

## AN INTERVIEW WITH

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**Miles Corwin, author of *Kind of Blue***

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

After graduating from University of California, Santa Barbara, I received an M.A. in Journalism at the University of Missouri. While at Missouri, I was part of a religious group that spent every Sunday afternoon at the Missouri State Penitentiary, talking to the prisoners. This sparked my interest in crime reporting. I got to know many prisoners quite well and wrote about them for the local newspaper.

My interest in crime reporting continued when I was a staff writer at the *San Jose Mercury*. I covered the California prison system for the paper and wrote stories about prison gangs and the criminal justice system. I also wrote a series on mass murderers and extensively interviewed – one-on-one – a number of them. At the *Los Angeles Times*, I expanded my scope; in addition to stories about crime and criminals, I began writing about cops and the LAPD.

**What inspired you to write your novel?**

I was sitting inside the LAPD's Robbery-Homicide Division squad room – while I was researching my book *Homicide Special* – waiting for the next case to emerge. The detectives I was shadowing were between homicides. While I was waiting, I started sketching some fictional ideas in my notebook, loosely based on some of the cases I'd followed.

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

I've spent many years writing about cops, criminals, prisons and courts as a crime reporter for the *L.A. Times*. During the research of my first book, *The Killing Season*, I followed two homicide detectives in South-Central Los Angeles for about six months. My third book – *Homicide Special* – chronicled a year inside an elite homicide division that investigates only the most difficult, sensitive, and high profile cases in Los Angeles. Any murder case that involves celebrities, organized crime, requires sophisticated technology, or is considered a high priority of the chief of police is transferred to Homicide Special.

In both books I was given complete access, and I followed the detectives from the time they picked up their cases, to crime scenes, death notifications, autopsies, witness interviews and, finally, to arrests.

Before I was a reporter, I spent more than five years as a Los Angeles County beach lifeguard. I have some surfing scenes in the book that reflect my time on the beach.

I used all of these experiences as fodder for *Kind of Blue*.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your protagonist?**

I got the idea for a Jewish detective when I was talking to writer James Ellroy. I met him in the Robbery-Homicide Division squad room while he was researching an article for *GQ Magazine*. He told me that when he was a young man, he'd been arrested. While an LAPD cop was hooking him up with handcuffs, he noticed the cop's nameplate, which read: Moscowitz. Ellroy told me the first thing that entered his mind was, "What's a Jew doing as a street cop?" I figured if that question interested Ellroy, one of the all-time great crime writers, it might interest readers.

### **How did you choose your setting?**

I was born in Los Angeles and spent the first few years of my life living at the Rosslyn Hotel, which my grandfather owned. The hotel is in downtown Los Angeles, at 5<sup>th</sup> and Main streets, at the edge of Skid Row. I still feel a strong tie to the area, so I decided to have my main character live in a downtown loft, not far from the Rosslyn.

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

Writing nonfiction crime books were, in one sense, easy because I had such great material. When you get called out to a homicide scene and then spend the next few days – sometimes without sleeping – with a pair of homicide detectives, you always come away with great drama, dialogue, anguish, humor, and action. And you have a built-in narrative structure: someone was killed and two cops are trying to find who committed the murder. When you write fiction, all this great material, obviously, is not handed to you; it has to come out of your head.

Also, much of homicide work is meticulous, monotonous and, frankly, boring. Going through records. Following false leads. Tracking down witnesses. The challenge was to keep the novel realistic, but provide enough drama and action to make it compulsively readable.

### **What was the easiest part?**

I spent so much time with homicide detectives as a crime reporter for the *L.A. Times* and writing two nonfiction books about homicide detectives, I didn't have to do much research.