

This is chapter 98 of the WCBS Author Talks Podcast.

I'm Lisa Tschernkowitzsch.

This week ... we meet a fictional [troubleshooter] who answers to the highest authority.



Lisa: Pop quiz time. What's the world's best selling book? If you answered the Bible, you're correct.

Now stop and think about how many other books you've read where God is a main character. I'm not being flippant here. Really think about it.

He really doesn't appear in fiction that often. So imagine my surprise when I picked up the thriller *Dangerous Purpose* and discovered the higher authority that protagonist Jack Tyrrell works for is none other than the man upstairs himself. And you know what?

It works. I recently had a chance to talk to author Geoff Loftus about his divine inspiration.

Geoff: I was trying to create a character for a series. I had not written a series before, and I was convinced that that was the way to go in my writing career. And I was just casting about for ideas, and I was getting absolutely nowhere.

And one day, and I cannot tell you why this happened, but it popped into my mind that if I used the beginning of *A Christmas Carol* where Marley's ghost appears to Ebenezer Scrooge and sets

him on a path of spiritual enlightenment, that that could be the foundation of an interesting thriller series. And the minute I had that idea, and I mean the minute I had that idea, all the other details fell into place.

I knew what Jack Tyrrell's – my hero – I knew what his backstory was going to be, I knew what was going to happen to his wife, I knew what his partner Harry was going to be like.

It just all happened instantly. I've never had that experience in my writing.

Lisa: It's kind of divine intervention, if you will.

Geoff: Well, I'm reluctant to say that, but yeah, it is.

Lisa: You know, this is a thriller book, and it has what you would expect to come from thrillers, the action, there's a lot of killing. But I also find it, which is interesting considering who Jack works for, but, you know, there's also a lot of theological debate woven in, this whole idea of free will“and why God allows certain things to happen. How did you decide to straddle that line?

Geoff: I felt I had never read anything quite like that, and it occurred to me that when I started writing this book, using *A Christmas Carol* as the platform, that that was a kind of obvious way to go. If you read Dickens' novels – *A Christmas Carol*, it's very, very obvious, but in some of his other books as well, this need for spirituality, this need for social justice, they pervade those books. And it occurred to me that I could do that in these thrillers, and that it would be different than pretty much what anybody else is doing.

At least, I hope it's different than what anybody else is doing.

Lisa: Are you yourself spiritual and or religious?

Geoff: Yes. Yes. And I grew up educated by the Jesuits, and they

really stress this idea that you have to think for yourself, you have to make choices, that free will is extremely important, and that you have to come to your own decisions about how you're going to behave, and what is right or wrong.

So I used my education to shape this character and what goes on with him.

Lisa: I'm going to go out on a limb and guess those Jesuits were connected to Fordham.

Geoff: Yes, they were. Which is why Jack Tyrrell went to Fordham.

Lisa: Well, those same Jesuits taught me as well, so we're on the same boat there. How much of you is in Jack or are you more like one of the other characters in his world?

Geoff: I get asked this a lot. Since we're on the phone, you can't see me, but Jack Tyrrell is six-foot-two and he's ex-military and ex-law enforcement, and I'm five-foot-seven and an English major. So on the surface, there's nothing in common between us.

On the other hand, Jack thinks and speaks the way I do, and that's a deliberate choice because it makes it easier for me as the writer to maintain his character and my narrative voice, and I can concentrate on other things. So if it were possible for me to be six-foot-two and a former Green Beret and a former marshal, then yeah, I would be Jack Tyrrell.

Lisa: Of all the things Jack has at his disposal, I have to say I'm the most envious of the whooshing.

Geoff: You know, Harry, his partner, is his guardian angel. And Harry whooshes Jack to all sorts of places, and it's a fantastic device for me as an author in that in many thrillers you have to explain how your hero is able to get to a certain place or learn certain kinds of information.

And I don't have to bother with any of that stuff. There are no mechanics. If Harry decides it's okay to whoosh Jack someplace, he does.

Lisa: And for people who haven't read your books yet, the idea that it's kind of hard to, I guess, wrap your head around the fact that not everything is going to go Jack's way, which is kind of odd considering he's working for God and you would assume everything would be taken care of and the good guys would always win.

Geoff: Well, I don't use this saying in any of the books, although I probably should. I'm a big believer in the phrase: Everything will be all right in the end. If it's not all right, it's not the end.

And what that means is that these books are not the end. Jack always has more adventures to come. And as a result, sometimes things don't work his way.

Lisa: I love that idea, that saying. I'm going to keep that one. And so I'm guessing then we have more Jack Tyrrell books to look forward to.

Geoff: I hope so. Yes, I just finished a new one called *No Traveler Returns*.

It will probably be out this summer. And I'm starting work on the one after that.

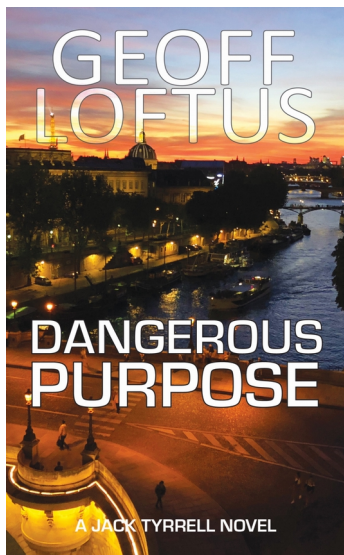


Lisa: The new book is *Dangerous Purpose*.

Geoff Loftus, thank you for taking some time to talk to us about it.

Geoff: Thank you very much for having me.

Lisa: And let's put our bookmark there.



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