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A Magazine for Literature of the American South

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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS WENDY WAX, AUTHOR OF "BEST BEACH EVER"

 JUNE 20, 2018 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#)  [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

AM: Thanks, Wendy, for the interview. Our readers are no doubt familiar with your *Ten Beach Road* series. *Best Beach Ever* is the sixth and latest novel in that series, which began in 2011. How do you stay so productive?

WW: Thank you, Allen.

As counterintuitive as it sounds, I think motherhood helped me become a productive writer.

I started writing my first novel while home with a two-year-old and a newborn – a decision I chalk up to post-pregnancy hormones and lack of sleep. I had no idea what I was doing or how much I'd bitten off. Because of my sons' ages it took me years to write that first book. It was only by turning every nap and stolen moment into writing time that I managed to finish and sell it.

When the boys started school I had a finite period of time to write each day before they came home and the after-school activities began. Procrastination was not an option. I learned to sit down at the computer and make the most of the hours I had because on any given day one of them might unexpectedly be home sick or get injured (both sons played competitive baseball year 'round) or some other emergency might arise.

The discipline I learned during those chaotic, time-challenged years has seen me through the publication of fourteen novels and two novellas. Writing daily is the only way I know to produce quality work on a regular basis. It's not like cramming for an exam. I don't know anyone who has successfully written a hundred thousand word novel the night before it was due though I do know a few who've tried.

Writing is a creative pursuit, but publishing is most definitely a business. When you sign a publishing contract the delivery date is not a "suggestion." You're expected to meet the deadline you've agreed to.

AM: When you sat down to write *Ten Beach Road*, the first in your series, did you know you were beginning a series, or did you think you were writing a stand-alone, one-off novel?

WW: Even when I'd finished *Ten Beach Road* I believed I'd completed a stand-alone, one-off novel and had no plans to write a series. I was halfway through a new, un-related novel when it became clear that the *Ten Beach Road* characters I'd just finished with were *not* finished with me. (I've learned not to ignore characters when they speak to me.) I was also hearing from readers who wanted to know what happened next.

I had never before set aside a novel I'd already started or considered writing a series, but it seemed clear that I needed to go back and revisit Madeline Singer, Avery Lawford, Nicole Grant and crew. Of course, it would have been a lot easier if I'd *planned* to write a sequel.

Still, I'm very glad I decided to continue with these characters. It's been a great pleasure and privilege to write their ongoing journeys of self-discovery and especially their friendship.

AM: Has your thinking about these friendships changed from novel to novel? Of course, the nature of friendship changes as characters face different challenges and circumstances, but I'm



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talking about *your* view of the friendships. Did your feelings about certain characters evolve or adapt?

WW: Yes. When I began writing *Ten Beach Road* all I knew about the main characters—or thought I knew—was basic backstory and elements of personality. I wasn't sure how those things might impact their reactions to each other.

In that first novel I built their friendship one scene at a time. In the unexpected sequels that followed they continued to grow and evolve. I'm always striving to create multi-dimensional characters. For me, that comes from putting them on the page and watching how they react to the obstacles thrown in their path and to each other.

I've put these women through a lot, and they have turned out to be far stronger and more resilient than even I had anticipated. Their friendship has been tested time and again and it's held. My sense of them changed and evolved as they did, but they still have the capacity to surprise me.

AM: What else surprises you?

WW: The new friends that appear in your life when you least expect them and most need them.

That stepping outside your comfort zone even a little bit can lead to great change.

That the people who told me how quickly my children would grow up knew what they were talking about. Happily, so did the pediatrician who promised me no one walks down the aisle still wearing diapers.



AM: Do you have any advice for mothers who are aspiring writers?

WW: My advice for mothers is the same I'd offer any aspiring writer. I just happen to know that making the time to write can be even more challenging for people who are actively parenting whether they're mothers or fathers.

Obviously, learning everything you can about the art and craft of writing is a good idea. Classes are offered at most universities and online. Conferences around the country include workshops on the creative and business aspects of writing, and there's no shortage of books on these subjects. As in any field, preparation is key.

Joining a writing organization can be a great first step. Being around others who share your dreams and are on the same path can make a big difference. I met my two longtime critique partners, Karen White and Susan Crandall, this way. Their feedback is invaluable and makes me work harder to become a better writer. Their ongoing friendship and moral support have helped me survive what can be an incredibly brutal business.

In the end the most important thing is coming up with an idea you're excited about and then sitting down and working on it. Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet, no shortcut, and certainly no one way to write a novel. It's only through writing regularly and over time that we find that "voice" that is uniquely ours and that sets our work apart.

I meet people all the time who say they've always wanted to write a book or intend to write a book one day. Many people will never begin. Many more will never finish. I know from personal experience that talking about writing is a lot easier and often more enjoyable than actually writing.

I have great admiration for anyone who completes a manuscript whether it is ever published or not.

AM: Last question: every dedicated reader wants to know what authors themselves enjoy reading. So, what are *your* reading habits? Where do you like to read? Which authors are your favorites? What time of day do you read?

WW: Like almost every writer I've ever met, I began as a voracious reader. When I do read for enjoyment, I am reading fiction. My taste in fiction is extremely eclectic. I love pretty much all genres including historical, romance, mystery, thriller, paranormal, and magical realism.

Over the last few years I discovered that I also love what is referred to as fantasy – urban and otherwise. Genre is far less important to me than compelling characters. I'm always looking for authors who create and write characters I can relate to. A great plot isn't enough to keep me interested if I don't care what happens to the characters.

While I'm writing a novel, I try to confine myself to magazines and daily newspapers (we have subscriptions to *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*) along with anything I'm reading for research. I also read my critique partners' novels as they're being written.

The closer I get to deadline the more strongly I try to resist reading for pleasure. If I do allow myself to read fiction then, I choose something far removed from what I write. I don't want to put other writers'

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thoughts or words in my head or put myself in a position where I'm making comparisons. Even more importantly, I'm trying to leave my brain free to process what I'm writing and to (hopefully!) figure out how to bring the pieces and storylines together.

I don't have any particular reading habits or times or locations. If a book pulls me in on page one and doesn't let go, my inclination is to read until I'm bleary-eyed or finished. I can, and have, read a book in a day. This is another reason I try to avoid reading while I'm writing. The truth is reading someone else's book can be a lot more fun than writing your own.

AM: Thank you for this wisdom, Wendy. And thank you for the interview.

WW: Thank you.

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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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