

Why Read *Presumed Innocent*?

With the publication of *Presumed Innocent* in 1987, Scott Turow ushered in the age of the legal thriller. Despite many other skilled writers who followed—including John Grisham, Richard North Patterson, Lisa Scottoline and John Lescroart—Turow's work remains unique: critically acclaimed psychological studies that appeal to a wide audience. Character rather than courtroom pyrotechnics dominates his elegantly written novels, which also raise important questions of morality, truth and justice. After earning his undergraduate degree, Turow graduated from the Creative Writing Center at Stanford and then taught there for several years. He graduated with honors from Harvard Law School in 1978. Turow's credentials are unique among his peers.

How to Get Involved

Check out *Presumed Innocent* from a participating library (see a list on the back panel). Discuss the book and participate in the various programs. Use this guide to lead your own book discussion group or attend one of the special Everyone's Reading events listed in the program brochure and at www.everyonesreading.info.

About the Author

Scott Turow is a practicing attorney and the author of seven best-selling novels, beginning with *Presumed Innocent*. As an attorney, both for the U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago and in private practice, Turow has had intimate experiences with the criminal justice system and capital punishment. Turow served on the Illinois Commission on Capital Punishment. He wrote about his journey from a self-described "death penalty agnostic" to becoming actively opposed to the death penalty in *Ultimate Punishment: A Lawyer's Reflections on Dealing with the Death Penalty*.

Turow is a partner at Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal in Chicago and concentrates on white collar criminal defense. He devotes significant time to pro bono work, including a 1995 case that resulted in the release of Alejandro Hernandez who had spent twelve years in prison, including five on death row, for a murder he did not commit.

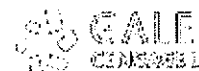
Wrongful conviction, a theme in *Presumed Innocent*, is a focus of the Innocence Project, a national litigation and public policy organization. Founded in 1992, the Innocence Project works to exonerate wrongfully convicted people through DNA testing and to reform the justice system. To date, 245 people in the U.S. have been exonerated by DNA testing, including 17 who served time on death row. Almost every state has an Innocence Project office, including Michigan's Thomas M. Cooley Innocence Project in Lansing and the Michigan Innocence Clinic in Ann Arbor. For more information about the Innocence Project and individual cases, go to www.innocenceproject.org or attend one of the Everyone's Reading programs about the Innocence Project.

Turow was born in Chicago in 1949 and lives in a Chicago suburb.

Discussion Questions for *Presumed Innocent*

1. The story begins with Carolyn Polhemus's funeral. How does Turov use this scene to set up the competing agendas of the book?
2. How does Rusty's obsession with Carolyn affect the way you feel about him, first as the investigator, then the prime suspect? What dual role does this obsession play?
3. Judge Larren Lytle has a long history with Raymond Horgan, the chief prosecutor who needs a conviction to help get re-elected. How does this raise the stakes in the criminal trial?
4. What is the role of the Night Saints case? Is it ultimately important to the story?
5. The story interweaves a flashback of Rusty's affair with Carolyn, the present tense investigation of her murder investigation and trial, and intimate family scenes with Rusty, his wife, Barbara and his son, Nat. Why are these family scenes so important? Do you view them differently as you are reading them and then after the conclusion?
6. Rusty Sabich is not indicted or charged with a crime until a third of the way into the story. Why does Turov wait so long? Why is it important that Sabich is not a suspect in the first third of the story?
7. Rusty reveals a difficult relationship with his own father and that he comes from a dysfunctional family. What does that background make you think about Rusty? And why does the author introduce that background at that moment in the story?
8. When Raymond Horgan testifies against Rusty Sabich, what does it tell you about their relationship? About Rusty's involvement in the case as an investigator before he was charged with murder? Does it affect the way you view Rusty's guilt or innocence?
9. Defense attorney Sandy Stern suggests that the case against Rusty Sabich has been manufactured by the prosecutor's office because of personal grudges. How does this turn out to be a kind of clue? How does Stern pursue this line of questioning later with the police pathologist? How is it pivotal both in the trial and in the ultimate conclusion?
10. Rusty knows an essential piece of information that is not revealed until after the trial. Why do you think Turov did this?

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Scott Turow

1949-

Also known as: Scott Turow, Scott F. Turow, L. Scott Turow

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Birth: April 12, 1949 in Chicago, Illinois
Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2006.
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"Sidelights"

Scott Turow uses his insider's knowledge of the American legal system to form the basis for best-selling suspense novels. A practicing attorney who has also studied creative writing, Turow explores the murky terrain of urban justice through highly plotted fiction. "No one on the contemporary scene writes better mystery-suspense novels than Chicago attorney Scott Turow," noted Bill Blum in

the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. "In a genre overcrowded with transparent plots and one-dimensional super-sleuths, Turow's first novel, *Presumed Innocent*, was a work of serious fiction as well as a gripping tale of murder and courtroom drama." *New York Times Magazine* correspondent Jeff Shear praised Turow for the "brash, backroom sensibility that informs his work as a novelist." Noting the range of legal thrillers available to readers, *Trial* reviewer Rebecca Porter noted that Turow's 2003 novel *Reversible Errors* is exceptional due to the author's "refusal to paint the issue in black and white." Turow's "characters are challenged morally, ethically, and emotionally," Porter added--"and respond with a depth lacking in most legal potboilers. Add an intricate plot, in which Good and Evil are both clothed in gray, and the reader can't plow through without paying attention."

It is a rare writer indeed who collects millions of dollars from a first novel. Even more rare is the author who crafts a novel while holding a full-time, high-profile job. Turow did both, writing drafts of *Presumed Innocent* in his spare moments on the commuter train while working as an assistant U.S. district attorney in Chicago. *Washington Post* contributor Steve Coll wrote that through his determination to write fiction without sacrificing his profession, Turow "has fulfilled every literate working stiff's fantasy."

For his part, Turow maintains that his background in the legal system has provided him with subject matter for fiction as well as practical experience in crafting a narrative. He told a *Publishers Weekly* writer, "As a lawyer, I never decided I didn't want to be a writer. I decided it would have to be a private passion, rather than something I could use My idea was to stay *alive* as a writer, just to continue to nurture that part of my soul." Turow not only "stayed alive" as a writer, he prospered. His novels have topped the best-seller lists and have found favor with many of the nation's book critics. *Time* reviewer Paul Gray contended that the author's works "revolve around a nexus of old-fashioned values: honesty, loyalty, trust. When those values are violated--sometimes salaciously, always entertainingly--lawyers and the legal system rush in to try to set things right again. But the central quest in Turow's fiction is not for favorable verdicts but for the redemption of souls, the healing of society. Best-sellers seldom get more serious than that."

Turow was born and raised in the Chicago area, the son of an obstetrician. In his early years the family lived in the city. Later they moved to an affluent suburb, Winnetka, Illinois, where Turow attended New Trier High School. As the author told a *Washington Post* contributor, he inherited his own driving ambition from his father, who was "out delivering babies at all hours of the day and night and wasn't around very much." The author added, "I suppose that's the embedded mental image of the hard-working male that I have become." Both of Turow's parents helped to nurture that spirit of hard work, because they wanted their son to become a physician too. Turow had other ideas, however. Even though he flunked freshman English at New Trier High, he grew to love writing, eventually becoming the editor of the school newspaper. He decided he wanted to be a writer, so enrolled in Amherst College in Massachusetts as an English major.

At Amherst Turow began to write short stories and novels, and a few of his short pieces were printed in literary magazines such as the *Transatlantic Review*, a rare feat for an undergraduate. After earning his bachelor's degree in 1970, Turow won a fellowship to the Stanford University creative-writing program. **There he taught while working on a novel about Chicago called *The Way Things Are*. He began to question the direction of his career when he received twenty-five rejections for his completed manuscript;** only one publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, offered even the slightest encouragement. Turow told a *New York Times Magazine* writer that the cool reception his novel earned "made me realize that I wasn't one-tenth the writer I hoped to be I could not sustain the vision of myself as a writer only." In a *Los Angeles Times* interview he said, "I became convinced that one could not make a living in the U.S. writing serious fiction. I was never terribly bitter about that. I didn't see why the world had an obligation to support novelists."

Even while writing *The Way Things Are* Turow was becoming interested in the law, and in 1975, he entered Harvard Law School. Even then he put his writing talents to work. When his literary agent secured him a contract for a personal, nonfiction account of the first year in the law school, Turow took notes during his hectic class schedule and finished the book during summer recess. In 1977 Putnam published Turow's *One L: An Inside Account of Life in the First Year at Harvard Law School*. The work sold modestly at first, but it

eventually became "required reading for anyone contemplating a career in law," noted Justin Blewitt in *Best Sellers*. *New York Times* critic P.M. Stern called *One L* "a compelling and important book. It is compelling in its vivid portrayal of the high-tension competitiveness of Harvard Law School and of the group madness it seems to induce in the student body. It is important because it offers an inside look at what law students do and don't learn and who they are and are not equipped to represent when they graduate."

After receiving his law degree in 1978, Turow returned to Chicago to work with the U.S. District Attorney's office there. As a prosecutor, he was assigned to the infamous "Operation Greylord," a series of trials that exposed judicial corruption in the city's courts. Little by little, the intrigues of corruption and legal wrangling began to work their way into the notebooks Turow kept for his fiction. He set aside a novel he was drafting and began to tinker with a story about an attorney. "I was learning a lot about bribery and I wanted to write about that," he told the *Washington Post*.

For several years Turow did his writing in the little spare time left him after meeting the demands of Operation Greylord and his growing family in the suburbs. He edited chapters of his new novel during his commute to and from work on the train and rose early in the morning to work on his fiction before he left for the office. Finally, his wife convinced him to quit his job and finish the novel. He accepted a partnership at the downtown Chicago firm of Sonnenschein, Carlin, Nath & Rosenthal and then took a three-month hiatus from the firm in order to write. His finished manuscript was mailed to a New York agent just two weeks before he was due to start his new job.


Turow was confident that his novel would be published, but he was astonished by the level of interest shown by New York's biggest publishing houses. A bidding war ensued over the rights to publish the work, and the sums soon exceeded 200,000 dollars. Ultimately, Turow did not choose the high bidder but instead took an offer from Farrar, Straus because of the firm's literary reputation--and because of the encouragement he had received from its editors during his student days. The payment Farrar, Straus offered Turow was the largest sum that company had ever paid for a first novel.

Presumed Innocent tells the story of a troubled

2 deputy prosecutor in a big city who is assigned to investigate the murder of a female colleague. As the nightmare case unfolds, the prosecutor, Rusty Sabich, finds himself on trial for murdering the woman with whom he once had an adulterous affair. Gray wrote that in *Presumed Innocent* Turow "uses [a] grotesque death as a means of exposing the trail of municipal corruption that has spread through [fictitious] Kindle County. The issue is not merely whether a murderer will be brought to justice but whether public institutions and their guardians are any longer capable of finding the truth." Turow told *Publishers Weekly* that his book is "a comment on the different kinds of truth we recognize. If the criminal-justice system is supposed to be a truth-finding device, it's an awkward one at best. There are all kinds of playing around in the book that illuminate that, and yet by the same token, the results in the end are just. And that's not accidental Absolutely everybody in the novel is guilty of something. That's a truth of life that I learned as a prosecutor. We all do things we wish we hadn't done and that we're not necessarily proud of."

Fellow attorney-turned-author George V. Higgins noted in the *Chicago Tribune* that *Presumed Innocent* is a "beautifully crafted tale Packed with data, rich in incident, painstakingly imagined, it snags both of your lapels and presses you down in your chair until you've finished it." Toronto *Globe & Mail* correspondent H. J. Kirchhoff called the novel "surprisingly assured," adding, "The prose is crisp and polished, every character is distinct and fully realized, and the dialogue is authentic. Turow has blended his experience in the rough-and-tumble of the criminal courts with a sympathetic eye for the vagaries of the human condition and an intimate understanding of the dark side of the human soul." Shear concluded that the criminal-justice system *Presumed Innocent* portrays, "without tears or pretense, has seldom appeared in literature quite like this."

1. "Presumed Innocent won the literary lottery," observed Mei-Mei Chan in *USA Weekend*. The novel spent more than forty-three weeks on the best-seller lists, went through sixteen hardcover printings, and sold four million paperback copies. Turow reaped three million dollars for the paperback rights and another one million dollars for the movie rights. A film adaptation of the work, released in 1990, was one of the ten top-grossing movies of that year. When Turow published his second novel--almost simultaneously with the



debut of the movie version of *Presumed Innocent*- he joined the ranks of Ernest Hemingway, J. D. Salinger, and Alex Haley by becoming the ninety-second writer to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine.

By the time *The Burden of Proof* appeared in the summer of 1990, Turow had established a routine that included several hours a day for his writing. He still practiced law, but he spent his mornings at home, in contact with the downtown firm by telephone and fax machine. His schedule remained daunting, however, as his celebrity status made him a sought-after interview subject in the various media. But, as Turow told *New York Times Magazine*, he does his best work under such pressure. "I run on a combination of fear, anxiety, and compulsion," he said. "I have to control my habit to work all the time."

The Burden of Proof takes its hero from among the characters in *Presumed Innocent*. Sandy Stern is a middle-aged defense attorney who returns home from a business trip to find his wife dead in an apparent suicide. As he confronts the loss and the circumstances behind it, he becomes enmeshed in a web of family intrigues, insider stock trading schemes, and unanswered questions about his wife's private life. Toronto *Globe & Mail* reviewer Margaret Cannon wrote that in *The Burden of Proof* Turow "has let his imagination loose and, while courtroom derring-do is still a hefty part of the plot, it doesn't subsume the tragic story about some very damaged people." In the *Washington Post Book World*, Jonathan Yardley wrote that "Turow's second novel proves beyond any reasonable doubt that his hugely successful first was no fluke It's that rare book, a popular novel that is also serious, if not 'literary' fiction. *The Burden of Proof* means to entertain, and does so with immense skill, so if all you want is intelligent amusement it will serve you handily: but it is also a complex, multilayered meditation on 'the heartsore arithmetic of human events,' and as such rises far above the norm of what is generally categorized as 'commercial' fiction."

Turow's third novel, *Pleading Guilty*, broke new ground for the author. "Although fully peopled with lawyers," explained Charles Champlin in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, "the story hardly peeps into a courtroom." A high-placed partner in a prestigious Midwestern law firm has suddenly gone missing, along with about five and a half million dollars of the firm's funds. Instead of calling in the

police (which would raise a scandal and cost the firm business), the partners turn to one of their employees, Mack Malloy, a former policeman, to find the missing partner and the missing money. In the process, Malloy encounters a body in a refrigerator, an old nemesis, and, eventually, the missing man and money. " *Pleading Guilty*, written as Mack's diary of the ... events, demonstrates that Mr. Turow, at his best descriptive form, is worthy to be ranked with Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler," said Champlin. "Scott Turow writes as well as ever," declared *Washington Post Book World* contributor Ross Thomas, "and is skilled enough not only to entertain his readers but also convince them they are acquiring vital inside stuff about the legal profession."

Although *The Laws of Our Fathers* reintroduces Turow's famous court scenes, it also moves in different directions compared to the author's previous work. The shooting death of the wife of a state senator reunites a group of 1960s radicals who had been friends but had gone their separate ways at the end of the decade. "The novel is less a legal thriller than a meditative examination of the hold that time past exerts over time present," said Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times Book Review*. "Beneath the layers of a deep legal deviousness," stated a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, "Turow never lets you forget that his characters lived and loved before they ever got dragged into court." "The resulting story is by turns moving and manipulative, compelling and contrived," Kakutani concluded. "Though deeply flawed, it stands as Mr. Turow's most ambitious novel yet."

Robbie Feaver is the failed actor and corrupt personal injury lawyer of *Personal Injuries*, a novel based on elements of Turow's experiences with Operation Greylord. "Without knowing anything about the Greylord case, I can attest that this novel has the ring of authenticity," wrote Dennis Drabelle in the *Washington Post Book World*. "It blends widespread graft, a spidery villain insulated at the heart of a complex web, suffering, murder, suicide, and also a measure of humor into a narrative that proceeds with the inevitability--and the surprises--of real life." The story is narrated by Feaver's lawyer, George Mason, called "a colorless fellow who readily admits that he did not witness most of the events he is describing," said Kakutani.

Feaver pays off judges from a secret bank account which is discovered by the F.B.I. while the agency is setting up a sting to nail those judges. Feaver is

offered an ultimatum--wear a wire and turn informant or face prosecution. Feaver, a womanizer, but devoted to his wife dying of Lou Gehrig's disease, is assigned an F.B.I. agent, Evon Miller, who, because she is a lesbian, resists Feaver's charm. Gary Krist wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that "to watch the two of them gradually probing the multiple veils, curtains, and trapdoors of each other's personalities, penetrating a little deeper each time, is to experience the kind of reading pleasure that only the best novelists--genre or otherwise--can provide And Robbie Feaver may be [Turow's] most inspired creation yet--a slick, mercurial, bighearted con artist, as flawed yet somehow as noble as those tragic figures he never got to play onstage."

Reviewing the novel for *Salon.com*, Jonathan Groner wrote that "the book doesn't pack much mystery Once the main action is under way and Feaver, wired for sight and sound, has set out among the judges and the courtroom lackeys, there are few surprises. But *Personal Injuries* succeeds as a long look at a world where greed, sloth, and lust holds sway despite the efforts of some good men and women." Drabelle concluded by saying that "lawyers like to differentiate between substance, the content of the law, and procedure, the steps by which you make the system work. In Turow's first novel, *Presumed Innocent*, substance dominated, in the form of a magnificently surprising answer to the whodunit question. *Personal Injuries* holds no similar shock, but the loving attentiveness to procedure--the nuts and bolts of that sting--makes it an absorbing crime novel, perhaps Turow's best."

In *Ultimate Punishment: A Lawyer's Reflections on Dealing with the Death Penalty*, Turow tackles the controversial issue of capital punishment. He first lays the groundwork by providing a history of the death penalty in America, along with overviews of the differing positions on its use. Laurie Selwyn of *Library Journal* praised the book for its even-handed approach to the issue, adding that it is "useful for law, debate, political science, and ethics students." A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* found the book to be "a sober and elegantly concise examination" containing "useful insights into this fiercely debated subject." William Vance Trollinger, Jr. of the *Christian Century* found Turow's book compelling. In his review, he wrote, "Those who carefully follow his reasoning will not be surprised when, at the end, he declares that he is now opposed to capital punishment. But his compelling logic leaves us with a crucial question: Why do so

many Americans and American politicians continue to support the death penalty?"

Turow returned to fiction with the publication of *Ordinary Heroes*. The novel, however, is not a legal thriller, but a World War II story. In it, journalist Stewart Dubinsky discovers documents indicating that his deceased father, David (a former World War II soldier), was court-martialed for allegedly aiding a suspected spy's escape from prison. Stewart later discovers his father's memoirs and much of the narrative in *Ordinary Heroes* is devoted to passages from them. Although Jeffrey Miller, writing in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, felt that some of the soldiers' dialogue was "stilted," most critics felt that Turow's effort was quite successful. As *Booklist* contributor Allison Block noted, "the author's action sequences ... do plenty to quicken the pulse." In addition, a *Kirkus Reviews* writer stated, "Without diminishing his page-turning narrative momentum, Turow extends his literary range."

Turow has said repeatedly that he does not intend to retire from his law practice, even though the profits from his writing career give him that option. The author told the *Chicago Tribune* that he spent many years defining himself as a writer before he became a lawyer. "I really didn't have any sense of identity as a lawyer. I really felt I was faking it," he said. "Somewhere along the way that changed; somewhere along the line I went through this kind of shift of identity. People ask me what I do. I certainly answer I am a lawyer. I don't say I'm a writer. I find that kind of a grandiose claim for somebody who spends sixty hours a week doing something else." Turow told *Publishers Weekly* that he is grateful for the level of success he has achieved with his books but that his perspective on writing has not changed. "Making money was not my intention," he said. "I wrote out of the same impulse that everyone else writes out of--I wrote because there were parts of my experience that I could best deal with that way." He concluded, "Obviously it was enormously fulfilling."

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born April 12, 1949, in Chicago, IL; son of David D. (a physician) and Rita (a writer; maiden name, Pastron) Turow; married Annette Weisberg (an artist), April 4, 1971; children: Rachel, Gabriel, Eve. **Education:** Amherst College, B.A., 1970; Stanford University, M.A., 1974; Harvard

University, J.D., 1978. **Religion:** Jewish.

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AWARDS

Writing award, College English Association/Book-of-the-Month Club, 1970; Edith Mirrielees fellow, 1972; Silver Dagger Award, Crime Writers Association, 1988, for *Presumed Innocent*; Writer for Writers award, 2001.

CAREER

Attorney and novelist. Stanford University, Stanford, CA, E.H. Jones Lecturer in Creative Writing, 1972-75; Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, Boston, MA, clerk, 1977-78; U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh District, Chicago, IL, assistant U.S. district attorney, 1978-86; Sonnenschein, Carlin, Nath, & Rosenthal (law firm), Chicago, partner, beginning 1986. Writer, 1972--.

WRITINGS:

- *One L: An Inside Account of Life in the First Year at Harvard Law School* (nonfiction), Putnam (New York, NY), 1977.
- *Presumed Innocent* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1987.
- *The Burden of Proof* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Pleading Guilty* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1993.
- *The Laws of Our Fathers* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1996.
- *Personal Injuries* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1999.
- (Editor) *Guilty As Charged: A Mystery Writers of America Anthology*, Compass Press (Thorndike, ME), 2001.
- *Reversible Errors*, Farrar, Straus (New York,

NY), 2002.

- *Ultimate Punishment: A Lawyer's Reflections on Dealing with the Death Penalty* (nonfiction), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Ordinary Heroes* (novel), Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 2005.

Also author of unpublished novel *The Way Things Are*. Work anthologized in *Best American Short Stories*, 1971, 1972. Contributor of stories, articles, and reviews to literary journals, including *Transatlantic Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Harvard*, *New England*, and *Place*, and contributor to newspapers.

MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

Presumed Innocent, a film based on Turow's novel of the same title, was released by Warner Bros., written by Frank Pierson and Alan J. Pakula, directed by Pakula, starring Harrison Ford, Bonnie Bedelia, Brian Dennehy, and Raul Julia, 1990; *The Burden of Proof*, a two-part television film based on the novel, was adapted by John Gay and starred Hector Elizondo, Brian Dennehy, and Adrienne Barbeau, 1992; *Reversible Errors* was adapted as a television miniseries in 2004.

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BOOKS

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SOURCE CITATION

Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2009.
Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*.
Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

Document Number: H1000100438

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Interview: Scott Turow: From Law to Best-Selling Novels



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Scott Turow is the author of seven best-selling novels: *Presumed Innocent* (1987), *The Burden of Proof* (1990), *Pleading Guilty* (1993), *The Laws of Our Fathers* (1996), *Personal Injuries* (1999) and *Reversible Errors* (2002). *One L* - a non-fiction account of Turow's experiences in his first year at Harvard Law School - is on the reading list of nearly every law school student.

In a recent interview with JD Bliss, Turow shared that he dreamed of becoming a novelist since he was 11 years old. He diligently pursued this goal even after embarking on his legal career, taking every opportunity to write and practice his craft even if it was only a paragraph or two while commuting by train to his first day job at the U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago.

Having achieved enormous success as a writer, what is less well known is that Turow continues to practice white collar criminal defense law at Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal (albeit on a reduced schedule from his earlier years). Turow finds that law nourishes his imagination and engages the side of him that sees law as an instrument for change and reform.

See our interview with Turow below.

JD Bliss: *After graduating from Amherst College in 1970, you attended the Stanford University Creative Writing Center from 1970-1972, and then taught*

Creative Writing at Stanford from 1972-1975. Was your initial career ambition to be a writer and/or teacher?

Turow: My dream was to be a novelist from the time I was 11 or 12 years old. Teaching was simply a way to make a living.

JDB: *What events, personal experiences, etc. motivated you to apply to law school and to pursue a career as a lawyer?*

Turow: There were a couple of considerations. One, I'd concluded that I was personally not really cut out for academic life. This is not to disparage people who are good at it, but I was just there for the paycheck.

Second, I was far more interested in the law than I expected. My father was a doctor, and as I say, he hated lawyers, long before that was fashionable for doctors. I had little exposure to law until my college roommates went to law school and started practice. By then I found that I was making friends with lawyers in San Francisco. It seemed I was far more interested in law than academic English.

JDB: *What inspired you to write One L while at Harvard Law School? Were the creative writing skills you developed while studying and teaching at Stanford instrumental to the conception and success of One L and your other novels?*

Turow: I actually went to law school with a contract to write the book. It was something of an accident. When I decided to go to law school, I told my agent that I'd noticed that there wasn't a good non-fiction account of student life. She mentioned my suggestion to an editor, Ned Chase, and a contract quickly followed.

When *One L* appeared, I heard many of my classmates mutter, 'I should have done that,' which irritated me to no end. I'd spent 5 years at Stanford honing my craft as a writer. I don't think *One L* could ever have been written without that background.

JDB: *After graduating Harvard Law School, you worked as an Assistant United States Attorney in Chicago from 1978 to 1986. Why did you choose to start your legal career in the public sector as a prosecutor instead of as an associate at a private firm? Why did you then join Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal in 1986 as a white collar criminal defense attorney?*

Turow: Law school was a surprising choice for me, in the anti-establishment days of the early 70's. But that was as far as I could go. Corporate practice was simply anathema. The U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago had become an instrument of reform here, and I wanted to be a part of that. Obviously, my perspectives changed over the 8 years I was a prosecutor. I began to realize that defense lawyers served an important Constitutional function, and with two young children, the paycheck in the private sector was attractive. I left because it was time to make a change, and I could not have picked better among the firms that offered me a job.

JDB: *One L was published in 1977. Presumed Innocent was published in 1987. Why did you stop writing for so long after publishing One L, and what motivated you to resume writing? Once you resumed, how did you find the time to write a novel while working full time as a lawyer?*

Turow: I never stopped writing. My promise to myself when I went to law school was that I would continue. When I started as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, I used to write on the morning commuter train. It was sometimes no more than a paragraph a day, but it kept the candle burning. The plot of *Presumed Innocent* suggested itself to me over a number of years. I started the book based on experiences I had in the Suffolk County DA's office, which had been my clinical placement in the trial practice class taught by Garry Bellow at Harvard. But that took me only about 120 pages into the book that ultimately resulted. I took two years off [from writing *Presumed Innocent*] and wrote other things while I figured out the rest of the plot.

I finished *Presumed Innocent* in the summer between the U.S. Attorney's office and my start at Sonnenschein. I never would have done that without my wife's encouragement.

JDB: After Presumed Innocent became a best seller, why did you continue to work as a defense attorney at Sonnenschein instead of devoting yourself full time to writing? What is it about practicing law that motivates you to continue working as a lawyer even after you have achieved enormous success as a writer?

Turow: I continued in practice mainly on the theory that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Every writer needs something else to do. I started practicing part time in 1989, and have tapered off some over the years, but I still find that practice nourishes my imagination and, more importantly, feeds the part of me that was so deeply engaged with the law that I had to go to law school.

JDB: Given what we assume is a busy schedule as a best-selling author and lawyer at a major law firm, what is your approach to balancing work with family and personal interests?

Turow: I work odd hours. A lot of time at night. Write in the morning. Do law stuff in the afternoon. Correspondence at night. I'm not sure my family would enthusiastically endorse the idea that my life has been balanced, but it was a rare evening when I was not home for dinner.

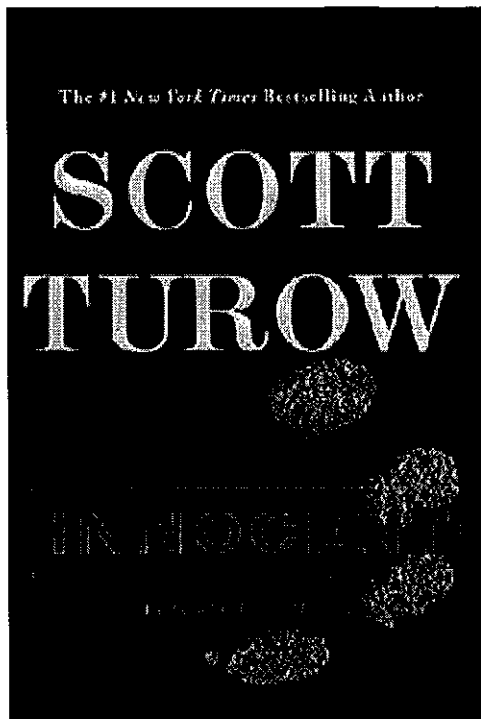
JDB: What advice would you give to lawyers who aspire to become novelists?

Turow: Write. There is no substitute for practice. Same answer to that old joke about how do you get to Carnegie Hall: "Practice, Practice, Practice."

JDB: What advice would you give to lawyers who are unhappy with their current career path and are considering alternatives – whether in law or outside of law?

Turow: I don't think a legal education is a mistake for anybody, but obviously practice is not for everyone. If law school interested you, then I'd encourage the disenchanted to try another legal milieu before giving up. Public sector - non profit - small firm if you're in a big firm. That kind of thing. But I know lots of

people who started practicing and by now have become successful in many other endeavors - two woodworkers, a sculptor, dozens of business folks, and the owner of a chain of basketball courts, not to mention several novelists. Few of them regret law school.



In his 1987 debut novel "Presumed Innocent," lawyer Scott Turow detailed a titanic courtroom battle between the prosecutor Tommy Molto and a defendant named Rusty Sabich, a distinguished lawyer accused of murdering his mistress. In the process, the book became a best-seller and Turow set the gold standard for the modern courtroom thriller, spawning hundreds of lesser clones.

Twenty-three years later, Turow has published "Innocent" (Grand Central, 416 pp., \$28), a courtroom rematch between Rusty and Tommy, and the sequel Turow vowed never to write. Rusty was acquitted at the earlier trial and became an appeals court judge in the fictional Kindle County, somewhere in the Midwest. Tommy is the acting county prosecutor. Rusty's troubled wife is found dead of apparent natural causes, but an autopsy indicates otherwise, and Rusty is again charged with murder. Tommy must prosecute the case at the risk of destroying his career and possibly sending an innocent man to jail.

The new novel is Turow at his best, pulling together the domestic dramas of unhappy marriages and adultery, fast plotting and brilliant courtroom showdowns. "Innocent" is an exploration of power, deceit and the brutal pursuit of truth and justice.

Turow, 61, author of eight national best-sellers, is a practicing attorney. He spoke with freelance writer Dylan Foley by telephone from his home in Evanston, Ill.

Q. What drew you to writing a sequel to "Presumed Innocent"?

A. I had said repeatedly that I would never do a sequel. In 2005, when I finished my novel "Ordinary Heroes," I found myself writing a Post-It that said, "A man is sitting on a bed, where the body of a woman lies." It sat on my desk for six weeks. I finally looked at it and said, "This must be Rusty Sabich. The woman must be his wife, Barbara. How did they stay married?" I was off to the races.

Q. In your first novel, Tommy Molto was an aggressive young prosecutor and flawed man. How did he age for you?

A. Tommy's grown up. In two decades, he went from being a zealot to being a fair prosecutor. He's motivated by simple things: love of family and loyalty to the law.

Q. Sandy Stern is Rusty's courtly defense attorney in both novels. Now he's dying of cancer, but is still an old warhorse capable of strong defense and the occasional underhanded move. Where did he come from?

A. Growing up, my parents had a friend who was a Cuban refugee, an extremely elegant man. Sandy's physical form is drawn from him. Stern is imbued with the best qualities of what a defense lawyer does.

Q. Why do you keep returning to your fictional Kindle County?

A. Kindle County evolved in a totally accidental manner. I had written "One L" (Turow's memoir of Harvard Law School) and I was well aware of the dangers of being accused of writing a roman à clef. It would have been a real peril to my legal career if people thought that I was writing about the people I was meeting in practice. It couldn't be Chicago, where I was working, so I called it Kindle County. It had an immense meaning for me to see how my characters changed over the years, to see people from a distance, then to see them, like Tommy Molto, grow in their own skin.

Q. Both Rusty and Tommy are your age now. Was this intentional?

A. This book is a very frank exploration of what happens at this stage of life, when the kids are gone and the professional tasks are mostly completed. They call these the "golden years," but that's not always so. Yet it is an incredibly rich time. This part of life is characterized as stable, but it's not. Marriages fail, friends die, careers start to dwindle. You have to accept the inevitability of change, or the gods will trample you.

Scott Turow: *Innocent*

By ELIZABETH BENEDICT

Published: May 4, 2010

Category: [Fiction](#)

It's not exactly like asking where you were when you heard JFK was shot, but for many of us, the publication of *Presumed Innocent* in 1987 was An Event.

A bookseller I knew in Washington D.C. called it "the best book ever written." Before publication, Sydney Pollack bought the movie rights for \$1 million --- an amount unheard of at the time. There were ads on the sides of buses. There was the hard-working-boy-makes-good personal story of the attorney-author writing his first novel over seven years, every morning from 4am to 7am, before he went to work in a downtown Chicago law firm.

There was the hype, and there was the book itself --- a legal thriller, a story of lust, murder, marriage and political corruption set in an invented Chicago-like place called Kindle County. Among the twists in the story: The county prosecutor, Rusty Sabich, is the one charged with the murder of his colleague-lover, and a contraceptive device plays a major role in the plot. Another knock-out punch is the identity and method of the murderer, about which not another word for those who haven't read the book

This was not Agatha Christie, this was contemporary America, and Turow's lucid, psychologically penetrating prose approached the high ground of literature.

This kind of hybrid --- the dynamic plot and the carefully wrought prose --- was not unheard of (Alan Drury's *Advise and Consent* and James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*), but it hadn't been seen in some time. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the lines between genre fiction and literature were much crisper; you did one or the other. Here was Turow, in a first novel, doing both.

In seven more novels, he has continued to mix genres extremely well, but I imagine that *Innocent*, the sequel to "Presumed Innocent", will trump them all. By page three, I was hooked --- I spent eight hours on my couch without eating. This is one of those cases when describing more than the start of the book can spoil your reading of the rest, so I'll say only that the story opens with 60-year-old Rusty Sabich, now a Kindle County judge, waking up next to a dead wife, in a sequence told by the couple's grown son.

I don't generally read legal thrillers or mysteries --- Turow is an exception for me. The pleasures of "Innocent" are many and complicated, particularly if you know the first book. If you don't, the publisher has just brought out a new paperback, and there is no

time like the present to crack it open.

For those who read #1, #2 is just as good, just as riveting, and moving in certain ways that "Presumed Innocent" was not. Rusty Sabich is now twenty-three years older, and so are we. He can look back on a lot more life: the sorrows, losses, mistakes, regrets, and the people he's hurt --- and so can we.

Scott Turow was kind enough to answer a few questions by e-mail for me.

When did calls begin for you to write a sequel to "Presumed Innocent"?

As soon as it was published.

Why were you reluctant to write one? What changed?

Complicated questions. I feared self imitation --- death for a writer --- and the inevitable comparisons, in which it seemed there would be no winning for the second book for reasons set forth by Ecclesiastes: you can't step in the same stream twice. But five years ago, at the inception of a period of upheaval in my personal life, I began to yearn to go back to Rusty, to return to my beginnings as a novelist.

With the understanding that no book is easy to write, what were the particular difficulties with writing "Innocent"? Did you feel you had to retell the story of "Presumed Innocent" --- or were you counting on readers to be familiar with it?

Deb Futter, my wonderful editor, actually made me expand my brief references to the original story because we both wanted this novel to stand alone. I wanted the two novels to interact so they could be read in either order. But the biggest difficulty was simply being self-conscious about the earlier novel's success, and to write without fearing anyone's disappointment, including my own. In the early stages, it was like writing with a vulture on my shoulder.

There's one piece of the original story that I noticed was not spelled out in the sequel, involving who killed Carolyn, Rusty's lover. Without giving it away, for those who might not have read "Presumed Innocent", I wonder if you can say something about why it's not in the new book --- or did I miss it?

No, you surely did not miss it. As I said, I wanted this book to stand by itself, without depriving readers of the chance to enjoy "Presumed Innocent". To simply spill the beans in this book would not only have ruined the reading of the earlier book, it would also have taxed the credulity of readers who hadn't heard the whole story and somewhat spoiled the conclusion of the new book for them. Writing a book that reads on two separate levels was one of the great challenges and ultimately pleasures of the writing.

I frequently tell your story to my writing students who want to get an MFA as soon as they graduate from college. I describe the trajectory of your legal and literary career, and show them that your life as a lawyer provided you with the material that has made your literary career what it is. I know you've funded programs at Stanford, where you studied writing. I wonder what advice you give to beginning --- or even intermediate --- writers about how to proceed.

I always tell them that Phil Knight [founder of Nike] got to the writer's slogan first: Just do it. Writers write. Don't plan. Put words on the page, learn how to connect words to thoughts and feelings.

Is there a movie of "Innocent" in the works? If so, can you tell us about it?

No deals yet.

On the Record: Scott Turow

by Janabeth Fleming Taylor

Scott Turow is considered by some as the father of the modern legal thriller. He achieved literary fame in 1977 with the publication of “*One L: An Inside Account of Life in the First Year at Harvard Law School*”. Before attending Harvard, he earned a master’s degree in creative writing at Stanford University.

In 1987 Turow burst onto the literary scene with “*Presumed Innocent*”, which became an international bestseller and is often credited with creating popular demand for legal thrillers. Later this book was made into a hit movie starring Harrison Ford as the prosecutor Rusty Sabich. Turow has followed this breakout success with a string of best sellers.

Turow served as an assistant U.S. Attorney in Chicago in the 1980’s when the FBI and Justice Department conducted Operation Greylord. This operation was a massive undercover investigation into judicial corruption in Chicago’s Cook County. Fifteen local judges, and 49 lawyers were convicted. Turow prosecuted one of the most notorious judges, who received an 18-year prison sentence. After service in the Attorney General’s office, he entered private practice with the Chicago law firm of Sonnenschein, Nath, and Rosenthal.

The action in Turow’s most recent project, “*Ordinary Heroes*”, moves from the courtroom to the battlefields of World War II. When retired newspaperman Stewart Dubinsky (last seen in 1987’s *Presumed Innocent*) discovers letters his deceased father wrote during his tour of duty in WWII, a host of family secrets come to light. The characters and situations portrayed in Turow’s newest suspense novel are inspired in part by stories and letters shared by his father, who was an army physician.

Recently, Mr. Turow took time to visit about his career, and his thoughts on the modern judicial process.

Please tell us about your law practice and how you divide your time between the law firm and writing.

Turow: These days I am more writer than lawyer. I have practiced part time since roughly 1990, but I spend only about 300 hours a year now in legal work. Most days I write in the mornings, and as that peters out, turn my attention to the phone, or email, or else go into the office downtown. My practice is divided between criminal representation and my work as chair of the Illinois Executive Ethics Commission, A quasi-judicial agency involved with regulation and discipline of state executive branch employees.

Please tell us about your background and when you first realized you wanted to write, and practice law.

Turow: I realized I wanted to write and practice law when I realized I wasn’t going to support myself as a writer. In 1974 I had the choice of teaching, going to Hollywood for a studio staff

job, going into advertising, or going to law school, with the promise that I'd find some way to continue to write. I chose the latter path.

You do pro bono work, and have had fund raising book events; what types of charitable activities are you involved in, and what is your philosophy?

Turow: I'm involved in a variety of charitable activities. I'm a trustee at Amherst College, a member of the Council of the Author's Guild, and active with several local charities, including Literacy Chicago.

As a "baby boomer" born in 1949, how do you feel the events of the 60's may have shaped you, and possibly the "boomer" generation?

Turow: The 60's were basically a statement that our parent's world would not do and that there had to be fundamental changes. I am one of those who thinks those years changed our way of life so much that for those who come later it's impossible to even understand it. There was, to use a term that came much later, a paradigm shift.

Please tell us about some of your favorite characters, and if you have a favorite among your books.

Turow: No favorite book B it is like naming a favorite child, truly impossible – but I'm especially attached to Sandy Stern and Sonny Klonsky.

Your latest book, Ordinary Heroes, is a novel about a man's decisions and actions during World War II. Please tell us a little about researching and writing material for the military versus civilian life and systems.

Turow: "Ordinary Heroes" was a gigantic research project that began with my father's letters home from the European front and went in a zillion different directions; histories of the OSS, of Negro troops, or the JAG department, to reading the 1943 Edition of the Rules of Court-Martials and literally hundreds of narratives of the war, ranging from Robert Kotlowitz's "Before Their Time" to many internet postings.

Can you explain how you achieve the balance of thoughtfulness and mystery to achieve the compelling scenarios?

Turow: There's no formula. I love the plot, so forward movement is essential, but reflection is also indispensable in creating a believable world, at least one that's believable to me.

How do you organize your writing, from beginning to end, or in certain segments, and approximately how long does it take to craft each one of your manuscripts?

Turow: Each novel since "Presumed Innocent" has been published three years after its predecessor, but that time has not always been spent the same way. For example, I finished a non-fiction book about the death penalty, "Ultimate Punishment", in the interval between

“Ordinary Heroes” and “Reversible Errors”. But I always start by just letting myself go and writing something different each morning. I’ll write “all over the book” as I put it, at first snatches of dialogue, a scene I like, a character’s background. Nothing organized. Eventually it becomes more whole in my mind. I do a “draft” which involves inserting blocks of the previously written material in some order. Then I write a continuous draft.

Have you ever actually tried a big case? What did you like the most about such trials? What did you like the least?

Turow: There’s a question that makes me laugh, since there was a time when I was a relatively prominent trial lawyer in this city. As an Assistant U. S. Attorney, I tried dozens of jury cases, the best known probably being the prosecution of a Reginald Holzer, a sitting judge, and former candidate for the Illinois Supreme Court, who was convicted of extortion and bribery. I was also the Junior Prosecutor on the trial of William J. Scott, then the Attorney General of Illinois.

Trial is the most consuming activity I have ever been involved in, which is what’s so great and what’s so awful about it. Life has few moments, aside from a birth, that are more dramatic than the instant before the jury renders a verdict in a major case; history is about to be made.

What did you do to prepare your self mentally for the trial of the case?

Turow: I haven’t tried a case in five years now, but I was by my own admission a maniac. I tried to imagine every conceivable permutation of events that might occur at trial and then be ready for it.

What role do paralegals play in your practice of law?

Turow: Large. I’ve worked with some great ones. Carolyn Dixon at the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Mary Kramer and Lynette Johnson at Sonnenschein. I – and several thousand documents – would have been lost without those great professionals.

What do you think of the jury system in America, if you could make any changes, what would you think would make for a better jury system?

Turow: I’m mildly skeptical about juries, but I’m not really sure that judges are any better. It might be interesting to try the system in Vermont, a Judge and two jurors to decide a case.

What role should redemption play in applying a death sentence?

Turow: The defendant’s capacity for redemption has traditionally been recognized as a prime consideration in determining whether a death sentence is warranted.

Do you think there is a constitutional right for the government to spy on US citizens without court oversight?

Turow: I had thought it was established by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972 that the Government could not eavesdrop on private conversations within the United States without a warrant. Then again, I also thought that the Government could not take an American citizen into custody on our soil and hold him incommunicado, including without counsel – until I heard about Jose Padilla.

Perhaps I am wrong about the Constitution, but I doubt it. I think this will be remembered as a shameful period, in which we allowed Osama Bin Laden to diminish our freedoms, a victory he never deserved. •

This project would not have been possible without input from the many attorneys and paralegals across the US who contributed ideas and suggestions for this article, in particular Susan Whatley, attorney with Nix Patterson and Roach.