



R. Earl Muir

Author & Storyteller

Suggested Interview Topics

- Background and Experience
- Writing with Birmingham as the Backdrop
- Development of Interesting Characters

Suggested Interview Questions

When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?

I think I have always been a writer and storyteller. From childhood, I loved creating stories playing in my backyard. Later, I was inspired by my English teacher as a sophomore in high school. She challenged me with creative writing assignments that channeled my imagination and creativity.

What do you think makes a good story?

For me, I think it begins with the characters. As a reader, I am drawn into the story by interesting characters. I want to know more about them. How they react and deal with certain situations. Of course, there has to be a good story to go along with them, but they make the story have depth. I also think it's important to leave some things open to interpretation of the reader. Like any art form – What does it mean to you? What do you think happens next? It keeps the reader involved in the story.

How do you do research for your books?

The internet, of course, is a great resource especially for the last two books since I was isolated, and libraries were limited. Wikipedia, and more specifically, BhamWiki has been a tremendous asset for me. I also used the library for the first book and I'm beginning to use that resource again. Our Birmingham Public Library is a tremendous resource with newspapers, City Directories and public record archives dating back more than a hundred years. I love scouring old newspapers for information. Often, I find something totally unrelated to what I am researching. Something that just happens to be on the same page or something. Sometimes I can work it into the story, or I may just save it in my Future Project folders for a project down the road.

Is there a lot to do before you start writing the story?

For me it usually starts with an idea and I begin considering how it can develop it into a good story. I don't do outlines really. When I start writing I usually don't know exactly where the story will take me or how it may end. I know that would drive some writers nuts, but it just keeps thing creative and fresh for me. I usually spend time building my main characters, thinking about their background and how they will fit into the story. I am currently working on a new series where the protagonist is a former cop that had a very brief career as a major league baseball pitcher before becoming a cop. I did research about the seasons and teams he played with and gathered a lot of statistical information. Much of the background information never makes it into the book but it helps me develop the characters. Even though it is fiction, having facts that are real to sprinkle in gives it a lot of depth, I think.

Your first two books, Magic City Murder Déjà vu and BOMBINGHAM A Day of Reckoning, were modern day crime dramas with significant historical ties. Your new book departs from the cast of characters and the theme of the first books. How did that departure affect your process?

The story in TIMELESS Magic City was deeply rooted in the research for my first book and another project I have been working on for a few years. As I delved into my research of Birmingham at the beginning of the twentieth century, I was intrigued by the everything about that time. The diversity of the population as people from across the globe and all walks of life flooded in to take advantage of the booming economy. The changes in the city as leaders tried to change Birmingham from a rough and tumble town that could easily fit into a scene from an old western movie into city that would be mentioned with the likes of Chicago and New York. The nick name of the Magic City came about because of the phenomenal growth and changes that happened in that period. I toyed with the idea of a period novel because I had so many

research notes, but the premise of the story took flight from a dream I had. I developed a screenplay for a movie short based on the dream and then it kind of evolved into the novel.

Tell us about the process of coming up with the cover design?

Morris Avenue is pivotal in the book both in 2022 and in the first decade of 20th century, and while we could photograph it as it is today, I wanted it to really reflect the 1900's too. Plus, the door that is the center of several scenes in the book is fictional and so a painting seemed an obvious choice. I have long admired the paintings of my friend, Mara Jambor, and I have a few of her works. I pitched the concept to see if she might do a commission for the cover and she agreed. We talked about a general idea, and she scouted out the area and came back with a charcoal sketch that blew me away and I knew that I had made the right decision.

While the backdrop of Birmingham is consistent with previous work, the time travel and other aspects of the new book are very different. How was different in the story development?

I like writing about Birmingham because it is familiar. I live downtown and the building I live in was built in 1924 and many of the buildings in the Historic Loft District were built from the 1880's through the 1920's, so the architecture is familiar but certainly not what those buildings or the city was like at the turn of the century. Most of the streets were dirt because automobiles were few and far between. Telephones were scarce and electricity was just becoming a thing, so I had to think about what all that meant. I am old enough to have seen technology of computers and cell phones become commonplace, but to imagine that same thing happen with electric lights, indoor plumbing, and transportation is kind of mind boggling. Then you drop a guy into that era that has grown up with all the modern conveniences and imagine the struggle of being thrust back into that archaic time and how he would cope. It certainly added another dimension to the story, I think.

In your first book, there is a true crime drama from 1888 that you parallel with a fictional modern-day story and in the second book there are plenty of historical references to Birmingham in the 1950's and 60's. Are there any historic elements other than the city buildings in the new book?

Yes, there are tons! Many of the second-tier characters are actual people that lived and working in Birmingham in that era. I tried to use as many as I could, but of course, most of the accounts are purely fictional but some elements of truth are woven in. The Presidential visit of Teddy Roosevelt, actually happened, although not his interactions with the protagonist. As I always, do, I want people reading the book to be intrigued by the historical elements to seek out more information and maybe learn something they didn't know about the city.

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