

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

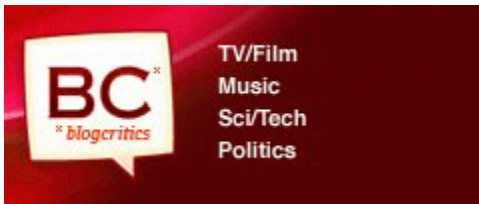


Interview: Lori Rader-Day, Debut Author of 'The Black Hour'

By Suzanne Brazil, BLOGCRITICS.ORG

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"To my right, the staircase rolled out like a tongue, a taunt. At the summit, just up there, lay the scene of the crime. Peering up into the darkness, I felt a cold finger of fear slide down my spine. He reached for his backpack - I held out a hand to stop him. I hated backpacks. I hated the dark. I hated loud noises. I hated the students. I hated my hatred and my paranoia, but they were deep. I hadn't found the bottom." Excerpt from *The Black Hour*.

[Lori Rader-Day](#)'s debut novel [The Black Hour](#) has garnered starred reviews from [Publishers Weekly](#), [Booklist](#) and [Library Journal](#). An active member of the [Mystery Writers of America Midwest Chapter](#), she earned her MFA from [Roosevelt University](#) and recently taught a Mystery Bootcamp class for [Story Studio Chicago](#). She has won numerous awards for her short stories and is currently at work on her second novel.

Can you tell us a little about your background as a writer and the seeds for this novel?

I grew up in Indiana. I always loved to read, so, of course, I grew up wanting to write. It took many attempts at writing before I could figure out how to end a story, and then many years after that before I wrote anything complete that I liked and wanted to show anyone. I gave up writing for a while when life got in the way, but then decided to take it seriously once and for all. In 2006 I started a writing program. I've been writing and publishing ever since.

The seeds for *The Black Hour* came, pretty clearly, from starting a new job on a college campus. It's a perfect, beautiful setting - the kind of setting that murder mysteries thrive on. It's also a closed community, like Agatha Christie's little English villages. *The Black Hour* is about violence on campuses, but more than that, it's about surviving violence and surviving being forced into victimhood. A small community within a community was perfect for a story about gossip.

Describe the moment you got the call that your book was going to be published.

It was an email from my agent who said the editor at [Seventh Street Books](#) was interested in my book. "Don't get excited," she said. It was too late. Eventually there was an email with the word "offer" in it, and the deal was signed a few weeks later. But it was that first "don't get excited" email that was the real moment where I thought *this is going to happen*. It's very exciting, but the moment you type "the end" might be a little better yet.

You completed your MFA at Roosevelt University and mention them in your acknowledgements. What do you think you gained from the MFA program that you couldn't have gotten working on your own?

I wasn't writing at all when I applied to Roosevelt. I had been working a writing job, but hadn't written a word for myself in five years. And I was tired of that. So the MFA program for me was a line in the sand, in a way. I got deadlines, first. There was instruction and encouragement from the faculty, but even better, I got a community among the other students. The first night of my very first fiction workshop was a dream come true. It was such a relief to be in a room of people who thought books mattered, that writing well mattered. I've been in a lot of rooms like that since, but I got started through my MFA program.

As a follow-up, would you recommend an MFA for every writer? Why or why not?

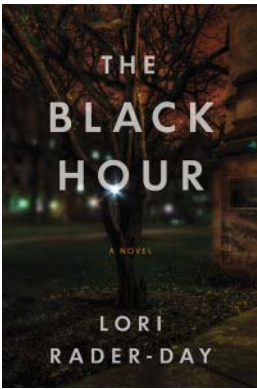
I don't recommend an MFA for everyone. For one thing, they can be expensive, and they can be hard to work into an already busy life. You can take classes from places like [Story Studio Chicago](#) or online through [Gotham Writers](#) (I've done both). You can gather a few friends to share pages. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. That said, if you can take a couple of years to study writing in a program you can afford, consider it. Don't think it's a degree that will change your career prospects. It's not a guarantee of any sort. But mine changed my life.

[1](#) | [2Next »](#)

(Page 2 of 2)

How many short stories have you published and how did you get started on these - open submissions, contests, MFA assignments, etc.?

About 15, I think, without counting them. My first published stories were those I'd written early in my MFA program. I won a few contests early on that were very encouraging to keep writing and attempting to publish. The last story I published was written quite a while ago. Now that I write novels, I don't write as many short stories.



One tip you think aspiring writers should consider ignoring?

If anyone ever says anything about "the muse," just back away slowly. Write when you can and when you can't. Write. Don't wait for some fairy to land on your shoulder. The only way to get any musing done is to do it yourself.

Where do you write? Special pen? Favorite chair? Beverage while writing, etc.?

Anywhere I can get a half-hour, but usually on my laptop in a restaurant, café, or quiet corner at work during my lunch hour. Tea with milk, always.

Most unexpected experience bringing the book to publication?

I was ready to be disappointed by my cover, but I loved my cover. I was ready to have my title changed, but I got to keep it. I've been surprised again and again by how generous everyone in the mystery community have been.

Favorite book or author growing up?

[Beverly Cleary](#) then [Judy Blume](#) then [Agatha Christie](#). My very favorite book as a kid, though, was [From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler](#) by [E.L. Konigsberg](#). Not surprisingly, it has a mystery in it.

Can you name the TopThree3 things that got you to this point?

Deciding to put up or shut up - either write or stop talking about writing, which was all I was doing for those dry five years. Finding a writing community, which in my case is the Mystery Writers of America. And writing, even sometimes when I didn't feel like it. The only thing that ever works is writing. Not talking about writing, not reading about writing, not writing about writing. Only writing will make you a writer.

Find out more about Lori by visiting her [website](#).

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