



Interview with Mark Zvonkovic, author of *Belinda*

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1. What was the inspiration for this book?

Character development is a focus of all of my writing. I think every person is a story of sorts, and I enjoy telling the story. I practiced law for 35 years so I had a lot of material to use in the creation of the stories of the characters in *Belinda*. It was like combining all the ingredients in a very complicated recipe.

2. And what about Belinda Larkin? Is there a real life version of her?

Oh no! She is an amalgamation of many people I've known, some for many years and some only casually. Many of them weren't even lawyers. But that's how all of my characters are created. They start as fused together impressions and evolve with their story into people. And, of course, sometimes creative license leads to exaggeration. I mean, could a man, even a lawyer, be as entirely despicable as Patrick Brashner? But Belinda Larkin is a modern woman who is not going to make a life transition on account of anyone telling her what to do.

3. How long did it take you to write *Belinda*?

A little more than two years. But I was wading my way through being a recovering lawyer during that time. I worked with an excellent editor for most of that time. At one point the novel was twice as long as it turned out. That was how I learned about the principal characters, by writing much more background material about them than was needed in the end.

4. Where can readers find out more about you?

Information about me and my earlier novels can be found at www.markzvonkovic.com. The site also contains book reviews I have written, most of which have been published in *Midwest Book Review*. I have an author's page on Facebook and also one on Goodreads.

5. How did your past as a lawyer affect your writing of *Belinda*?

Primarily it was a hindrance. My editor said more times than I can remember, "Stop writing like a lawyer." Exactitude was definitely not my friend. It wasn't always necessary to say how many coffee spoons were on the table. And I certainly didn't approach it like I was writing a contract. One thing I never did as a lawyer was put my head back, close my eyes, and imagine dialogue. Perhaps, if I had, I might have been a better negotiator.

6. What do you like most about your novels?

What keeps me writing is my love of making up characters that I hope readers will connect with. I want my characters, like Belinda Larkin, Raymond Hatcher and Larry Brown in my three novels, to move readers and get invested in what they think and feel. It's a reason why some of these characters appear in several novels. None of the novels is meant to be a sequel of another, except to the extent that a reader is granted access to more about the lives of the characters who reappear.

7. Do you have a favorite character?

My favorite character changes when my curiosity leads me back to their personalities and life events. Obviously, Raymond Hatcher is the one I've thought about the most. He is the common element across the novels. But I've been thinking a lot about Larry Brown lately, as well as Vera, the young Croatian woman who was Raymond's first love. In everybody's life feelings and past events come to the surface, and the insights that accompany them can be both exhilarating and painful.