

AN INTERVIEW WITH

*Martha Powers, author of
Death Angel*

Was *Death Angel* inspired by a real story?

Yes. After her daughter was raped, the mother shot the man who did it. The other event that influenced the writing of the book was the Dowaliby case. After their child was killed the parents were suspected and tried for the murder. I don't believe they were guilty and eventually he was released from prison. All through that investigation and trial, all I could think of is the nightmare of losing a child and then being accused of the murder.

I literally found myself looking over my shoulder as I read the book and wonder if you're ever frightened by your own stories. How do you manage to deal with such difficult subjects?

I'm frightened by other people's stories. When I write, I have control of the situation so I know that there will be some form of justice in the end. In part I write out of my own fears. There's so much random violence in the world that it's a way to calm my own fears. Sort of like whistling in the dark.

***Death Angel* is extremely real on a number of levels. Did any specific research contribute to your writing the book?**

I've read a lot of books about the psychological makeup of criminals. I lived in a suburban area of Chicago and I've spent a lot of time in Wisconsin.

As a parent, was it hard to write *Death Angel*?

As a parent, I can't think of anything worse than losing a child. Anyone who can go through that and survive is braver than I. While I'm in the character of Kate it's almost painful to consider how she would react to her daughter's murder. The most difficult part is when I'm writing in the killer's viewpoint. It's depressing to work out why and how someone would commit such a heinous crime.

One thing that is striking about *Death Angel* is how you seamlessly move from character to character and scene to scene. How do you achieve such flow in your books? Do you map out the plot prior to writing the book?

I work from an outline but am not totally wedded to it. If something comes up and the story shifts, I can generally work with it. I write a linear plot and am constantly asking myself, "What would he or she do next? What is the most logical

reaction?" *The story is very real to me and since I'm writing about ordinary people, I can put myself in their places and think of their actions in a logical progression.*

How did you work out the psychological profile of the killer?

*I've read a lot of books on profiles of criminal. After *Silence of the Lambs* was published, profiling became a hot topic and there was a lot of information available about the men and women who work out the profiles for the FBI. I have a strong belief in the presence of evil in the world and it fascinates me to learn how the background of criminals contributes to the formation of their character. We are all products of our childhood.*

You are a well-respected humor writer. How does a humor writer write such a chilling tale and vice versa?

Humor has always been a major part of my life. That's probably the strongest part of my personality. I view the world through a slightly fractured lens. It's gotten me through all the tough passages in my life. I read pretty voraciously and the books I enjoy most are mysteries and thrillers. So when I started to write it was only natural that I'd gravitate toward thrillers. When we had children, I was always terrified that something would happen to them. It was much easier to write stories where I had control over the evil people. It was a way of protecting my own kids.

Was the transition from romance writing to suspense difficult to make? Why or why not?

The pacing is much different in a suspense novel. You have to learn the technique of writing a page turner. I read all of Clive Cussler's books to understand the process of keeping the readers on the edge of their seats. He's an absolute master at this.

What is next for you?

I'd like to do more humor. It's difficult to put too many humor elements in a thriller since it cuts the level of tension. I'm working on a mystery with a lighter touch which will be less intense.

Will any of the characters in *Death Angel* return?

One never says never. However at the moment I get a bigger kick working with new characters. It's a surprise for me when I'm creating them to see what they're capable of doing.

Are any of the characters based on people you know? Are any autobiographical?

No, although I use a lot of names of people I know. If I base a character on someone I know I can never get them to do what I want them to do. They're already formed so they are predictable. I do use incidents from my life and from other people's life when they fit and usually find when a passage gets preachy that it's my thoughts that have been interjected.

What do you think is most admirable about Kate? Least admirable?

I've known people like Kate who have been controlled all their lives by the men in their lives. I admire the fact she not only can survive in the worst nightmare situation but can finally break free from her dependence and become a whole independent person. I like the fact that she starts the story as a non-assertive appendage of her husband and works

through her tragedies, gaining strength of character and will.

Do you believe in vigilante justice?

For the most part I don't. I'm rather old fashioned in that I do believe in an eye for an eye sort of justice that we rarely see in our court system. The ending of this book has always been totally satisfying to me. It's what I would want to happen if someone hurt my child. The book has gone through many changes but I've never wavered on the ending.

You live in Florida. Why did you choose to set the book in Illinois and Wisconsin?

I spent the majority of my life in the Midwest so it's the area I'm most familiar with.

Start-to-finish, how long did it take to write *Death Angel*?

*Twenty years. I wrote the original story before I was published but I didn't have the skills or the wisdom to do it justice. The original book was called *Blueprint for an Execution* and the plot was more involved in the vigilante justice aspect. It focused more on the difficulties involved with the parents trying to kill a man they believed had killed their daughter. They had no real evidence, only a feeling that he was guilty. They stalked him in order to execute him. The book didn't work because I could never justify their actions in my own mind.*