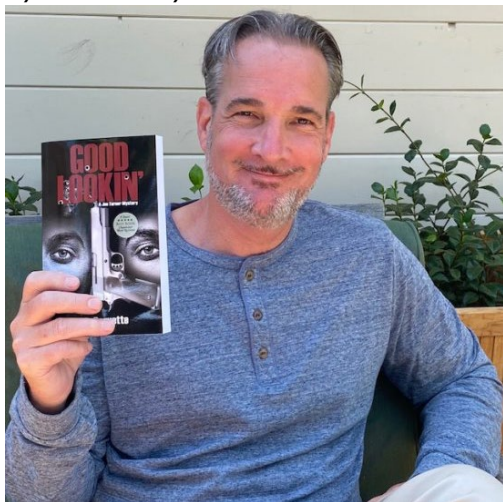


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Lafayette defense attorney turns mystery author

By Diane Claytor



Mystery author Todd (T.L.) Bequette Photo provided

In the back of Todd (T.L.) Bequette's mind, he always thought he could write a book. He was right. His first novel, "Good Lookin, A Joe Turner Mystery," has recently been published and been very well received. In fact, the San Francisco Book Review wrote that "T.L. Bequette creates a brilliant masterpiece that is easy to love and hard to forget."

The Lafayette resident and married father of four boys has always enjoyed writing, crediting his mother's love of books and his father's "ability to spin a yarn" for his passion. He would love to spend all his time writing but admits that, until he sells many more books, he needs to keep his day job: a criminal defense attorney in Oakland.

Bequette notes that his work "offers a huge treasure trove of ideas, many of which are stranger than fiction." Authors are generally advised to write what they know and Bequette has certainly taken that advice to heart, as is apparent from the book's synopsis: "From the streets of inner-city Oakland attorney Joe Turner defends the most hardened criminals. At its heart is a decade-old murder and a tangled web of family, loyalty and devotion that has the trial hanging in the balance."

Many of the characters in the book are compilations of people Bequette knows. (In fact, there is a storyline about a set of twins, a scenario Bequette knows very well although, he says, his twin boys have told him he actually knows nothing about twins.) "I find when I create a character," Bequette reports, "I think of people I know and combine traits from several different ones. The same goes when developing a plot.

"I have definitely gotten messages from colleagues trying to guess who I'm actually writing about or which judge or district attorney I'm referring to in the story," Bequette says.

When he's at work or in court, Bequette admits writing his stories is often in the back of his mind. "If something strange happens in court, or I run into a character that is wildly entertaining, I think about ways to incorporate that into a book. There's rarely a day that goes by now where a co-worker doesn't relay a story and suggest I include that in a future book."

"Good Lookin" is actually not the first book Bequette wrote, although it is the first one published. As he discovered, writing a book isn't quite as easy as he originally thought. His first novel, written over the course of 10 years without much of an organized plan, Bequette now realizes, had a "wonky" plot, and was rejected by numerous independent publishers. As luck would have it, that first novel has been significantly reworked and will be released next spring as the second Joe Turner mystery, "Blood Perfect."

In some ways, Joe Turner is similar to Bequette, "although I made him a little more `everything,'" Bequette acknowledges. "He drinks too much and stresses too much. But he's super witty and funny like I would be if I could stop time and think of the perfect legal argument, the perfect comeback, the perfect joke. Some of the most fun I have when writing is flushing out the Joe Turner character," he continues.

Having gone through the long and often arduous and frustrating process of writing, editing and publishing a book, Bequette believes he has become a better writer. He is now working on the third Joe Turner Mystery, noting that he'll keep writing about Joe Turner "until I get tired of the character."

Editorial reviews of "Good Lookin" have been quite positive. Kirkus Reviews calls the debut crime drama a "thoroughly engrossing mystery from a writer with immense potential a serpentine thriller a zesty, addictive tale that will satisfy fans of suspense novels and literary crime dramas." Reviews like this are, of course, wonderful, Bequette says, and he feels very lucky. However, he notes that some reviews haven't been quite so complimentary and "it's amazing how personally I take it when there are negative comments." But those appear to be few; goodreads.com readers also seem to love the book, with the majority giving it five stars.

"Good Lookin" may be purchased from most major online book sellers.

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