

Questions and Answers

- 1) It's been noted that you possess '... one of the boldest and most entertaining voices writing legal thrillers today.' So, how does that sit with you and how big a smile does it create?!

It's flattering and honestly, the smile is awfully big, but I also realize this is a business in which you're only as good as your last book. You have to produce each time and that's what I'm striving to do. I want every book to be better than the book before.

- 2) Regarding your debut novel 'The Jury Master,' your main character sets out to solve a murder purposely cast as a suicide. Along the way he also just might expose a 30-year conspiracy that could extend as far as the Oval Office and topple a presidency. Please tell us where this creative idea first originated and to what lengths you had to travel to ensure accuracy within its more political aspects.

Actually the first idea started innocently enough. I heard an attorney in court who seemed to have this incredible ability to really hold the jury's attention. It was captivating, and I thought to myself "My God, imagine if you could really get the jury to do what you wanted?" That led me to research people who are said to have that gift. They're called different things in different cultures, but shaman is the main word. Then I started to think about the tremendous morale and ethical problems that would pose to an attorney with a conscience, like a David Sloane. From there I put Sloane in the worst kind of ethical dilemma - defending amoral companies in cases in which somebody was wrongfully killed.

The idea for the second story line came from the Vincent Foster incident. I just started wondering, what if a personal friend of the President found dead hadn't really committed suicide. From there I began to blend the two plots together from there.

I did a lot of research for all my books, like The Cyanide Canary. On The Jury Master I spent a lot of time trying to understand the oil embargo of the 1970s and the history of Mexico and its oil. It was really interesting but there was actually an awful lot of research that never went into the book.

- 3) Having placed yourself in the spotlight for speaking engagements, I'm wondering what it is you speak about - the legal system in general or writing books about it?

I actually speak about the journey. I keep a small sign on my desk that says "enjoy the journey." For so long I didn't enjoy what I was doing. There were good days, but for 12 years I was really just going through the motions of being a lawyer. When I started doing theater, and writing again, I realized you can't do that with your life. This is our one chance to make a mark. This is our chance to enjoy what we do. I didn't want to look back and realize I'd never pursued my dreams. Now I try to enjoy every day and remind myself how blessed I am.

- 4) I found 'The Jury Master' a quite astounding read with regard its writing style and information, but do you have any fears for the reader when it comes to the more complex, more expansive legal, political aspects of the writing style?

My goal was to create interesting characters the all readers would sympathize with and put them in a compelling plot that would challenge their moral integrity. I think all readers can identify with David Sloane and Tom Molia and Charles Jenkins. As for the more complex issues, readers are intelligent and smarter than we give them credit for

sometimes. If they like the characters I think they'll live through those complex moments with them and find out things as the character finds out.

- 4) Having first opted for law school as the career path to take, you've stated that three weeks into your very first year you knew it was a mistake! What gave it away for you and more importantly, what inner strength enabled you to tough your way through three years, toiling further at the profession for twelve years?!

I was in the hallway and suddenly people in my class were in suits interviewing for jobs. Interviewing for jobs? We'd been in school three weeks. We didn't know anything. But that was sort of the problem. I found a lot of the people in law school suddenly believed they did know everything and were eager to show it off. There was very little humility. People began to judge you by your grades and how much your job was going to pay.

I took great comfort in a close group of friends, like Charles Jenkins - a great group of people who didn't take themselves or law school too seriously. They really helped me get through. When I graduated, that was what I looked for in a law firm, and I was fortunate to find it at Gordon & Rees in San Francisco. It was a great group of people who worked hard, were very bright, and were very good lawyers, but never took themselves too seriously. They maintained their compassion and created, for me, a sense of family. Not so ironically, I looked for and found that in my literary agent, Meg Ruley, at the Jane Rotrosen Agency.

Quitting was never an option. I'm from a family of ten kids, all admitted overachievers and I never let myself quit something I start. I'm a plugger. Or maybe I'm stubborn. I just keep putting one foot forward.

- 6) With two published books and a third under contract, you've also stated that you hardly feel qualified to comment on writing, but that you've made your fair share of writing mistakes along the way. Mistakes such as ...?!

Where do I begin? Probably the biggest mistake was the belief that having a background as a writer qualified me to write novels. It doesn't. It's like someone who can sing thinking they can sing opera. It takes a lot of training and education to learn how to write novels. There is a story structure that is unique to novels and it is an art to weave characters into that plot structure. I'm still learning, and Meg tells me when I'm hitting and missing the mark. She is the best.

- 7) I happened across one of the only Amazon.com customer reviews in creating these questions, and they had written: "*The plot zooms out of control and becomes silly and irrelevant. Any more comments are not worth the effort. The book was a big disappointment.*" As I do not agree with this, I do however wonder if such vibrant, yet naive shows of damning inflict mental harm upon you, as 'The Jury Master' reviews are each and every one brought to your attention?

I hadn't seen that one until I read this question. I'd be lying if I said at this point in my career that the reviews don't sting a bit, though I've been fortunate to dodge any real nasty ones. But I'm also not 21 years old. I'm 45 and I've experienced dark days and woke up the next morning to realize that life goes on with or without us. So I have a bit more experience to draw on and to help me realize that it is just one person's opinion. When you put yourself in the public domain its foolish to think everyone is going to like your work. There are a lot better writers than me who have been ripped by critics and

readers. I remember reading something Stephen King said about never writing with anyone on your shoulder or your writing will lose its honesty. I write what I feel. I try to write honestly, and I am my biggest critic. No one can be harder on me than me. If the words don't resonate with me, that's when I worry.

8) Finally, are you working on your next book and if so, have you a title stashed away at the back of your locked desk drawer that you could perhaps unveil for us today?!

Yes. The next novel is set in Seattle. Dana Hill is a successful attorney in a bad marriage and bad job whose brother is murdered in what appears to be a robbery gone bad. She won't let it go, however, and in trying to find justice for her brother, she also must find herself. The title is *Damage Control*. I'm also working on a novel that will bring back David Sloane and I'm very excited about both.