



Behind the Scenes with Best-Selling Local Author *David Baldacci*

By Linda Barrett

Local author David Baldacci just released his latest book in April 2021—sure to be the next best seller. But there is so much more to this local writer. Come with me behind the scenes to learn a little more about the man and his process for creativity.

A GAMBLING MAN

David Baldacci's most recent book, *A Gambling Man*, is the second in the Archer series and the follow-up to the Nero Award-winning thriller *One Good Deed* featuring once again the ex-con and straight-talking WWII veteran Aloysius Archer. The story opens in 1949 with Archer heading out to California to connect with a former FBI agent named Willie Dash. He takes a detour in Reno, wins enough money to buy a blood-red Delahaye convertible, meets an aspiring actress named Liberty Callahan, and the two head off to California. Upon arrival,

Archer quickly discovers that the people who flocked there seeking fame and fortune landed in a false paradise that instead caters to their worst addictions and fears.

What was the inspiration for *Aloysius Archer*?

"I'm a history buff and World War II has always fascinated me—people had been through war and a depression and they uprooted themselves and went in search for a better life. Like Archer," Baldacci explained.

"One thing a writer has to do for motivation is to give yourself a new comfort zone, like a setting in a new time period. Archer is a very new thing for me and something I really got excited about. It's a fun read in a different time period. People will know what life is like after WWII and they'll like the characters—especially Archer. He's somebody that resonates in

every person, as he always tries to do the right thing."

Aloysius Archer fans will be pleased to know that Baldacci has just completed the first draft of the third book in the series, set in 1953 in Hollywood's glamour golden period and due out in 2022. Asked for a sneak peek, Baldacci answered, "Archer has learned a lot and is a different man for it."

Do you become the character or is part of you in the character?

"In a story like this with a lot of characters, you have to immerse yourself. I did a lot of research and traveled places (pre-covid). I tried as much as possible to put myself in that time and place. I ask the reader to do that, so I have to do it as well. Immersion is very important or you lose connectivity with the story and the plot doesn't add up the way you want it to."

"I'm part of every character I've written," Baldacci said with a laugh. "Like Archer, I'm an optimist. Although Archer is only 27, he's in the middle span of his life. He has a lot of experience, but is still naïve at times, and has learned some of his lessons from *One Good Deed*."

The #1 *New York Times* bestselling author is often promoted as a mystery, thriller or crime writer. "I describe myself as a storyteller, and no more than that. I don't put myself in a box. When I sit down to write, whether it's a thriller or young adult fantasy, I think about the story I'm writing. Every story is simply a story."

"There are two things I try to do: 1) entertain and 2) inform," Baldacci said. "Every book covers subject matter that is important to me and should be to others. I try to alert people to 'this is something you might want to check out.' Even though I write fiction, I understand the critical power of understanding what the truth is."

What is your method for writing a novel?

"I like to let the story grow organically. For example, let's say you want to learn to drive a Formula One car. You can read a book about it or actually drive the car. I like writing in the trenches and don't work with an outline. Nothing in an outline prepares you to be in the battlefield of being in the novel. As you write, your mind is going a million miles an hour with plot twists and turns along the way. Each becomes a possibility as you're writing. I let the story grow and work at it every day, think about what I want the people to do, and fashion a number of possible endings before picking the perfect one."

Do you have advice for new writers?

"The most important thing is to write about something you're so interested in you can spend years on it and not lose enthusiasm. Don't write about what you know a lot about. Write about what you'd like to know a lot about. The passion will show up in your prose and plot."

Baldacci also pointed out that although someone may publish a book that is very well received, but seven years have passed and there's no second book, "The audience will forget the first book." He added that, "If you take a few years off, your muscles will atrophy and you won't be as good the second time around. If you want to build a career or a business, be consistent and think down the road. When you finish up one book, think about what you want to tackle next. You can only have a successful career if your books are being sold to readers. With mystery/thriller writers, they produce a book a year—at least."

"On the business end, I work with almost 50 publishers worldwide, and publishing agreements are very pro-publisher. My mantra is simple: nobody should make more money off a book than the person who created it. Nobody will care about your career more than you do, so you need to learn the industry."

Why did you start your Wish You Well Foundation?

"When I first started on book tours, events were sponsored by libraries. Over the course of three years, I got a crash course in how illiterate this country is. There are 50-60 million illiterate people who can't read directions or a menu. Without that skill, they won't be able to reach their potential."

David and Michelle Baldacci started the Wish You Well Foundation®, named after his deeply personal book of the same title, to combat illiteracy. Its literacy programs have evolved from one on one tutoring to ways that can allow people to support themselves and be sustainable, and to get better education and jobs. Program participants can choose a defined goal and obtain credits towards a GED or college. Funds have been awarded in more than 40 states.

"Literacy is not an ESL, rural, urban or suburban issue; it's a growing problem, and literacy and poverty go hand in hand," he said. "Reading permeates every aspect of your life, and too many people never read a single book. If there is a number one job we have to do, it is to make everyone literate."

ABOUT DAVID BALDACCI

David Baldacci received his BS degree from VCU and his law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law, after which he practiced law in Washington, D.C. He and his family live in Virginia.

"As a kid growing up in Richmond, my job was to create the fantasies we would play every day. I used my imagination to the fullest. I was also a huge reader and enjoyed living in my head. Even though I didn't travel out of Virginia as a child, I saw the world through books. I learned about people who didn't look, dress, play, eat or learn like me, but I saw the common humanity we shared. That has resonated through my life as well as my writing."

Baldacci published his first novel, *Absolute Power*, in 1996. He has published 40+ novels for adults, all of which have been national and international bestsellers, with several adapted for film and television. He also published seven novels for younger readers. See a downloadable checklist of book and a list of upcoming author events at www.davidbaldacci.com. ♦

