



An Interview with Sue Duffy Author of *The Sound of Red Returning*



Tell us how much of yourself you write into your characters.

More than I care to admit. It's pretty scary when you fit comfortably inside the head of your villain. But I couldn't birth any character without imparting my DNA. That means I'm a little bit of everyone. A little Sybil-like.

What is the quirkiest thing you have ever done?

Hitchhiked up I-75 to Atlanta with two University of Florida football players. Purely spontaneous (after losing our ride mid-trip). Purely stupid. And wholly exhilarating, at least for an invincible college kid.

When did you first discover that you were a writer?

When my ninth-grade English teacher told me I was. So I became an advertising copywriter, newspaper writer, and magazine writer. And then I discovered I liked to make things up—not a respectable trait for a journalist. So I shifted into respectable fiction and conjured my first novel, *Mortal Wounds*, in 1998. My second novel, *Fatal Loyalty*, was released last year. And now Kregel is launching my new series with the release of *The Sound of Red Returning*.

Tell us the range of the kinds of books you enjoy reading.

In fiction, I used to read only Frederick Forsyth, Tom Clancy, Robert Ludlum, Patricia Cornwell, John Le Carre, Ken Follett, and other high-suspense authors. Some of my women friends thought that strange. So I tried some of the sweeter, softer novels they liked—and decided to find new friends :-)
Now, though, my reading list is all over the place, from Joyce Carol Oates to Ted Dekker.

How do you keep your sanity in our run, run, run world?

I quit running. I'd rather write.

How do you choose your characters' names?

I was driving through the mountains alone when the storyline of my first novel sprang to mind. I pulled over as soon as I could to make a few notes and realized I was in a small cemetery. I took my characters' names from the tombstones in front of me.
Since then, the names have come from more conventional sources: seed catalogs, legal notices, members of Congress, Olympic athletes, obits, phone books, old movies, cartoons. You know.

What is the accomplishment that you are most proud of?

Professionally: the publication of my first book. Personally: the publication of my first book.

If you were an animal, which one would you be, and why?

(*Oooh, I hope my answer is better than Miss Oregon's. Here goes.*) An eagle because it stands for power and nobility. Oh, wait. Eagles eat rats, don't they? Ooooh, disgusting. Can I change my answer?



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What is your favorite food?

Blackberry cobbler like my grandmother used to make and nobody else on the planet does. Fresh berries we kids picked in the fields (then clawed chigger bites until we were pulp), fresh milk and butter from her neighbor's cows, flour and sugar from the circa-1800s country store up the road. No recipe. No discernible measurements.

What is the problem with writing that was your greatest roadblock, and how did you overcome it?

Time. I was editing a magazine and trying to write novels simultaneously. That tandem effort didn't work for me. I needed to completely immerse myself in the make-believe world—like disappearing through the back of C.S. Lewis's wardrobe and letting fiction morph into the virtual. At least until it was time to cook dinner and sort socks. So, I resigned from my magazine position and became writer-in-residence.

Tell us about the featured book?

My new book *The Sound of Red Returning* is the first book of the *Red Returning* trilogy. Here's the storyline:

It's been fifteen years since famed pianist Liesl Bower saw her beloved Harvard mentor gunned down, since the CIA disclosed his double life as a Russian spy. She was interrogated and released, with no incriminating evidence against her. But now, something has happened to set Russian and CIA agents on her heels. New intelligence suggests that Liesl possesses a coded message critical to a resurgence of Soviet power.

As global tensions mount, the Russians are in a frenzy to find the code before the Americans. Standing in their way, though, is the young pianist from the tidal creeks and secret-shrouded lanes of old Charleston. As Liesl outruns the tip of the Russian spear, she must reckon with the wounds of her past, the love of a man she never thought could be hers, and the prevailing power of God.

In the final hour, on a world stage, Liesl must deliver a message of her own.

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