

## A CONVERSATION WITH CARTER WILSON about *THE COMFORT OF BLACK*

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

I started writing about twelve years ago. It was a bit serendipitous. I was taking a continuing-education class for work and was bored out of my skull, so I started sketching out an idea for a story. Really something just to engage my mind to make it to the end of the day. Three months later I had a 400-page manuscript, and I thought to myself, *now that's something*. I haven't stopped writing since.

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

I remember wanting to write a really good sex scene. *Fifty Shades of Gray* was all the talk at the time, and I kept thinking, *hell, I could write a steamy sex scene*. It was more of a creative exercise rather than an idea for a book. After I wrote the scene, I had the idea of the man falling asleep and then saying something jarring in his sleep. I was intrigued by that and then kept writing to see where it led me, and that became *The Comfort of Black*.

### WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVATION TO GO DARK IN YOUR WRITING?

Well, a good story is about conflict. I like to explore how someone reacts to great tragedy, or some event that is beyond what most people would ever have to deal with. What do they have to do to push through to the other side? In order to test the limits of my characters, bad things need to happen. It's not so exciting to see how someone deals with a tax audit.

### ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Rarely. Sometimes there's a mannerism or a flash of something I recognize in one of my characters from someone I know, but usually my characters are built from the ground up from bits and pieces I find all over the place.

### WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Oh, I love Hannah, though I would understand if a reader didn't find her wholly sympathetic. She's very flawed, which is one of my favorite things about her. She struggles with her alcoholism, she fights an inner rage she inherited from Billy, and she doesn't always make good decisions. But she's put in a situation where she can either let those weaknesses destroy her, or she can overcome them. I find that journey highly sympathetic.

### WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Billy, hands down. There's just nothing to like about him. He's a worm of a man.

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

It was difficult to balance Hannah's flaws with her ability to overcome them. If you write a protagonist who struggles with his or her weakness too much, they aren't sympathetic. If your protagonist is too strong, they become boring. I wanted Hannah to both fail and succeed—because I think that's more real—but finding that balance is hard to do.

### IS IT MORE FUN TO WRITE THE HERO OR THE VILLAIN?

You have to have a good, balanced hero to thwart your villain. The hero needs to be strong but flawed, accessible but aspirational to your readers. But the fun for me is always the villain. I like exploring the depths of what we consider evil, but what evil people consider normal. I like writing villains who are just being true to their nature. There's something much scarier about a killer who thinks what he's doing is right, rather than a killer who simply doesn't care.

### WHAT'S YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE?

Staggered. With a family and work obligations, I'm always looking for time to write and rewrite, which currently most often happens in the early mornings. I try to budget two pages a day, or the editing amount equivalent.

### DO YOU KNOW THE ENDING OF THE BOOK WHEN YOU START?

Rarely. I mean, if I knew the ending right away, I am assuming the reader's going to see it a mile away, which is always a letdown. For me, the ending needs to evolve from the story, which itself continuously twists and turns as I write the story. I like the surprise myself.

### SO YOU DON'T OUTLINE?

I tried it once. I really, really tried. Character boards, intricate timelines, the whole bit. After I outlined for about three months, I hated the story and felt like taking a bath with an electrical appliance. Shame, really, because it was kind of a cool story. I might revisit it someday.

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

That to remember writing is entertainment. You have to write something people want to read. I know that sounds basic, but it's easy to get caught up in something that might be constitute amazing writing, but it's not something people want to spend their time absorbing. Don't put the quality of writing above the need for a strong, compelling story.

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

That a writer has to outline.