

Author Q&A

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Q. What was the spark that inspired you to write *Sudden Impact*?

A. I was intrigued by the idea of hit and run accidents, which are on the increase, and what would happen if someone who has led a pretty decent life, like Judge Frank Stevenson in my novel, made a very bad split second decision in a hit and run situation. He's a good judge, father, and husband who does charity work, but his panicked reaction escalates to the point of involving his family in a complex cover-up.

Q. *Sudden Impact* brings back two characters—police detectives Terry Nye and Rose Tafoya—that appeared in earlier books. Why did you choose to resurrect them?

A. *Sudden Impact* is the third novel featuring Nye and Tafoya. The first is *Pressure Point* followed by *The Bribe*. The earlier books are stand-alone novels. I never thought I could do series characters, but these two people just captivated me and I enjoyed being in their company, watching them, listening in to their arguments and conversations—it's been a revelation to me as a writer. I'm now working on what will be the fourth Nye and Tafoya novel, *Hymns and Anthems*. Rose genuinely likes and admires Nye, and he reciprocates, but the tension between them is his experience and cynicism colliding with her more foursquare approach to life, family, and the law.

Q. Are your books inspired by real life cases and people you've worked with?

A. They are to some degree. It would be hard not to have certain cases or personalities provide impetus for rich storytelling. I was compelled, however, to move into nonfiction with *The Bone Garden*, which is the definitive story of female killer Dorothea Puente. When I was a prosecutor I sent her to prison for five years for a series of crimes involving drugging and robbing elderly men and women, sometimes when she masqueraded as a live-in nurse. After she had been out of prison for three years, I was horrified to learn that bodies were being dug up in her yard on a main street that was six blocks away from the Sacramento District Attorney's office. Puente had vanished at that point and there was a nationwide manhunt to capture her for trial. She was eventually convicted on three counts of murder without the possibility of parole. She died in prison several years ago. *The Bone Garden* was difficult to write because I was involved in her case before she became a serial killer. Novels are a lot less nerve-racking than true crime.

Q. Many of your legal thrillers revolve around judges rather than lawyers. Why this particular fascination?

A. Through my experience as a prosecutor in California, I have many friends who are now judges. The central paradox and tension in *Sudden Impact* is that Judge Frank Stevenson is presiding over a criminal case at the same time he is frantically trying to cover up his own crime, blackmailing his father-in-law to participate in the cover-up, getting deeper and deeper into not just a moral abyss but flat out criminal acts. He's a judge who must uphold the law and he is compelled, he believes, to break it. My earlier novel *Court of Honor* (which was filmed as "Broken Trust" with Tom Selleck) is about a judge who gets involved in a federal sting operation. Both characters must deal with great moral conflicts.

Q. What new projects do you have in the works?

A. In addition to finishing *Hymns and Anthems*, I'm excited that my entire backlist has been acquired by Turner Publishing with one title being reissued monthly, in both paperback and e-book editions, from May through December of 2014. This is exciting for me because readers of *Sudden Impact*, who are unfamiliar with my previous books, will now have access to those older titles. Having all my books back in print in different formats is a good thing.

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