

A CONVERSATION WITH MERRY JONES about *CHILD'S PLAY*

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

I started writing when I was six or seven years old. I don't know why, but I've always wanted to tell stories.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

Several things. One was an article I read about adolescent brains. It talked about rash behavior among children/teenagers, explaining that the human brain doesn't fully develop until we're about 25. Adolescents are subject to risky and impulsive behavior, as they are not yet fully capable of anticipating the full effects of their actions. This might explain binge drinking, bullying, drinking/texting while driving, having unprotected sex—And even, in some cases, abusing or murdering.

Another “inspiration” came from a neighbor and friend who goes to circus school. She's in her forties and does trapeze and tightrope, etc. She amazes me.

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

See above about circus school.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

The ice cream truck driver, Duncan Girard (the real one is NOT a suspected pedophile!), is based on my brother's college pal.

Susan Cummings is based on a lawyer I know.

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

Ty Evans. He's a generous, sweet, neglected kid who sacrifices himself for his messed up family. He has a big heart, trusts the wrong people, pays the price.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Katie Evans is a sociopath. She survives by manipulating people, and she enjoys testing her power. She lacks a conscience, lacks empathy, is a sadistic bullying brat.

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

Creating children who were “evil” but believable.

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

The “evidence” doesn’t always lead to the guilty party. Confessions are not always true. Appearances aren’t always what they seem.

Also, the book brings up questions of trust, responsibility, judgment, friendship, determination.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Too many. Sue Miller, Joy Fielding, Susan Isaacs, Gillian Flynn, Mark Twain, Faye Kellerman

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

It varies. There are days when I feel I spend six hours getting a character to walk across a room. Other days, the characters take over and we zoom through events and conversations, and I lose track of the “real” world, don’t even know what time it is. The best times are when I’m in the “zone,” and writing is like taking down dictation from a voice inside my head.

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

Two things: 1) Write. Then write some more.

2) There’s more to writing than writing. (In other words, it’s a business.)

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

My first agent discouraged me from writing fiction. She said, “Write what you know you can sell.”

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

Always. I’m working on a stand-alone based on a true story involving human trafficking.