

Q& A with Jack Sussek, Author of *Manhattan Affair*

1. Where in California were you born?

Sacramento, California

2. What school did you attend in Massachusetts?

Cushing Academy

What's it like to grow up with six brothers and sisters?

Fun.

What do they think of your novel writing?

I think they are so busy with their own lives they don't think about it much.

3. Why did you choose NYC as the setting for the novel?

I guess I always knew Manhattan would be the setting; the story began from an idea I had while sitting at the bar in the old LION'S HEAD in Greenwich Village almost 20 years ago. I was watching a very pretty young woman while I waited for a friend to show up, he was late, and as I watched this woman, who obviously was waiting for someone as well, I conjured all kinds of scenarios as to why she was there, who she was waiting for, etc. Suddenly a young man came in and walked over to her and sat down. They ordered martinis and that was it. I began to imagine what they were talking about, the body language was somewhat sensual so I started imaging what their relationship was; they certainly were not married and perhaps not even 'seeing' each other, but I was intrigued with the whole scene. Then they finished their martinis and abruptly left but I kept thinking about them. As for the rest of it; the story takes place in the 1990's which to me was a very different kind of New York than the New York after 2001 and so the story is partly about that too.

4. What are some of your inspirations for this book?

There used to be an old television show when I was growing up called The Naked City. The opening line every week as the show began was, "There are eight million stories in the Naked City," or something like that. Anyway, New York is such a mash up of human existence it is chock full of stories, millions and millions; interactions and intertwining's, rivalries, competitions, loves, hates, jealousies, companionships, successes and failures, paradoxes and ironies, just about everything that could ever exist in life. If you fail to be inspired by New York than you are simply not an inspired person.

Favorite Mystery writers?

God, where shall I begin? Eric Ambler, John LeCarre, Adam Hall (Elleston Trevor), Raymond Chandler, Dennis Lehane, Lee Child, James Ellroy, Elmore Leonard, Scott Turow, James Cain, Frederick Forsythe, Graham Greene, of course, Agatha Christie, Mickey Spillane, I could go on.

Were there any true-life events in NY that inspired you to write Manhattan Affair?

Not any one thing in particular. I've always been intrigued with the so-called 'secret' world of Wall Street and finance. I've also always been intrigued with the role the Federal Government has in New York, not just Wall Street but in just about all the areas; security, immigration, customs, investigative, regulatory, etc. You are always reading about the conflicts between Washington and New York; the NYPD and the FBI or Wall Street and the SEC, for example. New York is basically a world unto its own and I think the Federal Government, in a way, treats it that way. New York is not really American in the way Atlanta or Denver or Sioux City is. It is an international city more than an American city. There are something like 180 languages spoken here. In fact, New York is not really representative of America at all, it is different than the rest of America, for a whole variety of reasons; for your average American New York City is more like a portal into the rest of the world. And for the rest of the world New York is a portal into America. I think that's why the Federal Government has such a large interest and presence in New York; it sort of gives them a training ground of sorts for their activities in the rest of the world.

5. You reference NY in the 90's with some nostalgia—and you also include reference to Wall Street white collar crime with a knowledge of Investment banking. How did you research this?

Well, a lot of this stuff today we unfortunately take for granted to some extent; but back in the late '80's and early '90's there were a number of Wall Street scandals that, at the time, were quite shocking. Drexel, Burnham, Lambert; Mike Milliken and Ivan Boesky, there were others. Guiliani was the US Attorney then and afterwards, Mayor of New York— anyway, movies like "Wall Street" and books like LIAR'S POKER and BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES and BARBARIANS AT THE GATE were becoming part of the culture, at least in New York, and I was fascinated with this sort of parallel world that existed downtown. I knew a number of guys working on Wall Street, guys I went to school with, guys I had known for a while, and believe me, it was strictly a guy's world back then, I don't care what anybody says; I'd meet them in their offices, sit and watch and listen to them on the phone, in meetings, lunches and dinners, a lot of dinners. It was a rarified world. A world that seemed to run by its own rules. I think if you look at the recent history of the mortgage and housing industry and its relationship to Wall Street in the late 1990's through 2008 you'll see very similar, if not the same patterns, occurring all over again.

Do you ever get together with other writers?

Well there is a literary club I belong to here in New York that meets somewhat regularly; sort of like an old fashioned salon, something that existed before the digital age. Nowadays I imagine people do it online. Anyway we meet in a nice quiet place and have cocktails and discuss all kinds of things; the relationship between an author and his audience maybe, or the relevance of the spy novel, we've invited guests to the salon to come and talk about their books, we've had filmmakers, novelists, comedy writers, editors, anything that has anything to do with literature or the literary world. It is really a lot of fun, we all end up having dinner together and usually eating and drinking too much and going home too late. But the next day my brain is loaded with inspiration and ideas. It truly is a lot of fun.

6. How did you get into manufacturing government systems? Where did you get your expertise?

By accident. I lived in Greenwich Village on September 11th which is not too far from where the World Trade Center was. Anyway, without getting into all of that, I had come to know someone who was involved in manufacturing electronic counter-measure systems for governments and government agencies and so forth and one thing led to another and soon I was involved in the company.

7. Did your work for the manufacturer of electronic counter-measure systems inspire your interest in the CIA and help you create your characters Arthur Barrett and Steve Cahill?

Let me just say that I have met and have come to know a lot of interesting people since I started working in that field.

8. Are you a member of the CIA? How do I know how to trust that answer?

That's a silly question.

9. If yes, Why did they recruit you?

That's also a silly question.

10. You were involved in providing "Bombjammers" in Afghanistan for use by US contractors, what are Bombjammers and you say the Afghan president also used them?

The word 'Bombjammer' is really slang for radio frequency (RF) jamming. In other words, a bombjammer is a device that interferes or jams a radio frequency signal that may be used to trigger a bomb or something more appropriately described as an 'improvised explosive device' or IED. Suicide bombers or roadside bombs being the most current threats. RF jamming

isn't rocket science, it has been around since World War One and was primarily used to jam enemy communications, radios and such. These days it is also used to jam radio frequencies that trigger bombs, such as cell phones or garage door openers. In places like Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq, Chechnya, most people who have access to them use them.

11. Explain to us what a bombjammer really is and how it works?

It essentially is a device that sends out a huge amount of RF interference or "noise" so that anything transmitting a radio signal is jammed or can't get through. Sort of like when you are listening to the radio and you drive through a tunnel and you lose the radio signal. Same thing except we produce the blocking signal. Understand this; there are always two parts to a radio signal in order for it to work: a transmitter and a receiver. A jammer blocks the signal coming from the transmitter, so that the receiver cannot receive it, and therefore not function. In Iraq for example, or currently in Afghanistan, almost all military vehicles have jammers deployed, as well as security personnel, politicians, diplomats, etc.

12. Is this dangerous work?

It depends.

13. Does your current business and life crossover with some of the scenarios in the book?

There is a fine line between truth and fiction.

14. What is remote site logistics?

Remote site logistics is an industry that provides support to anyone or anything operating in or doing business in places that are hard to do business or run operations in. Primarily conflict zones, post-conflict zones, harsh environments, disaster areas.

Does your business take you to overseas locations like some of your characters?

Well, the characters in MANHATTAN AFFAIR are all in Manhattan. I guess you could in some ways call Manhattan a 'conflict zone' but no, my business is not conducted in America per se, although our headquarters is in Washington. I do travel to areas that are considered conflict and post-conflict zones. In the last year alone I have been in Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Russia, Israel, and Jordan, among other places. Several of the key characters in the other novels I am working on visit some of these locations – and a few key characters from these books are introduced in Manhattan Affair.

15. Do you plan to write more novels using your main character Jed Chase?

I hadn't thought of it at first but the truth is I have started something with Jed Chase as a sort of follow through on MANHATTAN AFFAIR.

Was this character based on anyone you know?

No. Perhaps a compilation of many people.

16. Who are some of your readers? Where can they read more reviews about the book?

www.manhattanaffair.com

www.facebook.com/manhattanaffair

www.amazon.com

www.barnesandnoble.com

17. What is it like to be a first time published novelist?

I can't begin to tell you.

18. How many times was your work rejected?

Actually it wasn't ever rejected, I had dealt with several big agents who liked the book, but somehow through their own mergers and political issues across agencies several of my stories ended up in limbo-land.

19. What sustained you during those rejections?

Good question. My belief in myself and the theory that the established publishing world doesn't always know good stuff until after someone else discovers it, someone outside of the traditional circle; it is sort of a catch-22 though for any new writer.

20. It sounds as though your own life is fodder for a nonfiction book. What made you decide to write a fiction book, rather than nonfiction?

I am not interested in writing non-fiction at present; however I love reading non-fiction and do read a lot of it.

Why a mystery novel?

I love a good mystery, as most people do. Life is full of mysteries. Starting with the bible and the idea of God and how did the universe begin?

21. Where did you come up with the plot for the book? How did that evolve?

I can't really answer that, it just came as I wrote it. I'm not sure which came first, the writing or the plot. I just wanted to write a good story and one that

others, who read it, would think was a good story. That is, after all, what it is. A story.

22. What's the trick of writing dialogue?

In good writing there are no tricks. I'm not saying I am a good writer, but I don't look for tricks, I look for what sounds real, what someone would really say in any given situation.

23. How long have you worked on this first book?

Ok, true story; I wrote this book over ten years ago. I got a contract from a publisher but we could not agree on terms so I shoved the manuscript into a drawer. I wrote another book. I got a contract from an agency with a publisher in the wings but this is another story. While I navigated the uncharted waters of my second book I got frustrated with publishing world politics and took this old manuscript out and re-wrote it. This is the result of that.

24. How do you write? Do you have any rituals involved with your writing?

I write approximately 6 hours every day, 7 days a week, before my "day job". I guess you can call it discipline. Not wavering from your routine. Sticking with your convictions. It is never easy but the writing comes first, everything else after.

25. Did you have writer's block? And, if so, how did you work through it?

Of course, there are times when it just doesn't come and when that happens you just go with it. Let it happen, get through it. The writing will come back. That's where things like sailing or skiing or traveling are great antidotes for me. You always have to have something to focus on, it helps keep your center of gravity.

26. When you began the book, did you know the end already in your mind?

No.

27. How do you find time for sailing, with a multinational company, wife and child, and a writing career?

Unfortunately sailing, of late, is one part of my life that has truly suffered. I plan to make up for it.

28. What kind of sail boat do you own?

An old Hinckley yawl, she's what I refer to as my "other girl" or my mistress. Unfortunately she gets neglected more than I would like.

29. I assume this isn't your first sail boat. What was your favorite boat? Or, first boat?

My current boat isn't my first one but it is my favorite and I don't think I could ever give her up. I fell in love with her the second I stepped foot on her; she belonged to a close friend at the time, and I told him that one day he was going to sell that boat and when he did to simply call me. Love her even more now than ever.

How do you think NYC has changed since 9/11?

New York has changed immensely since 9/11. And not, I don't think, simply because of 9/11. 9/11 was a catalyst in many ways. And certainly without 9/11 I don't think we'd have the kinds of changes or the quickness that those changes were ushered in by. Security for one. The massive drop in the crime rate for another. I think this is true for the rest of the country as well, but New York I think saw those changes in ways the rest of the country didn't. For one, and I allude to this in the book, the elements of tourism in New York City has had an incredible effect on this city. Before 9/11, really before the early '90's, there wasn't the kind of tourism industry that exists now. And that industry has had an impact, no doubt about that. The chain stores, the 'mall' mentality, the 'Disney World' aspect for example. The tours and tour groups and the double decker sightseeing buses, none of this existed before the late '80's. But overall, the New York that existed prior to 9/11 was a more innocent New York in some ways, in many ways a more 'local,' and a more centric city, an introverted place really, a city of contained neighborhoods, all interconnected. New York City will never really exist like that again.

30. Will we be seeing this character in other books?

Yes.

31. What other subjects for a novel interest you currently?

I have written several other novels. One is a story about a man's life in the 20th century, an immigrant who comes to America, to New York, at the end of World War Two, I'm constantly tweaking it, but it's an epic story which has a timeless feel. Another is a pure spy thriller that takes place in America, in Europe, the Middle East, and Afghanistan; some of the characters introduced in MANHATTAN AFFAIR are main characters in this story. There are more in the works, they are mostly interconnected yet you'll have to read on and see for yourself.

32. Has this new found fame changed you? How?

No. But there is an amazing sense of gratitude at having others tell me they like my stories – somehow I didn't realize so many people would enjoy the

book, and it's a little overwhelming to say the least, but fortunately I am kept grounded by my friends and my family – especially my 9-year old son who constantly amazes me.

From Book Marketing Buzz Blog

<http://bookmarketingbuzzblog.blogspot.com/2012/04/real-men-wear-nail-polish.html>

1. **What is your debut novel, *Manhattan Affair*, about?** It is about three former college friends whose lives unintentionally circle back into a conspiracy that involves sex, scandal, betrayal, and murder.
2. **What inspired you to write it?** Well, I've always liked the thriller genre and everyone, I think, likes a good mystery. Life is full of them.
3. **Why will readers love it?** I can't speak for everyone but those who have read it have told me that once started they can't put it down. If that is the case then I have achieved a part of what I wanted to do. I think also readers will like it because it tells a story that takes place during a particular time before the end of the last century, which, although not too long ago, seems like another time and place. Particularly, I think, for New York City.
4. **What is it about New York City that so many authors love to set their books there?** New York is place unto itself; I have traveled the world and I can tell you, although there are many interesting and fascinating cities and places around the world, there is no place like New York. It has a texture, a taste, a smell, all its own. It is one of the last 'City – States' left in the world, in my opinion, and what goes on here is amazing; the vibrancy, the energy, the creativity, the diversity. I think people are fascinated with New York because of that, because New York is its own world.
5. **Your book covers the early 1990s in the nation's biggest city. What were those days like back then?** Different, I think, than now. In some ways New York lost something with the passing of the 20th century, perhaps a little innocence, certainly some of its 'hometown' feeling. New York was more of a 'local' place, if you can imagine that. New York has always been a city of neighborhoods, closely interconnected yes; but separate and unique, almost like little 'villages' within the city. Places like Bensonhurst, Flushing, Pelham Bay, Greenwich Village. But for 400 years people came here to live and work, find opportunity, make a name for themselves, give their children a better life, you know, the American story. But now it seems there is another level, another reason, people come here. To visit. To spend money and leave. So the city has changed, I think, because of that. Don't get me wrong; New York is nothing but change and every generation that passes through here changes it in some way. But up until now, the people who came here and changed it were people who stayed, for the most part. Now 50 million people come and visit here every year for a week or so and then leave and I think the city has changed quite a bit to cater to that. That's one way the city has changed from 20 years ago. 9/11 had something to do with it too. Downtown, the Financial District, has sort of become like Pearl

Harbor or Normandy Beach now for visitors. Before 9/11 tourists might visit New York but they rarely went to the Financial District, maybe to go to Wall Street for a few minutes, or South Street Seaport, which was relatively new in the 1990's. Today people go to the site of the World Trade Center and stare at it.

6. **Your book is described as *Bright Lights, Big City* meets *Sex and the City*. There is sex, murder, and secret lives. What are the key elements to writing a great novel?**
Have a good story and know how to write it.

7. **Your day job involves being a government contractor. Are you living a double life?** No. It's just my day job. If I had my druthers I'd write full time but right now the day job pays better. Hopefully that will change.

8. **What advice do you have for a struggling writer?** Write every day, have good discipline, re-write a lot.