

Questions for Gene Ayres, author of...

Cry of the Heron ISBN: 978-1-935444-11-4 http://www.amazon.com/Cry-Heron-Gene-Ayres/dp/1935444115/ref=sr_11_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1234740270&sr=11-1

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1. You have had an interesting writing career. Can you please provide us a brief biographical sketch of it?

I have been an award winning novelist, journalist, columnist, critic, and film and television writer/producer, in my career. A graduate (B.A.) of Syracuse University, I worked in New York for seven years writing and producing short films for Children's Television Workshop ("Sesame Street,") ABC, and Time Life Television, then went on to write and produce for various other PBS television series at stations in Maryland, Arizona, and California.

Moving to Los Angeles in the late '70s, I began writing for commercial television, primarily in animation, worked as a feature development writer for Jack Arnold at Universal Pictures, and was recipient of a Warner Brothers Writers Fellowship in 1982. Since leaving Hollywood in 1989 I have published five mystery novels including winner of the St. Martin's Press/Private Eye Writers of America Best First Novel competition in 1992 (*Hour of the Manatee*). I was a single parent for more than a decade prior to my nearly three years living and working in China between 2004-2007. There I served as a freelance editor, writer, and university lecturer in English at Harbin University of Commerce in northern Manchuria, where I wrote *A Billion to One: An American Insider in the New China* (2009). I married a Chinese national while there, and now live in Seattle with my wife and daughter.

2. Who is Tony Lowell of your Tony Lowell mystery series and what makes him special? What, in anything, inspired you create this character?

Tony Lowell is partly autobiographical, of course, as many fictional protagonists are. Those who know me and have also followed this series see this right off. What originally inspired the first book of the series was my personal outrage at knowing that people really do get away with murder in our world and society—both literally and figuratively. Especially those who are rich and powerful. The one thing an author has to power to do,

at least in the fictional world, is render justice. And that's what I wanted to do in a real murder case in which, in the real world, justice was denied.

Lowell himself was also based, in part, on a friend I made during my dropout hippy days while living on a boat near Annapolis, Md. I'd met a former NY Times press photographer named Mike Lien who'd reinvented himself as a 'waterman'--a classic rustic, reclusive Chesapeake Bay fisherman and boat builder. Combining my own hippy background and inclinations with my own strong belief in justice and the interesting history of this journalist friend became the basis for Tony Lowell.

6. What authors have inspired you throughout your career?

F. Scott Fitzgerald taught me the illusory nature of the seductive power of the American Dream. Hemmingway showed me how to combine character with action in the most efficient ways possible, without losing mood and atmosphere. Norman Mailer taught me how to be terse, and challenging. John D. MacDonald inspired me to write Florida based mysteries with a compelling central character.

How would you describe your writing style?

Atmospheric and suspenseful. Writing for animation taught me how to use simple, classic structure. Working as a critic taught me the importance of seeking and maintaining high standards. Working as a journalist taught me the importance of fact-based detail.

What have the critics found remarkable about your work in your career?

I have worked successfully in virtually every genre of writing, and it has been my principle livelihood my entire working career. I think this is very unusual, and this has been noted.

As for my books, as far as I can determine, Tony Lowell still remains the only hippie detective in mystery lore as well as the only peacenik detective who refuses to carry a weapon. He's also, as a sidebar, the only pot-smoking P.I., not that he's that much of a stoner (he actually prefers beer).

7. Are you working on any other books now?

Yes. I am working on an autobiography, chronicling this writer's journey.

What are your writing plans for the future?

Wide open. Take it as it comes, and take notes just in case!