

## A Conversation with Dick Belsky about *BELOW THE FOLD*

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

I'm a longtime tabloid journalist (*NY Post*, *NY Daily News*, *Star* magazine, NBC News)—but I've always written mystery fiction at the same time. My love for mystery novels started way back in the '70s when I read my first Raymond Chandler book. Afterward, I devoured Ross Macdonald, Agatha Christie, Robert B. Parker—and later Michael Connelly, Sue Grafton, Mary Higgins Clark and Lawrence Sanders. I use my real-life journalism experiences as inspiration for much of my fiction. And why not? I'm always involved in a lot of great stories and working with plenty of colorful characters in a news room. In fact, when people ask me the age-old question of "Where do you get your ideas to be a mystery author?"—I answer: "I just go to work every day!"

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

As a real-life journalist, I've covered many high-profile murder cases—Son of Sam, O.J., John Lennon etc. Many other murders get little or no attention in the media. I wanted to write a book about what might happen if a seemingly meaningless murder—in this case the death of a homeless woman—exploded into a sensational story involving prominent and powerful people from her past.

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

I write about what I know. I know a lot about New York City, cops, crime, the media and what happens in a newsroom—the energy, the intensity, the dedication of the people in it. Hopefully that all comes through in my books.

### ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

A lot, I suppose. I tend to write about real life places I've been, events I've covered and things I've really done in my fiction books. It's still fiction, of course. But I think using elements of my own life and career and experience in my fiction gives it an authenticity you might not find in other mystery novels.

### ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Not really, of course. But there are certain elements of many of the colorful characters I've worked with in newsrooms in *Below the Fold*. There is no real Clare Carlson. But...well, let's just say I've met a lot of Clare Carlsons in my life.

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

Clare herself is my favorite character. She's good and honest and smart—but she's also flawed and troubled, which I think makes her interesting.

The most sympathetic character is probably Dora Gayle, who was once a beautiful, brilliant young woman, but became a sad homeless woman on the streets of New York. Her seemingly unimportant murder opens up a Pandora's Box of long-buried secrets about prominent, powerful people from her past.

## WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Grace Mancuso—a money-hungry, unscrupulous stockbroker who is murdered at the beginning of the book. Everything we find out about her after that is bad. But her murder is a key to solving the rest of the mystery.

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

The middle of the book is the most challenging for me. I always know how I want to start the book—and I generally have a pretty good idea of what the ending will be. But the middle is where the novel really comes together. And, when it works, it can take you in directions you never envisioned. Stephen King once said that finishing a novel was like a band of ancient warriors attacking a castle—you just keep hurling stuff at the castle until their defenses finally fall away and you are successful in your quest. That's kind of what getting through the middle of the novel is like for me.

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

I just want them to get a good read out of it; like spending time with the character(s); and enjoy the whole experience. I try to write books about the same kind of people and things I like to read about myself. I've gotten a lot of enjoyment out of characters like Harry Bosch, Philip Marlowe, Spenser, Kinsey Millhone and Matt Scudder in the past. My goal is that readers will enjoy my characters in much the same way.

## WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Michael Connelly, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, Sue Grafton, Robert B. Parker, Mary Higgins Clark, Lawrence Sanders.

## WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

I may be unusual in that I actually enjoy the writing process. I simply get up every morning and write. Always have, probably always will. I don't outline, don't do a lot of research or any of that sort of thing beforehand - I just put words on the page. I like to write in crowded noisy spots – coffee shops, park benches or beaches, even in bars. I work better with a lot of chaos around me, probably because of my years working in busy newsrooms. Later on in the process of writing a book – line edits, revisions, fact-changing – well, I don't find that nearly as much fun. But I truly enjoy writing the book itself.

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

If you want to be a writer, you need to write. Sounds simple, but it's the best advice I've ever gotten—and the advice I tell to anyone who says they want to be a writer. I know a lot of people that talk about writing a novel, but very few of them ever sit down and really try to accomplish that. It can be a daunting experience. But it's the only way to find out if you are really a writer or not.

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

Anytime anyone told me to avoid a special subject—serial killer books or whatever—because those topics “aren't hot anymore.” This kind of advice is always wrong.

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

I'm working on a new book now called ***The Perfect Victim*** – about a woman who becomes a media celebrity after surviving a horrifying crime, but then begins to suspect that everything she's been told about what happened to her is a lie.

I also hope to keep writing Clare Carlson books.