

# AN INTERVIEW WITH

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**Don Bruns, author of *South Beach Shakedown***

**Mick Sever, the protagonist in both *Jamaica Blue* and *Barbados Heat*, returns in *South Beach Shakedown*. What prompted you to bring Mick back?**

Unlike so many protagonists who are thrown into a world of harsh reality, Sever lives in a fantasy world -- the world of super rich entertainers and hedonistic lifestyles. It's fun to fantasize and play with that image. And of course it always comes crashing down, but there's still that life that most of us can only dream about.

**You write knowledgeably about the music industry, Are you an industry insider? What is your connection?**

I was on the road as an entertainer for a number of years. I found out early on that there is an opportunity for corruption, manipulation, and graft unlike any other industry. Read stories of Sinatra, or soul singer Jackie Wilson, or recently Michael Jackson or Phil Spector. These people start to believe that there are no rules for them. And sometimes they're right.

***South Beach Shakedown* focuses on music icon Gideon Pike. While Gideon is a fictional character, there are elements about him that may remind readers of other musicians. Who, if anyone, is Gideon based on?**

There's a disclaimer in the front of any fiction book that says these characters are not based on anyone living or dead. However...if you had to see a similarity in Gideon Pike to a living musician I suppose there might be a resemblance to Elton John. Might be.

**Is Mick autobiographical in any way? How are you like, and unlike, Mick?**

I think that every character I write about is autobiographical. I'm not Mick Sever, but part of me wants to be. I'm not Jimmy Shinn, Gideon Pike or even Ginny (Mick's ex), but I know some of me is in each one of them.

**How did you get the idea for the plot of *South Beach Shakedown*?**

In the fifties, singer Jackie Wilson was blackmailed by a group of men who were involved in organized crime. They took most of his earnings, and there's even a story about how they held him by the heels from the balcony of a high-rise hotel until he agreed to their demands. I've thought about that story for years.

**Start-to-finish, how long does it take you to write a novel? What is the process?**

About 8 months. I need a sense of location. Geography is important. I've had some really good reviews about my sense of place. I think you get a feel for actually visiting Miami and South Beach in *South Beach Shakedown*. It takes about 8 months to complete a novel. If I can knock out three or four pages three times a week, two or three hours at a time, I have a book in 8 months.

**Your books typically involve warm, beachy locales. What is your connection to these areas?**

I love the water. I love the sunshine. I love the beaches. Some people live for snow skiing, crisp falls and warm fireplaces. I just want a hot beach and a cold rum drink.

**In writing about the music industry, do you embellish? Do you think the music industry is really corrupt?**

I know the music industry is corrupt. As Jimmy Shinn says in *South Beach Shakedown*, "It's a license to steal." Record companies don't report accurate sales to recording artists, movie studios constantly under report numbers. Every week an actor, an artist, a manager, or an agent is suing a major label, studio, network or someone for millions of dollars. The industry is ripe with white collar crime, and then you've got the entertainers who are involved in drugs, sex, and even murder. Every single scheme or scam that Jimmy Shinn is involved with in *South Beach Shakedown* is grounded in reality.

**Mick has a rather unusual relationship with his ex-wife Ginny. What was your reasoning behind including the ex-wife in South Beach Shakedown?**

Ginny has been in all three Mick Sever books. She brings some sense and reason into his life. She also causes a lot of sexual tension. I do think that she will stay home in the next book. Mick's got to try to solve some problems on his own.

**Are any of the other characters in South Beach Shakedown based on people you know?**

I actually have a friend named Tom Biddle, who owns the condo that Gideon Pike lives in on Biscayne Bay. Biddle plays Pike's manager in the book. And Gideon Pike is the combination of the last names of a wonderful couple I know, Jim Gideon and Anne Pike. I've always wanted to combine those names. Gideon Pike just has a superstar ring to it.

**I understand you had a rather unusual introduction to the publishing industry. Can you explain the circumstances leading up to the publication of your first novel?**

Sue Grafton actually read my first novel, sent me an eight-page critique and told me to throw the manuscript away and start over! She read the second novel, (I did listen well to her suggestions) and announced to a Bouchercon audience in Washington D.C. that "Don Bruns has a really good manuscript and somebody needs to publish it." St. Martin's Press was there, and they asked for the manuscript. Within a month, I had a contract.

**Do you have plans to bring back Mick Sever or any of the other characters in South Beach Shakedown? What is the next project you have in the works?**

I've got an anthology that I'm editing, with 13 authors who have written a short mystery and recorded a song to accompany it. This will be released in September. I'm going to St. Barts in another month so I can research the next Sever novel. I can only picture Mick coming back in this one. It's time for new faces.