

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #39
“The art of writing in the rain with Garth Stein”
Sno-Isle Libraries, Sept. 13, 2019



Kurt Batdorf:	00:00	Hey, this is Kurt Batdorf with Sno-Isle Libraries. Today, Ken Harvey tossed me the keys to run the Check It Out! podcast. That means I get to talk to Garth Stein, the author of <i>The Art of Racing in the Rain</i> which is a New York Times bestseller and also a major motion picture.
Kurt Batdorf:	00:16	So, we're going to talk about racing. We're going to talk about cars. We're going to talk a little bit about Hollywood. We'll hear what he has to say about his new graphic novel and a new novel that he also has coming out. We'll also talk about dogs.
Speaker 2:	00:39	Welcome to season two and episode 39 of Check It Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 3:	00:46	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Kurt Batdorf:	00:54	Today we have Garth Stein with us, with the Check It Out! podcast, from Sno-Isle Libraries. We're going to ask him questions about writing and his novel, <i>The Art of Racing in the Rain</i> , that just was made into a major motion picture.
Kurt Batdorf:	01:07	Garth, have you always been a writer?
Garth Stein:	01:14	Kind of. I mean, how do you define that? I mean, I've always been a storyteller.
Kurt Batdorf:	01:19	Yeah.
Garth Stein:	01:20	I wrote a lot when I was a student, back in the day, in high school, college, and stuff. Then I decided to go into ... I thought I would go into screenwriting.
Kurt Batdorf:	01:30	Okay.

(Continued)

- Garth Stein: 01:31 So, I went to film school to study that. It didn't work. I had a bizarre allergic reaction to it. It just didn't work for me at all, neurologically. I ended up going into documentary films for about nine years. I made those for a bunch. Had a great time doing it. And then, eventually came back around to writing and wrote my first novel, *Raven Stole the Moon*, I guess I was 32 when I wrote that.
- Kurt Batdorf: 01:58 Okay.
- Jim Hills: 01:58 When you think of documentary films, when you think of film writing, screen writing ... I kind of heard in your voice that, "Hey, it's all writing." Is it all writing? Do you think of yourself, even when you're doing something for film, for the screen, do you think of that as writing, as opposed to writing a book?
- Garth Stein: 02:17 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 02:17 I mean, you know, loosely defined, yeah. I mean, I think I was trying to refer to storytelling, I may have conflated the two. But the thing about ... When I did documentary film making, the reason it worked for me was because I was 25 years old and in grad school. I thought, "I'm not mature enough as a writer or as a person yet to really have anything to say." Now, that's just me. I'm sure there are plenty of 25 year olds who are brilliant genius ... Take James Joyce, for instance, who wrote *The Dead* when he was, what, 24 years old.
- Jim Hills: 02:50 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 02:51 So, for me, it didn't work. When I went into documentary film making, what I realized that it was, my epiphany there, was that it was telling a story using found objects. I'd use archival footage, interviews, photographs, or any of these number of things. And then piece together a story that would have all the same elements of a good story that you would read. It would have to have a compelling main character or main issue. There would have to be a goal. There would have to be obstacles that get in the way and create problems. And then there has to be a climax, a crises, and a denouement, and the whole thing. It just happens to be using found objects instead of coming out of someone's imagination. In that sense, I do believe that my time making documentary films was a help to me as a storyteller, in the writing form.
- Jim Hills: 03:49 It's interesting to me that you talk about, as at 25, maybe you didn't have a deep well of experience that you could draw on

for personal stuff, for your books, like you have. But I am really interested, when I look at your books and see the settings that you've used and some of the subjects and those obstacles that your characters are overcoming. Many of those appear to be coming from your personal life. They say ... There's the stereotype saying write what you know. It seems like, in many ways, you're writing things that you know about.

- Garth Stein: 04:33 Well, sure. I mean, the thing is ... Look, guys, writers-
- Kurt Batdorf: 04:40 Well, we're writers, too.
- Garth Stein: 04:43 Writers are well adjusted. Yeah. If writers were well adjusted, we wouldn't be writing, we'd be having a normal job like doing podcasts or something, you know what I mean? A lot of us are self-deluded and we're fooling ourselves. We don't really quite have a firm grasp.
- Garth Stein: 04:58 But it's true, in retrospect, if I look back at the books that I've written, I would say, "Oh, yeah. That's interesting. I guess I was struggling with that myself a little bit." I wasn't actually thinking that while I was writing it.
- Kurt Batdorf: 05:11 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 05:12 You see? We fool ourselves, we lie to ourselves all the time. It's fine. It's part of how we cope as people. I tell people when I was writing my last book, *A Sudden Light*, I wrote like 100,000 words. Which is a full book, by the way-
- Kurt Batdorf: 05:27 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 05:27 That's a long book. I wrote 100,000 words. I thought, "Okay, I've really got something." I read over and I said, "No. I don't have anything. I have nothing."
- Kurt Batdorf: 05:36 But was it good therapy?
- Garth Stein: 05:38 Well, here's the thing. It was great therapy because what I had to do was say to myself, "Okay, I just spent two years doing this." And what I was doing was pre-writing for the novel I'm really going to write. I was doing research. I was doing character studies. I was doing development of all the different issues that I wanted to include. Then, I could take that 100,000 words, which is what I did, I set it aside. Then I rewrote the book from the beginning. It turned into the book that I used. Now, I

wouldn't have gotten the book that I wrote if I hadn't spent two years writing 100,000 words that I wasn't going to use.

Kurt Batdorf: 06:13 Sure.

Garth Stein: 06:13 Right?

Garth Stein: 06:16 And yet, at the same time, my point is, at the same time, if I had said to myself, "You know what I'm going to do?" ... My wife says, "Hey, what are you working on now?" And I say, "Oh, you know, I'm going to take two years to do some pre-writing. And then I'm going to write a novel," she would say no.

Kurt Batdorf: 06:28 I could not get permission for that, I don't think, no.

Jim Hills: 06:30 I can't get permission to do any of my hobbies before I have to do what I'm supposed to do.

Jim Hills: 06:36 I have one more ... I'm really anxious to get to Art of Racing in the Rain. I know Kurt is, also. But I have one more question about process. I read somewhere that, at some point, you were ... You rented some space someplace in Ballard to do your writing. Now, Kurt and I both worked in newspapers where they kind of require you to got to a certain place called work and do the work. But, as a writer, you can go anywhere you want to.

Garth Stein: 07:01 I hate that.

Kurt Batdorf: 07:01 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 07:03 But when I saw that, I went, "Huh. It sounds to me like he wanted to create some structure for himself, for his writing." Is that part of the plan for you?

Garth Stein: 07:13 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 07:14 I think that's definitely part of it. But the other part of it is that, at the time, I had three kids living at home.

Kurt Batdorf: 07:20 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 07:20 I kind of wondered about that, you know?

Garth Stein: 07:23 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 07:24 I would much rather hang out and do slot cars or read books or do some art projects with my kids than work.

Kurt Batdorf: 07:34 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 07:34 I mean, writing is not actually fun to do. I mean, it can be rewarding. There are moments of, certainly, there are moments of fun. But, in general, it's ... I would rather be hanging out. So, eventually, I had to leave and go get an office outside of my house. In fact, I rented my first office outside of the house was me renting a desk from a pizza restaurant down here in Seattle, called Tutta Bella Pizzeria. In the support offices, we had some extra space. Everybody was working in the restaurant business but me. I'd be sitting there in my little cubicle, writing with my earbuds in. I'd be crying because I get very emotional when I'm writing an emotional scene. People would be like, "What's up with that guy?"

Jim Hills: 08:25 He's not making my pizza, is he?

Garth Stein: 08:28 I wrote *The Art of Racing in the Rain* there, at Tutta Bella, and half of *A Sudden Light* there, too.

Kurt Batdorf: 08:34 Okay. So you weren't down in the restaurant writing and having people look at you sobbing?

Garth Stein: 08:38 No, no, no.

Kurt Batdorf: 08:38 Okay.

Garth Stein: 08:38 No, no, no.

Garth Stein: 08:41 It would be very funny because it was a great place. The owner, Joe Fugere, is a super nice guy. In the restaurant business, everything happens late. At the mornings, I was in this giant space, all by myself.

Kurt Batdorf: 08:52 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 08:52 It was great. Then, in the afternoons, the managers come in and they start having meetings. That's when it got a little bit weird.

Kurt Batdorf: 08:59 Yeah. I've done my stint in food service. I kind of remember those weird times, when things were slow.

Garth Stein: 09:04 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:04 Then, suddenly, it was a crush.

Garth Stein: 09:07 And it's everything has to get done now-

Kurt Batdorf: 09:07 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 09:07 ... kind of thing.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:08 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:09 Well, why don't we get over to Art of Racing in the Rain and talk about cars? I'm a car guy. Jim's a car guy.

Jim Hills: 09:17 Deborah's a car girl.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:19 Deborah had the car that you have in Art of Racing in the Rain, at one point.

Jim Hills: 09:23 The BMW 2800.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:25 The 2800cs.

Garth Stein: 09:28 Oh, yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:28 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 09:28 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 09:28 We actually have a picture of her, in front of us, in her 2800, and a picture of you. So, we were going to wear masks, so we all thought that we were talking to you. Because we're doing this by phone, right?

Kurt Batdorf: 09:39 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 09:40 You're not here now.

Garth Stein: 09:41 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 09:41 But we were all going to wear masks of you. Then we thought, "No, that would be weird. Plus, it would be kind of muffled with the microphone."

Kurt Batdorf: 09:47 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 09:48 So we're just staring at the photo.

Garth Stein: 09:50 That actually borders on creepy. In fact, you know, you don't have to share all of your ideas, you know. You could keep some of them to yourself.

Kurt Batdorf: 09:57 Yeah, well, maybe we'll let this one out.

Jim Hills: 09:59 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:01 So, Garth, have you always been a car guy? Did you play with Hot Wheels or slot cars or stuff as a kid?

Garth Stein: 10:08 Oh, yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:09 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:09 I mean, car guy for sure. I mean, in that sense, yes. I mean, I loved ... Hot Wheels were my jam, man. I'm old. See, I'm an old guy.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:17 Yeah, we're pretty close. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:19 Oh, all right.

Garth Stein: 10:20 I mean, I have old Hot Wheel cars, the original, when they made them out of metal-

Kurt Batdorf: 10:23 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:24 ... instead of all that plastic stuff they use these days. But, yeah, yeah, no. I always loved that kind of stuff. The thing is, though, that I went to school, I went to college in New York City and I stayed. I lived in New York for 18 years. For much of that time, didn't even have a car.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:38 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:39 So, I'm not that kind of car guy.

Garth Stein: 10:42 What happened was, when I moved back to Seattle in 2001, my father was very into cars. He would go down to the racetrack, in Kent, and do Lapping Days.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:55 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:55 High Performance Driver Education Days.

Kurt Batdorf: 10:57 Yeah, yeah.

Garth Stein: 10:58 He said, "Come, you should come. Come with me." So, I went down there and I got bit by the speed bug. I ended up getting

my license and getting a Miata and turning it into a race car and then racing for a few years.

Kurt Batdorf: 11:11 Yeah. Yeah.

Jim Hills: 11:12 I was going to say, you're talking Kurt's language here.

Kurt Batdorf: 11:13 I currently have two Miatas. Let's see, I think I've had a total of seven. Five of them drivers-

Garth Stein: 11:21 Oh, really?

Kurt Batdorf: 11:22 ... two for parts cars.

Garth Stein: 11:24 Yeah, well, that's ... Are they the 1.6 or the 1.8? What do you have?

Kurt Batdorf: 11:29 I've got a '94 Laguna Blue that's got 295,000 miles on it that had to retire because it was just breaking all the time, during driving, during commutes.

Garth Stein: 11:38 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 11:39 Now, I've got a 2002 SE that's my new daily driver.

Garth Stein: 11:42 Oh.

Kurt Batdorf: 11:43 I think, Goose, now, the 2002, that one's the keeper. Astro, my '94, I'm never going to get rid of him. He's the first Miata I ever owned. He's a thing of beauty. Even if he's a little derelict now.

Garth Stein: 11:57 The Spec Miatas are the older, like '92 through-

Kurt Batdorf: 12:02 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 12:03 ... '98, I think-

Kurt Batdorf: 12:04 Yeah, yeah.

Garth Stein: 12:07 ... the first and second generations. It's a great car. Well, it still is a great car. It just got a little bit more tripped out, technologically.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:13 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 12:13 But that '94 that you've got, that's a good race car. It's perfectly balanced.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:18 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 12:19 It's so simple to deal with. It's not got any ABS or any of that nonsense.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:24 It didn't even have power steering. So, it's a bare bones model.

Garth Stein: 12:27 Right, right.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:27 And I've done Track Days with it. That kind of got me into Tire Rack Street Survival. That's how I cure my track bug-

Garth Stein: 12:37 Oh, nice.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:38 ... teaching kids not to kill themselves when they get behind the wheel.

Garth Stein: 12:45 Not only that, it has a benefit to society. You're terrific.

Kurt Batdorf: 12:46 Thanks.

Jim Hills: 12:48 Would you care to share: A. Your current drive, and B. Your aspirational drive?

Garth Stein: 12:54 Well, interestingly enough, my eldest son just graduated from college last May. He was working over the summer. He's arrived on my doorstep and is now ... I guess he's assuming that he's going to move back into his room. Although I'm not sure he has clearance for that. But we were talking about cars. And I have ... My daily driver is a 2008 S4, Audi S4 Avant.

Jim Hills: 13:22 Oh.

Kurt Batdorf: 13:22 Oh.

Garth Stein: 13:23 It's the last year they made it. It's a great car. I love it. It's got a stick shift and a big old V8 engine in it. But it's well over 100000 miles. It's getting on in years. I frequently think, "Oh, what would I get next? Hmm." So, he was talking about cars, needing a car. I was like, "Hmm." My wife suggested that maybe we move the Audi over to him and then I get myself a new car. That may happen. We'll see. I also have a '74 Alpha Romeo GTV 2000.

Kurt Batdorf: 13:55 Oh, nice.

Jim Hills: 13:57 Oh.

Kurt Batdorf: 13:57 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 13:58 That's my car that doesn't go out in the rain kind of thing.

Kurt Batdorf: 14:01 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 14:02 Not because it's so valuable. Because it leaks.

Jim Hills: 14:05 Because it's an Alpha.

Kurt Batdorf: 14:06 Well, yeah.

Jim Hills: 14:06 It's an Italian. Right.

Garth Stein: 14:07 Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Garth Stein: 14:09 So, I don't know. If I actually started looking for a car, I have no idea. I do like that new Alpha Giulia. I have to say, it's kind of cute. Although, you know, Jaguar is really doing a good strong market push. You can't go wrong with a BMW M-series. Who knows where I'll end up?

Jim Hills: 14:32 There you go.

Kurt Batdorf: 14:33 All right.

Jim Hills: 14:33 So, how much of your experience ended up in Denny and Enzo?

Kurt Batdorf: 14:42 Your life experience.

Jim Hills: 14:43 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 14:43 Your personal experience.

Jim Hills: 14:44 Your life experience. Your car experience, in the characters in the book-

Garth Stein: 14:49 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 14:49 ... in The Art of Racing in the Rain.

Garth Stein: 14:51 It's mixed. I mean, there's always a little bit of every writer in everybody, in everything they write, I think. At least for me, I feel that way. Everything has to get filtered through my brain, eventually. So, something is going to rub off, on its path through my brain, I imagine.

Jim Hills: 15:09 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 15:10 I will say that the character of Denny was inspired by a friend of mine by the name of Kevin York. He's now living in North Carolina. He was living in Seattle, at the time. He was my first driver's coach.

Kurt Batdorf: 15:21 Ah.

Garth Stein: 15:22 He took me out and showed me the ropes and how to do it. I was always impressed with his work ethic, his life ethic, I guess. He had a day job. He had kids. He always wanted to be a race car driver. He was always hustling a ride. He was always trying to balance and find the time and find the time and find the resources and find the sponsors and all that stuff. Then provide for his family, as well.

Kurt Batdorf: 15:49 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 15:51 Kevin is really the Denny of my book. As for Enzo, I did not have a dog like Enzo. I mean, our dog, Comet, who recently passed away, she was a great dog but she was no Enzo. Put it to you this way, she has a few more lifetimes to live as a dog before she gets to come back as a person.

Kurt Batdorf: 16:15 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 16:15 She has some maturing to do, you know what I mean?

Kurt Batdorf: 16:17 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 16:18 I've got a Border collie mix named Quattro.

Garth Stein: 16:21 Ah.

Kurt Batdorf: 16:21 Now, he's not an Audi but he came with that name. He's really smart, I think, for a dog.

Garth Stein: 16:30 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 16:30 But Enzo's story kind of resonated with me, with Quattro, because they're both really smart and they both have a lot of things to say. And partly it's because I also for him. So maybe I equate intelligence with Quattro's abilities.

Garth Stein: 16:50 There is no shame in that, honestly. It's really funny because I did a thing last week, an interview thing and someone asked

me, "Do we, as a society, over-anthropomorphize our dogs?" And I said, "Over? Is there too much that we ... Is there a limit that we need to look for? I don't understand." Everyone seems to think ... There seems to be this school of progressive thought that it's wrong to anthropomorphize our dogs. Now, I get it. We're not supposed to say, "Oh, our dogs like Reese's peanut butter cups, okay?"

- Kurt Batdorf: 17:29 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 17:29 That's bad. That's wrong. Right? But to think that our dogs have sophisticated thoughts, analyze things, are observing things, and are judging things, I don't see ... At first, it might be true. And second, if it's not true, what's the harm?
- Kurt Batdorf: 17:50 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 17:51 I mean, why are we here on Earth? Why are we here to live this life except to indulge in the magic of the world, use our imaginations, use our empathy, use our creativity, and engage in the world in a way that is fun and enjoyable? I mean-
- Kurt Batdorf: 18:12 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 18:12 ... what's wrong with that? I don't get it. That's just me. Sorry.
- Kurt Batdorf: 18:16 Well, that was a good tangent.
- Kurt Batdorf: 18:18 That kind of brings up another question I have. My wife and several friends and colleagues will not read *The Art of Racing in the Rain* because it involves Enzo and his death. When you have that kind of a powerful visceral reaction, I guess, as an author, how do you react to that?
- Garth Stein: 18:42 Honestly?
- Kurt Batdorf: 18:43 Yeah.
- Garth Stein: 18:45 You say, "Whatever."
- Kurt Batdorf: 18:49 Yeah.
- Jim Hills: 18:50 On the other hand, it's, I mean, when-
- Garth Stein: 18:52 No, no. Look man, seriously, seriously, someone can't handle it? Okay. You shouldn't then.

Jim Hills: 18:57 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 18:59 If you don't feel that feeling is good for your soul, then you shouldn't feel.

Jim Hills: 19:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Garth Stein: 19:05 It's correct. That's good. You should go back into your room and sit in the dark and not feel anything. It'll be fun for you. I mean, life is about peaks and valleys. It's about highs and lows, you know?

Kurt Batdorf: 19:15 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 19:15 We need to be able to shed some tears so we can appreciate the laughter. A flat Earth is a very dull place to live. Trust me, I have three kids and they all read *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Which means I've read *The Giver* three times.

Kurt Batdorf: 19:30 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 19:30 And let me tell you something. That world that that kid grows up in, where everybody wears the same color clothes, everybody has the same name, everything is flat, all the food is the same taste, nothing is different, that world is really boring. Until that kid breaks out of that world, rides a bicycle up a mountain, gets really cold and really tired and really hungry, that's when he appreciates life.

Jim Hills: 19:52 Everything else.

Kurt Batdorf: 19:52 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 19:52 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 19:55 Lois Lowry.

Kurt Batdorf: 19:55 Yeah. Okay.

Jim Hills: 19:56 You explore a lot of those very emotional moments in all of your books, right? I mean, that's-

Garth Stein: 20:02 I try to.

Jim Hills: 20:03 ... a big part of it.

Kurt Batdorf: 20:03 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 20:05 I think it's important. But I'm all about feeling stuff. I mean, I think that you should read a book that engages you, brings you into a good story, and, hopefully, makes you feel a reaction. Then you come away from it feeling a little bit different about the world. That's my goal, as a writer. But that's just me.

Kurt Batdorf: 20:23 Yeah. It definitely worked for me for *Art of Racing in the Rain*. I really devoured it. I read it in about just three sittings. But last chapter, it took me a good two hours to get through it because I was just crying so much. On these themes of loss, that just sort of run through the book, through your books, are you drawing on personal experience?

Garth Stein: 20:47 Well, I mean, not necessarily. I mean sometimes.

Kurt Batdorf: 20:52 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 20:53 Certainly, I have experienced loss in my life. I know what it feels like, on many different levels. But I mean, I work hard to refine, as much as I can, my sense ... or exercise, I should say, as much as I can, my sense of empathy.

Kurt Batdorf: 21:14 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 21:15 I think that that's why I love writing. That's why I love reading. That's why I love books. Because with a book, you have to develop your sense of empathy. You have to put yourself into somebody else's shoes who is not you. You have to see how they go through a journey of some kind where you can also think, "Oh, wow. I don't know if I would have done that. Ooh, I definitely wouldn't have done that. Maybe I should try that sometime," you know?

Kurt Batdorf: 21:40 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 21:42 I see people, my job, as a writer, is to essentially be a thief. I look at people. I watch people. I experience other people in what they do and how they go about their days and how they deal with tragedy, with success, how they solve problems. Then, I tuck it away in my brain and, hopefully, I can find it, as some point, and put it into a story or into a character.

Jim Hills: 22:09 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 22:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim Hills: 22:11 I'm interested, just as you were talking about how a reader might look at the character and their choices. When you're writing, do you sometimes have your characters ... Are you consciously having your characters make choices that maybe you wouldn't do, to see how it works out?

Garth Stein: 22:32 Yes. Yeah. I mean ... Yes, absolutely.

Jim Hills: 22:36 Against your own personal grain, you say, "Well, we'll try this?"

Garth Stein: 22:40 Well, it's not so much we'll try this. It's not arbitrary, okay? You're talking about two different levels. Let's talk about that in a second, the arbitrary, the let's just try this thing. That's an interesting concept you're saying. I do want to address that.

Garth Stein: 22:55 But the idea of having your characters act in a way that you wouldn't necessarily act. I mean, that's part of the ... If everybody made ... If I wrote a story in which all the characters made all the correct choices, it would be the worst book ever written.

Kurt Batdorf: 23:13 Well, it would be pretty predictable. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 23:15 Right.

Jim Hills: 23:16 It would be what my mom told me to do.

Kurt Batdorf: 23:16 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 23:20 It would be predictable and it would be boring.

Kurt Batdorf: 23:20 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 23:21 Because there's no opposition. The world of a drama, the world of a book, in this case ... But it could be theater or movie or whatever ... is based on the concept of conflict. There is no drama until there is conflict.

Jim Hills: 23:36 True.

Garth Stein: 23:37 There is no drama until somebody makes the wrong choice. Right?

Jim Hills: 23:43 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 23:43 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 23:44 That's how I approach my characters.

Garth Stein: 23:47 Now, the other question of making a character do something, I would say to you that me, personally, I don't make my characters do anything. I put them into situations where they are forced to act and then they act. If I don't like the way they act, the only thing ... I can't just say to them, "Don't act that way." Because they're acting true, hopefully, they're acting true to their nature, in that situation. What I have to say to myself is, "Garth, you need to change the situation so that you get the reaction that you want for the larger story."

Jim Hills: 24:22 Oh, that's a really interesting perspective.

Kurt Batdorf: 24:25 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 24:25 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 24:27 I'm very organic about writing, about creating this, and about ... I do huge amounts of notes. I do outlines. I try to plot everything out, that I can think of. But I know that that's just me guessing. Because I don't know what the book's about yet because I haven't written it.

Jim Hills: 24:42 Interesting.

Garth Stein: 24:43 As I write it and try to make it match up, the book starts telling me what it's about. Then I start modifying my outline and my notes to conform to what the book is telling me. Now, I don't try to make the book conform to me. I try to conform to the book.

Jim Hills: 24:57 Oh, that's a really interesting-

Kurt Batdorf: 24:58 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 24:59 That's pretty profound.

Garth Stein: 25:01 Yeah. I've been working on it for about 54 years.

Jim Hills: 25:07 You're getting it down.

Kurt Batdorf: 25:08 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 25:09 I guess, how much time does it take you ... You have this germ of an idea for a book. How long does it take you to develop that

from that germ of a notion into an outline? And then, into a finished product?

Garth Stein: 25:25 Forever, man.

Jim Hills: 25:27 54 years.

Garth Stein: 25:27 It's just a disaster. I mean, just, it can't come quicker. I don't know. I just turned in my new book, to my publisher. I was talking to my wife about it last night. She's like, "When did you start that book?" I was like, "Yeah." I looked back. My first notes on this book ... I know specifically where I got the idea for the book. It was easy for me to track it back. I said, "I actually started writing notes and ideas on it in January of 2017."

Kurt Batdorf: 25:55 Well, that's not that long ago.

Garth Stein: 25:57 Two years and eight months.

Kurt Batdorf: 25:59 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 25:59 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 26:01 But A Sudden Light took me like five years, seven years, five years? How long did it take? Five years to write.

Kurt Batdorf: 26:05 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 26:05 Sometimes they take a long time. The Art of Racing in the Rain, I wrote the first draft in four months. Now, I wrote the first draft in four months. But I had the first idea for it in 1998.

Kurt Batdorf: 26:17 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 26:17 So it really took me eight years to write, if you want to go from the first idea.

Kurt Batdorf: 26:22 Okay.

Jim Hills: 26:23 We don't want to let the cat too far out of the bag. But any dogs or cars in this new manuscript?

Garth Stein: 26:30 You know, there are no cars. There are no dogs or cars.

Jim Hills: 26:34 Oh, okay. Breaking new ground.

Garth Stein: 26:35 My new book is about ... It's called A Couple of Old Birds. It's about an 87 year old woman, here in Seattle, who's a widow. She's pretty sure that her time is done.

Kurt Batdorf: 26:50 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 26:50 She starts getting herself together. She sells her house and downsizes into a condominium. She gives away almost everything she has, figuring, that's it. If she doesn't die on her own, she's going to take herself out, in fact.

Garth Stein: 27:04 Then, she moves into her new condo and meets her neighbor across the hall, who's an 84 year old lady, who's still married. But they become new best friends and go through some adventures together. Then, in the end, realize that just when you think the story is over, a new chapter begins.

Kurt Batdorf: 27:21 Interesting.

Jim Hills: 27:21 Oh, that sounds great.

Garth Stein: 27:25 Old ladies.

Jim Hills: 27:28 Well, that's set in Seattle?

Garth Stein: 27:32 Yeah, that's set in Seattle.

Garth Stein: 27:33 But you know what else I have? I've got a graphic novel coming out in July.

Jim Hills: 27:37 Oh.

Kurt Batdorf: 27:37 Where's that one set?

Garth Stein: 27:40 Everything's set in Seattle.

Kurt Batdorf: 27:41 Oh, okay.

Kurt Batdorf: 27:42 You grew up in-

Garth Stein: 27:44 The graphic novel is called The Cloven. It's about mutant goat people living underneath the freeway in Seattle.

Jim Hills: 27:51 Well, that is then true. That's a documentary, right?

Garth Stein: 27:54 You know, it actually is true.

Jim Hills: 28:00 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 28:01 So, you grew up in north Seattle. Jim, also, grew up in north Seattle.

Jim Hills: 28:05 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 28:06 You went to one of the shoreline schools, right? Shorewood?

Garth Stein: 28:10 I went to Shorewood High School.

Jim Hills: 28:12 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 28:13 I'm an ... Well, back when I went there, there might not have been a Shorewood High School. I'm that old. It was Shoreline and Shorecrest. I went to Ingram. I may have egged the Shoreline, now Shoreline Center, once or twice, after a high school football game. I don't know. Anyway.

Kurt Batdorf: 28:40 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 28:40 No, no. I know Ingram. I lived at 130th, across from the famous Granite Curling Club.

Jim Hills: 28:44 Exactly.

Kurt Batdorf: 28:45 Ah, okay.

Garth Stein: 28:46 In case you were into some curling. Maybe you did some curling after school. I don't know.

Jim Hills: 28:51 Granite Curling Club was a summer trip for us on our bikes. We'd go to Granite Curling Club and down to the go-kart track. Then down to Greenlake and then back. Nobody cared that we were gone all day.

Kurt Batdorf: 29:02 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 29:03 We lived in the same era, man. There used to be a go-kart track right down on 125th, I think.

Jim Hills: 29:10 Yes, exactly. That's the one. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 29:13 Yeah. I did that.

Jim Hills: 29:15 That's the go-kart track.

Jim Hills: 29:18 We're going to take a quick break here. Then we'll come back and we'll talk to Garth a little more.

Speaker 6: 29:25 Hey parents and grandparents. Is there a child in the family who's latched onto a smartphone or tablet computer? Help them put that screen time to good use by downloading fun and educational magazines from Sno-Isle Libraries. Like Highlights, High Five, and American Girl. Every magazine packed with age appropriate content like crafts, quizzes, experiments, poems, and wholesome stories. Each issue is free to download with a library card from Sno-Isle Libraries.

Speaker 2: 29:56 If you live in Snohomish or Island County, we'd like to invite you to stop by your closest library or visit the library online. You'll find thousands and thousands of titles of classic and popular books, music, movies, and a surprising number of digital resources, just waiting for you. Plus, you'll have opportunity to enjoy our friendly, helpful librarians. Check us out today.

Kurt Batdorf: 30:27 Hey. We're back with Garth Stein. We're talking about Art of Racing in the Rain and writing and living in Seattle. We're going to talk now about the actual movie that just came out in early August. Garth, tell us what happened when the movie came out, with the book.

Garth Stein: 30:45 Ah, yes.

Garth Stein: 30:46 Well, the book immediately went to number one on the New York Times bestseller list which was a lot of fun. I had to retrain my children to call me "Numero Uno Dad."

Kurt Batdorf: 30:57 How well did they adhere to that?

Garth Stein: 30:58 I stopped responding to dad. I said, "Only if you use number one in front of my name will I respond."

Kurt Batdorf: 31:06 How long did that last, for the kids?

Garth Stein: 31:10 Wait. Them calling me Number One or-

Kurt Batdorf: 31:12 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 31:12 ... it staying on the list at number one?

Kurt Batdorf: 31:13 Yeah, well, them calling you Number One?

Garth Stein: 31:18 It was a fantasy. They refused. We didn't talk to each other until ... It was on number one for two weeks. Then they were like, "Okay, you're number two now so we don't have to call you number one."

Jim Hills: 31:31 What's it like having your book turned into a movie? You've done movies. I mean, you've written your own short films, documentaries. Familiar with the process. But then you have this thing turned in ... Disney produced it, right? 20th Century Fox and Disney? This is a big deal. What's it like being involved in that kind of a deal when it's your book being turned into images?

Garth Stein: 31:55 Yeah. It's kind of weird.

Garth Stein: 31:57 I mean, it was such a protracted process. I wasn't involved in most of it. It could've been weirder, I think.

Kurt Batdorf: 32:06 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 32:08 Didn't it take about 10 years between the time the book ... Well, it was about 10 years between the time the book came out-

Garth Stein: 32:13 Yep.

Kurt Batdorf: 32:13 ... and the movie. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 32:14 Yeah. Roughly.

Garth Stein: 32:15 I mean, Patrick Dempsey optioned it at first, back when it first came out. Then it bounced around. It went to three different studios. Oddly, it went from Universal to Disney to Fox. Then Disney bought Fox. So, technically, it's Disney.

Garth Stein: 32:34 It is weird when they ... I was very skeptical it was going to get made. Then I got a phone call from the director one day. He said, "We're going to make your movie." I was like, "Hm. Heard that one before." But then they made it. It was cool. They shot most of it in Vancouver.

Kurt Batdorf: 32:52 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 32:52 I took my family up and we hung out on the set and got to hang with the movie stars. They treated us real nice. They did some shooting down here in Seattle. I was hanging out for that, down at the racetrack, as well. It was like a whole thing, man. It was

like a whole big deal. We went down to L.A., for the premiere, red carpet-

Kurt Batdorf: 33:13 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 33:14 They closed down Hollywood Boulevard. I was doing press. I was waving at people and signing people's autograph. It was insane. Then they sent me on a tour-

Kurt Batdorf: 33:24 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 33:24 ... all around the country. You go on a tour for Hollywood, man, that's hard core. I had a publicist traveling with me. There would be publicists already on the ground, in the cities we would go to. I had a groomer. A groomer. Can you imagine?

Kurt Batdorf: 33:36 No.

Jim Hills: 33:36 Did you need a groomer?

Garth Stein: 33:36 Someone who literally followed me around all day, touching up my makeup.

Jim Hills: 33:44 I was going to say, I'm looking at a picture of you. Did you actually need a groomer? You look okay.

Kurt Batdorf: 33:49 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 33:49 Oh, no. The bags under my eyes.

Kurt Batdorf: 33:51 Oh.

Jim Hills: 33:52 Oh.

Garth Stein: 33:52 They work you hard, man. It was like six a.m. radio shows. Then I would be finishing a Q & A, at a screening, at like 10:00. I was getting real worn down. But my groomer always kept me looking fresh and perky.

Kurt Batdorf: 34:05 Well, I guess, as far as the movie goes, how did you ... Did you like the transition from your words and story into what you saw on the screen?

Garth Stein: 34:20 Yes.

Garth Stein: 34:20 I mean, look, it's a different ... Yeah, okay.

Kurt Batdorf: 34:25 It's a little different.

Garth Stein: 34:26 Let me give you this answer.

Kurt Batdorf: 34:26 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 34:28 In the interest of my children's college education-

Kurt Batdorf: 34:31 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 34:31 ... I'm going to take a pass on that question.

Kurt Batdorf: 34:33 I understand.

Jim Hills: 34:34 Yeah, absolutely.

Garth Stein: 34:35 No, no, no. I'm kidding. It was good. It's good. I mean, they had to change stuff.

Kurt Batdorf: 34:40 Yeah, yeah.

Garth Stein: 34:41 I understand that. Did they do everything to my personal liking? I think they left some stuff on the table. I think we could have ... I think if they had been more forward at consulting with me, I could have fixed a couple of little things for them.

Jim Hills: 35:01 Did you offer to be the screenwriter?

Garth Stein: 35:04 They didn't want me

Jim Hills: 35:07 [crosstalk 00:35:07].

Garth Stein: 35:07 They don't want me.

Garth Stein: 35:08 But they could have let me ... They listened to some of my comments but they didn't listen to all of them. I think that there's some humor that was intrinsic in the book that they didn't translate evenly-

Kurt Batdorf: 35:24 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 35:25 ... to the movie.

Garth Stein: 35:26 All that being said, the trick for me is that when I go to see a movie that's been made of a book, if I've already read the book, especially, I don't want to know how accurate it is-

Kurt Batdorf: 35:37 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 35:37 ... because I know it can't be. It's a 360 page book. It's a 93 minute movie.

Kurt Batdorf: 35:41 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 35:41 They have to do stuff. What I want to know is, is the heart of the movie in the right place. Honestly-

Jim Hills: 35:48 I'd say so.

Garth Stein: 35:49 I can honestly say that the heart of this movie is in the right place.

Jim Hills: 35:52 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 35:52 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 35:53 Did the viewers go away ... Did they get a good story? Did they have a good experience? Did they get the message that they ... Did they understand the emotion? It has to be told differently.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:02 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:04 Just like the book, there was not a dry eye in the house when I left the movie.

Garth Stein: 36:10 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:11 It was fun. So, in that sense, I'm perfectly ... I'm very happy with it. I love the way they brought it to the end. I thought it was great.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:19 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:20 The little kid, no spoilers, but that little kid, at the end. Oh my God.

Jim Hills: 36:24 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:24 He nailed it.

Garth Stein: 36:27 Amanda Seyfried, I thought, just acted her heart out, man. She was really good. And Milo did good work.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:34 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:35 He was ... I thought that, gosh, it was fun. The car stuff was fun. Jeff Zwart is this famous t.v.-

Kurt Batdorf: 36:44 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:44 ... commercial director for Porsche and all that. He did all of the car sequences.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:49 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:49 He directed all those.

Kurt Batdorf: 36:50 And those racing scenes, those were some of the best stuff in the movie, really.

Garth Stein: 36:55 Oh, really, yeah, I agree.

Garth Stein: 36:56 IMSA got behind it-

Kurt Batdorf: 36:57 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 36:58 ... the automotive racing body called IMSA. They were shooting at actual races. It was weird. They had a race car driver driving ... In one scene, there's a yellow BMW race care, for Turner Racing Sports. They had the guy who's dressed up ... They took their driver and made him wear Milo Ventimiglia's Nomex racing team and everything else.

Kurt Batdorf: 37:21 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 37:22 When he drove by, it would look like it was Milo playing Denny.

Kurt Batdorf: 37:29 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 37:30 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 37:30 In fact, it was a race car driver.

Jim Hills: 37:32 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 37:32 So it was cool. It was very cool.

Jim Hills: 37:33 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 37:37 Let's talk ... Well, let's see. What else do we need to talk about here? Who are some of your favorite authors, as an author yourself?

Garth Stein: 37:46 Well, gosh, I mean, there's so many, out there. It's almost hard. My favorite classic writers would be Ken Kesey here, from the Northwest.

Kurt Batdorf: 37:56 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Garth Stein: 37:58 Sometimes A Great Notion is a fantastic book for anybody who lives around here. I have a ton of local writers who I love, non-fiction and fiction. Erik Larson, Tim Egan, Elizabeth George, Susan Wiggs, these people. Interestingly, I grew up sort of as a theater guy. I always loved theater. I worked for a Broadway producer for a while and stuff. A lot of my biggest influences, as writers, I think would be playwrights.

Kurt Batdorf: 38:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Garth Stein: 38:35 Specifically, Tennessee Williams, for instance.

Kurt Batdorf: 38:37 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 38:37 I mean, his plays are so powerful and written so cleanly, you can read them and get just as much enjoyment out of them as seeing them. Sometimes even more, I dare say, as seeing them on the stage. I do give Eugene O'Neill and Bertolt Brecht was always a big inspiration for me and challenging me to try and not worry about reality. I write fiction. I don't care if it can't really happen. That's not my business. Emotionally, it needs to really, emotionally. But I mean physically. Does a dog really have those thoughts? I don't care. My dog has those thoughts.

Kurt Batdorf: 39:22 Well, Quattro does.

Garth Stein: 39:25 Right.

Kurt Batdorf: 39:25 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 39:25 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 39:26 I'm curious, you mentioned Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill and some of the others. Tennessee Williams ends up with a lot of geographic and cultural references, in his pieces.

Garth Stein: 39:42 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 39:43 You spent quite a while in New York. A lot of things get set in New York. But it's not like it's New York. It's the culture of New York. It's not the ... Sometimes it's the physical-ness of it. When

I see authors like yourself who are taking to the Northwest and to ... For example, in Alaska, in Raven Stole the Moon.

Garth Stein: 40:06 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 40:08 What I love is that it's not tokenism about the Northwest, like maybe Sleepless in Seattle or something. But it's the culture. It's the thought. It's the feel that can come from an area. I'm really interested on how you go about mining that from Seattle, from the Northwest, maybe from Alaska, and what you look for, when you're doing those settings.

Garth Stein: 40:39 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 40:42 The Alaska connection is my mother grew up in the town of Wrangell, Alaska.

Jim Hills: 40:47 Okay.

Garth Stein: 40:47 My mother is Irish and Klickitat Indian, from this small fishing village.

Jim Hills: 40:53 Interesting connection, combination. But go ahead.

Kurt Batdorf: 40:55 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 40:55 Yeah. It is. I have a weird ... I have that and she married, of course, a Jewish kid from Brooklyn. I'm all messed up.

Jim Hills: 41:06 You're all that.

Garth Stein: 41:06 Yeah. I know.

Garth Stein: 41:09 Anyway, I love putting ... I like writing about Seattle for a number of reasons, I guess. One, because I grew up here.

Jim Hills: 41:20 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 41:20 So, it's very familiar to me. I've seen it, how it changed, how it has changed over the years. There's also a certain ... The word that pops into my head is wrong but I'm going to say it anyway ... a rootless-ness. It's not a rootless-ness. It's a transplanted-ness. There's a-

Kurt Batdorf: 41:42 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 41:42 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Garth Stein: 41:43 It's different than New England. I lived in New York for a long time. So, I've experienced it. It's different in New England and other places in this country and Midwest and in the South, as well, where there are, at least, hundreds of years of history. Now, of course, all of that pales to writing a book in Barcelona, where there are thousands of years of history, right?

Kurt Batdorf: 42:05 True.

Garth Stein: 42:06 But here, we don't have hundreds of years here, in the Northwest. 1851, there were no white people here.

Kurt Batdorf: 42:13 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 42:13 1852, there were white people. That's it. I mean, you know when the clock starts. Therefore, Seattle seems, and the Northwest, in general, seem to attract people who sort of want to leave the ruts of tradition and of the culture of the East behind and come out here and sort of reinvent themselves. I think that there is a certain feeling about that here that I enjoy writing about.

Kurt Batdorf: 42:47 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 42:49 Yeah. That's an interesting-

Garth Stein: 42:50 Especially being descended from a family of immigrants.

Kurt Batdorf: 42:53 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 42:55 My father's parents moved here after fleeing World War I, from Austria.

Kurt Batdorf: 43:02 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 43:04 I don't have any long history. If I were some Mayflower family and my parents, my ancestors came here in the late 1500s or something like that, well, then I'd have a different way of writing about my home than I do. I didn't meet three out of four of my grandparents. They were already dead. Kind of, in a sense, I don't have that great ballast of history. Furthermore, the Klickitat side of my mother's family, it was illegal to speak Klickitat Indian, the native language. It was illegal to speak their native language when my mother was growing up.

Kurt Batdorf: 43:42 Wow.

Garth Stein: 43:42 When my mother grew up in Alaska, they had segregated classrooms. My grandmother refused to allow her children to be educated in the Indian classroom. She wanted them in the white classroom. That's her own issue.

Kurt Batdorf: 43:53 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 43:53 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 43:54 But the fact is that the culture of the Klickitat Indians was suppressed by the government and if you were caught speaking your native tongue, they would take you away and put you in an institution, what they called the institutions. Which would be government run boarding schools for children.

Kurt Batdorf: 44:10 Yeah. We had those. Those are were in Washington, for sure.

Jim Hills: 44:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Garth Stein: 44:14 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 44:15 I love the way you describe that. My question was really about the thinness, the shallowness of the, at least the white culture, here in the Seattle, in the Northwest, and how you look at that and turn that ... and look for what it does give you, what it does bring. Who are those people? What do they come with? That was really interesting. I really liked hearing that.

Kurt Batdorf: 44:44 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 44:47 All right. Write that down.

Kurt Batdorf: 44:48 Okay, we got that. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 44:50 I'm kidding.

Jim Hills: 44:51 Oh, no, Debra got it. She's a great note taker.

Kurt Batdorf: 44:54 So, Garth, who is your favorite race car driver?

Garth Stein: 45:02 Well, of course, I have to give props to Ayrton Senna. He's all over the book.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:06 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 45:07 I mean, you know that.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:07 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 45:08 That's Enzo's favorite driver. I mean, right now-

Kurt Batdorf: 45:14 And it can be living or past. Active or not.

Garth Stein: 45:21 I don't know. I've never actually given it that much thought. I've got to be honest with you. I mean, it'd have to be, really have to be ... When I was five, I would've said Mario Andretti.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:31 Uh, yeah. I would go with that, too.

Jim Hills: 45:36 I'm a Jim Clark fan.

Garth Stein: 45:38 Jim Clark?

Jim Hills: 45:39 Yeah. Jimmy Clark.

Garth Stein: 45:39 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:40 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 45:40 Drove for Lotus. Then-

Garth Stein: 45:44 For sure. I'm anxious to see this Ferrari versus Ford movie that's coming out.

Jim Hills: 45:47 Oh, yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:48 Yeah. I want to see that, too.

Jim Hills: 45:50 That could be good.

Kurt Batdorf: 45:51 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 45:52 It's based on a book, oddly, that they don't ... I don't know. I know the guy. I blurb'd the book. I'm friendly with A.J. Baime who wrote ... It's called Go Like Hell.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:02 Okay.

Garth Stein: 46:02 It's the title of the book. I don't know why they distanced themselves from it, with the movie. I'm not sure exactly why. But that era is pretty crazy, man.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:12 Yeah. Yeah.

Garth Stein: 46:13 I mean, think of all the great car makers ... Look at Ferrari. Enzo Ferrari himself. He raced.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:17 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 46:17 He was terrible but he did race.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:20 That's why I don't race.

Jim Hills: 46:21 Yeah, there'd you go.

Garth Stein: 46:25 There's some really ... I'm always a big fan of the champions who have overcome adversity, you know?

Kurt Batdorf: 46:36 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 46:36 You've got Nelson Piquet. Alex Zanardi.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:41 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 46:42 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:43 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 46:43 You know? He's still racing, that guy. He doesn't even have any legs.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:46 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 46:46 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:47 That's amazing.

Jim Hills: 46:48 Still gets in a car.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:49 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 46:50 We're talking about cars. We're talking about Art of Racing in the Rain. I want to get back and ask ... We're getting maybe close to the end, a couple more questions. But I want to ask a question about the characters as you set them up in your books. Because you have Enzo in Art of Racing in the Rain. In A Sudden Light, it seems like the ghost kind of brings on a similar kind of feel in the storyline.

Garth Stein: 47:15 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 47:16 In Raven Stole The Moon, there's why the mom goes back and the spirit of her child that she's maybe looking for.

Garth Stein: 47:26 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 47:27 Whether that kind of construction, that piece, helps you tell the story. Why you choose to do that in the stories? Is that a conscious choice?

Garth Stein: 47:40 I wouldn't say it was conscious.

Jim Hills: 47:40 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 47:40 I mean, clearly I'm grappling with something. I think that, again, what I'm fascinated by is the mystery of life and of the world.

Jim Hills: 47:54 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 47:54 I mean, I'm just fascinated by the magic that's out there that happens all the time. We, often, just dismiss it because our culture is so cynical, you know? We just say, "Oh, that's coincidence. That's an accident. That's a random chance. It's once in a million." When, in fact, I'm not sure that's true.

Jim Hills: 48:16 Right.

Garth Stein: 48:17 So I do like to grapple with that. So there's always that spiritual element of some kind-

Jim Hills: 48:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt Batdorf: 48:22 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 48:23 ... that I bring into it. I do it again in my new book, I realized. Then, there's also this ... There's just things that writers have little tells and little tics. Someone pointed out to me that there's always a Dickie character in my books. In A Sudden Light, there's Serena's questionable boyfriend, this money guy who's investing in real estate. He comes in and he has a presence but not really much action. He's only in like maybe one or two scenes. When he's there, he tries to act a certain way. There's a comic relief to it. I'm like, "Oh, yeah. There's the Dickie character." Well, he's a guy named Field in Raven Stole The Moon, he's the Dickie character. I guess it might be the lawyer in The Art of Racing in the Rain, in the book-

Kurt Batdorf: 49:18 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 49:18 ... not in the movie.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:19 Denny's lawyer?

Garth Stein: 49:21 Denny's lawyer, yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:22 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 49:22 He's coming on in. He's going to get things together. But he's pretty ineffective in what he's ... in a weird ... So, there's always a Dickie character. There certainly are patterns that I've gotten myself into. I try not to be conscious of them.

Jim Hills: 49:37 On the other hand, I would say that's one of the reasons that so many readers end up with authors that they love.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:43 True.

Jim Hills: 49:44 In the way you tell the story.

Garth Stein: 49:48 Yeah. That's a very good spin.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:51 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 49:54 I do marketing here. It's one of my jobs.

Garth Stein: 49:56 [crosstalk 00:49:56], stop writing the same book over and over again. All right.

Kurt Batdorf: 50:01 Well, okay. I guess, two last questions.

Kurt Batdorf: 50:03 Your Spec Miata career came to an abrupt halt, in the rain, correct?

Garth Stein: 50:10 That's true.

Kurt Batdorf: 50:12 So, what happened that you were able to take The Art of Racing in the Rain and learning to drive on the eggshells? How did it not work?

Garth Stein: 50:24 How did the racing not work?

Kurt Batdorf: 50:26 Well, I guess, what ... I guess sort of what led up to the accident?

Garth Stein: 50:30 Yeah, yeah.

Garth Stein: 50:31 What happened was I was racing a bunch. I really enjoyed it. But nobody else around me did. My family wouldn't come to the track with me.

Kurt Batdorf: 50:38 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 50:39 My kids didn't care. I was going off on these three day weekends, you know, all-

Kurt Batdorf: 50:44 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 50:44 ... summer long to race by myself. I was like, "I kind of want to be with my kids, man."

Kurt Batdorf: 50:51 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 50:51 So, as I say, we don't necessarily recognize our own situation, when we're in it, or see the clarity of things until we get through it.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:00 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 51:01 What I thought was I would ... I was going to sell my car and then do what they call Arrive and Drive, meaning I don't have to maintain my own car-

Kurt Batdorf: 51:08 You rent a car, at the track.

Garth Stein: 51:11 Right.

Garth Stein: 51:11 So, the last race before I was going to sell off my car ... I had already made the deal with the guy and everything ... that's when I put my car into the wall.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:21 Ah.

Garth Stein: 51:22 Was that my subconscious telling me, "No, you should just quit racing altogether. Enough of this trying to mediate it,"? I don't know. It probably, if I had had clarity, I probably would have said, "You know, today's not a good day to race."

Kurt Batdorf: 51:42 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 51:42 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt Batdorf: 51:42 But you didn't know that, at the time.

Garth Stein: 51:43 I didn't do that.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:43 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 51:44 I didn't know that until I was going backwards, 100 miles an hour, into a Jersey barrier.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:52 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 51:52 It was not cool.

Garth Stein: 51:53 But then I was like, "Okay, that makes sense. I've got that."

Kurt Batdorf: 51:56 Huh.

Garth Stein: 51:58 "I'm out."

Kurt Batdorf: 51:58 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 51:59 I should have seen that coming.

Garth Stein: 52:01 The thing is though, it's such a fun sport. I really, really do love it. What else I do is I respect it.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:08 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 52:09 I know you cannot be a front runner if you're not taking it 100% seriously, with all of your time and all of your energy and all of your resources.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:16 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 52:17 Just like anything else, really.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:18 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 52:19 So, I couldn't devote myself to that. It made sense, then, that I would be a middle of the pack guy instead of a front runner. I'm too competitive. I want to be a front runner, you know?

Kurt Batdorf: 52:29 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 52:30 There you go.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:30 Let's see. Okay. One last question.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:32 Is Miata always the answer?

Garth Stein: 52:38 Um, it can be, yeah. It certainly can be. I mean, Miata's such a great car. I remember when the book first came out, I got a call from Jim Jordan is his name. A guy who was, at the time, working for Mazda Speed, their racing division.

Kurt Batdorf: 52:58 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 52:59 He said, "Hey, everybody here has read your book and we love it." He said, "I just know that you must race because nobody writes a book like that without having some track time."

Kurt Batdorf: 53:10 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 53:10 "So, what's the deal?" I said, "As a matter of fact, everything I learned about racing, I learned in a Miata."

Kurt Batdorf: 53:16 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 53:17 He said, "Can we put that on a billboard?" I said sure. They actually put me in a factory race. They said, "Well, we want to do a promotional stunt. We're going to put you in an X5 Cup car." They have a ladder series. Monster runs a ladder series. The first level is the MX5. They put me in that. In the SCCA, Sports Car Club of America, is the big sanctioning body. I was doing Club Racing, they call it. It's all amateur stuff. Then, there's SCCA Pro Racing.

Kurt Batdorf: 53:54 Right.

Garth Stein: 53:55 The race they put me in was a pro race. What I learned quickly is that the difference between Pro Racing and Club Racing is that all the people that I can beat, they aren't in the Pro Series.

Jim Hills: 54:09 That's a big lesson.

Garth Stein: 54:09 There were 24 cars in the race-

Kurt Batdorf: 54:11 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 54:11 ... that I was in. I finished 22nd.

Kurt Batdorf: 54:14 Well, that's not dead last.

Garth Stein: 54:16 I would like to thank those two drivers for crashing.

Kurt Batdorf: 54:20 Oh.

Jim Hills: 54:20 There you go.

Jim Hills: 54:22 Well, so, I don't want to call Kurt a liar but there is one last question we have to ask all of our guests. That is, do you have a memorable library experience? If you think about libraries, how have libraries played a part in your life?

Garth Stein: 54:38 Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Garth Stein: 54:39 Well, sure. I've got two. There's a tie. My favorite library memory was back when I was a kid. I must have been like eight or nine years old. We would eat our dinner in the kitchen up there, in Shoreline. There'd be some debate would come up about something. I don't know what it was. Imagine just an argument over a fact.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:04 Right.

Garth Stein: 55:05 Those there the days ... I don't know if you guys recall this. Remember those days there was no Internet.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:10 I dimly recall that time.

Jim Hills: 55:12 And there was this thing called an encyclopedia.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:14 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 55:15 There was an encyclopedia. But you know what else there was? A reference desk.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:19 Ooh, that's right.

Jim Hills: 55:19 Ooh.

Garth Stein: 55:21 My mother ... During dinner, my mother would leap up from the table, rush to the phone, and dial the Seattle Public Library reference desk. And ask the question ... She would talk to somebody at the reference desk. She would ask them a question. Then she'd hang up. 10 minutes later, the phone would ring with the answer.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:39 Wow.

Jim Hills: 55:40 That's awesome.

Garth Stein: 55:41 I was always really impressed with that. I always thought that library, that's got a lot of power.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:48 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 55:49 My second memory of library stuff would be when I was in high school, at Shorewood. Shorewood.

Kurt Batdorf: 55:58 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 56:00 There was a great librarian there. She knew that I loved my English classes and I read a lot and everything else. She would always pull me aside. I would go study during lunch or something. I'd be leaving the library. She would say, "Hey, come here, come here. This book just came in. I want you to have it first."

Kurt Batdorf: 56:17 Nice.

Jim Hills: 56:17 That's beautiful.

Kurt Batdorf: 56:19 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 56:20 Could I remember her name? No. Could I remember any of the books? Probably, if I work really hard. But still, it was a real ... Librarians do what they do because they have a passion for the written word. I don't believe I've ever met a librarian who does his or her work to get rich quick.

Jim Hills: 56:42 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 56:42 No.

Garth Stein: 56:42 It's so great when you get to connect with somebody who have a true passion for what they do and just does nothing but want to share with other people.

Jim Hills: 56:53 And can support your own, right?

Kurt Batdorf: 56:55 Right.

Garth Stein: 56:56 Yeah, exactly.

Kurt Batdorf: 56:57 Well, Garth, it's been a delight talking to you. I think we're going to wrap this up now.

Jim Hills: 57:03 Thank you so much for your time.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:04 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 57:05 We can keep going if you guys want to come down here and spend the night. We'll just talk forever.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:09 I'd do that.

Jim Hills: 57:11 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:11 I'd do that.

Jim Hills: 57:11 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 57:12 Can you do an overnight podcast?

Kurt Batdorf: 57:18 Maybe. I mean, if we can do the remote by phone, here, I'm sure I can call it in and have Debra do the engineering up here.

Jim Hills: 57:24 Yeah. There you go.

Garth Stein: 57:25 See. See.

Jim Hills: 57:25 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:25 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 57:27 Maybe you can do it driving around in Kurt's Miata.

Garth Stein: 57:31 With the top down.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:32 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 57:33 Kind do like a Jay Leno thing.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:35 Yeah.

Garth Stein: 57:35 There you go.

Jim Hills: 57:37 All right. Thanks so much.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:39 Hey, thanks again, Garth.

Garth Stein: 57:40 Oh, my pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

Jim Hills: 57:50 Well, Kurt, that was amazing time with Garth Stein. I really-

Kurt Batdorf: 57:53 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 57:54 ... really enjoyed it.

Kurt Batdorf: 57:55 That was just awesome. He's funny.

Jim Hills: 57:57 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 57:58 He kind of offered to have you over for a slumber party, in Ballard. I think you should take him up on it. I'd go along, too, just because it would be so much fun to talk to that guy.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:06 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:07 I think I've got a connection now. I think I might take advantage of it, if I can.

Jim Hills: 58:11 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 58:13 What I loved was listening to him talk about ... Well, talking about cars. But I really wanted to hear about his writing-

Kurt Batdorf: 58:22 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 58:22 ... and what he cares about and what he's trying to do with his writing.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:25 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:26 He left a lot there.

Jim Hills: 58:28 Yeah. That was cool.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:31 And I really liked the fact that he spent so much time talking about the emotions that go into his writing, too.

Jim Hills: 58:38 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 58:40 Art of Racing in the Rain, everybody thinks it's a car and a dog movie. But, for him, it's all of the interactions-

Kurt Batdorf: 58:48 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 58:49 ... with the dog, with the other people, the other characters. He talked about how he builds that-

Kurt Batdorf: 58:55 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 58:57 It's got a lot of layers going on through it.

Jim Hills: 58:59 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 58:59 It's clear that he thinks about that, too-

Kurt Batdorf: 59:02 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 59:02 ... as he's building his story.

Kurt Batdorf: 59:03 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 59:03 And then he calls himself a storyteller, you know?

Kurt Batdorf: 59:05 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 59:05 He's done films. He's done documentaries. He's done books. But he calls himself a storyteller.

Kurt Batdorf: 59:10 I like that, yeah.

Jim Hills: 59:11 Clearly, that's ... He's good at that.

Kurt Batdorf: 59:13 Yeah. It came through.

Jim Hills: 59:14 Yeah. That was fun.

Kurt Batdorf: 59:15 It was fun. Let's do it again.

Speaker 2: 59:18 If you enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe so you can receive every episode, automatically. And until next time, remember your library has a lot to offer you. So, what are you waiting for? Check it out.