

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Announcements](#)

[First Annual Contest](#)

[Interviews](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Poetry](#)

["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)

[Writers' Craft Box](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

[Writers' Challenge!](#)

[Submission Guidelines](#)

[Indie Bookstores](#)

[Artists' Gallery](#)

[Feedback & Questions](#)

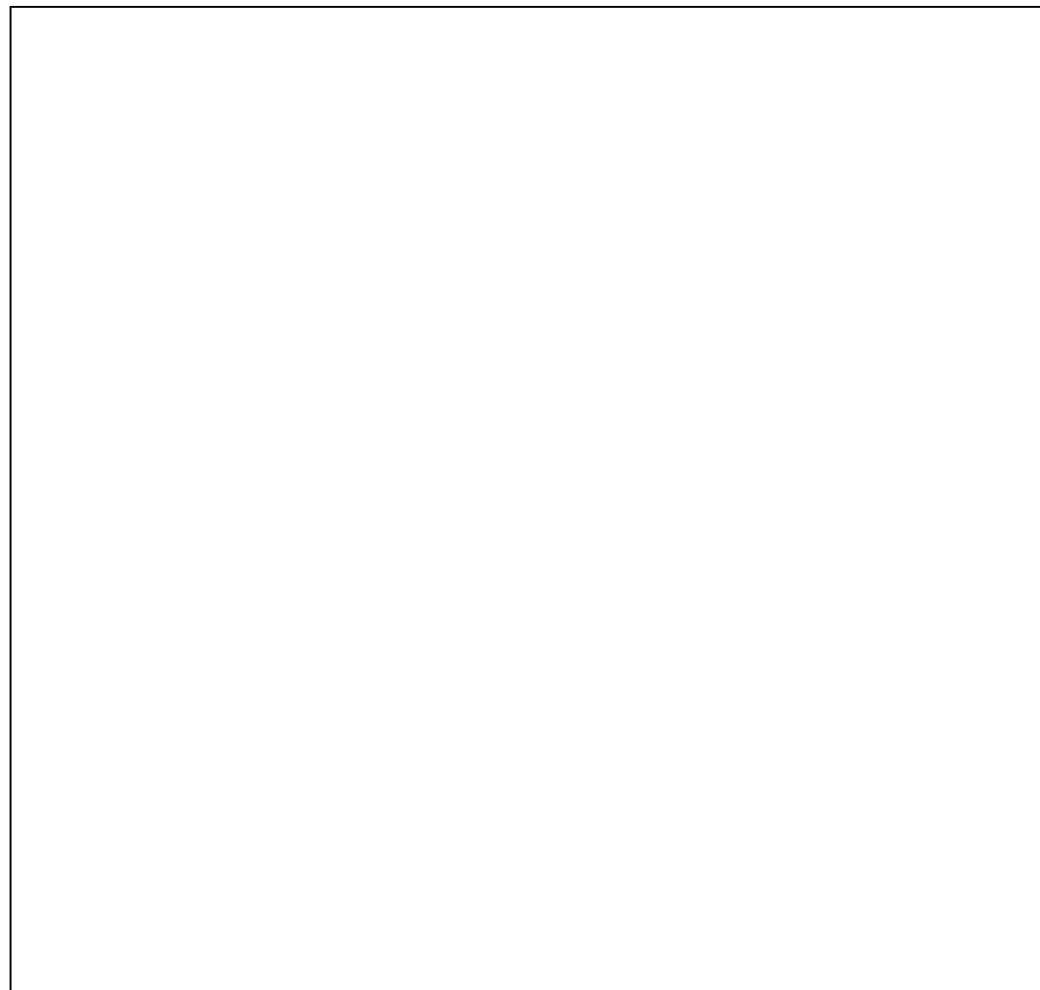
[Scrapbook of Four Years](#)

[Archives](#)

[Inscribing Industry Blog](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

Search x





Dennis Lehane; photo by Ashleigh-Faye Beland (<http://www.ashleigh-fayephoto.com/>)

Under the disquieted, gray New England skies of autumn, it seems timely that we are venturing out into the storm to decipher the gray areas of life, of the psyche with none other than the brilliant, prolific Lehane, who humbly yet unapologetically, examines all aspects of what we perceive to be truth. Bold and unflinching in his study of human behavior, Lehane does not shy from the shadows, but rather tears down the walled facades that would cast them. It is through his creation of worlds and characters so painstakingly authentic, that the reader navigates the map of the mind; instinct, belief, emotion and human nature in raw form. There are books that enrich you, books that influence you, but rare are the books that fundamentally change how you perceive life. It is with Lehane's work that we experience the latter, step beyond the locked door and draw back the fabric over Wilde's mythical portrait of Dorian Grey to glimpse what we can of humanity.

Honest, direct and unvarnished, we give you Dennis Lehane...

Dennis Lehane is the author of nine novels—including the New York Times bestsellers Mystic River, Shutter Island and Gone, Baby, Gone that were adapted into major motion pictures directed by individuals such as Clint Eastwood, Martin Scorsese and Ben Affleck. Lehane has taught advanced fiction writing at Harvard University, served as a member of the board of directors for the MFA program sponsored by Pine Manor College, been involved with the Solstice Summer Writers' Conference, served as a writer -in-residence at Eckerd, been an honorary brother of Phi Alpha Tau professional fraternity at Emerson College, co-directed the Writers in Paradise conference, and been amongst individuals such as Robert Frost and Walter Cronkite in being a recipient of the Connor Award. Lehane's extensive body of work includes, in addition to his novels, short stories, screenplays and teleplays.

Dennis Lehane Interview by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) You ask questions in your books but don't presume to be the one to answer them; you cleverly allow for the interpretation of the reader. There are certain impenetrable gray areas in your works that invite the reader to stand in the doorway observing them, be wholly affected by them, but never venture past the threshold to make definitive black and white judgments about what they've witnessed.

In *The Literary Imagination*, a book from the 1960s that examines the correlations between psychology and writing, the writer is portrayed as the rebel genius; its treatment of a philosophy by author Andre Gide conveys the importance of a writer's role in getting people to open their minds. Gide was quoted as saying of the comparison between Victor Hugo and Rousseau, "...the [creative] individual... refuses to submit to laws already established." The book takes this to another level by interpretation: "The implication is that, by such refusal, the [creative] individual, provided that he be endowed with expressive talent, can see both the flaws in the world and make others sufficiently aware of them to want to change either the flaws or their ways of looking at and apprehending the world."

Do you feel that your previous experience as a counselor allows for some of the intricate perspectives you present? Discuss with us the impact of some of those experiences upon your writing.

The experience of being a counselor merely solidified a not terribly original opinion I'd been formulating at that point in my life, which was that most situations are not black and white. And those that are make for poor drama or inform the horrible bore that is the "problem play." I look back now and notice the Jesuits probably played a larger role in my intellectual firmament than I've given them credit for. The Jesuit's interrogatory model of obtaining knowledge leads by its nature to an almost infinite degree of questioning. So if the answer I hear seems clear cut, my mind moves immediately to, "Yeah, but. . ."

Where you see that most in play is in MYSTIC RIVER, where I was questioning the myth that underpins most American crime fiction—that good can will out through a regeneration of violence. I had propagated that myth myself in several books, and maybe as a younger man I believed it (and even to this day, I sometimes, paradoxically, agree with an old buddy of mine who used to say, "Some motherf#\$%ers just got to be got") but as I grew older, the more I bucked against the reductive stupidity of the idea that might equals right. In MYSTIC RIVER, Jimmy Marcus fulfills all the duties of the classic American outsider-hero—he knows the truth and he follows his gut to right the wrongs and settle up with the villain society is either unable or unwilling to punish. And he restores order. Except. .

.he's wrong. He kills the wrong guy (Dave.) And society (Sean) shows up just a few minutes later to say, "We had this covered. There's a reason for laws. For the concept of society. For due diligence and a criminal justice system."

2) Main characters in your novels often aren't just heroes or villains- in the best sense of the three dimensional literary character tradition, they've done some right and some wrong, conditioned by their beliefs and histories. No one comes out a clear winner at the end of the day which is perhaps a comment on the messiness of life. When pushing the characters over the line into one category or another (hero or villain), do you think there is a nature vs. nurture element that brings out the distinction (upbringing, genetics, socioeconomic factors, childhood trauma)? Do you feel what an individual is capable of is a result of their circumstances (in other words that anyone under the right conditions could be capable of anything, good or bad) or rather a result of what they in turn make of those circumstances?

One of the most powerful and singular aspects of your novels is that the reader is moved to feel for or have an understanding of almost every principal character- if only for a brief moment. This exposes the audience itself for better or worse in who we feel for, how, when and why.

Purely evil people are rare. Stalin strikes me as pure evil, I guess; by all accounts, he woke up every day wanting to pollute the world with his hate, and there wasn't much else to him. But Hitler strikes me as something different—an odious human being of unforgivable hate and blood thirst, yes, but also a messianic lunatic who convinced a bunch of banal racists to commit evil for him. Which is different, again, than Stalin who wasn't crazy or deluded, just simply evil. Hitler was a more complex version of evil, I guess; his evil had dimensions, like all seven circles of hell wrapped up in one disturbed package. If Hitler hadn't come along with all his nationalistic and populist poison, the average Germans of that era could have gone from the cradle to the grave thinking they were good men and women. But he did come along and he unleashed the beast within of an entire populace. It's all about how you're tested—by people, by circumstance, by the culture in which you live.

That's what the best drama often embodies for me—the moment when someone is put to the test. Who are you really? Not the

you of cocktail parties, faculty chitchat, armchair quarterbacking, and helping your neighbor mow his lawn. The you with the lost job and the foreclosed house, the you who catches her husband cheating, the you who suspects his neighbor poisoned his dog, the you who has to help someone you dislike, potentially at the cost of your life or your freedom. That's the you of heightened drama, that's the you who is authentically revealed in extremis. And that's the you, for better or for worse, I want to write about.

3) In the study of process, writers often cater their methods to the needs of their work- best-selling author Meg Waite Clayton spoke of how she assembles binders for each of her novels that juggle period details and multiple character viewpoints. You've referred to yourself as the "bastard child of pulp and literary fiction"; the blending of the genres is evident in the highly elaborate plot complexity, suspenseful pacing, characters that come alive in a matter of pages and description that hits home on both a sensory and emotive level.

In building such complex story architecture, particularly in the instances of *Shutter Island* (when there is a difference between perceived reality and reality within its protagonist) and *Prayers for Rain* (where psychological manipulation takes precedence as it's turned on the investigators), what is your method for keeping every twist and turn, every innocuous detail straight in the front of your mind as you write the story? Do you employ storyboards, charts, binders, index cards, character maps, etc...

The honest answer is that I just make the shit up as I go. If I take a wrong turn, I figure it out pretty quick because, otherwise, I lose my ability to write. The well simply dries up until I figure out what I did wrong. This can be a bitch at the time, but I'd rather lose that month of blockage so I can figure out where I messed up as opposed to continuing on blithely for months or years and then realizing what I've produced is worthless.

4) Places in your novels become characters with their own histories, pasts, personalities, evolutions and hopes. This brings to mind a poem by Thoreau, entitled "THOUGH ALL THE FATES":

Though all the fates should prove unkind,

*Leave not your native land behind.
The ship, becalmed, at length stands still;
The steed must rest beneath the hill;
But swiftly still our fortunes pace
To find us out in every place...*

The poem goes on to describe a tie to New England for its native sons wherever they may venture. Your work clearly resounds with the neighborhoods of Boston, a strong tie to your Mass. roots. Talk to us about the cultivation of setting in your novels. Does their development bear similarities to character sketching? What are some of the most important factors in determining setting for the plot? (Examples- Jimmy's ownership and personification of his neighborhood in *Mystic River*, the cut-off quality of *Shutter Island* for Teddy)

When I was in college, I set stories everywhere because I was trying to stretch, to see what kind of writer I really was. However, I kept noticing that the stuff faculty and fellow students responded to in the most visceral way was the stuff I set in Dorchester, where I'd grown up. Then I realized I felt best when I set things there, too—more loose-limbed, more confident about what was in my characters' cupboards, certain about what words they'd use and which ones they wouldn't, what they thought of while they were shaving or sitting in an empty kitchen at 3 AM, that sort of thing. Writers search a long time for that feeling of a literary home, so once I realized I had it without having to look too far for it, I was good to go.

As for how you determine setting, the truth is I don't know. For SHUTTER, I wanted to write a gothic and I knew the moment the desire popped into my head, that I should set it on an island on a dark and stormy night when communication to the outside world was cut off. For the rest of the books, I've started with Boston, narrowed my focus a little to a particular neighborhood, and run with it. I prefer not to overthink process. I knew too many writers coming up who could talk about their ideas for hours but somehow could never write them down. I'd rather be writing with as little self-consciousness as I can muster.

5) Annabeth's speech toward the conclusion of *Mystic River* has to be one of the most memorable in contemporary literature. When it comes to justification, individuals can become exceedingly resourceful in citing reasons of love, duty, religion... It is justification that makes individuals that much more precarious because their inner reflection is skewed and in this way, conscience doesn't have the same power to inhibit them. Here the expression 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions' would seem fitting. Do you think that people, in likeness to these characters, who utilize rationalization to fit their own needs, truly believe it or is it just a way to survive, to get to a justification for living with their actions?

One of the first lines I ever wrote for MYSTIC RIVER was one of the last to appear in the book—"It occurred to him while he was shaving that he was evil." I drove the entire book toward that line. But once Jimmy realizes he's evil, he makes his peace with it and moves on. Which is what people do. I think Annabeth is honest. She's not rationalizing. She's saying Jimmy's a king, she's a queen, and her children and her family's needs outweigh those of the great unwashed like Dave and Celeste. She's an awful person, but would that the rest of the world was so honest, that the neo-cons admitted they don't care about morality, they care about money, end of list, or that the nicotine Nazis admitted they don't care about some bartender's lungs or anyone's lungs really—or else they'd sell their cars—they just don't like the stench of cigarettes in their hair.

People rationalize almost everything bad that they do. They say, "It's for the children," or "It's for the better good," or "It's for a stronger America," but what they're really saying is, "It's for me." People are for the most part full of shit. I mean that in a loving way—I'm full of shit, you're full of shit, most of the world population, in a way that transcends religious, cultural, and racial divides, is entirely full of shit. We're just making this up as we go and hoping we don't get called out for it. It's the ones who are so filled with their own self-righteousness and their misplaced rage and self-loathing, the ones who claim to be looking out for me or my children or the culture or the national moral barometer who I don't want to share a cab with.

6) All writers have a way of shutting off from their work and recharging. Particularly when in the midst of emotionally heavy, hard-hitting, dark

content that evokes a gut emotional response, how do you put a layer of distance so as not to allow the fictional worlds to affect you in your daily life?

I have two young kids and a very sane wife who doesn't have much trouble speaking her mind. I'm asked to keep that stuff in the office where it belongs and I'm good with that. I punch a clock now, pretty much 6 to 11 AM. And my work has gotten better in most cases because of it. Also, the older you get, the better you get at managing the emotional stretches. You don't need to guzzle a bottle of scotch and fight with your girlfriend to get the fuel to write a scene in which a guy drinks a bottle of whiskey and breaks up with his girlfriend. The dumbest question I ever asked an actor was after I watched Ben Kingsley perform a particularly brutal scene several times, and I said, "How do you do that time and time again?" And he gave me a look that was sweet but withering at the same time and said, "It's called acting."

So I guess the short answer sometimes is, "It's called writing."

7) You served as an executive producer for *Shutter Island* and have been quoted in a 2007 article in *The Patriot Ledger* as saying in regard to considering writing screenplays, that you have 'no desire to operate on my own child'. In striking a balance between involvement and relative objectivity in the conversion of your novels to major films, what have you enjoyed the most and the least about the change in mediums? What was it like to have such a role in the film adaptation of *Shutter Island* where you had access to the stellar cast and location?

I just wrote the books. The filmmakers and the actors and cinematographers interpreted them for the screen. And—lucky me—they did a bang-up job three times. But the novelist is about as useful on a film set as a vacuum cleaner in the forest. The books are mine, the films are theirs. So far it's been a really nice arrangement and I don't go trying to fix things that aren't broken.

8) You've taught advanced fiction writing at Harvard University, served as a member of the board of directors for the MFA program sponsored by Pine Manor College, been involved with the Solstice Summer Writers'

Conference, served as a writer-in-residence at Eckerd, been an honorary brother of Phi Alpha Tau professional fraternity at Emerson College, co-directed the Writers in Paradise conference, and been amongst individuals such as Robert Frost and Walter Cronkite in being a recipient of the Connor Award. What are, in your opinion, the most important facets of a writer's education (both in and outside of the classroom) and what elements of fiction writing do you stress most to your students?

Read.

Stop trying to write the story and start trying to tell it. (And, no, that doesn't overrule the Show Don't Tell rule; I'm talking about a different type of telling.) Put another way, don't think of yourself as a writer; think of yourself as a storyteller.

If you're not doing this because you believe in depth—of character, language, structure, and insight—then maybe you should do something else. No shame in that.

Wanting something and earning it are not the same thing.

Motive matters. If you're trying to become a writer because you want to get rich, there are way easier ways to do that; become a stockbroker. If you're doing it to self-actualize or because you're hoping your writing class can become your secondary therapist, that's cool but let's not pretend you're trying to learn how to tell a story that will entertain, delight, illuminate, and hopefully transcend. So, forgive us, if we take your work a little less seriously than others.

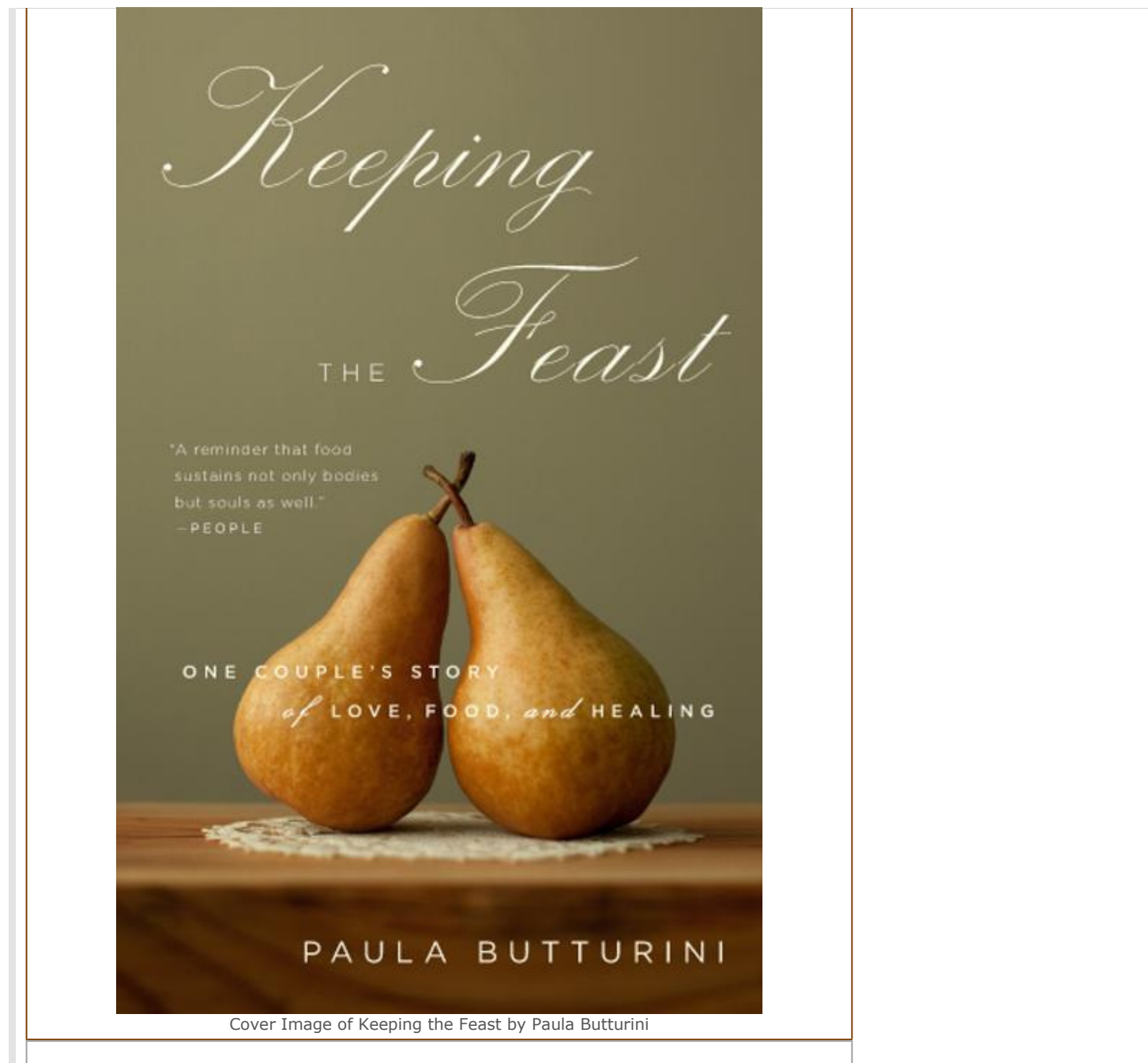
If, however, you write because you can't stop or because narrative is the only way you've ever known by which to make sense of the chaos of the universe or because you simply love to tell a good story or each day you just want to get better than the day before—then you are a writer. And no one should ever be able to bring you down on that score or tell you differently. And when they try to, ask yourself, 'What in their life is so f#\$%ing great?' And nine times out of ten, the answer is. . . nothing. Which is why they want you to fail. Because misery loves company.

9) Visiting the Roaring Twenties in the era of Prohibition for your latest novel, *Live by Night*, available this October, tell us about your thought process in choosing the time period and subject matter for your latest project and your favorite aspects about writing the novel (whether the process was similar or dissimilar to the writing of past works).

I always wanted to write a gangster novel set during the Roaring Twenties. Simple as that. One day, my abilities finally caught up with my ambitions and I started writing it.

10) In keeping with the mystical spirit of autumn, we turn to the topic of dreams. In Naomi Epel's *Writers Dreaming*, authors such as Amy Tan and Stephen King speak of the dreams that shaped either their writing or gave insight into their creative lives. With your being an author with incredible depth and capacity to understand the psychology of the human condition, we want to ask, what do you dream? Have any of your dreams ever influenced your work in the form of an idea, a solution or an insight? Has there ever been a recurring dream that coincided with a theme in one of your works?

Most of SHUTTER ISLAND came to me in a dream. I scribbled it onto a piece of paper—only time in my life that's ever happened—and woke up the next day, looked at the paper and thought, 'Who wrote this?'



Cover Image of Keeping the Feast by Paula Butturini

In Keeping the Feast, Butturini writes, “Both of us had lived essentially fortunate lives when we met in Rome in 1985, when I was thirty-four and John was forty-three. We lived four joyous years afterward, deeply grateful to have found each other. Only then, just after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, were we sucked into what I came to think of as our own private tornado. Though I don’t believe the maxim that trouble comes in threes, I suspect that consecutive blows make it harder to rebound, easier to be dragged into a downward spiral. Our troubles began with a police truncheon in Czechoslovakia, two weeks before our wedding, and a bullet in Romania three weeks after.”

I was intrigued by this, interested to see what had happened to this couple, but it was the book’s beautifully descriptive prose and the very thought of having long stretches of time to think, to walk, to heal in Italy with its people, its food were the reasons I brought this book home from the bookstore. I had no idea of its depths, which is the way good books often come into my life.

“Can you love a city for its pink mornings and golden twilights? For the screech of the seagulls, the flitting of its swifts? Can you love a city because it is a riot of ochres and earth tones, all of them drenched by a fierce, rich light? Can you feel sheltered by the earth-hugging chaos of a city’s skyline, exhilarated by its church domes floating like balloons across a deep blue sky? Can you feel nourishment for a lifetime because an ancient city has never forgotten that its citizens need honest, fresh and simple food, not only to survive but to flourish?”

Paula Butturini has worked for the Chicago Tribune and in overseas bureaus for United Press International in Warsaw, London, Madrid and Rome. She is now based in Paris, writing and giving talks on how we heal.

Paula Butturini Interview by Denise Bouchard

1) “When we returned to Rome, ghost-like, in 1992, we were longing for those comforts, that blend of light, warmth, food, beauty and friends- the very elixir that had nourished and protected us before our jobs as foreign correspondents called us off to cover the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. We had taken a battering during our five years away. Italy seemed the place to try to get over it.”

“That was the July I entirely gave up cooking by the book, I mean that literally and figuratively as well.”

It seems that in your craving for normalcy after the troubles you encountered, that all of the rulebooks were thrown out and in order to heal, you learned the art of letting go to get to something greater. I sometimes think that in times of great turmoil lie the seeds for our greatest creative potential.

Would you also say that the transition from journalism to the creative, intimate nature of personal memoir non-fiction was a part of giving up living life by the book? How difficult or refreshing was that change for you?

The transition happened slowly over many years. At first, I thought ‘You are going to write a series of short, linked pieces’, and this thought kept me from being overwhelmed. I used a calendar that I had written in day after day at the hospital during John’s grueling recovery for all of the historical facts. It was difficult at times to reconstruct what had happened to John. Reconstructing the bullet was the first thing that I wrote about, but it was also the hardest and it made me a wreck; yet once I got it out of the way, it left room for the memoirs.

Writing about my childhood was more creative and much more fun. It’s very different from journalism, though. I had spent many years with United Press International and reporters have a hard time going from one to the other. I kept telling myself, ‘Just think about the book.’ Journalistic writing is so chronological and parts of the book are written in an A-B-C format, so it was trickier finding food memories, but it was as if I was giving myself a reward after reliving the painful memories of what had happened.

I also tried to remember who my readers were and because I was writing from abroad, I felt for example, that my mother was one of the people that I wrote for. She was intelligent but not intellectual; she was savvy and street-smart and I wanted those readers to be able to relate. Also, I initially wrote the book for John’s children, Anna and Peter, to show that their father was actually a tower of strength. People who go through such difficult things and come out the other side are so strong

and I wanted his children to know that it was like any other illness and not a sign of weakness. Depression is not seen as being as legitimate an illness as something like cancer; you would never say to those patients ‘buck up’ or ‘go for a walk and you’ll feel better’. Thus I wrote in part for them to know how strong their father was and to tell what he had been through.

I also wrote for my father. He was there at my first talk at the Fairfield, CT library. Though he was quite ill, he was there in top form. I used to send him my notes and he read them chapter by chapter. I think he stayed alive to read all of them. He cried with joy when the book came out and held it as if it were a newborn, out on his forearm, looking down at it. He was so proud.

2) You’ve revealed so much of yourself and your family in order to bring us this beautiful book of healing, food and love. It has been said by Muriel Rukeyser that if one woman told the truth of her life, the whole world would crack open. Your mother talked of truths when she said that for her, having a child was the best and the worst, as she revealed her struggles with postpartum psychosis. How has telling the truth of your life, your husband’s and mother’s struggles, affected your readers either by helping them to know they were not alone and what things could possibly help them or conversely by inspiring stigmas based upon age-old ignorant perceptions? I’m curious to know what came up through the cracks when your book creating an opening in the world.

This question really intrigued me because when writing the book, I never once expected to have the response that I had. The bookstores would always tell me, ‘Don’t expect more than ten people or so.’ We always ended up with about one hundred people or more when articles ran in the newspapers talking about the book and its underlying theme of my husband’s and mother’s mental illnesses. As I looked around at the audience, I could see that many people there were suffering from depression. Their attention was rapt, you could have heard a pin drop. An older woman grabbed my arm when it was her turn to have her book signed and said, “I can’t tell you what it was like to have someone talk about depression like you did, so calmly, like it was a normal thing. I had it at ten years old and no one in my family ever spoke of it to me.”

No matter where I went, something always happened like that. I went from book signings to giving small lectures on depression. I once gave a talk to a group of psychologists and one of them, a woman in tears, approached me afterward to say that she had been manic depressive and tried to keep it a secret and finally crashed. Her teenage daughter felt betrayed about being lied to. This woman was crying as she thanked me for what I was doing, for getting people to talk about what they had gone through or are currently undergoing to their families in order to keep these secrets from becoming a time-bomb.

When my daughter, Julia, was nine, she had trouble sleeping. A friend's aunt had committed suicide in January on New Year's Eve. I told her, "You really need to think about what's bothering you." It took her until August when she said, "Daddy's got depression; does this mean I will get it? Does this mean Daddy will commit suicide?" And then she said something that described depression better than any clinical analysis of it I've ever heard: "When Daddy got depression, it was like my real daddy went away and another daddy took his place."

3) K.D. Lang sings of "constant cravings" and she is referring to love. In your book, you talk of 'voglie'; an Italian expression used to convey desires, longings, wishes, wants and of course, food. You say that your family Americanized the word to 'wool-ees', as in, 'I've got the wool-ees for a hot fudge sundae.' Your Italian grandmother believed that wool-ees should be taken seriously. I agree with her. How important do you feel it is to listen to your cravings not only for food, but for our soul's deeper yearnings in life (travel to a particular place, a career change, love...)?

I believe that all of us have to be in tune with our body's hidden needs. It's what makes us human; we cannot be all intellect. The body should listen not only to what the brain is saying, because the brain can lie, but also to the stomach which is more reliable because those gut truths can lead to our soul's needs.

4) As news correspondents in war-torn countries, both you and your husband have seen and experienced violence first-hand; your husband's experience having been struck by a sniper bullet two nights before

Christmas in Romania. You go on to say that “even a single bullet takes at least two paths; one through the body, one through life itself.” You mention how one thought continues to haunt you: “If a single bullet travels up and down the generations, how do we ever begin to measure the havoc of war?” Given your personal perspectives and experiences, how do you feel about the current war and its possible repercussions?

Well, I feel having seen what any kind of violence can do, that violence destroys a certain part of life and carries with it repercussions that are hard to get over. I know any war causes an endless spiraling chain down the generations of trouble-both mental and physical. I also think that we don't do enough for our soldiers. As you say, they are coming home with PTSD in large numbers. If you read The Theory of War by Jone Brady, it talks of the Civil War and what violence can do and how it did affect and continues to affect her family. You are changed by violence. John received a letter from a guy who had been knifed by a young man. The letter spoke of what it had done to his life and how it had changed it. I know we all think that at least WWII was necessary, but it's not just this war but any violence that has serious repercussions...it's endless.

5) Similar to the way in which Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* touches upon the healing aspect of food, conversation and friends in Rome and Frances Mayes (*Under the Tuscan Sun*) details the Italian approach to hearth and home in Tuscany, you discuss the healing light and nutritive powers of food and conversation in *Keeping the Feast*, including your time in Trevignano where the company of your close friends would draw your husband out and keep him grounded during his healing.

“All of us cook, I think, in part to feed our daily hunger, but just as important, and perhaps more so, we cook and eat to feed our spirits, to keep us all in the same orbit of life. As the generations turn, as our family expands, the table and its simple pleasures- never just the food, but the food and the talk, the food and the laughter, the food and the tears, the jokes, the memories, the hopes- still hold us in place, well-anchored in a safe harbor.”

I love that you took a part of your parents' way and went by your gut to actually live in Europe. There's not enough of this philosophy of healing, family, conversation and food around the table in a lot of American homes

where fast and convenient reign supreme. I grew up with the more European view and still arrange our lives to at least be together at dinner every night and spend time engaging one another at a big meal on the weekends. How would you encourage families to do more of this and convey its importance to the overall well-being of the family?

It's something I kind of find mystifying with people in the States; nobody grazed in my family. I know that everyone's schedules today are so different. I know how hard it is to have to work. Yet if you don't have that meal together as a family, then how are you a family? You are simply occupying rooms in the same house otherwise. How does one recover all those mealtimes not spent together? I don't understand not connecting at all. Even when I got home late from work when I was a teenager, my family came and sat down with me. I think families can run into problems if there is no life together. There should be no TV, no computers, no phones, no music period- and if someone is going to be late, join them. No one should eat alone.

6) You now live in a quiet corner of France. "These days we own a small stone farmhouse, a low-slung, tile-roofed place half-hidden by climbing roses and grape and Virginia creeper for most of the year..."

Can you give us a current day-in-the-life including your time spent with John and Julia as well as your process for writing?

We spend most of our time in Paris. The house is for vacations. After Julia finishes high school, we'll spend more time there as the city is so expensive. During the day, Julia is very involved with school; she goes to a special school where she has classes in the morning and takes classical ballet in the afternoon. I get up with her in the morning and make her breakfast and lunch and the three of us have dinner together between six and seven every evening.

John is retired from The New York Times but still writes for them. His stories are lighter fare now, they are of life in different countries, funny stories.

At the moment I'm working on a novel for kids about a family who experiences mental illness that is based on John and Julia, what Julia learned and tools for children to deal with depression in the family, because it takes a lot longer than you would think to come out of it. A child can actually help in this process and learn from it.

7) What's next for you? Is there a cookbook, perhaps, with pictures of your family in your future? What project would you most like to work on next?

The one complaint that people had about the book was that they wished I'd included recipes. I'd like not just a cookbook but a cookbook with stories behind the food.

I may write two books at once. Of course, the one for kids dealing with family depression will be dark, so the one about food and family will be my reward.

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

© 2012 *The Write Place At the Write Time*
This on-line magazine and all the content contained therein is copyrighted.