



Ransom's Voice by Gary Dvorkin – Author Q&A

You are a neurologist who moonlights as a fiction author. How do you find time to write? What is your process?

I am still a practicing neurologist, but I have reduced my hours to allow for my writing.

I write anywhere. Mainly in my study at home. But I can write on planes, hotel rooms, etc. I find being on the road “loosens up” the creativity energies. Lizanne, my wife, is always kind and understanding to allow me to get a lot of writing done early in the morning in the hotel room. Check into the Hotel Santa Fe Puerto Escondido Mexico, and watch your novel write itself.

I started *Ransom's Voice* at the beginning. The process at the beginning was terrifying. Then quite quickly became exhilarating. It then settled into an intense process of grinding to the finish line.

In terms of *Ransom's Voice*, I had the basic map. I knew in advance there would be surprises (even to me). Ultimately it was a kind of a narrative road trip. As if one were driving from L.A. to New York with quite a bit of time, but still with a defined arrival date.

Happy to report that I am clueless as to the creative process, and I intend to keep it that way!

What are your favorite books to read?

Strangely I do not read psychological thrillers. I often find myself reading history and biography, but I remind myself to keep in touch with fiction. Recently, I reread Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*. Plus, Roth's *Letting Go*.

Having written a novel, I am now of course reading novels in a very different manner. I am much more conscious of, “What they are up to?”

An acquaintance recently compared *Ransom's Voice* to *The Silence of the Lambs*. I had seen the movie but had never read the novel. It was an interesting experience to read it, and try to see what my friend had seen in common.

Dominique Stein propels the narrative forward seamlessly. Was it difficult to develop such a complex protagonist?

Dominique simply appeared. I knew that she was going to be an intriguing character. I never had to worry about that. But, I did have to pay very close attention to keep her consistent—and to keep her moving.

Readers tell me they love the unexpected turns the novel takes. And that is exactly what I was shooting for.

Due to your profession as a neurologist, how did your understanding of neuropsychiatry translate into Dominique Stein’s world which is shrouded in psychological intrigue?

Great question! I quite consciously wrote the first draft without any great attention to the neuropsychiatry side of it. I very much wanted the novel to “flow,” which it did. When I started the re-writes, I realized that my inner “doc” had indeed come through, but in a literary way, not stiff and pedantic—which is a well-known risk factor amongst my esteemed colleagues!

Let me give you an example. One of the scariest things that can happen to a patient, is the doctor walking into the room and declaring, “Great news! You can go!” For many people, having medical staff attend to their every need brings out a primal, infantile, and very satisfying need. Being discharged by a self-satisfied medical person can be experienced as being ejected back into harsh reality. As I reread the novel, I saw that this dynamic had inserted itself into St. Beatrice’s Hospital.

Dr. Haddad and Dr. du Chevre are both psychiatrists but polar opposites with different motives. Together, how do they embody the profession of psychiatry?

It is an exploration of the spectrum of egos that one may encounter in the professional world of medicine, or anywhere for that matter. Every profession has an encapsulated aspect to it—and medicine is no exception. It is just that, the goal of alleviating human suffering is, understandably, held in such high esteem. So, it can be shocking when one realizes that ego inevitably enters into it. Academic medicine is highly competitive. Jumping on that energy as I wrote the novel was a lot of fun.

***Ransom’s Voice* has a visually stunning cover. What was the inspiration behind this?**

Well, that is a great story. I had lived with this woman Dominique Stein for six years (My wife Lizanne understands what I mean by that!). So, of course, I had a strong image of what Dominique looked like.

Meanwhile, we struggled to get the cover art right. Then, I realized one of my best friends in the world is married to a very successful and talented artist named Shelley Adler. Shelley specializes in portraits of women, and her canvasses are extremely large. I highly recommend her as an artist—just make sure you have a very large house!

I called Shelley, and she immediately and generously offered me her entire portfolio to choose from!

I just sat at my laptop, poring over literally hundreds of portraits of women’s faces.

And . . . there she was. I could hardly breathe.

When Lizanne, my wife, arrived home from her yoga class, I did not tell her a thing. I just asked her to sit down and go through the entire portfolio to see if there was a portrait she might consider to be “Dominique.”

I went downstairs and left her in peace. About fifteen minutes later, I heard a scream. “Oh my god, it’s her!”

I ran upstairs to confirm what I already knew. It was a really great, super intense moment.