

A Conversation with Mike Pace on *One to Go*

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

I can't remember when I wasn't writing. As a kid, I loved **Classics Comic Books** and kept a stack of them by my bed all through grade school. (My favorites were **Moby Dick** and **The Man with the Iron Mask**.)

I remember helping to write a Christmas play in 4th grade, and at every stage of my life have been involved in creative writing at some level. For example, when I worked in Washington and had a 45 minute commute each way, I dictated the first draft of a stage play that ultimately won a regional playwriting competition and was produced in the Washington area.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

One to Go is my second thriller. The small kernel of the idea came from a PSA on TV warning against the dangers of texting while driving. From that kernel sprang a crazy bunch of unrelated ideas, some focused, most very fuzzy. What if by texting you caused an accident? Let's make it more dramatic. The accident occurs on a bridge and it involves a school bus. No, a school bus has too many victims, so how about a minivan. Wait! And to really ratchet it up, what if we put the driver's kid inside? And then, instead of tipping over into the river below, what if time stood still, freezing the van on two wheels? And ... and... how about this? The driver's given a chance at a re-wind! And then what if ...? I changed the protagonist from a cop to a young lawyer. I also wanted to explore how a normal guy would react to an extraordinary situation. (Shades of Hitchcock.) Tom Booker is not troubled, was not raised in an at-risk environment and has no parent issues. He grew up in suburbia with two loving parents, got a good education and never shot a gun in his life. So how would this kind of normal American guy handle having to become a serial killer to save his daughter? I couldn't wait to get to my desk every morning to see how he was doing.

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

My background in the Washington criminal justice system was very helpful.

ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

Nothing other than the primal love a parent has for his children.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Some are composites.

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

I like Tom, the protagonist, of course, and I really like Eva.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Masterson, because he's been bitten by Potomac fever which says in politics, anything means is justified to achieve what is best for "the people," and invariably, what's best for the people just happens to be what's best for the politician.

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

Like all of my books, getting that first draft done is excruciating. After that it's a ball.

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

That they loved escaping to a world which enthralled, fascinated and scared them, and, when the roller-coaster comes to a stop, they're glad they took the ride.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Too many to list. Stephen King, Michael Connelly, Daniel Silva, David Morrell, John Grisham, Wilbur Smith, Doug Preston, Dean Koontz, just to name a few.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

The first draft is work, the rest is a blast.

WHO IS THE FIRST PERSON TO SEE YOUR MANUSCRIPT, AND WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK DO YOU RECEIVE?

My wife is my first reader and she'll give me the unvarnished truth. The very unvarnished truth. There's some troubling, scary stuff in my books, so after each read she'll turn to me and very seriously ask, Who ARE you?

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

Three things. First, no matter how good you think it is, it isn't. Go back and re-edit. Second, you have to have the guts to kill your babies. And third, (from Catherine Coulter) when it comes to rules for writers, remember, there are no rules.

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

None, really.

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

Two. *Red Island* (*Hunger Games* meets *Saw*) and *Side Effects* (Big Pharma conspiracy).

ANY FINAL WORDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR NOVEL, OR LIFE IN GENERAL?

I explained my life philosophy to a high school graduating class once. If you're learning, by definition, you're growing. And if you're growing, by definition, you're living. So, learn to live. And ... If you're skating on thin ice, might as well dance.