That was loaded.

Dan Carlin: Let me take them one at a time. Some of the movies that I enjoy watching, it's so perverse to bring them up because they're not good movies, a lot of times. Like for example, I tell my wife if it

has time travel in it, I'm likely to watch it. That's what gets me. Forget about "oh, this is a great film." I'll give you a perfect example. There was a movie, I think they did it in late 1970s or 1908 I think it came out called *The Final Countdown*. And it's relatively horrible as a movie goes. But it doesn't matter. The story is about what if a modern aircraft carrier went back to the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack.

So it's taking on Japanese zeros with modern airplanes and forget it, the story can suck; now I'm in. that's all I need. The acting can be terrible. I don't care. That's a perfect example of a movie that would grab me. Conceptually, I'm all in.

You don't even have to execute it. And with our podcast, sometimes we kind of go there, too. Hopefully these twists are enough to disguise the fact maybe we didn't tie this other thought together so well, or I go off on too many tangents. I think you're striving to try to find how the history bug got started in me. I think we've been trying to figure that out in my family forever. My mother's concept is that I was somehow born with it because you could give me history related things at Christmas when I'm 4 and I'm into it, and there's no explanation.

I just think you have to suggest that a lot of us are hardwired to like this or that. Some people, you give a musical instrument to and oh, my God, they're 4 years old and they're playing like a teenager. For me, it was stuff from the past and I don't know. But I've been into it since I was very little. It's so weird to me to be able to make a living doing something – that's what I mean.

When we started this conversation, I said I've really been fortunate to fall into something that you almost seem to have been born to do. And I don't know how I got so lucky but everybody should have this feeling. To feel like catching a football, I've been doing it since I was 2, it's the thing I do best in life and somebody gave me a job catching a football. That's how I feel. When you talk about being born to something, I guess what I do is story telling, because that's what people tell me I do. I think there's a storytelling gene. I think it runs in families.

I think the Irish people in my family could tell a hell of a story long before I was on this planet. And if you're lucky, you get some of that. So I think there are a bunch of those elements that just work in our favor and we're taking our strengths and running with them. So when you talk about how you put a podcast together, one

of the things I would suggest that people do is build it around what you do well.

So I feel like I'm just utilizing whatever talents I was born with and that I can do this instead of working on the assembly line is one of the great gifts in my life, you know?

Tim Ferriss: It seems, and please correct me if I'm wrong, that Hardcore History has existed until at least 2006, is that right?

Dan Carlin: You might know better than I do. I think the other podcast is 2005 and Hardcore History comes sometime after that.

Tim Ferriss: Like you said, you've been in this medium for some time. When did it occur to you that you might be able to do this full time? When did that transition take place, and is there a particular moment that stands out to you when you realized that?

Dan Carlin: People have been telling me for a long time that we could do this, long before I thought we could do this. I had a guy hire me, a tech guy, back in '96 off the radio to do our show on the internet, and I looked at him like he was crazy.

One, the internet wasn't that old at that point, and two, the mechanisms didn't exist. And he said that's what my company will do; we'll invent the mechanisms to do this and you'll be like the text case; you'll show people. It never went anywhere but ever since then, the discussion of how do we put Dan on the internet has been going on amongst people that I just had to trust knew better than I did about that. And the implication always was that you would have more listeners.

I would say I was the messed up part of the radio station's day part whenever I was on, because I just was a Martian. I apparently was good enough to stay employed but I never fit with the rest of the programming. So the attitude was, that's what the internet is for. You'll be able to reach this mass of people that are above and beyond your normal talk radio show demographic, and that turned out to be true. But the implication was if you had a bunch of listeners, you'd be an idiot not to be able to figure out one way or another how to make money off of that.

For me, what saved me was the listeners. We had done this show for years before we asked for any donations or any money or anything. And I went to a bunch of experts I trust in business and law and a bunch of other areas, and I solicited their advice. I said,

if we ask the listeners to donate to this, will that work? And every single one of them said not a chance in hell. Really, really intelligent, smart people. And I was dissuaded, I thought all these people. And we thought, let's just do it anyway; what are you going to lose?

We're just asking the listeners, if you think what you heard was worth a dollar, give us the dollar. Save up until you have five and then give us five; whatever. And oh, my gosh, that's changed our lives. So when I talk about how fortunate I feel to be doing this, let's not forget who I owe for this; a bunch of people who didn't have to pay. We give them away for free. They didn't have to do this.

It's like what Radiohead did when they put that song out on the internet instead of putting it on the radio or selling it as a CD and saying just give us what you think it's worth. And it worked out better. Now, I don't know if this is sustainable. I don't know if this is a flash in the pan or whatever. But at the moment, what people have done is make possible professional amateur media.

I know that sounds like a contradiction in terms, but that's what we are. so I owe a lot of people out there listening to your show and mine and lots of other podcasts for giving me this blessing that I do. I talk about it too much; I'm sure it gets old. But I wake up in the middle of the night and just say thank you. It's crazy to me.

Tim Ferriss: I'm going to tone down my over the top praise but it's very clear that you put a ton of effort and prep into the episodes, which I think is part of the reason why people are so willing to donate, for instance. What has been the most popular episode to date, if you had to guess, or popular episodes?

Dan Carlin: They say in history, like if you're the History Channel, for example, the subject that people get the most excited about is the Second World War. That's why I think they did it to death on the History Channel and stuff like that because it's almost something you have to screw up to not do well with. The only real time that we've touched that subject dead on is when we talked about, in the multi-part series, the Eastern Front in the Second World War. So basically, the war between the Germans and the Soviet Union, although there were a lot of people involved. Most Americans, and I didn't realize this, actually, don't know much about that because they hear so much about the stuff that our side was involved with.

That, to them, is a part of the war that essentially gave us the advantage of taking that subject that's gold, Second World War, it's history gold. And yet a part of it that people weren't aware of. So it's like finding new World War II stuff. If you're the History Channel, you go: guess what all this World War II stuff you haven't explored yet, it's like finding gold.

So we told the story and people love it.

Tim Ferriss: This is the *Ghost of the Ostfront* right?

Dan Carlin: *Ghost of the Ostfront*. Ostfront is the German word for Eastern Front. I think we said this in the show – I can't remember what we said yesterday, much less what we said then but if you take just the Eastern Front of the Second World War and isolate that as its own war, it by itself is the biggest war in human history, all by itself. And so I think the stories that come out of that, and the horrificness and the feeling of the people who must have been trapped in that dynamic are such that people listen to and I think can really relate.

And again, having a new World War II subject, especially one that's so big, when you hear that you really understand that the war was probably won or lost on the Eastern Front. So I think it had all of the elements right there to be a really popular episode if I don't screw it up.

Tim Ferriss: It doesn't seem like you did. I know how stressful it must be.

Dan Carlin: It is. People don't understand. It's become a lot more stressful than it used to be. All good stuff; I'm glad to be doing it but we're stressed right now, for example. We are stressed.

Tim Ferriss: So whether it's with stress or without, which episodes did you have the most fun personally recording, whether it's researching or recording?

Dan Carlin: I could cheat on this answer, though. Because we did three interview shows before the audience informed me that they get hugely let down when they finally see a Hardcore History show after waiting forever for a new one, and instead of being what they expect, they get an interview show. The interviews are fun because you can do them in real time. You basically take an hour, talk to someone you admire for an hour, and then you have a show. Oh, my gosh. I'm on three months now working on the latest Hardcore History show so I love that, and I get to talk to people I admire like James Burke.

But in terms of the other shows, I won't lie to you. None of them were easy, and they get harder and I don't know why I keep doing that to myself. My wife was saying, why don't you just pick a nice, small, easy topic and do that? And I don't know why because there's something about feeling like I'm pushing myself. If I have some creative brain cells, I am using every single one of them. I will not be able to say, as I'm laying on my deathbed somewhere, that I didn't push myself to the limit. And on these shows, we'll go from that Mongol series, which like I said, I think I left some of my sanity in the studio, and decide to do the First World War after that. What sort of masochist does that, Tim?

Tim Ferriss: I think we're cut from the same cloth.

Dan Carlin: Yeah, who's doing the thinking in this company? So the answer is just when I think I'm going to have some fun with one of these things, I decide to take on something that listen, there's no question.

By the time it's done, it's very satisfying to say hey, people liked that. We did a lot of good, hard work and it paid off. But while you're in the midst of it, first of all I'm not sure it isn't going to crumble like an airplane crash. I don't know that we're going to get to show five and the whole thing is just going to fall apart. So it's nice when it's over to know that it worked out. But I'm always feeling like I'm not having a ton of fun while I'm doing it, but I am. It's like working on some big account if you're an account executive.

You're so happy when it's over, and you go and toast the team that you worked with and all that at the end; it's very satisfying. But while you're in the midst of it, there's a lot of stress and pressure and deadline and all that. But listen, that's life, right? You always have that.

Tim Ferriss: It makes me think of my experience with publishing where, after each book, I'd tell myself: you know, the next book is going to be a short book. I always say that. The next book is going to be a really short book. I'm gonna take it easy.

Dan Carlin: Crank it out fast.

Tim Ferriss: Crank it out fast and be nice and bite sized.

Then, of course, after I have some type of series of nervous breakdowns every year and a half or three years, someone implies I assume the books must get easier. After you do the first book, the second must be much easier and then the third must be just rote by that point. I say no because I take everything that I've learned that should and could make it easier, and then I just double what I want to do, or triple what I want to do based on that new efficiency. So I end up doing just as much if not more.

Dan Carlin: It sounds exactly the same. And listen, from a creative standpoint, you shouldn't want to have it any other way. If you're the Rolling Stones and you're Keith Richards in that studio on the hundredth take, you want to be working that hard. There's an old line that when you reach the top, the only way to go is down. So when we hear that we just did an episode where people say that's the best episode you ever did, we instantly think to ourselves, you don't want to do anything worse than that. That becomes the new minimum standard.

And truthfully, if you don't give them something as good as that next time, they're going to say it's not as good as that other thing. So we always, feel, and I think you do, too – I think everybody does when they're doing creative work, the next thing needs to be better than the last thing. So you're continually saying: sure, I almost went insane the last time; I'm going to go insane the next time. It's the only way to ensure that I'm pushing the limits.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, the high water mark must be surpassed.

Dan Carlin: That's right. How does Michael Jackson do better than *Thriller*, right?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, God, I don't even want to think about that. I can't even imagine. One of the many things that comes up listening to Hardcore History is military history. And certainly with *Wrath of the Khans*, the explanation of different techniques and approaches like the false flight or the false fleeing,

I found endlessly fascinating, and it sounds like that's something that has fascinated you. In military history, are there any particular people or techniques or strategies that you've found most interesting? I know that's a very big question.

Dan Carlin: I'm thankful that you find it interesting. And again, something for podcasters who are just starting out maybe to pay attention to is if you talk about what you find interesting, eventually you will

acquire a listenership that likes that, too. And so a lot of times I'll wonder if I'm not getting too deeply military on some of this stuff but then I realize that the people who are listening, they're still listening and liked that military stuff from earlier episodes.

That was my focus in college, was military history so that's what I've always been interested in. I don't do rainbows and unicorns is what I always tell people. And it's dark. I'll tell you something on your show no one else even knows, Tim. We're working on artwork for the specific shows that we've done. I've got an artist.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, very cool.

Dan Carlin: It is so dark. And our artwork is dark anyway. I showed my wife the other day. I was so proud of it and I said, "Honey, look at this art."

And she comes over all excited to see the art and I can watch her face drop and she goes, "It's horrible." I said, "do you mean it's bad?" She goes, "No, it's just so dark and terrible." I go, "The listeners will love it, then. It's just what we're after. It matches the subject matter perfectly." But it's what I like. And you just figure if you try to make a show based on what other people will like, eventually you will have a show that you don't like.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great point.

Dan Carlin: So you have to do what you like, and that's why this internet is so wonderful and all these billions of people out there, if you only suck up 1/10 of 1 percent of the pie of internet users that like your weird stuff that you bring up, that translates into a lot of people. I always tell folks I'm like a street performer. Really, Tim, that's what I do. I'm like that guy, the mime on the street corner, or the guy who plays the violin and he opens up his violin case and you throw pennies on the street corner to the guy who plays the violin.

I just work a really busy street corner. That's what this is. If you're a niche market product, the internet is a place where that niche can still translate into a ton of actual people. So don't water it down. There's a phrase, and we've all heard it but we don't think about what it means. If you go on television on a TV network, you are broadcasting, right? You are reaching a broad segment of the audience. The problem is that to broadcast, you have to water things down and widen them out to the lowest common denominator.

We podcasters are narrow casters, not broadcasters. And you can't lose sight of the fact that that's not a bug, it's a feature. You want to be a narrow caster and you want to have this niche that's all yours. So if you're talking about invisible unicorns that you see on the weekend, make that yours, man. You could be a physical unicorn on the weekend podcast, and anyone else who does it is ripping you off.

Tim Ferriss: I told you never to tell anyone about that. I'm really upset.

Dan Carlin: That's right, man. The Sasquatch is in my House podcast. That's how it should be. I don't think that when you're talking about a program that you should do it for other people; do it for yourself and military history is where I live. I think the other thing that I have to keep emphasizing, and I don't think you should be afraid of this, either. If I've learned anything from the podcasting, it's don't be afraid to do something you're not qualified to do.

Tim Ferriss: I like that.

Dan Carlin: I tell the story all the time is I didn't come up with the Hardcore History idea. I have far too much respect for historians to have thought that I could have done that. As a history major with a degree, the one thing history majors know is how great historians are because we read them all the time. So I used to tell my stories that I've told my whole life, and I was telling them around the dinner table. And my mother-in-law said to me, because I was already doing one podcast on current events, and she said why don't you do a podcast on the stuff you're talking about here at dinner?

And I said I couldn't do that. I said it's history, and I'm not qualified to talk about history. I don't have a doctorate, I'm not a historian. And she said, I didn't realize you had to have a doctorate to tell stories. And I thought about that for a bit. I thought listen, most of the great historians from the non modern era didn't have doctorates, either. They're just storytellers, too. As long as I'm not purporting to be a historian, and as long as I'm using their work, and what I will always say is let's say there's a historical controversy.

I will tell you the controversy, and then I will say here is what historian A says about it, and here's what historian B says about it. And I've been surprised how much the listeners like to hear about what's called historiography, which is the process of how history gets written and made and interpreted. They love hearing that! And

so you'll actually talk about the different theories. So I'm not making this stuff up; I'm using the experts to tell you a story. And the story is the part I'm qualified to tell you.

Tim Ferriss: One of the aspects of the show that I most appreciate is that you'll point out the contradictions and you'll also talk about the different schools of history. So you'll have certain types of revisionist history, you'll have different political leanings and how they interpret events, say, Tim Ferriss: he Spanish American War found the events in Cuba fascinating, the Philippines. And really helping people to realize the biases at play in a lot of the reporting and writing that we might otherwise assume to be objective.

Dan Carlin: I'll give you a perfect example. We talked about Ancient Rome and the Republic period. The reason the people look at that period and think it looks a lot like our own is because you can see some of the same political dynamics at work, broadly speaking. Obviously there's a lot of time lapsed. I often say to people, imagine that there is a Fox News in ancient Rome, and an MSNBC in ancient Rome. So a left wing version of events and a right wing version of events.

Because what they always say is journalism is the first draft of history. So then imagine that only one of those narratives made it into your history. Rome as seen by Fox News, or Roman politics as seen by MSNBC. And how you can tell the Roman story that way. And if you do it and you contrast the two views, it sounds even more modern. So I do think that it actually sheds light on the events. The Apaches, 100 years ago those are red murderers killing good Christian white settlers.

30 years ago, it's terrible, horrible white people murdering blameless Indians. You go through these periods where the entire focus and the public mood changes and we write history a different way. Those are fascinating in and of itself because it also teaches you that there isn't necessarily truth here; there's just the current perspective that's in vogue.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, absolutely. I'm actually reading a book right now called *Dying Every Day*, subtitled *Seneca at the Court of Nero*.

It's a very fascinating account of Seneca that tries to reconcile, at some level, the opposing views and mythologies and facts surrounding this character Seneca, who was a very famous stoic but at the same time was very, very wealthy. Some people called him opulent. Just trying to point out the backgrounds to the people

who wrote these histories or who had these accounts who were, in some cases, his political enemies. It's really fascinating thus far because I'm a huge fan of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius and a lot of these philosophers.

Dan Carlin: I like the hedonistic stoics; that's my favorite, exactly. That's the best kind of stoic to be, the hedonistic. That's like free meditated spontaneity.

Tim Ferriss: If I could shift gears a little bit, let me ask just a handful of kind of rapid fire questions. I'm having a lot of fun; we could do this for a long time but I want to be respectful of your time.

I'd love to throw off a couple of rapid fire questions, and you can take as little or as much time answering them as you'd like. You have your hands on a lot these days; you're doing quite a few different things. What does the first hour or two of your day typically look like? What are your morning rituals?

Dan Carlin: I've had the same morning ritual for a long time. It's the old talk radio show host or reporter ritual where I get up and one of these days when books and newspapers go away, I'm going to be really sad because I have to start with the newspaper like an idiot nowadays. I bring it in, I get the cup of coffee out, I start with the newspaper. Then I go online.

If I see any stories that pique my interest, I'll print them out, I'll put them in the folder and then the next time it's time to do a current events program, I'll look in the folder and see we're on like 275 of those so it's getting awful hard to find new things to talk about that I don't feel like we've already done. But I spend the early morning while I'm waking up with the first cup of coffee or ten catting up and reading mostly current events stuff.

Tim Ferriss: What time do you wake up?

Dan Carlin: Oh, goodness. It's summer vacation now at my house. It's based on the children's schedule. So when it's school time, it's like 7 a.m. and we're up and at 'email. Now, I can sleep a little bit later sometimes. But I have a sweet spot in my production ability where I'm at my best talking and it's usually from about 9 to noon or 1. So that's when I like to be in the studio. I hit 2:00 and all the coffee in the world is not keeping me up anymore. That's why we're having this interview now, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Right, I remember the scheduling.

Dan Carlin: So I have this awful problem and when I'm dealing with East Coast people, it's really awful. So I try to get into the studio when I've got a decent amount of energy. And then by the time I'm out of there and done, I spend the afternoon getting back into reading research. Because there's a lot of reading to do. I'm not the world's quickest reader. I also have a very tough time trying to figure out opportunity costs.

One of the things that a lot of podcasters start to learn once their podcast becomes popular is you're running a business, now. And that's not the part that most people – yours truly included – thought of when we got into podcasting. You think about the product. You don't think about the edifies and structure that you have to maintain to keep the product going. I'm not gifted at that stuff. People will often say on Twitter and stuff, wonder what you're doing in the three months since the last time you put a history podcast out.

And you can't even begin to tell them. Just the website alone that I've been working on for years, the time wasting that goes on in my life, and certainly I could do it better. But people will come to me and say Dan, could you do this? And you get your opportunities thrown your way because of the podcast. And you think to yourself, I can't get a podcast out in three months; how am I going to take advantage of any of these other opportunities that come my way?

And so I'm wrestling with how I do more. Because people have given me these chances based on the fact that these listeners are so kind to listen to the show. I don't know how to do them. I don't know how to run this business. So it's all I can do to get these shows out. So when you talk about how you do these things, I wrestle with the business side of this every day, to be honest.

Tim Ferriss: We've chatted about this before but if I can help with any website stuff, or whether it's Wordpress related or otherwise, I'm happy to help.

Dan Carlin: Be careful, Tim. I could abuse you worse than you've ever been abused. Let's stay friends, okay?

Tim Ferriss: I've heard about your book shelf full of tomes about Medieval torture. I know how you operate.

Dan Carlin: I've used it on people who promised to help me with websites.

Tim Ferriss: What is the newspaper that you read? Is there one newspaper that you consistently read?

Dan Carlin: Yes, the stupid local one here in my burg that just gets delivered to my front door easily. And the funny thing is, everything that I read in it has been printed two weeks ago on the internet.

But I still, just like some old person, have to do it and I have to read it all the way to the end of the comics like some person with OCD or something. I can't help myself. When I was in TV news before the internet and was doing news, I used to get five newspapers and I'd go through every one of them all day like an idiot. I don't do that anymore. But just the silly, local paper here in my local burg.

Tim Ferriss: I love it. When you go online to potentially find interesting current events or angles to print out, what are those sources? Are there any particular sources that you repeatedly visit?

Dan Carlin: Twitter has turned out to be a really good way for listeners to share with me things that they think I'd be interested in. They get a pretty good idea of the sort of things I like. But no, I go everywhere. I might start with Google News and I check out all the British newspapers. I check out the major American newspapers, there are some in Canada.

And then I like the wonderful thing about the internet, the wonderful ability to kind of go local. So if you're reading about stuff between the Israelis and Palestinians, for example, I like looking at the newspapers from the Middle East. For example, if you're looking for the Israeli side, there are different Israeli newspapers with different perspectives.

So when I'm delving deep, it's wonderful to have the internet that allows you to three dimensionalize in a way that was not possible when I was getting five American newspapers in one day. I don't know if you end up being more intelligent on the subject but you could certainly give multiple viewpoints. Does that make sense?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, definitely. I remember my first real extended trip abroad after college. This was after being in Japan as an exchange student. I was in China, and I found the local English newspapers contrasted with the *International Herald Tribune* to be really mind opening because I'd never been exposed to two extremely different

viewpoints on what I perceived to be exactly the same phenomena or current events.

It really was an eye opening experience for me.

Dan Carlin: The *Tribune* is what we always read when we're out of the country.

Tim Ferriss: It was all I could get my hands on.

Dan Carlin: I know. I've been there.

Tim Ferriss: Just to completely shift gears, when you think of the word successful, who is the first person who comes to mind?

Dan Carlin: Oh, my goodness. You know, Tim, I don't know. You're throwing some questions at me today and I'm this verbal person, and I'm usually pretty quick on my feet. But I don't know how to answer that. Because my definition of success is perhaps a little different. I was arguing with somebody once about ambition. We were talking about whether ambition was genetic or not. We were discussing happiness. I was trying to make the point that being successful in life means you're happy, but that some people have to achieve certain things to be happy.

So in other words, I know people who can do nothing in their lives and be happy with that. So to me, they're successful. But there are a lot of people who say no, if I don't make a bunch of money, or if I don't achieve something, or if I don't create something, if I don't reach these particular goals, then I'm not happy. So in other words, success for them, in order to be happy, requires that they do these other things to find happiness.

So to me, being successful is being happy. So there are lots of people out there that I think have managed to be successful who most of us have probably never heard of. I'll tell you what, there's a part of me that's even jealous of the people who can manage to be happy without having to do a bunch of things to get there.

Tim Ferriss: Absolutely, yes.

Dan Carlin: People say isn't it great what's going on with your podcast? And I say yes, because it makes me happy; not because of any other amorphous or even concrete goals; making this much money, or getting this much notoriety.

Or going on Tim Ferriss' show and having him say all these nice things about me is wonderful. But the show itself makes me happy. That's where the success comes in. Now, if we didn't make enough money to live, I wouldn't do the show. So it all kind of boils down to the same thing. We need different things to be happy but happy and successful are the same thing to me. Does that make sense?

Tim Ferriss: Yes, that makes sense.

Dan Carlin: It's a roundabout way of answering your question.

Tim Ferriss: No, it's a good answer.

Dan Carlin: Please stay in the whole goal of the question. Sorry about that.

Tim Ferriss: It was very clever of you. What would be failure to you, then? Would it be being unhappy or is it something else entirely? And that could even be as it relates to the podcast, if we wanted to kind of constrain it a bit to make it easier to answer.

Dan Carlin: I'll tell you, here's the worst part about having a podcast that people think is successful. Is if you've never made it successful, then you haven't screwed anything up.

You took a chance and you failed, and that's part of life and it's part of learning and it's part of success, actually. But if you manage to create something that's successful and then you screw it up and blow it that, to me, seems much more of a tragedy and a personal failure than never having gotten one off the ground at all. So I think I was rather devil make hair when we started these podcasts.

Now, all I'm thinking about is if I don't do this Blueprints of Armageddon Part Four and have it be really good, then I've screwed up the golden goose. So failure to me is really like Keith Richards would have said in that Rolling Stones Studio, "You're only as good as the last thing you put out." So failure is not putting out a piece of good work at this point, in my mind.

Tim Ferriss: I definitely get it. I think especially with *The Sophomore Act* with me, at least, the second book, brought a lot of stress with it.

Dan Carlin: Yeah, you feel really under the gun with the second book. That's a perfect example.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, very similar feeling, if you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Dan Carlin: I'd be more productive. I think that's pretty easy.

I got out of the booth today in the studio, and I didn't have anything working part for about three days, now. And you're just ready to smack walls. To sit there and be so unproductive. And I learned this writing, as well. I remember writing something and setting myself a weekly total that I wanted to hit. So every day I wanted to write this many hundred words, and I would feel productive. And then you get to the end of the week and you need to edit what you wrote, and you get rid of 5,000 words or something and you think to yourself, oh, my God, what did I waste all that time for?

I think that's how creative endeavors often are. So like you asked me how these programs go, there are days when I'll go I there and not like anything I do. And they just feel like such wastes. I could have used that time so much more constructively, had I only known it was going to be a wasted day at the microphone. So yes, productivity; I'd love to be more productive. I'd love to be able to multitask. I can't multitask, either.

Tim Ferriss: Just to touch on what you just said, don't you think, though, that sometimes that day of seemingly wasted recording is necessary to gestate, to get to that one paragraph that is the one that everyone quotes?

Dan Carlin: You are absolutely, 1000 percent right. Yes, you're fumbling your way to glory.

Tim Ferriss: That's my M.O.

Dan Carlin: You're fumbling your way to glory?

Tim Ferriss: That should be the name of my next book.

Dan Carlin: The next book. I think we have a tee shirt, at least. You couldn't be more right about that. And I keep trying to console myself saying that it wasn't actually a wasted creative day, even though 500 people on Twitter said where the hell is the next show, Carlin and get off the beach with your Mai Tai. You know what I love, Tim? I love that there are p pout there who literally think that I wait until the last second, and then I walk in and four hours later, we have a show and I was just making you wait.

I love those people. Those people think I'm Frank Sinatra. I love those people. And you know what? I'm going to start to cultivate that image. That I really don't do anything until the last second. And then yeah, okay, I'll give you a show. Maybe tonight after dinner I'll crank one out for you. Talk about making yourself an immortal legend, right? I just do those shows in real time, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Absolutely. @OneTakeCarlin. Let me know how you like it.

Dan Carlin: @FrankSinatra. I come in at midnight, I keep the band up late and then we're out there with an album.

Tim Ferriss: So speaking of Mai Tais, you walk into a bar. What do you order from the bartender?

Dan Carlin: Something straight. I come from a family on both sides of old fashioned men. That's the only way to describe them. I don't smoke cigarettes like they did but it's hard to totally get away from your roots. They were hard drinking. They were so much tougher than I am, too. I don't have the toughness but I can drink like they drank.

If I'm goin to go to a bar and drink, I'm going to drink a straight whiskey, or a straight rum, or a straight vodka, or something like that. I don't fool around.

Tim Ferriss: Right, just skip the foreplay.

Dan Carlin: That's right. Come on. Get some production done.

Tim Ferriss: I'm going with the Sinatra theme that you set. So we talked about Sinatra, we talked about drinking. What's the first face that comes to mind when you think punchable?

Dan Carlin: Punchable? This is where, if you get to my old shows on politics and current events, I sound so much angrier. When I got into politics as a teenager, and I think a lot of teenagers when they get to politics, or early college students, it's out of anger. You start to see the world as it's been created by the generations before you. And you just feel like it's so screwed u, and how can they deal with all the injustice in the world, you know? And so that's how I got into political talk radio, for example.

I was so mad at things that I saw that were just wrong, in my opinion. As I've gotten older, I think I've been able to see more

perspectives and maybe be able to walk a mile in the other guy's moccasins a little bit better. When you say people you just want to punch, and maybe it's a holdover wanting to punch them from years and years ago. I'm going to answer this question a certain way.

Tim Ferriss: We could downgrade it to slap, also, if you like.

Dan Carlin: I'm not re-crafting. I just want to tell you there was a wonderful series called *Hell in the Pacific* It's on the Second World War in the Pacific theater and I think it was made by a British company. I remember being shocked because it had footage that we didn't show much in the United States of really horrifying Pacific battles. They interview a U.S. veteran who didn't die that long ago. His name is Eugene Sledge and his nickname when he was in the Marines was Sledgehammer.

He went on, after he got out of the service, to teach school at a college in I think it was Georgia. He's the most soft-spoken, wonderful, sweet, Southern gentleman you've ever met. The whole *Hell in the Pacific* series starts with him saying that no one who's even yards behind the front line in war knows what it's really like. And nobody who does, who hasn't been up there, should be able to send young people off to war – and he means right on the front lines – you have no place doing that.

The people that drive me crazy are the people in American politics who see war as the answer to everything. And I don't even mean war. John Bolton is the guy I always use. He's the former American Ambassador to the U.N. Just another one of these guys who himself avoided military service but who sees sending other people to go do that as his answer to every problem. And I guess that just drives me nuts.

Because as a guy who talks about military history all the time and who hears these accounts of veterans and realizes how often their lives are forever altered, even when they come home in seemingly one piece, you just want that to be such a really well thought out decision when you decide to have people suck up that lifetime of damage for some cause. Just like Eugene Sledge was saying, anyone who's going to send someone off, you've got to have a really good reason.

And I feel we've got a lot of people in the public sphere who didn't do this themselves. But for any reason are willing to go send other people. And they just make me angry like I'm 16 years old and into

punk rock, which I'm still into. And you get Irish and I'm ready to become a stereotypical punch somebody in the mouth. And it's really a piece of me that's mostly dead, now, that comes back and haunts me at moments just at the wrong time.

Tim Ferriss: It's always at the wrong time.

Dan Carlin: It's always at the wrong time.

Tim Ferriss: So speaking of punk rock, what are the most frequently played bands or songs on your computer, iPhone or otherwise?

Dan Carlin: Oh, God. I go through phases where I just kill something. I'll get back into the dead Kennedys and then it's like two weeks of just nothing but that until I can't listen anymore. I've never quite discovered the variety is the spice of life thing. I have to eat all sushi for like two weeks until I can't have anymore. And I don't like sushi but that was just as an example. That's how I am with music. Back in the days of record albums, the new record album and play it 200 times and then never want to hear it again.

I like all the old stuff, too when you go back to Lou Reed or the Seeds or to me, even Jerry Lee Lewis is punk rock to me. That's an attitude, not a sound. So to me, music is about so much more than the listening experience. That's just a basic philosophy in music is it about the technical expertise of the musician, or the beauty of the melody?

Or is it about tribal drums that get your blood going. And I'm much more of the tribal drum person. I work with a lot of audio people and for them, they want to hear technical expertise, and wonderfully crafted. And I want to hear something from the soul, you know?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, for sure. I'm just getting into hand drums so I'm all about the drums at the moment.

Dan Carlin: There you go, exactly. It's very emotional and ancient, sort of.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I love it. So last question, potentially, if you could give one or two pieces of advice to your 20-year-old self, what would it be?

Dan Carlin: Oh, I think about this all the time. I remember coming out of the television station where I was a TV reporter. I was working the night shift and I had just worked on some stories all day, and was just thoroughly unsatisfied with them by the time they hit air. I

remember walking out of the station at like midnight. It was up on the top of this mountain, beautiful place. I remember looking out and just saying, oh, my God, when am I going to like this?

When am I going to really be happy with the work that I'm churning out? So I look back on that all the time when I think of where I am now and just think, if I could go back and just tell myself don't stress about it, it's all going to work out in the end. Wouldn't any of us like to know that? Just tell me it's all going to be okay and I can get by in my 20s. the 20s were really hard for me, I thought. And if you could have just said stop worrying, it's all going to be okay, although I'm assuming it's all going to be okay, Tim; I still don't know that.

But I think I would have saved a ton of emotional stress and worry. I'm a natural born worrier. Although, if you had told me that, I might have relaxed so much that that reality might never have occurred. So that's why you can't go back in the time machine and step on the butterfly; you'll screw up everything. So I won't go back and tell myself that, Tim, because I'll screw up my future.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. But if there's an aircraft carrier headed back to Pearl Harbor, you'll at least sit down and watch the movie.

Dan Carlin: I don't know how I wouldn't.

I don't know how I could avoid that. All you have to do is come up with a good concept and I'm in.

Tim Ferriss: Dan, this has been a lot of fun. I want people to listen to more of your stuff. What episodes would you like people to listen to? What's the starter kit? If you want to get people hooked, I have my own thoughts but what episodes of Hardcore History would you recommend people start with?

Dan Carlin: I wouldn't start with the really old ones because I don't think they're representative of what we've evolved into. It's not that I don't like them. I think people who liked the really old episodes sometimes missed the way they sounded. And the people who like the current ones, don't as much like the old ones. So I'd start with something new just because if you like that, you might get more of it. If you listen to the old stuff, you're not getting any more of that. I think I would simply pick it based on the subject matter. We have a certain number of shows. We usually leave the new shows up for a year or two or three before we remove them to the paid archives.

So we should have a decent mix of things. We do something called “Blitz Editions” sometimes, which were supposed to be shorter but they aren’t shorter because I’m too long winded. They turned out to be about slightly different focuses. So instead of focusing on an event, one of the Blitz Editions that we did focused on were people in the old days tougher than we are. I think the question we asked is could you beat your grandparents in a war? And then we did another one, we called it *History Under the Influence*.

It was the hidden effect of intoxicating substances maybe on the past. Blitz Editions more look at weird subjects like that, and then the other episodes look at historical events. So I would say pick one that sounds like it’s an interesting piece of subject matter and then keep your fingers crossed that we pulled off that episode halfway decently. That’s how I would do it.

Tim Ferriss: That’s the gateway drug into Hardcore History.

I would say for those interested in my personal recommendations, I have yet to dislike any of the episodes. I think *Wrath of the Khans* is outstanding. If you’re interested in warfare and tactics. And the lore of not Genghis Khan but Jenghis Kahn, I guess it turns out...

Dan Carlin: That’s right, Jhengis.

Tim Ferriss: Then I think that’s a fantastic series. The *Prophets of Doom* I’ve got to say I know you weren’t happy with it for whatever reason I know you have your reasons.

Dan Carlin: I’ll tell you why. Because I was saving that story. That is one of the great, twisted history stories of all time. I remember thinking to myself okay, you are halfway to a good show before you say your first words with this story. So I had really high hopes. The story itself is so wonderful, you don’t need Dan Carlin to make it better.

Tim Ferriss: You had too much performance anxiety.

Dan Carlin: I think so.

Tim Ferriss: I really enjoyed that episode.

You teased the hell out of it in the beginning. I’ve got to say for a little bit in the very beginning, but...

Dan Carlin: I was giving you context, though .You have to understand the reaffirmation for that thing to make sense.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, no, I love the reaffirmation. But the lead is fantastic. I'm not going to give away too much of the story.

Dan Carlin: I would tell your listeners don't listen to that one. There's too much setup.

Tim Ferriss: So I'm going to let people explore. Where can people best find you on the inter webs? Where would you like people to find you online?

Dan Carlin: Listen, you can get the free shows from our website at DanCarlin.com They're obviously on iTunes, as well. You can get the old shows off our website. I think they're a little cheaper off our website but you can get them on iTunes, as well. Type my name into the search engine somewhere and the right things should pop up. Listen, I'm just happy you're sharing my stuff with your listeners. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, my pleasure. Just having attempted to do some form of a podcast myself now for a little bit and having listened to a lot of podcasts, the amount of effort that you've put into each of these episodes is, I think, magnitudes of order better than most audio books.

That's saying a lot. I've listened to hundreds of audio books.

Dan Carlin: Think about this, though, man. Think about this. This is the real key. The real key is that we live in an era where we can do this stuff. Because I can tell you right now, you look at podcasting and there are about 20 or 30 really creative podcasts out there that you would never be allowed to do in a million years, in the media 20 years ago. And yet, when you listen to them, you think it's just brilliant.

And so if we're lucky enough to be in that category where you go: oh gosh, this is something that would never be in the mainstream media and I'm so glad I found it, then we're really fortunate. To me, as somebody who came from that media and by the time I left it, it was so the opposite of creative; the fact that we've got this blank canvas where we can be creative again, what a great time to live.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, it's amazing. You've got everything from, of course what you might expect like *This American Life*, to *Welcome to Night Vale*, which is like one of the weirdest things imaginable as it stands.

Always in the top 10 on iTunes. It's a hell of an open playing field. And like you said, narrow casting, it's just ripe for the picking. People can be as weird as they want to be and they'll find their audience if they're passionate enough about it.

Dan Carlin: And listen, if you're gifted, I always think about this way. Can you imagine someone as gifted as Eddie Murphy when he first showed up on the comedy scene, or Richard Pryor when he first showed up on the comedy scene, the mike can be bad, the audio can be bad. You might not get shows out very frequently. But if Eddie Murphy were simply doing a podcast today when he first started out, that would be his ticket to fame and fortune without ever needing to make it on a *Saturday Night Live* first or anything like that.

This is direct media to the public. We've never had it like this, and I'm not even sure it's going to last. This may be a wonderful little golden opportunity in human communication. Take advantage now. If you've ever thought of having a podcast, it's a good time to get in.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, absolutely. Dan, this has been a blast. I really appreciate your time. I'm going to continue to listen again to the entire series of *Wrath of the Khans*, which I use for my morning walks.

Dan Carlin: That's as twisted as me!

Tim Ferriss: I know. You're going to start getting weird letters from me soon. But I recommend everybody check it out. If you've ever thought of starting a podcast, maybe now is the time to do it. And I'll be writing a lot more about that. Dan, I appreciate it. I will talk to you soon and really good hanging out. Thank you very much.

Dan Carlin: Thank you for having me on, man. And continued success; you're doing great.

Tim Ferriss: Thanks, man. I'm still on the training wheels but I'm learning as I go so thanks again. I'll talk to you soon.

Dan Carlin: Anytime.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, bye-bye.