

CONVERSATION WITH SUSAN KLAUS *Secretariat Reborn*

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

Always been an animal and movie lover, and sci-fi reader. I wrote my first book 30 years ago, a fantasy involving mermaids. I started writing again in 2004 after being a movie extra on *Ocean's Eleven* with Brad Pitt. He inspired me to write *The Golden Harpy*, about a beautiful, half-mortal creature that was hunted by mankind. On the set, Pitt was also mobbed by the extras. This book was self-published in 2005 with great reviews in the local press. It is a game animal's point of view, concerning man's cruelty and destruction of the environment. Since then I have written five more books.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

Every Thoroughbred breeder including myself, hopes, prays, and dreams that their next foal will be another Secretariat, the fastest horse on the planet. And wouldn't it be great to write a story about a person who experiences that fantastic dream?

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

I was born in Florida, know the water and country, and have bred and raced thoroughbred horses for 13 years.

IS THERE ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

I believe every author puts part of him or herself into a character. It's the best way to ensure they're realistic. Like myself, my protagonist is an animal and nature lover and a native Floridian who is discouraged with progress, wild beautiful places being replaced with urban growth, making us somewhat environmentalists. We are also horse owners and share a passion for scuba diving, sailing, and fishing.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Christian is a young Brad Pitt, met him. Little Lenny is my nephew. Vic, the Myakka cowboy, is my neighbor. Vince, the Italian mobster, is Dominic— who is a real N.Y. mobster that I meet at the Derby. We became friends and he gave me an Arabian. Sal, Vince's sidekick, is Dominic's partner Frank in Ocala, and he sold me 2 thoroughbreds. Ed Price, the horse trainer, has a look loosely based on Henry Collazo, my Miami horse trainer, and he also briefly mentioned in the book. But Price's character is based on my first Miami horse trainer, a woman I won't name but who had a bad reputation for injuring horses, including two of my fillies.

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

First half, character driven, second half, plot.

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

Christian, a decent but naïve sailor, who promises his dying father that he'll race his colt, not knowing he'll face life-threatening challenges in the racing industry.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Ed Price, the crooked horse trainer.

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

I love coming up with a story idea and then letting my protagonist lead me through it, sometimes even surprising me. The challenging part comes when all is said and done, and I have to do the research and make sure it's accurate, such as is the gun in a scene described correctly? Is that street in the right location? What was the track record time for that horse race? The research is not so much a challenge, but it's like homework and not fun for me.

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

Knowledge of thoroughbreds and what it takes to race them, also the various locations in Florida, what and who is there and a native's perspective of growth.

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

Christian keeps sinking deeper and deeper with problems, a father dying of cancer and then the horseracing industry with crooked trainers, gangsters, evil wealthy sheiks, and a demented ex-girlfriend.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Dennis Lehane, Piers Anthony, Frank Herbert and recently George LL Martin. I read more sci-fi/fantasy.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

Rise early, write, feed horses, and write until I run out of energy and ideas.

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

Write every day, and Stephen King's philosophy that every reader will find fault with your book. If the problems are the same, you have a problem and need to fix it. If the faults vary from reader to reader, ignore them all.

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

That I couldn't write. Of course, that editor has since changed his tune and gives me glowing comments on my work.

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

Currently, I'm revising the third sci-fi novel in the Golden Harpy Trilogy. Also working on a thriller, based on a true story of a Sarasota murder that took place in the 1970's, and a sequel to Secretariat Reborn with the same characters.

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

Even non-horse lovers will enjoy this book, and women should love the character.