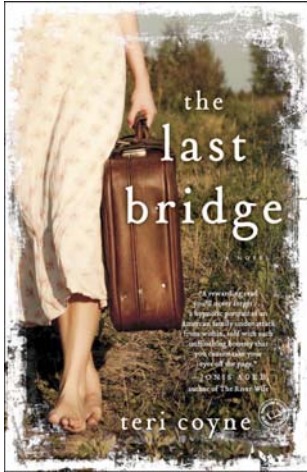


A Talk with Teri



You did stand-up comedy for many years. Although **THE LAST BRIDGE** has some humor in it, it is an intense story. How did you go from making people laugh to writing a gripping drama?

To be honest, it wasn't that far of a leap. I think it's universally acknowledged that there is a thin line between comedy and tragedy. Arnold Beisser said, "Tragedy and comedy are but two aspects of what is real, and whether we see the tragic or the humorous is a matter of perspective."

As a comedian, I was always drawn to material and artists that chose to mine the harsher realities of life and turn them into humor. Richard Pryor was my favorite comedian—no one did that better than he did.

Humor, like fiction, is a way of getting at the truth with minimal risk to the audience or reader. One thing I learned as a stand-up that has helped me tremendously as a writer was to pay attention to the story. A reader can tolerate a lot if the story hooks them.

How has working in technology and for lawyers shaped your writing, if at all?

Both have helped my writing enormously. Trainers and technical writers in IT departments are the bridge between the users and the technology. Our job is to take the "techno-speak" and translate it to plain English. In other words, making something simple from something complicated.

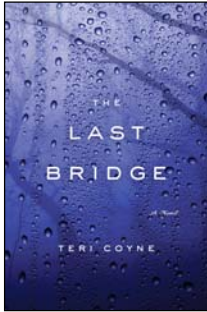
I have found this skill to be of great value in writing fiction. After all, what good is a novel if it doesn't ask big questions? But what good are the big questions if you can't get into the story?

Lawyers, on the other hand, are all about language. What a word means and how it appears in context is vitally important in legal writing. You need to be conscious of what you are trying to convey; you should not be vague unless that is your intent.

Writing and communicating with lawyers has taught me how to be concise and clear. It has also helped me get a thicker skin when getting feedback!

THE LAST BRIDGE opens with a quote from Muriel Rukeyser: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." In what ways does this set the tone for your novel?

Personally, I think this quote sets the tone for any woman's story. Let's face it—most of us never tell anyone the whole story of our lives. Here's an example, you read the statistics that 1 in 6 women will be the victim of some form of sexual abuse. One in



six women. Now, think of six women you know, have any of them ever told you about an experience? Think of 10 you know? Think about yourself.

It's around us but we don't discuss it. Sadly, we think this says something negative about us, rather than about the world we live in that condones this.

As women, we are conditioned to keep our stories to ourselves. Many of us come to believe that there is something unattractive about the truth. Imagine if all women told their stories. The world would split open and I believe it would get better.

Alex is a remarkable character because although she struggles, you get the sense from her she will triumph over this—or at least I hope you want her to.

In THE LAST BRIDGE, both Alex—nicknamed 'Cat'—and her siblings have to decide whether to avoid or confront the traumatic events of her childhood. Why did you make this a central theme in the novel?

One of the my core beliefs that has defined my adulthood and my writing is that you cannot move forward in your life without integrating and understanding the past. While all the characters in the book are stuck in some way, Cat is self-destructing. As the story unfolds and more of her past is revealed, we begin to understand what happened to her and how hard it is for her to confront it. But it's also getting harder for her to avoid it. The stakes are high.

How true to life is THE LAST BRIDGE? Are any of Cat's experiences based on things that happened to you or someone you know?

Although Cat's story is her own—she is not based on my experiences or on any one specific person—I think THE LAST BRIDGE mirrors the world many people live in. I took pains to make Cat's experiences true to what abuse survivors go through.

That said, although our society has become more open about discussing the subject of abuse at a surface level, I don't think our deeper understanding and acknowledgement of the reality of abuse have grown in the same way. I continuously encounter people who don't understand why no one speaks to Cat about what happened. There is a lingering question in the story about who knew what. This is a very common experience for survivors.

So—though it is not directly related to your own experiences—in what ways do you think your own upbringing and environment influenced the story?

The main influence of my own childhood on this story is the impact of abuse and addiction on generations of a family. My father was an alcoholic who had rage issues that included physical violence. His disease colored a large part of my childhood, and I felt the effects well into adulthood.

When I started to unravel the impact of his addiction on my own life, I was able to trace the pattern back to previous generations and issues he experienced in his life.



This, coupled with knowing so many people who struggle with addiction, lead me to explore the idea: what makes someone drink or do drugs? I think a part of our society assumes it is a weakness, but almost everyone who has ever talked to me about it has told me they have experienced intense tragedy, abuse or violence that triggered the addiction. While not everyone who goes through these traumas becomes an addict, most addicts have had some kind of trauma.

Facing what happened to us in the past can be very difficult. Aren't some things better forgotten? Why should we look back?

If I believed it were possible to truly forget, then I would say yes, go ahead. But just because no one talks about what happened doesn't mean they forget. When you can't integrate the past into your life, it becomes a secret you don't tell; and I believe that secrets have more power to destroy than the truth.

Many people "reinvent" themselves. They decide they came from a different background, or move far away from their birthplace or family, or have rage issues. We don't think our unhappiness is about the past—we think it's about the guy in the car in front of us who won't make the left before the light turns—but it's not. We all feel the past bearing down on us, affecting our lives every day.

So why do it? This is going to sound corny, but you do it for love. To feel love and give love.

What was the hardest part of writing the book?

Finishing it. It took me over ten years to finish it. I didn't work on it the whole time—I had periods where I struggled with the story and put it away—but I never, ever lost Cat's voice in my head.

I knew I was done when I stopped hearing her. She had been a constant companion for many years. I was surprised at the loss I felt when the book was done. I spoke to a few other writers, and they told me this is common. It feels like a good friend has moved away. I get to visit her, but I still miss the closeness.

And the easiest part?

Taking breaks for snacks.