AN INTERVIEW WITH

H. Terrell Griffin, author of *Bitter Legacy*

Tell us a little about yourself, how and when you started writing.

I grew up in the small town of Sanford in Central Florida near Orlando. I enlisted in the Army at age 17 and after three years of active duty earned degrees in history and law from Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. I was board certified in civil trial by the Florida Bar and practiced in Orlando for many years. My wife and I have three grown children and two grandchildren. We divide our time between homes in an Orlando suburb and an island off the Southwest coast of Florida, Longboat Key.

What inspired you to write your novel?

There was no great bolt of inspiration, other than living on a beautiful island in the Gulf of Mexico. I have been a reader all my life and always wanted to write. I discovered the mystery genre when I first read John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee novel, *The Deep Blue Goodbye*, while a college student. I set my stories in and around Longboat Key, and try to convey to the reader the beauty of my part of the world, and at the same time provide a crackling good mystery that is fast moving and attention grabbing.

How did you use your life experience or professional background to enrich your story?

Matt Royal, the protagonist in all my books, is a retired lawyer. My first book, Longboat Blues, was a legal thriller, but the books that followed are more straight line mystery/thrillers in which Matt is trying to outthink and overcome the bad buys. Matt has not entered the courtroom since the first book, but he cannot escape the fact that he is a lawyer and a man of the law. My Army experiences add to the bonds among soldiers that I try to explain and bring to life.

Anything autobiographical in your novel?

Not really. Matt Royal, the protagonist, sometimes muses about life and its foibles, about human frailty, the practice of law, good versus evil and the enduring bonds forged between soldiers. I guess those musings reflect my own thoughts, but I'm certainly no Matt Royal. He's a heroic character and I'm your basic chicken.

Are any characters based on people you know?

Quite a number of them are. The two other main characters in the books are based loosely on two of my best friends. A number of the minor characters are also based on friends from my days in the practice of law and those who inhabit my slice of paradise, Longboat Key.

Would you say that your novel is more plot driven or character driven?

I hope is it both. I want my characters to be believable, to be people that the reader can identify with and would like to get to know. At the same time, I think the plot has to move at a rapid pace, be multi-layered and plausible. If I can do that, then I have succeeded in writing the kind of novel I enjoy reading.

Who is your favorite or most sympathetic character? And why?

I think my favorite character is Jock Algren because he is a bit mysterious. He's Matt's best friend and always shows up when needed. He's a tough guy with a good heart. His background is murky. We only know that he does things for our government that need to be done, dangerous things that include taking out our enemies. He is loyal to those he loves or owes. His lifelong friendship with Matt means that he will do anything to take care of Matt and help him out when he is needed.

Who is your least sympathetic character? And why?

That varies from book to book. I try to paint my bad guys so that they are unsympathetic, but not just deep-in-the-gut bad. They all have some redeeming value. They are often people who have been led to their present lives by some event, in one case a weird religiosity imposed on a schizophrenic personality. Another was a military hero done in by the horror he witnessed in war, a third a man trying to protect his empire.

What part of writing your book did you find the most challenging?

Keeping all the lines of the plot together. I want my plots to be layered, but not to the extent that the reader gets lost. At some point, near the end of the book, all the threads of the plot have to come together as the protagonist solves the mystery.

What do you hope that readers will take away from you book?

I hope the readers will like the characters and enjoy the descriptive parts of the book. I hope they will find the mystery enthralling and the writing up to their standards. If a reader finishes one of my books and says to himself or herself, "Wow. I enjoyed that ride," then I have done my job.

How do you dial up the tension to keep your readers on the edge of their seats?

I think this is where the layers of the mystery come in. I try to throw up new situations that the reader doesn't expect, lay a few red herrings along the way and keep the story moving at a fast pace. I want the reader to be wondering who are the bad guys and why are they doing whatever it is that they're doing. I want the reader to keep turning the pages to find out the answers.

What writers have inspired you?

John D. MacDonald, James Lee Burke, Randy Wayne White, Michael Connelly, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Pat Conroy

What is the writing process like for you?

An absolute pleasure. I'm able to let my mind wander as the characters take on a life of their own. I never know when I sit down at my computer where the characters will take the story that day. Sometimes, when I'm writing, it's like I'm reading someone else's work because the characters surprise me every day.

What is the best piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

If you want to be a writer, put your butt in a chair and start writing.

What is the worst piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

I don't think I've actually every received any bad advice.

What's next for you? Any new books in the pipeline

Bitter Legacy releases in December 2010, and I have submitted another manuscript to my publisher, Oceanview Publishing. I've tentatively entitled this next one *Collateral Damage*, which should be published in the fall of 2011. I haven't started on book 7 in the Matt Royal series yet, but I will get onto that in the next two or three months.

Any final words you would like to say about yourself, your novel, or life in general?

Life is good. Writing is fun. I'm happy.