

An Interview with Bestseller Lisa Scottoline

By: Dorinda Ohnstad

I recently attended my first writer's conference, *Legal Fiction Writing for Lawyers*, which New York Times bestsellers Lisa Scottoline and Stephen Horn teach every Fall in Cape Cod. I was excited, but anxious, about attending the conference and meeting my instructors. You see, I had never met a New York Times bestseller in the flesh before. Alright; yes, I've lead a rather provincial life.

The first thing you notice about Lisa Scottoline is that she stands no more than an inch or two over five foot tall, but the instant she takes the stage she fills the room with her presence. God packed a lot of personality into her petite frame. Lisa loves her job and it shows, both in her teaching and in her writing. She quickly connected with her audience in the same way her writing reaches her readers through the words on each page of her novels. All fourteen of them.

Lisa graduated cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania's Law School in 1981, and landed a coveted clerkship for a state appellate judge. Following the clerkship, she joined the prestigious Philadelphia law firm of Dechert, Price & Rhoads as a litigator. Although her career was on the right path, her marriage was not, and it ended shortly after the birth of her baby. Determined to raise her new daughter, Lisa gave up practicing law to stay at home with her child, but needed to find a way to pay the bills.

Always interested in writing, and a big fan of Grisham and Turow and the newly created legal thriller genre, Lisa realized that no women lawyers were writing legal thrillers, and decided to give it a shot. Three years later, Lisa had a finished book, *Everywhere That Mary Went*, which was nominated by the Mystery Writer's of America for the Edgar Award, suspense fiction's premier award. While unsuccessful in attaining this prestigious award with her debut novel, she went on to claim it with her second book, *Final Appeal*. Lisa's fifth book, *Mistaken Identity* was her first of nine books to become *New York Times* bestsellers.

A true believer that you should write what you know, Lisa enjoys writing about her hometown of Philadelphia and her Italian/American heritage. Her novels feature gutsy and resilient female characters that mirror elements of her own personality and life. To read her novels is to know her. From every page of her novels, she not only thrills and entertains readers with page-turning action and her trademark wit and humor, but she opens the door to her soul and gladly waves her readers in.

Lisa's 14th novel, *Daddy's Girl*, due out March 13, 2007 features a wonderful heroine, Natalie Greco. Nat teaches law yet feels out of her element in the classroom and more at home with her collection of Nancy Drew books. Preferring to read a mystery rather than solving one, Nat's life is turned upside down when she is accused of a murder she didn't commit and is forced to go on the run to figure out the hidden secret behind one man's last words. Whether you have a well-read and much loved collection of Nancy Drew books (like those that sit above my desk as I write this article) or not, you will find that Lisa's story-telling skills will keep you riveted from beginning to end.

Q: What are you currently working on?

A: My new book, *Old Flame*, is the battle of the Good Girl vs. The Mean Girl. And this time, the Good Girl has to save the Mean Girl's life. In the book, Mary DiNunzio races against the clock to find her high school nemesis who has been kidnapped. It throws Mary back into the daily lives of her old neighborhood and rekindles lots of emotional baggage she thought she'd left behind. Don't you hate when that happens? We wish we could check our emotional baggage, but it's always carry on...

Q: What are your favorite and least favorite things about being a writer?

A: I love everything about being a writer. I love being able to work from home, I love the flexibility it affords me, I love being able to connect with people heart-to-heart, which is what I think books can do. It's not always easy, but nothing worthwhile is easy. Except golden retrievers.

Q: What do you do in your spare time, when you aren't writing?

A: Enjoy time with my daughter, walk my dogs and ride my pony.

Q: When will we see one of the attorneys from Rosato & Associates in the movies? Which character would you most like to see come alive on the movie screen and which actress would you choose to play her and why?

A: Soon I hope! Every birthday cake I wish, "Book to Movie!" And joking aside, we need more strong, smart, sexy women in the movies!!! And I'd never cast any of them. I don't think of them like anybody on earth. They're in my imagination, and I hope in my reader's imaginations, which is worth more to me than any movie.

Q: Which of your books has done the best on the best seller lists? Do you feel that the competition in this regard is increasing? Why or why not?

A: Each book does better than the next, and I'm so grateful to my readers for that. *Dirty Blonde* debuted as #5 on the New York Times hardcover bestseller list, and that's my best to date. I never view other authors as competition. In fact, we need more voices. I think everyone has a book in them, and I hope they write it.

Q: Where do you research information for your books? Your attention to detail is amazing -- I feel like I am right inside the scene.

A: I'm an admitted bookworm, but I'm also addicted to web surfing, so books and the internet provide me with lots of terrific research. However, sometimes that just isn't enough, and I need to see and experience things firsthand. That has led me to many great adventures over the years from taking boxing lessons, driving up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum, traveling to an internment camp in Montana, and breathing in toxic fumes in Centralia, PA. I do it because I think the details matter and I want to get them right for my readers.

Q: Not a lot of writers are as prolific as you. You are the author of over a dozen novels, and we know there are more on the way. Do you find it difficult to come up with ideas for your books? If not, how do you continue to do it?

A: I pray a lot. Really. My hope is to come up with at least one good book idea a year, and so far, I've been lucky enough to keep on schedule. Of course, when you are motivated by a mortgage, anything is possible.

Q: You have a new book coming out soon, what can you tell us about it?

A: Daddy's Girl is about Nat Greco, an everywoman, who, although loves her job teaching law, her family, her fiancé and her comfortable life, never really feels like she completely fits in. Then Nat gets talked into teaching a class at a local prison by the Faculty Hunk, Angus Holt, and her world turns upside down.

A violent prison riot breaks out during the class, and in the chaos, Nat rushes to give CPR to an injured prison guard. Before he dies, he asks her to deliver a cryptic message with his last words: "Tell my wife, it's under the floor."

The dying declaration plunges Nat into a nightmare. Suddenly, the girl who has always followed the letter of the law finds herself suspected of a brutal murder. She encounters threats to her life around every curve, from ruthless killers desperate to keep her from exposing their secret. In the meantime, she gets dangerously close to Angus, whose warmth, strength, and ponytail shake her dedication to her boyfriend.

With her love life in jeopardy, her career in the balance, and her life on the line, Nat is thrown back on her resources, her intelligence, and her courage. Forced into hiding to stay alive, she sets out to save herself by deciphering the puzzle behind one man's last words. And learns the secret behind the greatest puzzle of all — herself.

Q: While all of your books continue to have female protagonists, your most recent books have veered away from the use of an attorney with Rosato & Associates. Do you anticipate this to be the continuing trend, or do you have future plans for Rosato & Associates?

A: They're back! As I mentioned, my next book, Old Flame, will star Mary DiNunzio, which readers have been asking me to bring back. My last Mary book, Killer Smile, was a deeply personal book and connected to a lot of emotion with the death of my father. I felt like I needed a bit of a break before I could go back to those characters, which is why I started writing new characters. Now, after a few books, I'm ready to go back to Mary, and all those strong, sexy, smart girls!

Q: As I have heard you tell aspiring writers, being an avid reader is a key ingredient to being a talented writer. So if someone wants to be a successful author of legal thrillers tell us which books are a must read and why?

A: I don't consider my books legal thrillers. In fact, they rarely even have courtroom scenes anymore. Really, I try to write entertaining, page turners with strong female characters. In my case, many of them happen to be lawyers, but that is just their day jobs, and they're like all of us,

people who have an interest in right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice. That's how I conceived them originally, and I still think of them that way.

I write what I like to read, and I consider every book I read a lesson learned. You can learn something from every book you read whether it is what to do, or what not to do. Reading is really just the key.

Q: What is the best advice you would you give an aspiring writer?

A: Write what you know. I'm an independent Italian American woman, with a law degree, a wonderful family, great friends, and a bunch of adorable dogs. You will see all of this in my books, and real-life emotion. To me, this goes a long way towards making the characters feel true and honest, which helps readers identify with them and hopefully looking for more. Good writers are open books. No pun.

Lisa will be promoting her newest novel *Daddy's Girl*, due out March 13th, at the following locations:

March 13th —ON-SALE DATE—PHILADELPHIA, PA

March 14th —BRYN MAWR, PA

March 15th —PHILADELPHIA, PA

March 16th —PITTSBURGH, PA

March 17th —DEVON, PA

March 18th & 19th —MINNEAPOLIS, MN

March 20th —PHOENIX/SCOTTSDALE, AZ

March 21st & 22nd —SEATTLE, WA

March 23rd & 24th —LOS ANGELES, CA

March 26th —NAPLES, FL

March 27th —NEW YORK, NY/RAMSEY, NJ

March 28th —SPRINGFIELD, PA

March 30th —WILMINGTON, DE

March 31st —NEWARK, DE

April 7th —EXTON, PA

April 9th —WILKES-BARRE, PA

April 10th —FREEHOLD, NJ

April 11th —MORRESTOWN, NJ

April 14th —MCARTHUR, OH

April 17th —NYC, NY

For details about her publicity destinations, see Lisa's website at www.scottoline.com.