

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Patricia Gussin, author of *And Then There Was One*

Tell us a little about yourself and your novel?

And Then There Was One is my fourth novel. Like the others, it's a thriller and exploits the most basic of fears, a family torn apart by tragedy. Before becoming a writer, I was a physician (and I still am) and the mother of seven (I still am that, too.)

What inspired you to write *And Then There Was One*?

I was driving down Route 41 in Sarasota one afternoon and noticed a woman pushing a double stroller. In the stroller were two toddlers who looked to be twins. Walking along side the stroller was a child who also looked to be the same age and who seemed identical in appearance to the two in the stroller. Could they be identical triplets? And why was one walking while the others were being pushed? My next thought: What would happen if two of identical triplets were abducted, leaving only one?

How did you use your life experience or professional background to enrich your story?

Being the mother of seven, I'm always thinking about family dynamics. How the circumstances and the personalities of various siblings affect the others. In *And Then There Was One*, each of the Monroe sisters has a unique personality. And those distinct personalities drive the ultimate outcome of the story. Being a physician, although not a pediatric forensic psychiatrist as is the triplet's mother, I have a pretty good idea of the stresses of a medical career in the midst of raising a family. So I'm sure that a lot of my insights have made their way into the story.

Are any characters based on people you know?

As is the case with most novels, my characters are a composite. *And Then There Was One* highlights the modern parents, those who are a little older when their first child is born and who tend to be very child-centric. But the Monroes have an additional feature, they are a biracial couple, and that, in some ways, ups the stakes. As for the plethora of villains, they, too, are a composite of the reality of evil people out there in our world. The Monroe girls' parents, however, may be somewhat familiar to readers of *Shadow of Death*: Scott Monroe, a nephew of David Monroe, and Katie Monroe, formerly Jones, Lucy Jones's youngest daughter.

Would you say that *And Then There Was One* is more plot driven or character driven?

I believe that *And Then There Was One* may be slightly more character driven than plot driven, but the plot is solid, and very importantly, for a thriller, the pace is fast.

Who is your favorite or most sympathetic character? Why?

Jackie Monroe. The little girl is so lost in the terror and paranoia and the turmoil of roiling emotions as the desperate search for her sisters takes front and center stage.

Who is your least sympathetic character? Why?

Maxwell Cutty. Here we have a truly evil man.

What part of writing *And Then There Was One* did you find the most challenging?

Developing Katie Monroe as a sympathetic character was difficult. I wanted to have a strong, obviously accomplished, intelligent woman. But who knows what can happen to such a woman when faced with the abduction of two of her daughters? Would she hold up in order to help the FBI's investigation? Would she disintegrate into a million broken pieces? Would she be histrionic? Or would she withdraw completely within herself. This was a struggle for me to come up with the right balance, as I don't think anyone can predict a mother's reaction to the loss of her children.

What do you hope that readers will take away from *And Then There Was One*?

I hope that readers take away a deeper appreciation for the family unit and a realization of just how precious their children are and how vigilant we as parents must be. I'd also like the reader to enjoy this book so much that they can't wait for my next one!

What writers have inspired you?

Sidney Sheldon has always been a favorite, and my novel, *The Test*, in *Publishers Weekly* was compared to him; such a wonderful commendation. But in addition to the thriller genre, I have been inspired by other novelists who focus on family; Wilbur Smith and Barbara Taylor Bradford, to name a couple.

What is the writing process like for you?

Like everything else in my life, writing is chaotic. I'm used to juggling a lot of activities, but I find that the most important thing is that you stay focused in the moment. When I'm at home, I'm a mom (and now a grandmother). When I'm in the clinic, I'm a doctor. When I'm writing, I'm in my character's head. Now that's a scary thought.

What is the best piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

Write what you are inspired to write, not what someone else suggests.

What is the worst piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

That you can't be a writer unless you write every single day. Whoever said that has to "get a life."

What's next for you? Any new books in the pipeline

My next thriller doesn't yet have a title, but I refer to it as *Culture*. This one will be a medical thriller involving antibiotic resistant bacteria. The protagonist is Laura Nelson of *Shadow of Death* and *Twisted Justice*. It's seven years after *Twisted Justice* (which is seven years after *Shadow of Death*) and Laura is now Chief of Surgery at the teaching hospital in Tampa.

Any final words you would like to say about yourself, your novels, or life in general?

Yes. There's one more book, *What's Next...For You?*, that I co-authored with my husband, Robert Gussin. *What's Next...For You?* is non-fiction and tells the story of how Bob and I transitioned our life from medicine and research to wine and books. True story this time, a he-said, she-said sort of thing. Moving in the right direction, we say. And it makes sense; it takes a lot of wine to write a good book.