



EPISODE 106

Host: Vikki J. Carter | [The Author's Librarian](#)

Episode 106: Robert Dugoni; New York Times Bestselling Author of Mystery, Thriller and Suspense

Vikki: Welcome to the podcast Authors of the Pacific Northwest, where I connect authors with their readers. We also talk all about the authors inspiration, their journey to publication, and the authors will educate me and you the listener all about the business of writing. I'm your host Vikki, J Carter also known as The Author's librarian.

Vikki: Hi, there listeners. It's the host of producer Vikki J. Carter of this podcast, the Authors of the Pacific Northwest. And before we jump into the episode, I wanted to stop real quickly and share with you the newest project that I'm working on. If you are an author, I think you might be interested in it. I have a YouTube channel that I just launched called The Aauthors Librarian on YouTube. And on that YouTube channel, I am going to share with you free, accessible resources that you can use to help you with researching. I'm going to give you tips. I'm also interviewing librarians and I'm writing a book to help authors with researching. So hope you find me there on that YouTube channel. You can find the link in the show notes. Now let's get to the program podcast listeners.

Vikki: Thank you for coming back to the Authors of the Pacific Northwest. And today I have the privilege of introducing you to an author that I it's going to be really fun to interview. His name is Robert. Robert said hello to the listeners .

Robert: Hello everyone. Nice to be here. Thanks for having me.

Vikki: You bet. I'm so glad to have you. So I have a ton of questions. I read one of your books that you sent to me the advanced reader copy. So we'll dive into that in a little bit. But first I like to have authors kind of introduce themselves a little bit to readers that may not know them. So Robert, tell us what state in the Pacific Northwest that you live in.

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Robert: I live in Seattle, Washington. I actually live in Kirkland, Washington, which is across Lake Washington and I have been here for about 25 years, I guess, maybe about thereabouts and, you know, I started off writing legal thrillers. I was a lawyer by background and moved on to police procedurals with Tracy Crosswhite and found quite a bit of success with her. And that has sort of opened up a lot of my horizons. I have written, since then, an espionage novel and I have written literary novels. One is out and the other one's on the way. So, I really have kind of a broad swath of, of reading depending on what people like.

Vikki: I love it. You have a huge portfolio of books actually, which is really impressive. So my listeners know that when I talk to the authors, they can jump on the show notes. I'll have your website there. By the way, the trailer on your website from the Amazon was hysterical. I went on your website, you know, when I first looked you up, but then I went on again today and I heard it first, then watched the video. So what we're talking about is Robert has this really great trailer on here for the book that we're gonna talk about. It's from Amazon publishing and I heard it first and I didn't see it. And then I scrolled down to watch it. I watched it three times. I was laughing. It was so good.

Vikki: I'm not even sure I've seen it yet.

Vikki: You've got to jump off. It's good.

Vikki: This is for In Her Tracks?

Vikki: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, well, I got to see something that the author did not see? That's that's pretty phenomenal.

Robert: It was on my website?

Vikki: Yeah. That's on your website. Yeah, That's what happens, listeners when he becomes so big and have people doing things for you, you don't even know what's happening.

Robert: Well, and there's a lot of different videos that are out there. I mean, there's the one with the cat that I have and that one I know. Oh,

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Vikki: That's the one I thought, at least I thought it was really, really good. So I'm in the middle of creating a trailer for my book. And of course I honed in on that and I was like, oh my gosh, this is so good. Okay, let's talk a little bit about your background. You said you were a lawyer, prior to your writer life, were you involved in criminal cases? Because the book that I read was very heavily in police procedures, and I was curious what your background was when I was reading it.

Robert: No, I was a civil litigator. So nope, no criminal law at all for my novels. I'm really very lucky. I had two homicide detectives that helped me out with all my stuff. One of them passed away tragically. But the other one is still helps me. And then, I have another police officer who used to be in the domestic terrorism unit, here. And he also helps me with my stuff. I mean, basically it's just trying to get it right. And I feel good about it because I will get emails from police officers and they will say to me, you know, your books read very authentic and thank you for getting it right. And as you know, police are getting a really bad rap now. Everybody thinks that if you have one bad apple, the entire cart is spoiled and that's really not the case. I have found most police officers to really wonderful people and very dedicated to their jobs. I've been blessed to have that help.

Vikki: Well, in the book that I read that we're going to talk about it more in depth, for sure, In Her Tracks, you made it very clear that police officers are having emotions. They have a life. That's what I like about the story is that the main character Tracy, which we'll talk a little bit, I have a question about her for you... you're showing the whole complicated life, you know, it's not just the police life, it's her family life. It's her background history, which this is in a series... I feel like this one that I'm reading, which number is it in the series?

Robert: You're reading, I believe, you're reading, nine, I think it's nine. Yeah.

Vikki: And I feel like it could be read as a standalone. I didn't feel like I was missing tremendously a lot of background about Tracy. Was that intentional when you were doing the writing?

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Robert: You know, I always tell readers to liken it to the Harry Potter series where if you start at the first book you get a lot of background on Harry and that kind of stuff, but you can read any book and the book will stand alone. And that's really what I think is when the author is playing fair with the audience. That's what I try to do. The journey that the character is on in that particular book is completed. The characters will move on, but the journey itself, whether it's defined in *The Sorcerer's Stone* or *The Goblet of Fire*, whatever that is there is concluded so that the reader feels like they have a fully contained novel that they've read and finished.

Vikki: I love that and I appreciate that because as a reader, I'm jumping from all sorts of readings just from the podcast alone. I read a fantasy book one day, in a series another day, and something else before I bring an author on and I can feel a little disjointed with some of the books. So I do appreciate that about your book. The other thing I'm going to mention that I love is that you obviously live in Seattle, but you have you come to Seattle during the time of a massive amounts of growth, because it's very clear in your characters that they talk about some of the things that we've experienced in Seattle that. You know, everybody wants to live in the beautiful, beautiful Seattle... but traffic is a bear at least, you know, and his book is very relevant because you were also talking about the police force and the loss of police force members leaving Seattle because of the hotbed that has continued down there since COVID. So all of those things I totally took notice and you said you've only been Seattle for about 20 years?

Vikki: Yeah.

Vikki: I'll, we'll consider you're kind of a native.

Vikki: Did you come because of a lawyer jobs that you did and then you stayed and that's how it happened?

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Robert: No, I came because of a woman. My wife is born and raised here in Bellevue. And when I wanted to change careers, when I decided that I wanted to do what I really wanted to do my whole life, which was write novels, write books, we had a plan in place. That plan involved moving to Seattle and giving myself an opportunity to write, which, you know, would have been very difficult in the Bay Area which was cost-prohibitive and all that stuff. So, you know I have slowly come to appreciate the Pacific Northwest. It was a slow change because I left the Bay Area when the Bay Area was not crazy the way it is now. Prices are ridiculous and traffic and everything is ridiculous. I left a lot of family and I left a lot of friends, so it was very difficult for me to move up here. Bbut I've come to really appreciate a lot about the Pacific Northwest and you're right. E verything changes when I first came up here 30 years ago for a friend's wedding with no intention of ever moving here, not even having met anybody from here. I remember getting to downtown Seattle and feeling like it was the cleanest city I'd ever been in, in my life. It was spotless.

Robert: I was like, oh my God, what? Did , they wash the streets every night. And unfortunately that has changed in the last 30 years as have traffic.

Vikki: Oh yeah. But the one thing I'll comment about, and then we'll talk about some other stuff that my listeners know. I like to ask specific questions. So, in this book, the thing that caught me too was, one of the characters, she was a transplant from the Southern region of California and her comment about it getting dark really early in the winter time... that you only hear from people that are not natives, right? We do get sick of it. Those of us that have lived here all our life we just know 4:30 in the winter time, you're you're indoors. My husband grew up here in Washington. Moved and lived in LA for over 10, 15 years. He got very accustomed to LA life then moved back, not intentionally to stay, but he met me and I am very ingrained in my Pacific Northwest roots. So he stayed but his his first winter back was very depressing because he had forgotten about that it gets dark 4: 30 and you get up to go to work and you drive in the dark and he come home in the dark. It's really hard.

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Robert: I was always very lucky. I traveled a lot. I was always in Tucson, Arizona, and California and Tennessee and up in Canada. I mean, I traveled a lot and that helped, but with COVID I haven't. I mean, I've been on two airplanes, in a year and a half. I used to travel 50 to 60,000 miles a year. So this winter was really difficult and I think it was difficult for a lot of people for that very reason. My wife and I, we've always tried to find the sun at least for some of the winter, because it can be really difficult on people.

Vikki: Yeah, we do too when we could travel. He goes sun finding. We're often trying to find the sun when we can. So that's the good part. Okay, let's talk a little bit more about your background as a writer. You didn't start with this series, did you? Where did you start? What was the genre? You decided you wanted to be a writer or you're making a huge career change to be a writer and that was years ago. Right? So walk us through that process a little bit of your journey as a writer.

Robert: I always wrote. I grew up with a mother that before she started having 10 children, was an English teacher. And so by the time I was in seventh grade, she had handed me and I had read *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Old Man in the Sea*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Great Gatsby*, you name it. I had read all the classics and I fell in love with stories. It's really, really what I wanted to do. And I knew in the seventh grade I had to stand up in front of my classmates and give a speech on slavery. I took the role on of a slave and I gave this speech. It ended up going viral... back in that day meant I was taken from classroom to classroom to read my speech.

Robert: I just knew I fell in love with characters. I fell in love with dialogue. I fell in love with acting. And it's what I always wanted to do. But I studied journalism in high school. I studied journalism at Stanford University. I studied journalism at the Los Angeles Times, and then I got cold feet. Quite honestly, I saw myself working in a suburb in Southern California with no friends with no family, not getting paid a lot of money, and chasing stories. And working hard. All my friends were going to professional school and my mother had always said, get as much education as you can while you're young. I jumped on law school at UCLA and, I always thought that I would write. But this would be something great to fall back on. Well you get out of school and people are offering you \$50,000 a year, which back in 1987 was a lot of money .

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Robert: Yeah, coming out of school it defiantly is, right?

Robert: So I fell into practicing law. The best thing that happened to me and the worst thing that happened to me is I went to work at a law firm with a lot of really young people, young men, young women, a lot of athletes, a lot of people that love sports, which I do. And it was like an extension of college. And so it was hard to leave that, but I really, really did not like practicing law. It just was not my thing. And I started to look for other outlets and the first outlet I found was acting. I started doing a lot of theater in San Francisco. I started getting cast in some pretty big shows. And again, I fell in love with scenes and dialogue and character motivations and all those things.

Robert: And I finally, I'm trying to remember what year it was that I that I talked to my wife and I left... I think it was maybe, 1998, I think. We took a shot. We took a chance and like most writers, I failed miserably. And then you pick yourself up off the ground and you say, okay, what do I need to do to be successful and learn how to tell a novel and learn how to write a novel. And I started studying. I gave myself basically my own MFA. I have so many novels on the structure and the craft of writing. It's ridiculous how many books that I've read, studied, earmarked, highlighted, and everything you can, to try to get to be successful.

Vikki: But I think that makes a really great author is somebody that's willing to learn the craft and really, really dig in there deep. And I feel like I can see that in writing. I have formal... I don't have an MFA background. I have a library background. My background is in researching and the writing craft for me, I had to do the same thing. I told my husband that I was going to go do my doctorate, because that was the next step up. Instead, I'm just going to spend the rest of the time in my life doing the same thing, all the energy into writing and learning how to do the craft, how to publish both ins and outs. I want to learn all of that. And, so I think that makes for great writers. I feel it.

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Robert: I think the other thing is, a lot of our stories come out of our lives . We fictionalize them . I don't know a lot of writers who were successful in their youth or successful when they in their twenties. I mean, a couple even in the thirties. I think you have to live life a little bit to have a proper perspective to create those characters and have those characters come out of experiences. You have to have lived and loved and lost and had people die and have pets die. And you know, all those things... I think that makes us who we are before you can start telling a story. I just think that there's something to that.

Vikki: And I greatly appreciate that. Thank you. I am heading into as my daughters will say the middle aged old woman state, and I haven't even got my first novel out . Now I'm working on my first non fiction. That's coming out. But for me that doesn't feel like the same story as a novel. And I didn't even feel like I could start writing a novel until three years ago where I started to really write the first novel, I was like, oh, now I see why when I was 25, just starting off having kids I didn't have the same view of the world by any means to be able to write those characters with depth . So, thank you. You just encouraged me.

Robert: You raised a really good point, too. We all go through different phases in our life. And there is that phase of your life where you are parents or you're a spouse and you have obligations. You have things that you need to do. And whether it's youth sports or youth activities or youth theater or whatever it is... you want to give your kids the very best that you can. Finding the time to really delve deep into characters and create a story while you're also working, probably supporting your family, it's, it's very difficult.

Vikki: It is. And I know some that do it and they manage it. I'm still holding down a full-time job, but I don't have the commitments and family life like I did. My kids are out of house and on their own. we have dogs, that's enough, right? So, I can put the energy into it and the time.

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Vikki: Okay, so let's talk about your publishing journey. So back then, when you started, there was really two paths... you know, there was the independent, which was considered independent with self publishing as vanity presses really. And not a lot of people went that way. They weren't as lucrative as they are today or self-publishing was today. And then there was traditional publishing. So talk us through where you're at now because you're in one of those great stages of publishing where you're with a great publishing company. But it's come from the genesis of everything that's happened in the last 10 years in publishing.

Robert: I started out in traditional publishing and while I was in traditional publishing Amazon started coming into being. The whole notion of do you need an agent anymore? Do you need an editor anymore? That all started. I remember when it was coming up having conversations in the hallway, people saying to me, they're going to do this. They're going to do that. I'll be honest. I loved to write and that's what I want to do. People ask me how did I put out 15, 16 books in the last seven years or something like that. It's because this is what I love to do. I don't love to market. I don't love to do any of that stuff.

Robert: It's not part of my DNA. It's a lot of work and it's a lot of effort. My agents take care of so much stuff for me. I mean, they are so wonderful. My editors are so wonderful. So anyway, I started out in traditional publishing at Grand Central and they were wonderful. They were terrific. They really were really were great. And those two books that I did with them really went crazy. And then I probably got a little too big for my britches and I had another publisher offer me a boatload of money. I took the money and I didn't take into consideration some of the other really important aspects in business, which is loyalty, which is happiness, which is liking the people you work with.

Robert: My experience at my second publisher was not a positive experience at all. No, not at all. There was a lot of things that happened I'll take some blame for it, but it was not good. And so I really had to reinvent myself after five legal thrillers. I reinvented myself with Tracy Crosswhite and my agent went to sell it. So he went through traditional publishing and very luckily traditional publishing was so rigid in looking at just numbers. And they were looking at my last book which never came out in paperback. And you can imagine how many books does a genre fiction author sell when the publisher does need to put that novel out in paperback?

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Vikki: Then it wasn't going to sell at all.

Robert: So my numbers were not good. And so luckily a lot of editors wanted to buy the book, but they couldn't get the authority to do it. And Amazon had been after me and after my agent for quite a while. I decided I wanted to go to lunch with them. I wanted to find out more what they were about. I went to lunch and I kid you not, there was probably 12 people at that table. And I was probably 10 to 15 years older than everybody there or more. And it was like being at a startup meeting. I mean, they were telling me things. I had no idea. I mean, they were telling me who my audience was, where my audience was, you know, everything. And, I walked out of that meeting and I remember I called my agent and I said, "I don't care what the advances is, I want to work with them."

Robert: I got in at the right time. I got in and it's 2012 and things started to explode for them. I became kind of the poster boy. They pushed me and they pushed my books. They loved my books and they love the fact that I was prolific. I was putting out a lot of material and yet I had a really good system in place to make sure that those books were quality books. I will not put out anything that I didn't feel comfortable with or that my real strong readers wouldn't love. And Thomas & Mercer has been unbelievable. People ask me, what's the difference? And the difference is when my books came out with traditional publishers, they'd be promoted for two to three weeks. And that was it.

Robert: And I will tell you now that My Sister's Grave came out in I believe 2013. And to this day, they are still promoting that book. So, you t hey know how to sell and they know that an audience is always out there. The best example I can give you again, is Harry Potter, people will say, how can Harry Potter be the number one selling book, you know, 15 years after it was first published? Because there are so many people that are becoming 12 years old, 13 years old, 14 years old, and they're picking up books. So they just continue to market and market and market. I just been very blessed to, to have the opportunity to work with them.

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Vikki: I'm so glad you told me the story because the reason why I started this podcast was because I knew it was going to write novels, but I didn't know...now there's so many possible options; traditional publishing, there's hybrid publishing, there's indie, you know, there's everything. So I'm like, well, I'm going to approach this by just asking authors in the area what they have done and where they successful? What tips can they give me? And I was like, "Ooh, this is a good podcast." So I just started the podcast, didn't know what I was getting myself into. I'm glad you shared that about Amazon because I do have quite a few authors that are on Amazon's publishing company. And I just don't think that enough people talk about what Amazon publishing can do and has done for some authors. And I think that what you just explained, I mean, you have been very fortunate. I'm not sure all authors have been that fortunate, but you also have good representation of good team around you. I think that makes a big difference is that you have those people that you can trust, but you learned the hard way it sounds like?

Robert: I think everything happens for a reason. And I did learn a lot. I learned a lot in traditional publishing I took that. I knew what I wanted and what I did not want. I found a place where I felt comfortable and I think that's the most important thing for any author is to find a place where you're comfortable. Where you feel like you can pick up the phone and call your editor and your editor will talk to you. And you don't have to feel like "Gee, I'm bothering this person." I've always had a really open relationship with my people I have worked with at Amazon where I can email them or I can talk to them and they will respond.

Robert: The other thing quite honestly is I can't tell you the number of emails I've received from readers who will say to me, "You know, I I'm a shut in, or I'm getting over cancer. And, I read seven books a week and I can't afford to pay \$20, \$22 per seven books a week. And so really great to be able to pick up your novel at seven at 99 cents or six 99 cents or when it goes on sale at a \$1.99." And I know a lot of people will say that devalues a book. And I'll say "Really, because, you know, I have a book that's been out for four years and they put it on sale for a \$1.99 , and we sell 40,000 copies in a month. How does that hurt? How does that hurt me? You know what I mean?"

Robert: There's an awful lot of people out there that Amazon provided a product that they could afford to buy that couldn't have otherwise done it.

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Robert: I've had two or three incidences where I've been contacted by librarians who said, "You know, we're on a limited budget." This recently it happened to me in Alabama, "We're on a limited budget and it's really hard for us to get your books. The supplier is charging just way too much money." And so I got in touch with Amazon and Amazon helped me to provide them with a complete copy of, of all my novels.

Robert: That's awesome.

Robert: People always want to look at who's the big, bad guy in the business, and it's really not that simple of an issue.

Vikki: Yeah, it's not. And so the aspect that Amazon does provide it so that people that can't otherwise afford, I love that aspect. My love for reading came from my grandmother, who was a single older woman on her own. And she taught me. Obviously she took me to the library. It's where I got my first library card. And, secondly, she taught me how to find books in old bookstores and thrift stores. You can get great value from a book that's already been used. I'm so glad to hear the stories that you're getting from people that can't afford necessarily to consume large quantities, but they need to, because they're in a place in their life where they need to be read. It's very good.

Vikki: Let's jump into this series. Remind us again, you have nine titles in it, right ?

Robert: I think there is... I think there is nine. I off a lot.

Robert: I have finished the nine. There you go.

Vikki: I don't know if readers realize how this feels for writers. You write one whole book and you literally move on to the next one. You don't have time . So it's easy to forget where you're at when you have this many. Talk to us through this scenario of this character in this series. You don't have to share everything about it, but what would you want readers to know about so that there'll be interested in picking up one of the books in the series?

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Robert: The character is a female homicide detective. The first female homicide detective in Seattle, named Tracy Crosswhite and her partner is a guy named Kinsington Rowe. And when you meet Tracy, you first meet Tracy in the David Sloan series. She has a very cameo appearance in the book Murder One, where she is a former chemistry teacher who become a police officer. And so when I was looking for a new series, I was looking at the characters, whether I could do any type of a spinoff. And the first one that came to mind was Kinsington Rowe. He's a ex- football player with a bad hip from playing football. And he becomes a police officer and I thought, this character really has something great to him. And then I started looking at Tracy and my agent started looking at Tracy and she said, "Why was she a chemistry teacher?"

Robert: And I said, "I don't know." And she said, " Well, find out." And so, I started to think about Tracy Crosswhite, who she was, where she came from, how she went from being a high school chemistry teacher. And really what I touched on was the real life event in Seattle. They started taking down a lot of dams to restore the wild habitat of the salmon so they could return home and spawn. And when they did that they took down the reservoir of water collecting behind the dams, which were lakes and those lakes receded. And they started finding things. Now they started finding cars that they had thought had been lost forever. They found a car and a body in it. A woman they thought had been abducted and she wasn't... she went off the road and in her car she drowned.

Robert: I started to play with that idea of somebody who Tracy love disappears and nobody knows what happens to her. And then they take down the dam and the water recedes and they find a body and boom. And the thing is somebody's been convicted for her sister's murder. And Tracy doesn't believe that person is guilty based upon the evidence that she finds. And so in order to find out who murdered her sister, she has to get a new trial for the guy that's been convicted. People really took to her and took to her story and took to to her situation. I can't tell you the number of emails I received from people who said things like, " You wrote my life story. I lost my sister when I was such and such an age."

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Robert: This was really chilling. It's not a series where like Jack Reacher or James Bond, where every time you open the book, she's back in the same place she was. It's progressive. She grows as a person. She meets people. She starts to begin to have a personal life and other things that I won't say... people can find out. But I write as evolving character.

Vikki: That's what I like about it. Even though I'm reading book... what did you said seven or eight? I knew this because you do leave enough in there for us understand that she's evolved quite a bit in her life and in her background and her personal life and what drives her now and what might have driven her later. But here's my big question.... and this is something that I had a discussion with other authors in the past and in a group. Some authors don't like to write an opposite sex point of view or an ethnicity point of view that's not their own, because it's more challenging, they think. So was Tracy just naturally... was she easy for you to write or did you have to really draw upon the female people around you? Because I feel like she's very realistic for a female character.

Robert: I always say this to people. I don't write from the perspective of a woman. I write from the perspective of a human being who has been grievously injured in her past and is trying to deal with it while she's trying to be a spouse. She was trying to be a mother while she's trying to hold down a job, which I think is universal. I mean, I think that is a universal and they get it. It goes beyond ethnicity. It goes beyond sex. Everybody has to deal with things in life. And when you get to be my age, you begin to realize that everybody is dealing with something in their life. And so I do not try to create a female character. I do not try to embody, what it's like to be a woman working in a male environment.

Robert: Now I spent time with my female homicide detective, and I know what she went through and things will surprise you. One time I was there and one of the other detectives said, "Oh, you're a writer? You're writing? Really, a female character?" And he said, "Are you writing about, you know, Jen?" And I said, "Well, no, not specifically." He said, "Well, you should, because, you could call her.... if you're writing about a female detective, you could call her dickless Tracy." He thought this was hysterical. And I, you know, after he left, I looked at Jen and I said, "Do you get that a lot?" And she says, "Yeah, I do." And I said, "So what do you do about it?" She says, "I don't do anything about it." This is what was interesting.

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Robert: She said, "Women in the department hate it when other women file lawsuits for sexual harassment or all those things she said, because what it does is it makes everybody treat us differently. And I don't want to be treated differently. I just want to be treated like a detective and be allowed to do my job." So that surprised me, but I could definitely see where she was coming from. I have four sisters, they're all professional women. My mother's a professional woman. My wife is a professional woman. And so I worked in the legal profession with a lot of very wonderful, female attorneys. And, you know, I can remember one time a woman was in trial and I was helping her with the trial. And I went in her office one day and she just looked, she just looked completely worn out and stressed out.

Robert: And I said, "What can I help you with, you know, give me some things to do on it, take it off your plate. What can I help you with?"

Robert: And she said, "I just don't know what we're going to have for dinner tonight." And I thought to myself, that is a problem that I have never thought of but it was something she was trying to deal with because she's a Mom. She's a wife. There's a lot of things I think that women have to deal with that men don't have to deal with that I think make your lives a lot more difficult. And it shouldn't be that way. I just try to write from the perspective of a person dealing with those kinds of issues.

Vikki: And it stands out. It's not blatant. It's not uncomfortable to read Tracy. See, I don't feel like I'm reading someone that's trying to write a female's character from a non-female perspective. So that's what I appreciate it. That's why I wanted to ask you about it because I have read other works that haven't been that way. And I was like, oh, they're trying a little too hard in this character to be female, whether or not.

Robert: I do think if you do try too hard readers pick up on it. You can't do that with ethnicity either. In my espionage series, *The Eighth Sister* and *The Last Agent*, and the one coming out, *The Silent Sister*, my main character is this is a 60 year old African-American man. I'm obviously not African-American but my law school roommate was African-American. I saw the things that he went through in Southern California that we went through together. Now, does that mean I can write that authentically from my perspective. No, but what I can write is from the perspective of a person of a human being trying to do their job.

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Vikki: I love it. Great. I applaud that. So fantastic. All right. So let's dig into this particular book a little bit. I usually have the authors read a little bit on the book... when you do that, I do go on mute because my dogs can get a little rowdy. So I eliminate that. Set the stage, however you need to set the stage where you go into it. So, and I'll let you go forward.

Robert: I'm going to read a portion, from *In Her Tracks*. This is a story about Tracy, who is sent to do cold cases... handle cold cases. And the first case that really jumps out on her is the disappearance of a five-year-old little girl from a corn maze on the night before Halloween. The little girl's name is Elle Chin and her father's name is Bobby Chin. He's a Seattle police officer. He's going through a very bitter, very difficult divorce, with his wife. So where I'm going to read it from his Bobby has just gone to his ex wife's house to pick up his daughter. She always makes it extremely difficult for him to do that. Yes, he has his daughter. He's taken her to a corn maze.

Robert: He's doing his best to be a good dad. He wants to please her. He wants to be a good father. He wants his daughter to be happy. This is a very difficult time in her life because Daddy's not home with Mom anymore. Mom has a boyfriend and things just hard. And so what he wants is he wants his daughter to be here happy. And this is what happens. Most parents would hesitate but because the situation he is in, he lets his daughter convince him to do this. And this is what happens.

Robert: Seattle police officer Bobby Chin took his daughter's hand and they entered the corn maze. The thick stalks exceeded six feet and made the path narrow. He moved as quickly as Elle's little legs allowed, not wanting to rush her, but wanting to get through the maze before the light it's went out.

Robert: "Pretty cool, huh, Butterfly?" He calls her butterfly because she's wearing butterfly wings.

Robert: It's the night before Halloween. And she's a butterfly Elle stared at the stalks of corn. Then she said, "Let's play hide and seek Daddy."

Robert: "We don't have time for that, Elle. We have to get through the maze."

Robert: "Please, Daddy."

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Robert: "I'm sorry, honey. Maybe we can play at home." Elle cried. Then she sat down in the dirt.

Robert: "Elle, get up, honey, you're getting your costume dirty."

Robert: "No."

Robert: "Honey, you have to stand up."

Robert: "I want to play. Mommy lets me play."

Robert: The counselor Chin had seen for his court - ordered anger management classes had warned that kids going through a contentious divorce could become defiant and play one parent off the other.

Robert: "Elle. You need to stand up."

Robert: "No. Graham plays with me."

Robert: Chin felt his heart ripping apart. "Okay. One quick game. All right?"

Robert: Elle got to her feet. "Yay!"

Robert: "But when I say come out, you have to come out. Okay?"

Robert: "You count, Daddy. You have to hide your eyes."

Robert: "Okay. But if I say, come out, you come out, right?"

Robert: "Turn around when you count."

Robert: Chin turned and counted. It wouldn't be hard. Find Elle's colorful butterfly wings among the green corn.

Robert: "One Mississippi. Two Mississippi. Three Mississippi."

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Robert: At six Mississippi he cheated and turned. He didn't see Elle's wings behind the corn stocks.

Robert: "Here I come." He stepped forward. "I'm coming." He searched the aisle, looking under the drooping leaves. He turned the corner to another row. Then a third and a fourth. He checked his watch, felt himself starting to panic.

Robert: He shouted, "Okay, Elle. I give up. Come out." He turned in a circle, looking, hearing the wind, rustled the stocks.

Robert: "Don't let the lights go out," He muttered under his breath.

Robert: He called again. "Elle? You have to come out. The game is over."

Robert: His heart race.

Robert: He jogged turning left and right down the rows, shouting her name. "Elle come out. Elle? Ellie!"

Robert: He turned a corner disoriented. Another corner. Elle's colorful butterfly wings lay in the dirt.

Robert: "Elle."

Robert: Then the lights went out.

Vikki: And that's the part that got me hooked. I was like, oh no a parent's worst nightmare. Your stomach drops, right?

Robert: It is. It is your worst nightmare. I mean, I think every parent has been through it. I remember we were in a store one time and we had my son. He was a little guy at the time. He was two and a suddenly he disappeared. And my wife raced to the front of the store and screamed at the cashier to close the doors and not let anybody out. And they did. He was hiding under a circle of clothes. When we found him you want to kill him but at the same time you're just so happy you found him. It was heart wrenching.

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Vikki: It is. Both of our daughters have done the escape artist at least once or twice in our lives. And it was terrifying. But today they will tell you that we watched them like a hawk and they weren't allowed to go two steps away from me without holding hands. I'm like, no, you guys got away once in a while. Trust me. You will know that feeling. It's terrifying.

Vikki: So well, Robert is such a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for coming on the podcast. And before we go, do you have any advice for aspiring authors like myself who are just starting out?

Robert: Absolutely. And my advice is learn the craft. You will save yourself endless hours and endless drafts. If you learn how a story is told and the best book I have ever found out there is Christopher Vogler's book, *The Writer's Journey*. He talks about story structure and how stories have put together since they were first told thousands of years ago. If you study that craft you will find you will find success. How much success you're going to find is going to depend on how good you as an author, how strong your voice is and all those other things. But the most important thing is to first understand how do you tell a story. My career took off when I started to study the craft and learn what to do and what not to do.

Vikki: Awesome. Thank you. Great advice. And my listeners know that I'll get that referenced in our show notes too. So anybody that's like me that wants to learn more they can find that in the show notes too. And are you on social media so my listeners can find you and say they heard about you here?

Robert: Yeah. I'm on the I'm on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and all those, all those places you'll find it. You'll find me on all those. And you can also go to, Amazon books slash Robert Dugoni.

Vikki: Fantastic. Well, thank you for being here. I appreciate it. And, I will see you again soon. Thank you very much.

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Vikki: Thank you for listening to the podcast. I hope you enjoyed it as much as we did. Make sure you jump on the show notes find the author, buy their books prior to review. And most importantly, you can find out more about me on my project at one of my two websites, www.squishpen.com or theauthorslibrarian.com. And until next time, this is Vikki J Carter, The Authors Librarian, signing off.

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