



AUTHOR Q&A

A Conversation with Liz Lazarus

Author of *Free of Malice*

Q: Where did you get the idea for the book?

Like the main character, I was attacked by a stranger in my home in the middle of the night. In order to heal, I started to write about how I was feeling and what had changed in my life. At the time, I didn't know about EMDR therapy to heal from trauma, so used writing as a catharsis. Also like the main character, all I had for self-defense was a can of Mace. After the attack, I said to my brother-in-law, if I had owned a gun, I would have shot the guy as he left. My brother-in-law informed me that I was fortunate that I didn't—as the shooting might not have been a clear case of self-defense. That idea sparked my interest in learning about the criminal justice system and inspired me to write the hypothetical case portrayed in the book. The ending, which I won't spoil, was prompted by a question from my mother. Once you've finished the book, you can write to me at liz@lizlazarus.com and I'll tell you more about that.

Q: What traits and other tidbits do you share with the main character?

Like Laura, I went to Georgia Tech for an engineering degree, though I graduated. Laura transferred to the University of Georgia for a journalism degree. Also like Laura, I live in Atlanta, have an older sister and lost my dad to a heart attack. I suppose all writers have portions of ourselves in the characters we portray, which makes us vulnerable but was the only way I knew to tell the story and be authentic.

Q: What made you decide to self-publish?

The publishing industry has changed so much over the years and self-publishing has become a viable alternative, especially for an unknown, first time author.

Q: Are there any specific authors whose writing styles or subject matter inspired your book?

I actually like non-fiction—biographies, probably because I like learning about other people and their journey. I've just recently reread my grandfather's book, *Follow My Leader*. It's a children's book first published in 1957 and still has fans to this day. I also love thrillers with interesting female characters like *Before I Go To Sleep* by S. J. Watson, *Girl On The Train* by Paula Hawkins, and of course, *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn.

Q: Why should someone want to read your book?

One of the best compliments I received was that my book was educational while entertaining. It has a lot of information about therapy, gun ownership and the criminal defense system, but wrapped into a suspenseful thriller. I wrote it to be a fun beach read...and maybe a movie! And if you know Atlanta, you'll enjoy reading about all the familiar places.

Q: What advice would you give to authors who are thinking about writing their first book?

I postponed writing this book for many years to pursue other opportunities—I moved to Paris, got my MBA from Northwestern and got my pilot's license. But this book kept nagging me to write it so I finally relented. I would tell other authors, if you have the calling, listen to it.

Q: What is your writing process?

I used a huge wall calendar to outline the six months in which the book took place from June to December. I would list the events that occurred on the calendar which helped me sequence the story and also allowed me to circle back to clues I had dropped in earlier chapters. I had the great fortune to work with a certified EMDR therapist (Karen McCarty) and two criminal defense lawyers (Alison Frutoz and Ruth Rocker) to be sure those portions of the book were accurate.

Q: What interesting topics does your book shed light on?

Recovering from an attack, EMDR therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, gun ownership, criminal defense system, and race.

Q: Do you have another project in the works?

If so, what is it?

To my surprise and delight, many of my readers want to know more about what happens next for Laura. I have a few ideas on a new case.

Bonus question: What is your favorite past time activity?

I like anything that allows me to be creative. For example, I recently co-produced a music CD with my friend, Thomas Barnette. He inspired the character of Thomas and his song, *Let Me Breathe*, is the theme song for my book. You can listen to the song at freeofmalice.com.