

## AN INTERVIEW WITH

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**Sharon Potts, author of *Someone's Watching***

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

Would you believe it? I once lived in a world of numbers, finance, and pinstriped suits. More surprising than that, I actually enjoyed my various careers as a CPA, business executive, and entrepreneur. But several years ago I retired from the business world and had the opportunity to return to my first love—writing. It wasn't as strange a transition as it sounds. I've been writing for as far back as I can remember—stories, plays; writing was what I did to entertain myself. Now I have the opportunity to entertain others.

### **What inspired you to write *Someone's Watching*?**

My debut novel, *IN THEIR BLOOD*, is a story about a disillusioned young man, Jeremy Stroeb, whose parents have been murdered in their own home, and Jeremy's quest to find the killer by getting on the inside of their lives. In the process, Jeremy discovers his parents were not the people he always believed them to be, but also comes to terms with who he is. I had not intended to write a sequel. After all, how many terrible, tragic things can happen to one person? But I loved the world Jeremy lived in—the seduction, escapism, and corruption of Miami and South Beach.

In *SOMEONE'S WATCHING*, I return to South Beach, this time through the eyes of Robbie Ivy, the young woman who has aided Jeremy in searching for his own parents. As in my debut, the primary theme of *SOMEONE'S WATCHING* is family and relationships. Robbie's estranged father shows up one Sunday morning to tell Robbie that her kid sister has disappeared on South Beach while on spring break. Oblivious to the risks she's exposing herself and loved ones to, Robbie decides to search for her sister in a glitzy, corrupt society that will kill for profit. But *SOMEONE'S WATCHING* is also about Robbie's search for closure in unfulfilled relationships—with an absent father, overprotective mother, now deceased, and a sister that Robbie's never known, and may not get the opportunity to.

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

I live in South Beach and have had the opportunity to experience it myself, as well as see it from the perspective of my two kids, both in their twenties. South Beach is a wonderfully complex environment; it's a beautiful Eden-like place to live, but it's also a seductive lure for tourists and young people and those who prey on them.

### **Are any characters based on people you know?**

My characters are composites of people I've known, but no character is based on one specific person.

### **Would you say that *Someone's Watching* is more plot driven or character driven?**

I enjoy writing about people—how their behavior is formed by past events and relationships and how they react to the difficult situations I place them in. My goal is to create characters that resonate and who will remain in the reader's mind long after he or she has finished the book. That said, the characters in *SOMEONE'S WATCHING* are pulled along by a taut thread. The plot is fast-moving and suspenseful and the characters are continually challenged by difficult circumstances and choices.

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

Of course, I love Robbie. She's twenty-five and has learned to be tough and self-sufficient even after losing both her parents at an early age. But Robbie's also wounded. After being deserted by her father and watching her mother suffer then die from cancer, Robbie's afraid of long-term relationships and commitments. For her, the search for her sister is more than throwing herself into a dangerous, threatening world. It also represents Robbie's struggle to overcome her childhood demons and fears.

### **Who is your least sympathetic character? And why?**

I try to make my characters complex with some redeeming quality, even if they have an agenda that's harmful to the protagonist. Robbie's new boyfriend, Brett Chandler, is a cocky, arrogant kid, but at the same time he has qualities that make him attractive to Robbie. While he's not particularly likeable, there is a vulnerability about him, which makes him sympathetic.

### **What part of writing *Someone's Watching* did you find the most challenging?**

I had a difficult time creating the villain. I believe that the antagonist should be a fully fleshed-out character with a strong purpose that just happens to be at odds with my protagonist's quest. The more sympathetic the antagonist, the more interesting the final confrontation with the protagonist is. I found myself reworking the villain in *SOMEONE'S WATCHING* several times to make the character as human and interesting as I could. I believe I've succeeded in creating an unexpected, exciting, and satisfying ending when Robbie finally realizes who her greatest threat is.

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

As *SOMEONE'S WATCHING* progresses, I continue to raise the stakes for Robbie. First, her sister is missing, then her sister's friend is found dead. The more involved Robbie becomes in finding Kate, the more she puts herself in danger. More people die and even Jeremy, the young man Robbie loves, is threatened as the police suspect him of the murders.

### **What writers have inspired you?**

In recent years, I've been inspired by authors who write powerful, realistic characters and strong plots like Barbara Parker, Michael Connelly, C.J. Box, and P.J. Parrish. I also love the exquisite prose of Tana French. My inspirations going back to my youth have been Daphne Du Maurier and Emily and Charlotte Bronte, all masters of suspense and psychologically complex characters.

### **What is the writing process like for you?**

I start with an idea and a short, general outline of the plot. I don't create elaborate back stories for my characters. I find I learn a great deal about them as they interact with their circumstances. Often, when I discover something new about my characters, I go back to the beginning of the book and flesh out the character. I rarely sit down to write without having some understanding of what I want to accomplish in the next chapter. I often work out my plots and character interactions when I take my dog for a walk. Some days, Gidget goes on many, many walks.

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

Master the craft. There are so many elements a novelist has to get right to create a memorable, well-constructed novel—plotting, character development, and beautiful writing. It's almost impossible to get everything right your first time through, so be prepared to revise, then revise, then revise.

### **What do you hope that readers will take away from *Someone's Watching*?**

A friend of mine, who admitted to being "not much of a reader," told me a story about my first novel. She said that she started reading *IN THEIR BLOOD* out of a sense of obligation. But after reading a few pages, she found it difficult to put the book down. When she realized she had only a few pages left to read, she slowed down because she didn't want the book to end. She finished the book and called me to find out when she could read the sequel.

That's what I hope readers will take away from all of my novels. A feeling of regret that a wonderful experience has come to an end, and the desire to begin the next one.