

>> Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> Guy: This is Guy Lomolinar [assumed spelling] at the Library of Congress, Late September will mark the twelfth year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, DC to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will be two days this year, Saturday, September 22, and Sunday, September 23, 2012. The festival will take place between Ninth and Fourteenth Streets on the National Mall, rain or shine. Hours are from 10 am to 5:30 pm, Saturday the twenty-second, and from noon to 5:30 pm on Sunday the twenty-third. For more details visit www.LOC.gov/bookfest, and now it is my pleasure to introduce the internationally known and loved writer Patricia Cornwell, whose latest book is titled "Red Mist." Her forthcoming novel is titled "The Bone Bed." Patricia Cornwell has created so many memorable characters including, of course, Dr. Kay Scarpetta, who is one of the most enduring in all of fiction. More than 100 million copies of Patricia Cornwell's books have sold worldwide, and her work has influenced many of the shows we see on television today as well as in the movies. Patricia Cornwell, thank you for joining us.

>> Patricia: It's my pleasure. This is great.

>> Guy: Thank you. "Red Mist" is your nineteenth novel featuring medical examiner Dr. Kay Scarpetta. What would you say are some of the characteristics about her that you most admire?

>> Patricia: Well, I think what I most admire about Dr. Scarpetta is that she... there's one thing that she never does, which is she never abuses power, and I believe that the root of all that's wrong in the world is the abuse of power, and I have watched Scarpetta through the series in any number of situations, and whether it's the way she deals with her secretary or what she does if her own life is at stake, she just doesn't cross a certain line that she shouldn't cross, which is to use power above and beyond what is necessary to get a certain job done, and I just think that that's an incredibly important facet because if all of us would take that to heart and especially in this year of the great, you know, Presidential election, we're all thinking about politics and power and world powers and I think it's a very important thing to keep in mind.

>> Guy: True. Is there anything about her you don't like?

>> Patricia: Anything about her I don't like... You know, this is awful. I should have something about her [laughter] I don't like.

>> Guy: You don't have to.

>> Patricia: No, I really don't. I like pretty much everything about her. I mean there's things that she does that I wouldn't want to do, but she is much more stoical about quite a number of things that particularly when you're dealing with the most horrific types of deaths and, you know, when there's decomposition and really the grotesque factor that thankfully my readers might read about but they don't have to experience the way I do when I go out there and do the research. So she does a lot

of things that aren't necessarily my favorite, but overall I enjoy her, and I don't find her irritating or tedious. I think that I admire much more about her than I would ever probably quibble with, and some of these things people might think are my attributes, but that's really not quite the case. I think she's a bit of a fantasy version of what I'd like to be. She's incredibly tenacious. She's amazingly courageous. You know, I often say to myself if I have to go do something very difficult, I say, "You know, why don't you just send Scarpetta [laughter] in," and that helps give me a mindset of get into that frame of mind so maybe you'll think a little more clearly about this before you go out and do it.

>> Guy: Okay. How would you say she's grown over the years?

>> Patricia: Well she's grown a lot, and the biggest difference between the Scarpetta of today and the one that you would have met in 1990 is I think that she's much more reflective. We've seen a lot of tremendous changes in this world in the last 22 years. In fact it's almost incomprehensible where we are now as to where we were compared to what we were back then. I mean, when I wrote "Postmortem," they were just getting DNA to basically pass the Fry standard so it could be admissible in court, which is just bizarre to think about today. That's how much things have changed since my very first book, and of course we also live in the post 9/11 world where, you know, now our biggest fear I think is what I call domestic terrorism, not just international terrorism, but some of the things that we saw like recently in Colorado when people go into a confined space where everybody should feel safe and they commit mass murder, and these sorts of fears were not foremost from the minds of people when I was writing the Scarpetta novels in the 90's and the bigger fear was the proverbial serial killer. Unfortunately we still have plenty of those around as well. So she has grown tremendously in a world that has dramatically changed, in a world where there's now Twitter and Facebook and even email, which did not really exist when I first started these books, and I think she just doesn't think just so much about the how of a crime. What does this fiber mean? What does this fleck of paint mean? What does this biological fluid mean? She's also very thoughtful about the why. Who are we as people? Why do we do these things? What is the meaning of life and time as it passes, and what happens after we die? I think she's a much deeper person now.

>> Guy: One of your first jobs was as a crime reporter at the Charlotte Observer. Was that a position you pursued because you had an interest in the subject of crime, or did your interests develop after you took the position?

>> Patricia: Now that's a real irony. I did not want to do the crime beat. When I started with the Charlotte Observer, I had this fanciful dream that I was going to be a novelist and write beautiful works of fiction, you know, literature, and I wrote poetry back in those days, and I liked to draw and do things like that. So when I first interviewed at the Charlotte Observer I said I wanted to be a features writer, and they took me up to the features department, and then I thought, oh boy, I'm going to get my wish, but no what it really was was they were going to let me update the television magazine, which certainly wasn't what I had in mind, [laughter] and I started doing a lot of general assignment

things, just anything anybody would let me write, and then one day they said, "We have really great news for you. We are assigning you to the police beat," and I was absolutely devastated. I didn't want to write about crime. I didn't want to run around from 4 o'clock until midnight every night, but once I got into it, I was absolutely snake bit by it. I don't know what it was. I'm still not really sure. I have my ideas about it, but it really was the right fit. I belong in an investigative environment. That's where I really seem to come alive when I can figure things out and describe them in a way that's unusual.

>> Guy: Well, it's lucky for all your readers that that happened.
[Laughter]

>> Patricia: Well, that's nice of you to say.

>> Guy: You've written some of your novels in the first person from the point of Dr. Scarpetta, and you've also written them in the third person "Omniscient Narrator." How do you decide what person to write in, and how does it effect what you write?

>> Patricia: Well, you know, I tried the third person for a while because I thought it was a good step for me as a writer, a good growing experience because if you're getting into the perspectives of other characters that causes the stage to become much bigger and much more dimensional, but I shouldn't say never, but having done that for a while and moving back to the first person point of view in the Scarpetta series, it's not real likely I will shift back away from that with her, and I think the biggest reason, I had no idea about this, but I do listen to what my fans say, and most of my fans were extremely unhappy when I departed from the first person point of view. In fact some of them were, I think, angry even, and some of them have explained it. They say things on Twitter and Facebook that are really quite... really rather profound. One is when they are in her shoes, they feel they are the smart one solving these cases. It gives them the wonderful experience of being able to be a character like that, which is something I honestly hadn't really thought about in the earlier days, and I think a more subtle reason but equally powerful one, is the world that I write about is an intensely frightening one, and if you are with her, it's safe, but if you suddenly are not in the same room with her and you're watching what a killer is doing, it doesn't feel safe anymore, and the books suddenly become I think more terrifying than I really intended them to be. So I think that for lots of reasons we'll just keep... I kind of hold onto the back of her lab coat and let her lead the way.

>> Guy: Okay. Will you ever retire Dr. Scarpetta do you think?

>> Patricia: No, I think I'm more worried about her retiring me.
[Laughter] I don't have any plans for retiring her as long as it continues to interest me and interest readers, then I will continue to explore all sorts of different avenues of life with her in subsequent books. So I don't have any plans for that at all, but it's hard to know down the road. I think what would be a more likely scenario is if at some point, God forbid, I just decided... I just decided I wasn't doing it

very well anymore and it was maybe it was best to leave it alone, but we'll hope that doesn't happen any time soon.

>> Guy: Okay. Good. If I might change the subject a little bit, I wanted to talk about your research on Jack the Ripper. I was wondering how you became interested in that.

>> Patricia: Well that's a very strange story and a complete accident. I happened to be in London in early 2000... I believe it was early 2000, and somebody hooked me up with an investigator at Scotland Yard and got me a tour over there when I really was totally overwhelmed by other things I was supposed to be doing, but it would have been very ungracious for me to say no, so I went, and this investigator with Scotland Yards started talking about the Jack the Ripper case because he knows a lot about it. I'd never even read anything about Jack the Ripper, and this will shock you, but I had no interest in Jack the Ripper. I was interesting in things going on today and not so much back then, but as we got into it and he drove me around to the what was, you know, left of the crime scene to bend back in the 1800's, I said, "Who are the suspects and why?" And he told me a bunch of names, and I said, "But based on what?" He said, "Based on nothing. These are just based on theories." I said, "Well, is there any evidence at all left over from these cases?" He said, "The only evidence are the letters purportedly from Jack the Ripper, hundreds of them, written to the media and the police back then." I said, "Well, you can get a lot of evidence off of letters." And so nobody had ever examined them scientifically. So I got permission to go into the National Archives and into the... and they brought these letters out of the vault, and I began to get experts to look at them with me, and plus I'd been given a... this same investigator had said, "You really should look into this artist, Walter Sickert, from back then because he did a lot of murder paintings, and his name has come up before in this case," and that got me on the trail, and one thing led to another, and next thing I know I was involved in a full investigation that became absolutely all-consuming, and so that's... and I still am convinced that what I represented in that non-fiction work is accurate, and I still think that Walter Sickert was Jack the Ripper.

>> Guy: Do you think you'll be writing anything more about the Jack the Ripper case?

>> Patricia: Well, I do when I'm... I'm just actually starting, you know, my twenty-first Scarpetta, the one that follows "The Bone Bed" that will be out in October, and when I get done with that, I'm hoping to find a little time to do the third revision on the Jack the Ripper book. I have a few... it's a few polishes and a few things to add, and I'm really looking forward to it because it really is the most interesting case. It's... I can't... it's addictive. In fact you have to stay away from it because you can't stop thinking about it.

>> Guy: I can easily see that. I just have one more question. Could you give us a little sneak peek into your forthcoming novel, "The Bone Bed?"

>> Patricia: Well, "The Bone Bed" is very unusual in that it actually brings together the world of the prehistoric with the ultra-modern

technology that you expect with Scarpetta, and it opens with that she's minding her own business in her office when she gets a very strange email that seems to be related to a paleontologist, a woman who's vanished from a dinosaur dig site in Alberta, Canada, and this email gives Scarpetta the very bad feeling that whatever's happened to this lady, it's something she's about to find out about. So, and then next thing you know, she's out on a boat on the Boston Harbor because something very unfortunate has been entangled with a very huge sea turtle, and all of this becomes interconnected, and it's a really... it's quite a romp that she's on. It's very dramatic. It's very scary, and I think it's going to... I think people are going to find it an extremely exciting book.

>> Guy: Oh, it sounds really exciting.

>> Patricia: She also... she also ends up, you get a real courtroom scene with her, which we don't get to see very often where all of this lands her in front of a judge and a trial, and you get to see her put through her paces when she's got a really shrewd defense attorney going after her. So it's... "The Bone Bed" is a lot of fun. It's extremely unusual. I think it's one of the best books I've ever done, and I can't wait for people to read it, and I think they're especially going to like it if they've read "Red Mist" first.

>> Guy: Right. Okay. Thank you. We've been hearing from author Patricia Cornwell, who will appear on Saturday, September 22 in the Fiction and Mystery Pavilion at the National Book Festival on the National Mall. Patricia Cornwell, thank you so much.

>> Patricia: My pleasure.

>> Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at LOC.gov.