Hi Blair howard, today's interview is with Wayne Zurl. Enjoy!

Successful author, Wayne Zurl, discloses how he turns real life stories into authentic and suspenseful fiction.

"Other writers of mysteries or police procedurals may disagree, but I see that challenge as getting all the little details correct to satisfy the stickiest purist. If you accomplish that you can, with a clear conscience, request a little suspension of disbelief from your readers. That is usually necessary in good fiction." ~Wayne Zurl

Goodness! My interview with Wayne Zurl is packed with so much goodness! Zurl shares his thoughts about original work, having a solid grasp on the knowledge surrounding the topic he writes about. We also touch on thoughts surrounding plagiarism, ghost writing, Indy publishing vs. traditional publishing, and how to know that as an author, one has "arrived". Oh, and he expresses his love for Scotland which I'm sure many of us can relate to.

Wayne Zurl grew up on Long Island and retired after twenty years with the Suffolk County Police Department, one of the largest municipal law enforcement agencies in New York and the nation. For thirteen of those years he served as a section commander supervising investigators. He is a graduate of SUNY, Empire State College and served on active duty in the US Army during the Vietnam War and later in the reserves. Zurl left New York to live in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee with his wife, Barbara.

Zurl has had nine Sam Jenkins mystery novels traditionally published.

Twenty-seven of his Sam Jenkins novelette mysteries have been published individually as eBooks and many produced as audio books. Four anthologies are currently available putting twenty-three of these novelettes in print or as collections in all the usual eBook formats. A FESTIVAL OF FELONIES, a fifth anthology, is scheduled for release in February of 2020.

He has won Eric Hoffer and Indie Book Awards, and was named a finalist for a Montaigne Medal and First Horizon Book Award. He is a regular member of the International Thriller Writer's Organization. For more information on Wayne's Sam Jenkins mystery series see www.waynezurlbooks.net. You can read excerpts, reviews and endorsements, interviews, coming events, and see photos of the area where the stories take place. (Source: Wayne Zurl)

Now for our exclusive interview with Wayne Zurl.

THE REAL AUTHOR

Q: How has your life story influenced the stories you write?

Until recently, all the novels and stories I've written have been based on real police incidents I've investigated, supervised or just knew a lot about. But the last couple of books were based on things I've learned about—one from back in New York and one from here in Tennessee—and thought would make interesting stories. Sort of like those Law & Order "ripped from the headlines" episodes. These two both involve unsolved major cases. I took the evidence on hand, did a little investigating and provided a plausible ending.

Q: What type of environment works best for you when writing?

Wherever I am, I like to start work early. At home I sit in a wingback recliner in the living room and get to it with a cheap pen and lined legal pad.

Q: Who or what do you look to for motivation in your writing?

I've got to provide my own motivation to get anything done. But if I need encouragement or advice, I ask my wife Barbara. Two heads are always better than one and I've always liked the idea of participatory management. Over the years, she's provided me with some really clever lines and good elements that spruced up the stories.

Q: As an author, what mistakes and successes have you learned from the most?

Early on I learned never to submit anything to anyone before I was absolutely certain I had a truly finished product in hand. Publishers who don't know you are not in the business of being your teacher or friend. Getting any writing project accepted by a traditional publisher or presenting it to your target audience if you choose to self-publish depends a lot on the halo effect. Only a fool would show up for a job interview unshaven and dressed like he just finished cleaning out the gutters. The same is true in publishing. Always put your best foot forward—if for nothing else than to show respect for the person evaluating you or your work.

One of the biggest successes came to me with my first novel, A NEW PROSPECT. After many rejections from agents, one of whom told me my book wasn't trendy enough, it won Indy and Eric Hoffer Book Awards and was named as a finalist for First Horizon Book Award and a Montaigne Medal. The reason for so many rejections was explained to me by a well-known veteran author who said, 'You don't have to be good, you have to be marketable.'

With those awards in hand, I wanted to call all those agents and give them the raspberries. But my wife told me that would be unprofessional.

THE REAL STORY

Q: Did you choose your genre or did it choose you? What's the story?

Probably equal doses of both. I go by the old author's maxim of write what you know. I know police work. I can write about it with only a minimum of research and I can make it sound more authentic than a civilian can—I don't care how many "police academies for writers" someone goes to, you can't get it really correct unless you've lived the life or get LOTS of really good technical advice.

Q: What are the challenges and rewards in writing about a field of service, police work, that you have encountered?

Other writers of mysteries or police procedurals may disagree, but I see that challenge as getting all the little details correct to satisfy the stickiest purist. If you accomplish that you can, with a clear conscience, request a little suspension of disbelief from your readers. That is usually necessary in good fiction. For example, all my stories take place in a small city in the foothills if the Great Smoky Mountains—not exactly a hotbed of major crime. However, if you believe what I write, you'd think sleepy little Prospect, Tennessee has a homicide rate higher than Detroit and Chicago combined. So, I require a bit of SOD from my readers. In return, I give them authentic police work with the correct details that makes a police procedural special.

My reward comes when I can enlighten readers on the common misconceptions about police work that run rampant thanks to some writers and Hollywood. A literary agent with whom I once worked told me that one of the reasons he liked my books was because they not only told a good

story, but he came away learning something about a subject not often presented with authenticity.

Look, there are oodles of cops out there in the world. Not all of them are all-stars, but the vast majority are intelligent, dedicated, well-meaning men and women interested in doing a public service. I like the idea that I can show readers the real challenges cops face and what they need to know to do the job safely, intelligently and effectively. Plus, I like to spin a few "ripping yarns" along the way.

Q: Do you think there are new ideas out there or are we all just rewriting the same thing in different ways?

I once read something concerning stories of the Old West that claimed, there were only eleven basic plots used. Some written stories are left simple; others are made more complex by compositing two or more of these eleven elements. I think this is true of all fiction.

Look at the late Robert B. Parker. He made no secret of the fact that he studied Dashiell Hammett and more thoroughly, Raymond Chandler and based his Spenser novels on private eyes Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe. Parker never plagiarized anything, but he applied basic principles to his books and gave Spenser the character traits other fictional investigators had before him. His stories were entertaining and highly successful.

Q: What comes first, the characters or the story?

A tough question to assign a simple answer—sometimes they run neck and neck. Remember what I said about where I get the ideas for my stories? These all begin with some basis in reality. But contrary to popular belief, police work is not always a thrill a minute. And I never intended my stuff to be autobiographical. I have to embellish things to create good fiction. Sometimes I want to get a really interesting character into something and think, although they weren't there when this incident played out, they would be a perfect ingredient to the story—or vice versa.

In the twenty years I worked as a cop, I came away with some very interesting “war stories” and met some quirky and memorable characters. Fiction allows me to marry the two.

Q: What do you find to be the most challenging part of being an author? The most rewarding?

The most challenging aspect is selling books in the 21st century. Marketing your stuff is too much like work. But no matter how or with whom you get your books or stories published, all writers are obligated to do a lot of promotion and selling on their own. I had to learn the modern way to peddle my goods and what social and electronic media were all about.

The most rewarding aspect is getting a bunch of intelligently written, positive reviews about what I’ve gotten published. Then there was the time when my wife and I were standing on line in a supermarket. The man ahead of us turned to me and said, “Hey, you’re the guy who writes mysteries, aren’t you? Wayne Zurl, right?” I smiled and nodded. “I just finished HONOR AMONG THIEVES. I loved it.”

Hard to be humble after that. I guess I looked enough like my picture at the back of the book to get recognized.

THE REAL STATS

Q: Do you feel like you’ve “arrived” as a successful author? If not, how will you know when you have?

There are two ways to answer this one—first, there’s reality and where the rest of the world says you’ve gotten about what you can expect to achieve, and then there is your personal goal, either realistic or wishful thinking.

In my case, that reality, as told to me by a marketing expert, is that I’m not doing badly. I’m no threat to eclipse James Lee Burke’s sales figures, but

based on the number of books I've sold and the amount of money I want to spend on promotions, I'm about where I should be.

I once answered the 'how do you know when you've arrived?' question like this—my reality: The minute I raised my hand and swore to uphold the Constitution I was an employee of the United States Army. Once I graduated from basic and advanced individual training, I had yet to fire a shot in anger at an enemy of the country, but I was a soldier. Once I graduated from the police academy, I had not made an arrest, saved a life or delivered a baby, but I was a cop. So, for the new writer wondering if or when they have arrived—once you get something published and it goes on sale, go out and order a thousand business cards. You have arrived.

Q: As an author, what is your big dream?

I'd love to see Sam Jenkins and crew on film—either in a mini-series taking in a few books or on a weekly TV series based on the novels or the twenty-seven novelettes that were designed to create one-hour audio books. But, that's farfetched. Plenty of bestselling authors with tight connections to Hollywood don't see their work on film.

Q: Plagiarism seems to be on the rise. With so much content flooding the shelves, do you think we're running out of original ideas? Do you see ghost writing as a possible contributor to plagiarism issues?

Plagiarism is like cheating while playing solitaire. Who are you kidding? Chances are only one in a million readers might recognize your work as stolen—unless you set your exact version of GONE WITH THE WIND a hundred years after the Civil War. Plagiarism is like any other crime. If people who engage in the illegal activities would think first before acting they might realize that the benefits they derive from the ill-gotten gains are not as important as those they may lose if they get caught. They may gain wealth, power and artificial prestige, but would lose things more important to most people: freedom, respect, love, family etc.

We discussed original ideas for storylines or plots before. A writer's imagination is their only limitation in that area. You can "borrow" a concept and put your own twist on it and not be guilty of plagiarism. Look at Romeo and Juliet and Westside Story. With the amount of content flooding the book market each year, I think the quality of finished products is more of a problem than books having similar plots. Too many Indy authors are in a hurry to see their work on the page at Amazon or other Internet bookseller and allow the quality of their work suffer.

I never considered a ghostwriter and wouldn't want my stories told in someone else's voice. So, I never learned much about them. My best guess: There will be X number of books out there attributed to various authors with all the same sound.

Q: Do you feel that self-publishing leads to traditional publishing?

When I started writing fiction in 2006, the rule of thumb I learned from a few established writers was that if you self-published, you'd never get accepted by a traditional publishing house. This is no longer true. But the self-publishing route doesn't necessarily lead to a traditional, royalty paying contract. Some dyed-in-the-wool Indy authors don't even want one. They're happy where they are. They say, 'If I have to market my books, why should I share my profits?' There is truth in that premise. But a traditional publisher offers a writer (at no cost) a professional content editor, a professional cover artist, a professional formatter who prepares the manuscript into the various versions of eBooks and print sources, and a proofreader to give the final blessing before it becomes a finished product. If the Indy author can do the computer work themselves, wants to hire an editor or proofreader and a cover artist, great, go for it—I've seen it many times before. You will probably make more money than me. If anyone thinks they can self-edit their work and get their buddy to competently proofread it into an almost flawless form, get real. You're kidding yourself and what you publish will look like it came from an amateur. EVERYONE who writes needs at least one additional set of competent eyes to read their work.

JUST FOR KICKS

Q: If you could travel anywhere in the world to write, where would you go? Why?

If I could force myself and my wife not to behave like we usually do while on vacation—meaning we never stop moving, from one attraction to another, starting early and getting home late—we do not travel and relax, I'd love for us to rent a cottage on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands. I'd write until lunch, go out for a pub meal and then drive around and see what we could see. I might skip a morning's work and go fishing, have lunch and maybe write until dinner. For a guy who has lived most of his adult life around military or paramilitary organizations, I'm really not stuck on adhering to structured days. We've been to Scotland so many times, I know the roads there better than those in Tennessee.

Q: What is your favorite drink and/or snack to have on hand while writing?

Teetotalers might gasp, but if I write in the afternoon, I'll put a glass of single-malt whisky on the lamp table next to my chair. If my wife brings me a snack before dinner, it's usually a dish of salty mixed nuts.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Q: Did I miss anything? What would you like to communicate to our authors that I didn't think to ask?

Before I leave you, I'd like to relay what I think is the best advice I've heard for new writers—or old ones, too.

The best PRACTICAL advice I can offer isn't my original thought. I learned this reading an interview with Robert B. Parker. When asked why his books were so popular, Parker gave a simple answer, 'Because they sound good.'

Most of my novelettes were destined for audio books and had to sound good when read by an actor. So, I knew exactly what Bob meant.

Here's my recommendation on how to produce a classy piece of work. When you think your story, novelette, novella, novel, or epic is finished, when you truly believe you've found and corrected all the typos and nits and it's ready to sell, go back and read it aloud to yourself. Pretend you're the star of your own audio book. Read it slowly and professionally as an actor would. Then, ask yourself, does it sound good? Do all the paragraphs smoothly transcend to the next? Does each sentence contain the right number of syllables? Does each word flow into the next without conflict? Does it have a pleasing rhythm? Basically, does it sing to you? For a guy who doesn't dance very well, I have a great need for rhythm in my writing. If you notice any "bumps," go back and rewrite it. Smooth everything out. If something bothers you now, it will annoy the hell out of you in the future and someone else will probably notice it, too.

With that accomplished, you're finished, right? No! Remember what I said a few questions ago. Now you're ready to hand it off to a freelance editor or proofreader—whomever you can afford if you're self-publishing, or to the editor assigned to you by your traditional publishing house. A second pair of eyes is essential for ANY writer.

Lastly, remember something Stephen King once said: 'We don't have to so much be good writers, as we have to be great rewriters.'

Q: What is the best way for our readers to connect with you?

You can see what I'm up to at my personal website: http://waynezurlbooks.net ,where each book is described, interviews and reviews are shown, and if you just want to see the beautiful area where the stories take place, I've posted lots of photos.

Or connect with me at
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