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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS WILLIAM BERNHARDT

 MARCH 28, 2018 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#)  [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

AM: Thanks for doing this interview, Bill. You're a prolific author, having written dozens of books. Do you have a favorite among the books you've authored?

WB: I think *Primary Justice* will always have a special spot in my heart, because it was the first novel I wrote and the first that I sold, and of course, it was a big success that has now led to eighteen other books featuring lawyer Ben Kincaid. Creating that whole world from scratch, though, learning something new each day, was fun and exciting.



AM: Your latest book is *Justice Returns*. It's the latest installment in the Ben Kincaid series. When you began that series, did you think it would ever involve this many books?

WB: No, not remotely. I thought *Primary Justice* was a self-contained character-driven novel, and even now, if you read it, it comes to a definitive conclusion, not a "Tune in next week." Stupid me. My editor at Random House/Ballantine, Joe Blades, saw potential in these characters that had never occurred to me. From the start, he said, "This should be a series. Let's do a three-book contract."

AM: You're a lawyer by training. Did you find the transition from legal writing to fiction writing to be natural or difficult?

WB: Writing is always difficult, but at least when writing the courtroom scenes, I had some experience and credibility I could bring to the table. Other subjects, like forensics and police procedure, I had to learn from scratch.

AM: You also write poetry.

WB: I have always loved and written poetry, but it took a while for me to work up the courage to publish it. I find it to be the most challenging form of writing, so it's only appropriate to have some experience before I even attempted it. Though my poetry is probably lower profile than my novels, it has inspired some of the best reviews I've had in my entire career.

AM: Who are your favorite poets?

WB: Today, Billy Collins and Tracy Smith. In the past, there are too many to choose from. Emily Dickinson. Wordsworth. Donne. That Shakespeare guy is pretty talented, too.

AM: You're a publisher as well as a writer. How did you get into publishing?

WB: To me, it's just part of being in the literary world, and specifically, giving back to a world that has been so kind to me. We have two imprints, Balkan Press, which focuses on poetry and literary fiction, and Babylon Books, which publishes popular fiction. We also publish a literary journal called *Conclave*.

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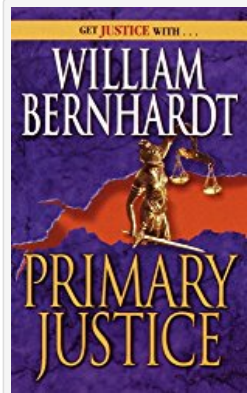
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AM: I'm always curious about how authors of thrillers develop suspenseful plots. Do you do it the same way for each of the Kincaid novels, or is each book approached differently? What are your methods?



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WB: I'm not sure I have a method. Ideas start to accumulate. In my mind, I think about how to make many good ideas fit together into a larger plot. Eventually, I have enough to start writing.

AM: Did you ever receive formal training in creative writing, or did you just start writing one day?

WB: I've written since I was in grade school, and even wrote something I called a novel in the sixth grade. I did take some writing courses in college that were helpful. But of course, the best teacher is experience.

AM: What was it like when you found out your first book was getting published?

WB: A great day. For years, I'd heard people telling me I was dreaming, being unrealistic. And then suddenly I had a book with a major publishing house getting major front-list treatment. Validating, to say the least.

AM: Thanks for the interview, Bill. Looking forward to doing another one.

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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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