

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID PUTNAM about *The Replacements*

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

I started my first novel when I was ten. It was a sci-fi time-travel-western. I wrote about forty handwritten pages before other childhood interests pulled me away. As a junior in high school, I wrote an organized crime novel with a love interest exactly like a girl I was dating at the time. After high school I fell in love with being cop and didn't write again for another twenty years. Although, according to my fellow uniformed compatriots, most of my police reports were works of short fiction.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

I was working a surveillance out in Lucerne Valley, flat desolate desert. We were watching a meth lab. When not on point, the chase cars could do what they wanted, as long as we were immediately available to the radio in case the suspect went mobile. Some detectives watched portable TVs in their cars, some played softball and others just hung out. I always kept five or six books in my backseat for these types of investigations. I came down to my last novel and started to read it. It didn't hold my attention. I thought: *I can do better!* So with a yellow pad and pencil I penned my first four novels, and found it much more difficult than I'd thought.

HOW DID YOU USE YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE OR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO ENRICH YOUR STORY?

I often weave real events into my writing: crimes, investigations, pursuits, shootings, and observations of what callous, uncaring, and morally bankrupt humans can do to good humans.

ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

The inciting event in *The Replacements* is a fictionalization of an incident I witnessed early in my career, one steeped in emotion, and ugly in its description in how children are sometimes treated.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

I did not fashion any of my characters after any one person I met or worked with, they're more an amalgamation of many. I would take an attribute—a language tic, a voice, a point of view, that sort of thing—from many different people, and mold them to fit into one.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR NOVEL IS MORE PLOT-DRIVEN OR CHARACTER-DRIVEN?

I believe story is not story—character is story. So, if I did my job correctly, then my story is character-driven.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER?

The protagonist Bruno Johnson because he is so flawed. He started out as a deputy trying to do the right thing and was led down the wrong path. He was unable to catch the criminals by following the rules. He is a knight errant, with a noble cause. Morally correct? Definitely legally wrong.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Jonas Mabry. He's kidnapped two children in order to further his mentally deficient cause.

WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

Getting all the moving parts to fit with continuity and in such a way that makes sense. And keeping Bruno's voice consistent.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR BOOK?

I would hope the reader would take away a feeling of realism—in the setting, the emotions of the character, and a sense of what it's like to work the streets in the bounds of flawed law enforcement. I would hope that the reader enjoyed the journey he or she took with Bruno as he evolves through the overarching conflict.

HOW DO YOU DIAL UP THE TENSION TO KEEP YOUR READERS ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEATS?

I was taught to pay close attention to the four C's while crafting a scene: Conflict, Complication, Crisis, Conclusion. I never end the scene on the fourth C. Whenever possible, I end the chapter at the beginning or the peak of the third C: Crisis. If done correctly, this applies pressure that will automatically pull the reader along. Another method I employ is, during action scenes, I chop the sentence structure, use fragments if necessary, anything to make the text run faster. I'm also very careful to keep the "Hooptedoodle" out--something I learned from Elmore Leonard.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

John D. Macdonald, John Sanford, Ross MacDonald, Walter Mosley, Scott Phillips, Vicki Hendricks, Jim Thompson, James Ellroy, Elmore Leonard, and more.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

When buried waist-deep in a novel, I like to write a thousand words a day. This is a minimum, it's usually fifteen hundred to two thousand, never over two thousand because the prose suffers. I start each day by going back and editing the last twenty pages before starting on the new day's thousand words. In this way, I circle back on the old stuff for a number of days. It also reacquaints me with the voice and tone, which I believe is critical before I start on the new stuff.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

Mark Clement gave it to me in one of my first writing classes twenty years ago. At the start of the class he wrote in big letters on the board, "Perseverance." You have to have perseverance or you'll never make it. The second most important piece of advice: Never confuse the reader.

WHAT IS THE WORST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

None.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY NEW BOOKS IN THE PIPELINE?

I am working on the sequel *to The Replacements*, working title: *The Squandered*.