

A CONVERSATION WITH PAUL BATISTA about THE WARRIORS

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

It's simple fact of my life, for better or worse, that I'm one of the best known trial attorneys in the United States, and the veteran of more than 30 years of many television guest appearances. I've also acted in the HBO film, *You Don't Know Jack*, starring Al Pacino as Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

In 1986, I wrote the leading textbook, published by John Wiley & Sons, on the federal racketeering law. The book will soon appear in its Fourth Edition (Wolters-Kluwer); it is one of the best-selling legal textbooks of the last 30 years.

As far as nonfiction writing is concerned, I have, since the early 1980s published poetry in some of the leading literary periodicals in the United States, including *Poetry International* and *The Atlanta Review*. In 2006, I decided to write my first novel, *Death's Witness*, which was published in 2007 and won a major prize granted by the Independent Book Publishers Association (IPPY). In the years since the publication of *Death's Witness* I have written several other novels, including *Extraordinary Rendition* and *The Borzoi Killings*, both of which were USA Today best sellers.

What inspired you to write your novel?

The Warriors had its genesis in several sources. During the course of a four-decade career, I've represented among a host of diverse people prominent politicians accused of criminal conduct. One of the lead characters in *The Warriors* is a world-famous Senator, who is also a former First Lady of the United States. While obviously no legendary Senator who was once a First Lady has ever faced a criminal trial, many prominent politicians accused of crime, in my experience, have distinctive ways of reacting to the very public exposure to criminal charges and often resort to strange and dangerous ways to counter-attack their accusers to preserve their visibility and ambition.

In addition, I was fascinated, as were many readers of my 2014 novel *The Borzoi Killings*, by a unique character I created, Raquel Rematti, the leading female criminal defense lawyer in the United States. For *The Warriors*, I not only envisioned the tense relationship between two very powerful women—the Senator, named Angelina Baldesteri, and Raquel—but the behind-the-scenes and dramatic events to which the Senator and others resorted during what is the biggest trial of the 21st century. Moreover, I was inspired to write *The Warriors* not simply because of my fascination with the Senator and Raquel Rematti, but because the events depicted in the novel could not only be a centerpiece of today's news but the news of the future—the trial of a woman Senator for serious crimes and the dangerous intrigues that surround that trial. (I have to add I have *no* political views. My sole view is to create drama, intrigue and fascinating stories.)

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

Obviously my life experience as a criminal defense lawyer for forty years who specializes in high-profile criminal trials—and as a writer who knows famous politicians, lawyers, judges, and prosecutors—shaped and enriched the dramatic pace and depth of *The Warriors* and the people whose lives, fears, hopes and wild excesses drive the story.

Anything autobiographical in your novel?

The novel contains some autobiographical but carefully veiled features. Once again, I stress that the events in the book are “fictional” in the sense that none of them actually occurred and “fictional” also because none of the people is drawn in full from real life. Certainly, I am not a character in the novel, so in that sense *The Warriors* is not an autobiography in any sense, but also certainly many of the events that take place have been drawn from diverse places and people I’ve encountered during a long and varied and richly active career.

Are any characters based on people you know?

It’s safe to say that all of the characters are based to varying degrees on people I’ve known. I am not in the business of creating Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland out of whole cloth. I have dealt with the prototypes of every major character in the book—from legendary politicians under indictment to difficult trial judges and drug kingpins, all of whom, among many others, play prominent roles in *The Warriors*. But you could search high and low in the world and find no one who is a replica of the men and women who populate *The Warriors*.

Who is your most sympathetic character and why?

Raquel Rematti, the criminal defense lawyer who represents Senator Angelina Baldesteri. Raquel is, like Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, a woman of infinite variety—extraordinarily intelligent, beautiful, skillful, brave and at times afraid, although her innate qualities of true grit and intelligence always overwhelm her fears. Also, to put it bluntly, Raquel is fun—in addition to the high seriousness of the work she does as a lawyer, she loves to dance at after-hours clubs in downtown Manhattan, where some of the scenes take place.

Who is the least sympathetic character? And why?

The least sympathetic character in the novel is in many ways the most fascinating, and that’s Senator Angelina Baldesteri. The daughter of a poor oyster-man in Louisiana, she rose in her remarkable career not only to become the widow of a very popular assassinated United States President but, as a Senator from New York after her husband’s murder, the defendant in the century’s most highly publicized trial. She, too, is as brilliant and charismatic as Raquel, who gradually becomes her nemesis as the trial progresses and the lawyer-client relationship between them unravels. But Angelina is ruthless and reckless. Her powerful, single-minded drive to become President involves creating contacts with many dark forces and contrasts with her immense public popularity as an elected Senator and the widow of a very popular President.

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

In truth, I've never found anything challenging about writing my fiction. This is not to say that I haven't given a great deal of thought to each character and event. It simply is to say that I find the act of writing a novel immensely enjoyable, and to the extent the word "challenging" describes an arduous or unpleasant process, there is nothing "challenging" for me about writing. Putting words on a page, envisioning and developing characters, and creating events are just a joyful process. Put simply, writing fiction is for me fun.

What do you hope that readers will take away from your book?

My hope is that readers will "take away" from *The Warriors* and all my other novels the following thought: *Boy, was that an exciting and engaging and memorable reading experience! I can't wait to get my hands on the next novel by this thrilling writer!*

What writers have inspired you?

The answer to this question would require a list of names as long as in the baseball Hall of Fame. I decided as a young man to attend Bowdoin College, the alma mater of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; in fact, in my freshman year, by pure coincidence, I lived in the dorm room in which Hawthorne had resided in 1823. At Bowdoin in the late 1960s I came under the influence of two extraordinarily skillful teachers and poets—Louis O. Coxe and Howard Nemerov. Not to mention Robert Lowell, the acclaimed poet who was a visiting professor. The simple truth is that for all of my life I've read broadly, from Melville to Updike and to Denis Johnson, who died recently. Indeed, I've run more than thirty marathons and still do. On most of them, I listen through earphones to books by writers as diverse as Camus and P. G. Wodehouse. If I didn't listen to novels, what else is there to do for 26.1 miles other than feel the pain of running that far?

What is the writing process like for you?

I have no "process" for writing. I have been and always will be a practicing lawyer—it's the grounded wellspring of my fiction. I write fiction every day, but that can happen whether I am at my desk in my office overlooking all of New York Harbor or at my weekend home in Sag Harbor, on Long Island. My home there, by the way, is a block from the house where John Steinbeck lived for the last thirty years of his life. If by "process" of writing you mean how do I write, the answer is that I write in old-fashioned longhand and let my assistant convert the illegible handwriting to flawless word-processed pages.

What is the best piece of advice about writing that you've received?

This question is easy, and the answer comes from an advertisement for running, which I've down endlessly since I was drafted into the United States Army in 1970—Just Do It!

What is the worst piece of advice that you've ever received?

I never listen to bad advice!

What's next for you? Any new books in the pipeline?

Funny you should ask. I'm already deeply into a very exciting novel sparked by the sexual harassment scandals. The book attempts to create drama from the standpoint of the accusers and their supporters as well as from the standpoint characters who are affected by this most recent of all new public events of unremitting humiliation, and I'm writing from the standpoint of the accusers and their supporters as well as from the standpoint of the accused. It's a multi-faceted tale. The book is neither an embrace of the *me too* movement nor a defense of alleged predators. It is a drama with no political and social bias, but with surprise after surprise.

Any final words you would like to say about yourself, your novel, or life in general?

Another easy question with a simple answer: Enjoy reading *The Warriors* and, more important, enjoy each day!