



# Jonathan Woods on writing

Texas pulp crime author moves to Key West to continue his craft

By Michael Haskins

Writer Jonathan Woods moved from Dallas to Key West several years ago to continue his writing career. Both his collection of short stories and his first novel have received favorable reviews. Florida author and writer of the long-running, award-winning Harry Bosch crime series, Michael Connelly wrote in his blurb for Woods' short story collection *Bad Juju & Other Tales of Madness and Mayhem*, "Quirky and disquieting... leaves you marveling at the imagination of Jonathan Woods." For Woods' recently released crime novel *A Death in Mexico*, Connelly blurbbed, "...a great and telling ride south of the border into madness and mayhem. I loved it.

**Q: You recently had a fantastic review in the Los Angeles Review of Books for *A Death in Mexico*, your new crime novel. The reviewer mentioned a few genres the book fit into, mystery being one. What genre do you feel you write in?**

**A:** I write pulpy crime stories with a literary twist. Crime stories covers a pretty broad waterfront from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, about an axe murderer, to Agatha Christie's "cozy" style detective stories starring Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple to American hardboiled crime stories from classic masters like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain to today's top crime story writers such as Michael Connelly, James Lee Burke and Elmore Leonard. My novel *A Death in Mexico* is a police procedural about a murder investigation in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. The reviewer for the Los Angeles Review of Books thought *A Death in Mexico* derived more from the works of Henry Miller and Graham Greene than Raymond Chandler. I'm a fan of all three of these great writers, so I'm not complaining about the comparisons.



Jonathan Woods

**Q: The Los Angeles Review of Books reviewer hoped to see another book featuring your Mexican police investigator Inspector Hector Diaz. Is that a possibility?**

**A:** Inspector Hector Diaz, the police detective hero of *A Death in Mexico*, was a fascinating character to write about and definitely deserves a sequel.

**Q: As mentioned in the intro, both your books received favorable blurbs from Michael Connelly. That has to make you feel good. How'd you get someone as busy as Connelly to read an unknown writer's work?**

**A:** I met Michael Connelly back in 2009 at a small conference of crime story writers and fans held in Panama City, Florida and put together by the writer Michael Lister. Michael Connelly was the guest of honor. Michael is very supportive of beginning writers but he doesn't treat lightly requests for blurbs. He's very specific that he will only blurb a book that he has read and likes. I count myself very privileged to have received blurbs from him for both my books.

**Q: Your first book, *Bad Juju & Other Tales of Madness and Mayhem*, a collection of crime short stories, also received acclaim. Do you prefer writing the novel or the short story and why?**

**A:** *Bad Juju & Other Tales of Madness and Mayhem* caused quite a stir when it was published in 2010. It went on to win a 2011 Spineingler Award for Best Crime Short Story Collection. Some critics have referred to my style of writing in *Bad Juju* as gonzo noir. The writing of *Bad Juju* was a breakthrough for me. Before *Bad Juju* I'd written a novel that no one wanted to represent or publish. Some of the stories in *Bad Juju* were first published on the web in literary magazines like 3:AM Magazine, Plotswithguns.com and Thuglit.com. Next thing I knew, I had a book of stories and a publisher, New Pulp Press. As a result of this history, I have a great fondness for the short story form. There's something thrilling about working on a story for a few weeks, polishing it into a lustrous final product. A novel takes a much greater commitment but it also allows for the telling of a much more intricate and deeper story.

**Q: You're a recovering attorney, last state of practice being Texas, so how did you end up in Key West?**

**A:** Yes, I was an attorney for many years doing deals for a multi-national high-tech company. I left that line of work a few years back to start writing. From that point it took me about seven years before my first book, *Bad Juju & Other Tales of Madness and Mayhem*, was published. During that time my spouse and I lived in Dallas, Texas, where she opened an art gallery. I helped out in the gallery in between my struggles to learn the craft of writing. Then the big recession hit and people stopped buying art. We were both tired of the big city and decided Key West was the perfect alternative, a small town with a thriving cultural community: music, an art cinema, plays, writers, artists, great restaurants, a cultural history reaching back to Hemingway and Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane. And I love that you can ride your bicycle everywhere. So here we are.

**Q: Do you find your creativity more active in Key West or do you feel you can write wherever you are?**

**A:** The task of writing books is not about being in a particular place. It's about being meticulously focused on the words on the page, on the rhythm of the words and the pictures they convey in the mind. But place is an important part of every story ... I expect Key West will appear more and more as a location for my stories. My most recent crime short story "A Lucky Man" is a tale of bone fishing, lust and murder set in Key West. It, along with stories by seven other Key West crime writers, will appear in the anthology *Murder in Key West and Other Island Mysteries* coming soon from Absolute-lyAmazingeBooks.com

**Q: When did you first know you wanted to be a writer? Where were you at the time?**

**A:** Growing up, I was hauled from one side of the country to the other and back again. We moved every two or three years from Rhode Island to L.A. to western Massachusetts to Ohio. You name it; I've lived there. As a kid that always meant I was the outsider. So early on I became fascinated with books. They were the one constant, the one loyal friend in an always-changing environment ... I think it was inevitable, after reading all those books, that I would try my hand at writing one or two.

**Q: What is your daily writing schedule and do you set goals for each day, like the number of words you must get down? Have you tweaked the daily schedule/goals over the years?**

**A:** When I'm deeply involved in writing a novel or story, I try to be disciplined about the process. That means writing for 3 or 4 hours five days a week. Obviously I don't achieve that all the time. Life has a way of getting in the way of our best intentions. At the other extreme, the writing thing can become a bit obsessive and when a story is really going well, I have a hard time breaking away.

**Q: Do you outline, story board, think the ideas out in your head? How does your story make it from you to the page and does it change from your original ideas?**

**A:** Mostly I start out with a character that interests me and see where that character takes me. Sometimes I know the ending of a story before I start writing, sometimes not. For a novel I do some outlining, some jotting down of ideas, plot points, characters, scenes. But for me writing a story is a process that is always in a state of flux and evolution, until at last you turn a corner and see the end. Probably deep in my mind the story I'm working on is a lot more developed than in my consciousness. But writing for me has always been a mystical experience as far as where the story and the characters come from. Of course, the hard part is getting the right words on paper.

michael@keysweekly.com

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