

A Conversation with Samuel W. Gailey about *THE GUILT WE CARRY*

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

I grew up in the country in a little town in northeastern Pennsylvania. And when I say little, I mean *little*—population 379. I hunted, fished, and explored the woods that surrounded me. We picked wild blackberries and bought our unpasteurized milk from a local farm. In my hamlet, I knew everyone and everyone knew me. We didn't lock our doors and there was very little crime to speak of.

Things changed drastically for me after graduating high school. In my twenties, I moved to Los Angeles (population 3.9 million) to work in the film industry, where I didn't know a single soul, and I surely locked my doors at night. For the next twenty-two years, LA was my home. I married, had a smart, beautiful daughter, and bought a house. I loved Los Angeles—its diversity, the museums, the choice of every type of ethnic restaurant imaginable, access to both beaches and mountains—but after so many years, I felt a growing need for change. In 2016, I finally made a change. A big one. I now live on a remote island (population 4,453) in the Pacific Northwest—no traffic lights, no chain stores, no writer's block.

I started sketching short stories when I was about nine or ten. In middle school, when I was assigned to write a book report for English class, instead of choosing a book from the library, I opted to completely fabricate a story and create an author that didn't exist, then wrote a report on this imaginary book. In retrospect, I'm not entirely convinced that my English teacher fell for my little charade hook, line, and sinker, but I ended up receiving an A on the book report, and after that, I never looked back.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

For my second novel, I wanted to write a story from a female protagonist's perspective. And like with *Deep Winter*, I was drawn to the idea of how a random, tragic accident can alter the life of someone for the rest of their days. I think the idea for *The Guilt We Carry* took seed when I lived in Los Angeles and one day when driving my daughter to school, I noticed one particular young woman (a kid really) living on the streets, desperate and alone, and I wondered how she arrived at this station in her life. Every person that lives on the streets—homeless, runaways, addicts, the mentally unfit—most likely had parents at one time, a home to live in, people they loved and loved them back. They went to school, had a friend or two, and dreamed of what they wanted to be when they grew up. I asked myself, *What happened? How did that young woman end up on the streets?*

That's where the idea for Alice derived from, and it grew from there.

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

Addiction is a theme in my stories, and it is a condition that I've been surrounded by my entire life. It is a painful illness that can be both lonely and shameful, but in the same token, it is an affliction that can be managed. I think that grappling with an addiction and eventually attaining the strength to overcome the disease is something that resonates with many.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Elton is a composite character of a few men that I knew growing up in my small town in Pennsylvania. Living in a rural area in the late 70s and early 80s, and being a homosexual was not an easy life to maintain, but these men didn't conceal their sexual orientation. They were ostracized by many, but I respected their courage and inner-fortitude to stay true to themselves and live the lives they were meant to lead.

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

Alice in *The Guilt We Carry* is my favorite character. I loved creating her character and watching her evolve. She was an average fifteen-year-old girl from a middle-class home who loved swimming, enjoyed her circle of friends, and applied herself in school—until the day tragedy struck and her life changed forever. I admire that she was able to overcome great adversity, both emotionally and physically, and eventually managed to let go of the past and find a way to forgive herself.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Although my antagonist, Sinclair, in *The Guilt We Carry* is brutal and shows very little remorse for his actions, and would be considered unsympathetic by many, I find that I hold a degree of sympathy for the man. Due to a pituitary gland disorder, his growth stunted, leaving him to be a diminutive adult. His parents were both psychologists, and were more interested in harnessing his intellect, and treated him like a case study. He was never shown love and affection in his home. He was both mocked and ignored as a child in school. Sinclair was marginalized as a teen, and underestimated as an adult, and as a result of all those years of inner pain caused by ostracization, he chose to take the dark path in life.

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

I hope that readers will leave my story with a sense of bitter sweet. Although Alice is a flawed character, she manages to find redemption and absolve the guilt has burdened her for far too long.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Larry Brown, Urban Waite, Scott Smith, Donald Ray Pollock, Russell Banks, Alice Sebold, William Gay

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

With all my books, I start with creating compelling and original characters. I try and learn everything about them. Then I create a solid structure and develop a detailed outline of the story. When I start the actual writing process, I hand-write the entire manuscript in orange Rhodia notebooks (many, many of them). After I complete my first handwritten draft, I then input my work into a Word doc, editing as I go. Then I rewrite, rewrite, rewrite and rewrite some more.

Another vital component to my process is working with my wife, Ayn Carrillo Gailey, who is an author as well as what is called a *Book Whisperer*. Ayn is the finest editor I know. She helps me stay on the right path in telling the most powerful story I can create. She reminds me that a great story is about more than plot and character. A writer must answer at all times: *What is your story about? What are you trying to say?* She works with me throughout the entire process:

character development, structure, outline, and then the writing itself. She line edits, makes suggestions, and points out what can be cut. I would be lost without her. Truly.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU CAN OFFER?

The writing process can be long and lonely at times. When you start a novel, you will be with those characters and story for a long, long time...make sure that you're invested in your idea. And after your manuscript is complete, don't stop writing. The process of securing an agent and finding a publisher is neither quick nor easy. Don't wait for your book to sell. Start on your next idea. Keep writing. Keep creating.

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

I am working on two different stories. One is a murder mystery with a complicated love story intertwined amidst the darkness. The other story is a suspense novel with a supernatural twist, about an elderly couple who discover an unexplained body of water on their land that will alter their lives forever—for better *and* worse.

