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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS LAYTON GREEN, AUTHOR OF "A SHATTERED LENS"

SEPTEMBER 25, 2019 BY ALLEN MENDENHALL [LEAVE A COMMENT \(EDIT\)](#)



Layton Green

AM: I'm glad we get to do this interview, Layton. I was intrigued when *A Shattered Lens* arrived in the mail and I opened the package and read this praise on the front cover: "Dostoevsky and Poe would be proud." You don't often hear Dostoevsky and Poe lumped together, but I knew instantly that whatever a combination of those two would look like, I wanted to see it.

The novel involves Detective Joe "Preach" Everson, who's investigating the murder of

David Stratton, the star quarterback at the local high school. I don't want any spoilers here, so let's just say that there's thrill and suspense and Preach's old flame is a suspect in the murder. How do you piece together the plot in a "whodunit" like this one? Pacing is everything in mysteries. Do you outline the plot before you start writing? Do you just let the story take over and go with the flow?

LG: Plotting is one thing that comes fairly naturally to me when writing a novel (plenty of other things do not). I construct a sizeable outline before I begin writing, usually about fifty pages or so. However, once that's complete, I sort of put that away and let the story tell itself with that framework in mind, referring back to it as needed. Sort of a mix between "plotters" and "pantsers" as they are called.

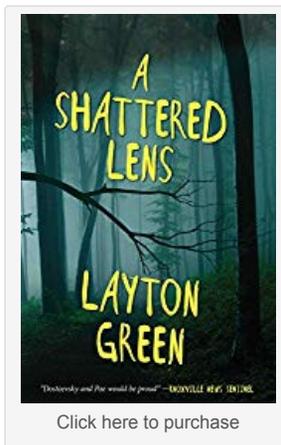
AM: What part of novel writing does not come naturally to you?

LG: I would say characterization. It's not that I can't create characters—or I would have a hard time being a novelist—but I find that I have to dig deeper here. The broader strokes come fairly naturally to me, but all the little details that make us human and which make a novel come alive—those require some gnashing of teeth and pulling of hair.

AM: Ah, the age-old wailing and gnashing of teeth. Did you ever struggle with Preach?

LG: The idea of Preach came to me as more or less a fully formed character. In fact, his character is what prompted me to launch the series. I've learned that if a powerful character comes into my head, it's probably a very good idea to run with it. However, characterization—translating the idea to the page—is something I have to work hard at every day in my writing.

AM: I've been doing author interviews, Layton, for a long time now, and there was a time when I found it to be significant that a novelist had been a lawyer in a previous career. Over the years,



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though, I've come across so many lawyers who've become novelists that I'm no longer surprised by the transition. You were once a lawyer, too. Why do you think so many lawyers turn to writing?

LG: Well it's not so much that we turn to writing—most lawyers, especially corporate lawyers, do a lot of writing—it's that we turn to telling stories. Actually, we tell a lot of stories also—each case is a story and how well a lawyer spins a story determines success or failure. But with novels, we get to tell the stories we want to tell. So I would say those lawyers with strong creative urges long to apply their research and writing and storytelling to their own unique worlds. Also, sitting in a sterile office all day is for the birds. It should be avoided if at all possible.

AM: Long shot, but do you happen to know Maurice Carlos Ruffin? He's also a novelist in New Orleans who recently gave up the practice of law to become a full-time writer.

LG: I do not, but I haven't lived in New Orleans since law school (though I visit as much as possible).

AM: You've become prolific. You must have a writing regiment. What's your secret?

LG: Well, it's all relative I suppose: I have author friends who eke out a book a decade, some who write one every two years, and some who write four to six every year like clockwork. Stephen King cranks out a serious word count! I think the only secret is to work every day and put your heart and soul into your work. Every writer has a different optimal output, and hitting that individual goal is key. Serious writers will know what that is for themselves—though it did take me a while to figure out.

AM: That's great advice to end on. Thanks for taking the time to discuss Preach and A Shattered Lens.

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About Allen Mendenhall

Allen Mendenhall is associate dean at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center. His books include Literature and Liberty (2014), Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Pragmatism, and the Jurisprudence of Agon (2017), The Southern Philosopher: Collected Essays of John William Corrington (2017) (editor), and Lines from a Southern Lawyer (2017). Visit his website at [AllenMendenhall.com](#).



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