

## How an intrepid adventure seeker (me) became a writer...

It all started when my sister received an alligator for a birthday present...a gift from her boyfriend at the time. Subsequently and not surprisingly, they broke up shortly thereafter. She got sole custody of the alligator, which ended up in a fish tank on my dresser. Her only instruction: "It eats live goldfish." Such music to a young boy's ears! In fact, it was my ticket to elementary school stardom. I became a third-grade P.T. Barnum. It also heralded my future career as both a biologist and a veterinarian.

But that's getting ahead of the story. I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1961. My father was a foreman at a Libby's canning plant. My mother stayed home and had children... many, many children. Being Polish *and* Roman Catholic, I believe there was some requirement: less than five children, and the secret of Kielbasa would be taken from you. So I was born the third of seven children, and of that litter, I was the only true storyteller of the family (what my mother called The Liar). My early work consisted of convincing my younger brothers that the new ventriloquist doll I got for Christmas would come alive at midnight and hunt for fresh blood...which led to many sleepless nights and wet beds. Or revealing to my baby sister that our family were really Martians – except for her, of course, as she was our adopted human pet.

I still pay their therapy bills, but it was worth it.

And I did eventually survive childhood. I even got accepted to veterinary school at the University of Missouri and settled out in Sacramento, California. I started my own practice and ran it for two decades. I even have the scars to prove it. But I also could not ignore that twisted little corner of my mind, that demented little storyteller who terrorized young children. I needed a new audience. So I began to write. I wrote much short fiction – truly bad short fiction, stories which are buried in my backyard and will never see the light of day (unless some future archaeologist discovers them and declares them to be verifiable proof that this century was devoid of literary merit).

But I persevered (*i.e.*, I wouldn't take no for an answer). I eventually wrote my first book, found an agent, and to my personal case of shock-and-awe, Avon Books bought it. Thus began my dual career – as both veterinarian and author. I often get asked, "As an author, why don't you write about a veterinarian, like James Herriot, or about animals, like *Marley and Me*?" My answer was simple: "Not enough people die in those books."

Presently I write full time, having weaned myself off my veterinary career. Though one Sunday a month, I do volunteer my time and surgical skills to spaying and neutering animals for the local shelter. Basically it's eight hours of removing genitalia. Otherwise, I continue to write novels that are equal parts historical mysteries, scientific thrillers and action adventures. And yes, many people do die.

And yes, I have dogs...way too many dogs. I blame my mother.