

"UP CLOSE"

APRIL 2008

CARL HIAASEN

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>> THE FOLLOWING IS A SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF WEDU, TAMPA, ST. PETERSBURG, SARASOTA.

>>Cathy Unruh: HE'S ONE OF OUR BEST, SHARP, OUTRAGEOUS WRITERS AND A NATIVE SON OF FLORIDA.

HIS PARTICULAR BRAND OF TWISTED CRIME FICTION AND TAKE-NO-PRISONERS JOURNALISM HAS MADE HIM A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR.

MEET CARL HIAASEN COMING UP NEXT.

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>>Cathy Unruh: WELCOME TO "UP CLOSE."

I'M CATHY UNRUH.

NEARLY A DOZEN ADULT NOVELS AND OVER 1300 COLUMNS FOR THE "MIAMI HERALD," CARL HIAASEN IS KNOWN FOR SCREWBALL CHARACTERS, ECO-ADVOCACY AND A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US, CARL.

>>Carl Hiaasen: THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME.

>>Cathy Unruh: I'M ESPECIALLY HONORED BECAUSE I UNDERSTAND YOU WOULD MUCH RATHER BE THE INTERVIEWER THAN THE INTERVIEWEE.

>>Carl Hiaasen: I AM A LITTLE MORE COMFORTABLE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE NOTEBOOK, BUT THIS IS PART OF BEING AN AUTHOR THESE DAYS.

YOU PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE, FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE, IN MY CASE.

>>Cathy Unruh: WE'LL JUST GET TO THE PERSONAL STUFF RIGHT AWAY.

>>Carl Hiaasen: OH, GOOD.

>>Cathy Unruh: AT WHAT AGE DID YOU REALIZE HOW WHACKY YOUR BRAIN IS?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I THINK MY MOM KNEW THAT AT A FAIRLY YOUNG AGE THAT I WASN'T A RELIABLE PERSONALITY, IN THAT I STARTED WRITING WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, FRIGHTENINGLY YOUNG AGE.

I GOT A TYPEWRITER WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD.

MY DAD HAD GOTTEN ME A TYPEWRITER, WHICH I ASKED FOR.

I STARTED LITERALLY WRITING STORIES, SITTING IN MY ROOM TYPING AWAY AT THAT AGE, WHICH IS A LITTLE SCARY.

ALL THE KIDS OUT THERE WHO DON'T KNOW WHAT A TYPEWRITER IS, IT HAS A KEYBOARD, IT'S LIKE A COMPUTER WITHOUT A SCREEN.

YOU PUT PAPER INTO IT, YEAH.

REALLY, I KNEW AT A FAIRLY EARLY TIME THAT I LOVED TO WRITE,

MAINLY BECAUSE I LOVE TO READ.

I THINK -- A LOT OF WRITERS WILL TELL YOU THE SAME THING.

THEY FELL IN LOVE WITH THE LANGUAGE.

THEY FELL IN LOVE WITH BOOKS.

THE IDEA OF BEING ABLE TO WRITE A BOOK WAS SOMETHING THAT

WAS ALWAYS APPEALING TO ME.

>>Cathy Unruh: WHAT WERE YOU WRITING AT THE AGE OF SIX?

>>Carl Hiaasen: WE HAD LITTLE SOFTBALL LEAGUES AND KICKBALL
LEAGUES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

SO I WOULD DO SPORTS STORIES.

IN THOSE DAYS, LIKE CARBONS, GIVE THEM TO MY FRIENDS.

LIKE SIX CARBON SHEETS.

ALSO, I DID SOME SHORT STORIES THAT I HOPE MY MOM HAS
DESTROYED BY NOW.

WHATEVER INTERESTED ME, I SAT AND WROTE, AND I ALWAYS GOT A
KICK OUT OF IT.

AND I STARTED FAIRLY YOUNG WRITING.

I WOULDN'T CALL IT ANY KIND OF SOPHISTICATED HUMOR, BUT I
LIKED TO WRITE THINGS THAT WERE FUNNY.

I LIKE TO WRITE THINGS THAT MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH.

IT'S A GREAT REACTION TO GIVE SOMEBODY SOMETHING YOU HAVE
WRITTEN AND YOU SEE THEM LAUGH.

AT A VERY EARLY AGE, I WAS SORT OF THE CLASS CLOWN BUT IN
PRINT.

>>Cathy Unruh: WERE YOU HAPPY?

WERE YOU HAPPY INSIDE?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I'M SURE I WAS HAPPY WRITING.

I'M SURE AS ANYBODY WHO WRITES SATIRE WILL TELL YOU, THERE'S ALWAYS A VEIN OF ANGER IN SATIRE.

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FUNNY, BUT ALSO HAS AN EDGE TO IT.

I THINK BECAUSE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN SOUTH FLORIDA WHERE I LIVED, I LIVED IN A PLACE CALLED PLANTATION, WHICH IS WEST OF FT. LAUDERDALE, RIGHT ON THE EDGE OF BASICALLY THE EVERGLADES, IT WAS GETTING PAVED OVER AND MAULED AT AN ALARMING RATE.

ALL THE PLACES I HUNG OUT WHEN I WAS A KID, YOU WOULD RIDE YOUR BIKE OUT THERE, AND THEY WOULD BE BULLDOZED.

IT WAS HAPPENING SO FAST.

I REMEMBER BEING VERY ANGRY AT A YOUNG AGE ABOUT HOW THEY COULD WRECK A PLACE SO FAST.

I NEVER SAW A PLACE DESTROYED QUITE AS QUICKLY AS WEST BROWARD COUNTY.

THAT'S WHAT FUELS A LOT OF SATIRE AND SORT OF THE TRADITION OF LITERATURE.

YOU GO BACK TO JONATHAN SWIFT, AND THESE ARE CRANKY PEOPLE.

>>Cathy Unruh: [LAUGHTER]

YOU ARE BEING REALLY NICE FOR A CRANKY PERSON.

WE APPRECIATE THAT.

YOUR FIRST JOB, THOUGH, WAS -- WELL, YOU GRADUATED FROM UF. YOU WERE 23.

YOU GOT A JOB REPORTING FOR THE "MIAMI HERALD."

>>Carl Hiaasen: NO, I WAS 21.

ACTUALLY, WHEN I GRADUATED, I WAS 21.

I WENT TO A PAPER IN COCOA FLORIDA CALLED "TODAY," WHICH IS NOW "FLORIDA TODAY."

I WAS THERE FOR TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS.

THEY HAD A SUNDAY MAGAZINE.

I WORKED FOR THEM.

I ALSO WORKED ON THE CITY DESK.

AND THEN THE HERALD OFFERED ME A JOB WHEN I WAS 23, AND I HAD A CHANCE -- AND I REALLY THOUGHT -- I REALLY CONSIDERED NOT TAKING IT BECAUSE AT THIS POINT, CENTRAL FLORIDA, THE COCOA, MELBOURNE AREA WAS NOT VERY DEVELOPED.

IT REMINDED ME A LOT OF FT. LAUDERDALE WHEN I WAS A KID, AND I LIKED IT THERE.

MY SON WAS VERY YOUNG.

MY FIRST SON WAS VERY YOUNG AT THE TIME.

IT SEEMED LIKE A GREAT PLACE.

BUT THE HERALD WAS THE BIG GAME IN TOWN.

IF YOU WERE GOING TO BE IN JOURNALISM IN FLORIDA, IT WAS EITHER THE HERALD OR THE "ST. PETERSBURG TIMES."

SO I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FOOLISH AS A FAMILY DECISION, AS A PERSONAL DECISION TO SAY NO.

SO I WENT BACK AND MOVED BACK TO SOUTH FLORIDA AND WENT TO WORK AT THE HERALD IN '76.

>>Cathy Unruh: I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT YOU HAD A JOB BEFORE THAT.

WOW, GOT OUT OF COLLEGE AND WENT RIGHT TO THE HERALD. THAT'S PRETTY IMPRESSIVE.

>>Carl Hiaasen: NO, NO, NO.

>>Cathy Unruh: HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO REPORT?

>>Carl Hiaasen: WELL, THERE ARE NOT A LOT OF JOBS FOR NOVELISTS WHEN YOU'RE 21.

YOU JUST READ THE WANT ADS.

YOU DON'T SEE MANY "FAMOUS NOVELISTS WANTED" JOBS.

ALSO, I LIKE JOURNALISM.

I GREW UP READING THE "MIAMI HERALD" AND WHAT WAS THEN CALLED "THE FT. LAUDERDALE NEWS," WHICH WAS AN AFTERNOON PAPER.

I WOULD READ THOSE PAPERS TO MY DAD FROM A FAIRLY YOUNG AGE.

I REMEMBER SITTING THERE, AND AT THAT TIME, THE YANKEES TRAINED IN FT. LAUDERDALE IN THE SPRINGTIME.

MY DAD AND I WERE BASEBALL FANS.

IN THE MORNING, I WOULD READ HIM THE STORY ABOUT WHATEVER -- HOW THE YANKEES DID THE DAY BEFORE.

I ASKED HIM ONE TIME WHERE THESE STORIES CAME FROM.

I WAS VERY YOUNG, LITERALLY FOUR OR FIVE WHEN I WAS DOING THIS.

I NOTICED THE BY LINE.

HE SAID THEY SEND A REPORTER TO THE GAME.

I SAID, DOES THE REPORTER HAVE TO PAY TO GET IN?

HE GOES, OH, NO.

I SAID, WAIT A MINUTE.

YOU GET TO GO TO A BASEBALL GAME FREE.

YOU GET TO WRITE ABOUT IT, AND THEN YOU GET YOUR NAME IN THE PAPER?

HE SAID, YEAH.

I SAID THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PRETTY GOOD GIG.

SO I THOUGHT JOURNALISM CAN'T BE ALL BAD.

YOU HAVE TO ALSO REMEMBER I WAS GOING THROUGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VIETNAM WAR, WATERGATE, GREAT SOCIAL AWARENESS IN THIS COUNTRY.

I WOULD SAY MORE THAN THERE IS TODAY ABOUT THESE ISSUES.

AND THERE WAS A LOT OF UPHEAVAL, AND THERE WAS GREAT JOURNALISM BEING DONE, WASHINGTON POST, WOODWARD AND BERNSTEIN.

I WAS THE GENERATION THAT, YOU KNOW, THEY BROUGHT DOWN A PRESIDENCY, A CORRUPT PRESIDENCY.

I MEAN, IT DOESN'T GET ANY HEADIER THAN THAT IF YOU'RE WRITING.

WHAT OTHER FUNCTION CAN YOU HAVE AS A JOURNALIST THAN TO PROTECT THE DEMOCRACY AND THE FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY?

SO THERE WAS A LOT OF IDEALISM IN THOSE DAYS IN JOURNALISM SCHOOL.

>>Cathy Unruh: YOU GOT YOUR OWN COLUMN PRETTY QUICKLY AT THE

"MIAMI HERALD," TOO.

ON YOUR WEB SITE, YOU WRITE -- YOU SOUND RATHER GLEEFUL ABOUT IT, ACTUALLY, ON THE WEB SITE.

IT SAYS THAT THAT COLUMN AT SOME POINT -- AND I'M QUOTING NOW -- HAS PISSED OFF JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY IN SOUTH FLORIDA INCLUDING MY OWN BOSSES.

>> OH, SURE.

NO, I'M HAPPY TO SAY THAT.

I THINK THAT'S THE ROLE OF THE COLUMNIST.

YOU HAVE TO BE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY S.O.B.

AT ANY GIVEN TIME, THE DEMOCRATS DON'T LIKE WHAT I WRITE.

THE REPUBLICANS DON'T LIKE WHAT I WRITE.

AND CERTAINLY, THE MANAGEMENT OF THE "MIAMI HERALD" AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER HAS TAKEN ISSUE WITH WHAT I'VE WRITTEN.

IT'S COST THEM SOME ADVERTISING ON OCCASION, BUT TO THEIR CREDIT, I'VE NEVER -- I'VE NEVER HAD A COLUMN KILLED, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID OF SOMETHING THAT WOULD HAPPEN, BECAUSE IT RAN.

IF YOU GOT YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT -- I HAVEN'T WRITTEN ANY INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN YEARS.

I WRITE A COLUMN, AND I WRITE ABOUT WHATEVER I WANT TO WRITE ABOUT.

IT'S TRULY LIKE SHOOTING FISH IN A BARREL IN SOUTH FLORIDA. THERE'S SO MUCH CORRUPTION AND SLEAZE AND BUFFOONERY, IT'S REALLY THE GREATEST GIG IN JOURNALISM IS TO BE A COLUMNIST

OR ANY KIND OF A WRITER IN SOUTH FLORIDA.

IT'S JUST A FOUNTAIN OF SLEAZE, AND I'M VERY LUCKY TO BE DOING IT.

>>Cathy Unruh: DO YOU REALLY THINK THAT FLORIDA IS SLEAZIER THAN OTHER STATES?

>>Carl Hiaasen: ABSOLUTELY.

AND I SAY THAT PROUDLY.

I WOULD SAY THAT DIRTBAGS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY GRAVITATE HERE BECAUSE OF THE OPPORTUNITY.

JUST LIKE HONEST, LEGITIMATE PEOPLE DO.

I'VE SAID THIS BEFORE, IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE A CAR THIEF, LET'S SAY YOU WANT TO STEAL CARS FOR A LIVING, WOULD YOU RATHER STEAL CARS IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, OR WOULD YOU RATHER STEAL CARS ON SOUTH BEACH?

THIS IS A NO-BRAINER.

FLORIDA HAS BEEN A MAGNET FOR SCOUNDRELS SINCE THE CIVIL WAR DAYS.

IT'S NOT SURPRISING -- THE SAME THEORY APPLIES TO WHETHER YOU'RE A STOCKBROKER, RUNNING A TELEPHONE BOILER ROOM, WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S MUCH BETTER TO CONDUCT THESE ENTERPRISES IN A SUNNY, WARM CLIMATE THAN IT IS IN DETROIT OR CLEVELAND IN THE DEAD OF WINTER.

>>Cathy Unruh: HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT GETTING OUT OF THIS SLEAZY STATE?

>>Carl Hiaasen: EVERY DAY.

>>Cathy Unruh: DO YOU STAY FOR LOVE OF THE STATE OR BECAUSE IT'S FODDER FOR YOUR FICTION?

>>Carl Hiaasen: RIGHT NOW, THE WEIRDNESS IN THIS COUNTRY IS SO PERVASIVE, I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYWHERE I COULD MOVE WHERE I WOULDN'T HAVE MATERIAL, WHETHER IT'S WESTERN MONTANA OR CERTAINLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA OR DUBUQUE, IOWA.

I DON'T THINK IT MATTERS.

YOU CAN FIND THE WEIRDNESS.

BUT I THINK WHEN YOU HAVE ROOTS IN A PLACE AND YOU CARE ABOUT A PLACE AS MUCH AS I DO IN FLORIDA AND MY KIDS ARE HERE AND MY GRANDKIDS ARE HERE, YOU DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THAT SITE.

THERE'S TOO MUCH TO FIGHT FOR.

THERE ARE TOO MANY GREAT PEOPLE IN THE STATE.

THERE ARE TOO MANY GREAT PLACES THAT HAVEN'T BEEN RUINED YET.

AS LONG AS YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR, WHETHER IT'S ONE LITTLE GOAL, YOU STAY AND YOU FIGHT.

THAT'S JUST THE WAY I WAS RAISED.

BUT THERE ISN'T A DAY THAT GOES BY WHERE SOMETHING DOESN'T HAPPEN.

YOU DON'T PICK UP THE NEWSPAPER AND SAY, I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE.

>>Cathy Unruh: WELL, WHEN I READ YOUR BOOKS -- AND I'M SURE A LOT OF READERS DO THIS -- I READ YOUR BOOKS, AND I SAY,

OH, I KNOW WHO THAT CHARACTER IS, OR I REMEMBER THAT EVENT,
BECAUSE YOU'RE TURNING FACT INTO FICTION A LITTLE BIT.

IF YOU'RE A NONFLORIDIAN READER OF YOUR BOOKS, I'M SURE YOU
HEAR FROM YOUR READERS, IF THEY ARE NOT FROM FLORIDA OR FROM
THE COUNTRY, BECAUSE YOUR BOOKS ARE PRINTED INTERNATIONALLY,
DO THEY THINK THAT'S TOTALLY FICTION OR DO THEY REALIZE THAT
THIS STUFF HAPPENS IN FLORIDA?

>>Carl Hiaasen: IT'S FUNNY, WHEN YOU COME AND GIVE A SPEECH
IN FLORIDA AND YOU TALK TO OTHER FLORIDIANS, THEY ALL SEE IT
AS DOCUMENTARY.

THEY DON'T SEE IT AS SATIRE FICTION.

BUT WHEN YOU LEAVE THE STATE -- IT USED TO BE YOU HAD TO
SELL THE IDEA, THAT I'M REALLY JUST POACHING FROM THE
HEADLINES, THAT I'M NOT TAKING EXACT CHARACTERS, BUT THE
SPIRIT OF THE CRAZINESS ALL EXISTS, AND ALL FLORIDIANS KNOW
IT'S TRUE.

HOWEVER, SINCE THE 2000 ELECTION, I THINK MORE AND MORE
AMERICANS REALIZE, YOU KNOW, WHAT A TRULY DYSFUNCTIONAL
PLACE FLORIDA IS AND APPRECIATE THAT I'M PICKING UP ON THE
HUMOR OF THE FICTION MORE BECAUSE THEY SEE -- I MEAN, THAT'S
A GOOD EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING YOU COULDN'T HAVE PUT IN THE
NOVEL, THE 2000 ELECTION.

YOU COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT.

NOBODY WOULD HAVE BOUGHT IT.

ONCE IT PLAYED OUT FOR ALL THOSE WEEKS THAT THE ENTIRE STATE

OF THE REPUBLIC DEPENDED ON A FEW MISGUIDED VOTERS IN PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA, IT DAWNED ON THE REST OF THE COUNTRY THAT THIS IS TRULY AS WHACKY A PLACE AS PORTRAYED.

>>Cathy Unruh: WE'LL TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW YOUR WHOLE WRITING PROCESS WORKS.

OBVIOUSLY, YOU FOLLOW FACTUAL THINGS.

YOU KEEP UP WITH THE NEWSPAPERS, KEEP UP WITH THE NEWS.

>>Carl Hiaasen: I STILL DO A COLUMN FOR THE HERALD.

SO I READ NEWSPAPERS VORACIOUSLY.

YOU CAN GO ONLINE TO READ THE TIMES, PALM BEACH POST, AS WELL AS THE NEW YORK TIMES, OF COURSE, THE HERALD AND THE TAMPA PAPER.

YOU CAN GET A FULL FLOW OF IT.

SO I AM LIKE A NEWS JUNKY, OBVIOUSLY.

AND I WATCH THE TV STATIONS, AND THINGS SORT OF CAST IN YOUR BRAIN AND YOU FILE THEM AWAY IN THIS LITTLE THING I CALL AN IMAGINARY ROLODEX THAT YOU HAVE IN YOUR HEAD.

A STORY WILL HIT ME, AND I'LL SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAS TO GO IN THE NEXT NOVEL.

>> AND THEN YOU JUST MAKE A NOTE?

>> I'LL MAKE A NOTE, POST-IT NOTE TO MYSELF.

I'LL LITERALLY CLIP OUT THE WHOLE THING, AND I'LL HAVE A FILE GOING WITH SOME WEIRDNESS.

THERE WAS AN EXAMPLE IN A BOOK THAT I DID CALLED "SKINNY DIP."

THERE WAS A GUY WHO WAS SNEAKING AROUND IN NURSING HOMES,
AND HE WAS STEALING NARCOTIC PATCHES OFF OF TERMINALLY ILL
PATIENTS, A VERY POWERFUL NARCOTIC PAINKILLER.

AND SO I HAD A CHARACTER IN THE BOOK DOING THIS.

PEOPLE SAID THAT IS THE SICKEST THING, BREAKING INTO A
NURSING HOME AND STEALING A PATCH OFF SOMEBODY.

I SAID I WISH I COULD SAY I MADE IT UP, BUT I DIDN'T.

I HAD THE CLIPPING TO SHOW.

THEY WERE HUNTING FOR THIS GUY ALL OVER SOUTH FLORIDA.

HE WOULD PUT ON HOSPITAL GARB AND WALK IN AND HE'D FIND
THESE POOR PEOPLE AND STICK IT ON HIMSELF.

>>Cathy Unruh: DID THEY FIND HIM?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I DON'T KNOW IF THEY EVER FOUND HIM OR NOT.

>>Cathy Unruh: IN YOUR BOOK, DID THEY FIND HIM?

>>Carl Hiaasen: HE WAS DEFINITELY FOUND IN THE BOOK.

ANOTHER TIME I CLIPPED A STORY OUT, THERE WAS A GUY STEALING
WHEELCHAIRS ALL OVER SOUTH FLORIDA.

NORMALLY STEALING CAMAROS OR FORD TRUCKS, HE'S STEALING
WHEELCHAIRS.

HE'D PULL UP A VAN IN NURSING HOMES AND HOSPITALS, AND HE
WOULD GO FOR THE TOP-OF-THE-LINE WHEELCHAIR.

I THOUGHT, THIS IS ONLY AN OCCUPATION YOU'LL FIND IN SOUTH
FLORIDA WHERE A GUY WAKES UP AND SAYS, WHERE AM I GOING TO
STEAL A WHEELCHAIR TODAY?

I CLIPPED THAT OUT, AND I PUT THAT IN A BOOK CALLED "STRIP

TEASE."

AGAIN, PEOPLE SAID THAT WAS SICK.

I SAID IT HAPPENED.

I CAN SHOW YOU THE CLIPPING.

>>Cathy Unruh: I'LL READ YOU A LITTLE PASSAGE HERE FROM

"NATURE GIRL," WHICH IS YOUR LATEST NOVEL.

AND A CHARACTER THAT WE MIGHT SAY IS A SEMI-BAD GUY HAS HIS
HAND JAMMED INTO A STONE CRAB TRAP.

AND THE CRABS PINCH OFF THREE OF HIS FINGERS AND BREAK THE
OTHER TWO.

AND THEN YOU WRITE -- I'M QUOTING NOW -- HERE'S WHERE IT
GETS NASTY.

THE PARAMEDICS OPEN THE TRAP AND BUSTED OFF ALL THE CRAB
CLAWS WITH HIS FINGERS STILL CAUGHT IN THE PINCERS.

THEY PUT THEM ON ICE IN A COOLER.

AND LATER AT THE HOSPITAL, THE NURSES STARTED ARGUING WITH
THE DOCTORS ABOUT WHO GETS TO KEEP THE CLAWS FOR DINNER.

PLUS THEY SEWED THE WRONG FINGERS TO THE WRONG STUMPS, OF
COURSE.

THIS IS ALL SPOKEN BY A CHARACTER WHO IS 12 YEARS OLD.

DOES THAT KIND OF STUFF JUST COME TO YOU?

DOES IT SPURT OUT WHEN YOU'RE ON THE PAGE OR WAS THERE A
MENTAL NOTE --

>>Carl Hiaasen: WELL, IF YOU'VE EVER DEALT WITH A STONE CRAB
UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WHILE IT'S STILL ALIVE, YOU REALIZE

THEY ARE PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF TAKING OFF YOUR FINGERS.

THIS IS A BAD GUY.

I TRY TO THINK OF POETIC FATE FOR A BAD GUY.

THIS IS A GUY WHO HAD BOTHERED, TRIED TO GROPE THIS KID'S MOTHER AND GOTTEN CLOBBERED FOR IT IN A BAD PLACE.

BUT NONETHELESS, I THOUGHT WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A GUY WHO IS A SERIAL GROPER LIKE THAT?

I THOUGHT STONE CRAB TRAP.

RIGHT AWAY, THAT'S WHAT CAME TO ME.

THE BEST PART, THE LIGHTS -- THEY ARE REATTACHING THE DIGITS ON HIS HAND AND THE LIGHTS GO OFF IN THE HOSPITAL, WHICH HAD HAPPENED BEFORE, SO THE SURGEONS GOT A LITTLE MIXED UP.

AND THERE'S AN ARGUMENT BECAUSE YOU DON'T EVER THROW AWAY GOOD STONE CRAB CLAWS.

YOU JUST DON'T DO IT.

TAKE THE FINGERS OUT, TAKE THEM HOME, LITTLE MUSTARD SAUCE, YOU'RE FINE.

>>Cathy Unruh: IF THAT WAS APPROPRIATE JUSTICE, HE KEPT GROPING EVEN AFTER THAT, EVEN WITH THE BAD FINGERS.

>>Carl Hiaasen: IN THE END, THEY USUALLY GET SOMETHING COMING TO THEM.

AND IT'S DONE IN A VERY TASTEFUL WAY, USUALLY.

IT'S NOT AS GORY AS YOU THINK.

>>Cathy Unruh: THERE'S A LOT OF WEIRD VIOLENCE, REALLY WEIRD VIOLENCE AND THERE'S A LOT OF BLOODSHED IN YOUR WORK.

>>Carl Hiaasen: BUT A LOT OF IT IS OFF-CAMERA.

YOU DON'T SEE IT.

IT'S NOT LIKE A MONTY PYTHON EPISODE WHERE THE BLOOD IS SQUIRTING OUT.

YOU FIND OUT ABOUT IT OR IT'S TOLD IN AN IRONIC WAY BY A CHARACTER.

IT'S TOUGH FOR ME TO EVEN WATCH A HORROR MOVIE ON TELEVISION.

I'M NOT A BIG FAN OF BLOOD, BUT I AM A FAN OF JUSTICE.

I'M OF THE BELIEF THAT BAD THINGS HAVE TO HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE IN NOVELS, BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAPPEN OFTEN ENOUGH TO BAD PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE.

WHEN YOU'RE COMING OUT OF A JOURNALISM BACKGROUND, MOST OF THE STORIES YOU WRITE, SADLY DON'T HAVE A HAPPY ENDING. SOMEBODY GOES MISSING IN SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, MOST OF THE TIME THEY AREN'T COMING BACK.

IN A NOVEL, YOU HAVE THE LUXURY -- AND IT'S A THERAPEUTIC ONE -- OF BEING ABLE TO SAY, YOU KNOW WHAT, THAT'S A GOOD PERSON, AND HE'LL BE STANDING AT THE END OF THIS NOVEL OR SHE WILL BE STANDING.

THIS BAD GUY IS NOT.

BAD THINGS ARE GOING TO HAPPEN TO HIM.

YOU CAN'T HOPE FOR THAT IN REAL LIFE.

USUALLY DOESN'T WORK OUT THAT WAY.

>>Cathy Unruh: I GUESS IT DEPENDS ON HOW YOU DEAL WITH YOUR

ANGER, TOO.

YOU TALKED ABOUT YOUR ANGER.

YOU CAN JUST KILL ANYBODY YOU WANT HOWEVER YOU WANT --

>>Carl Hiaasen: SPEND A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT IT IN THE NOVELS.

THE GREAT THING ABOUT HAVING THE LUXURY OF THIS JOB IS THAT IT'S A LEGALLY ACCEPTABLE OUTLET FOR THESE EMOTIONS.

I MEAN, YOU CAN SIT DOWN AND WRITE -- I MEAN, YOU CAN GO INTO ANY BOOKSTORE, PICK OUT ANY NUMBER OF NOVELS THAT ARE DISTURBING IN SOME WAY.

THE DIFFERENCE IS, I DO TRY -- THE POINT OF SATIRE IS TO MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH.

MY JOB IS TO BE ENTERTAINING AS A WRITER.

IF I CAN THERAPEUTICALLY DEAL WITH WHATEVER IS GOING ON IN MY HEAD AT THE SAME TIME, THAT'S EVEN BETTER.

THE FACT IS YOU CAN'T BE SUCCESSFUL AS A WRITER UNLESS YOU TOUCH LOTS OF READERS WHO ARE IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PLACES THAN YOU ARE.

>>Cathy Unruh: I WOULD THINK THAT YOUR HEAD IS BUSY ALL THE TIME, LOOKING AT EVERYTHING.

>>Carl Hiaasen: YEAH, UNFORTUNATELY, FOR MY FAMILY, IT IS.

>>Cathy Unruh: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THAT?

>>Carl Hiaasen: YOU JUST WRITE THROUGH IT.

IT'S LIKE ANY DISORDER.

I MEAN, YOU JUST DEAL WITH IT.

THERE ARE WORSE THINGS GOING ON.

ANYBODY WHO HAS LIVED WITH A NOVELIST OR ANY KIND OF A
SERIOUS PERSON WHO CONSIDERS THEMSELVES A SERIOUS WRITER,
KNOWS IT'S A TOUCHY SITUATION.

IT'S DIFFICULT ON YOUR FAMILY.

YOU GO AND YOU LOCK YOURSELF UP IN THIS ROOM FOR WHO KNOWS
HOW LONG.

SOME DAYS YOU HAVE A GOOD DAY, AND YOU'VE WRITTEN SOMETHING.
THIS IS WORKING.

SOME DAYS ARE HORRIBLE DAYS, AND YOU COME BACK AND TAKE IT
OUT ON EVERYBODY.

IT'S NOT LIKE A JOB WHERE YOU GO -- YOU KNOW, YOU GO, YOU
COME HOME 5:00, YOU CAN TURN IT OFF.

YOU CAN'T.

YOU COME BACK, AND YOU GRIND YOUR TEETH, OR IN MY CASE I'M
WATCHING THE NEWS AND ALL OF A SUDDEN SOMETHING HAPPENS ON
THE NEWS AND I SAY I GOT TO GO.

I HAVE TO RUN BECAUSE I HAVE TO WRITE DOWN SOMETHING THAT
POPS IN MY HEAD.

AS I SAID, IT'S A DYSFUNCTIONAL KIND OF CRAZY WORLD YOU LIVE
IN.

>>Cathy Unruh: IT'S A NICE DYSFUNCTION, THOUGH, IN THAT IT'S
GIVING YOU LOTS OF MONEY AND LOTS OF RECOGNITION.

>>Carl Hiaasen: YEAH.

>>Cathy Unruh: DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU'RE CHANGING FLORIDA?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I DON'T KNOW.

IF I WENT INTO IT HOPING I WOULD, I WOULD BE A FOOL.

I THINK THAT IF YOU MAKE A LITTLE BIT OF A DIFFERENCE, IF YOU GET ONE OR TWO PEOPLE THINKING ABOUT THINGS THEY DIDN'T THINK ABOUT BEFORE THEY WALKED INTO A VOTING BOOTH OR MADE AN IMPORTANT SORT OF CIVIC DECISION, I'LL TELL YOU, THE ONE THING -- I MEAN, I'M NOT GENERALLY A HOPEFUL PERSON.

NORWEGIANS USUALLY AREN'T, BUT ONE OF THE THINGS THAT THE NOVELS THAT I'VE BEEN DOING FOR KIDS, "HOOT" AND "FLUSH" AND A NEW ONE THAT I'M FINISHING NOW, THE RESPONSE THAT I'VE GOTTEN FROM THE FIRST TWO, LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF LETTERS FROM KIDS WHICH I NEVER ANTICIPATED.

AND THE GREAT THING ABOUT THEIR LETTERS -- AND BOTH OF THOSE BOOKS HAVE ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES.

BOTH OF THOSE BOOKS ARE ABOUT KIDS WHO CARE DEEPLY ABOUT SOMETHING, THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD, SOMETHING THAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR WORLD AND THEY GET INVOLVED AND THEY DO SOME GOOD THINGS.

THESE KIDS WRITE TO YOU, AND THEY GET IT RIGHT AWAY.

THEY GET THE HUMOR RIGHT AWAY.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL THE JOKE THREE TIMES.

THEY GET IT THE FIRST TIME.

SECONDLY, THEY HAVE THE PUREST MORAL COMPASS OF ANY READER, BECAUSE THEY ARE YOUNG, AND THEY HAVEN'T HAD AN MBA SLAPPED IN THEIR HAND, AND THEY ARE NOT IN THE REAL WORLD TRYING TO

MAKE A LIVING.

THEY JUST KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT AND WHAT'S WRONG, AND IT'S A GREAT JOY TO WRITE FOR THEM.

>>Cathy Unruh: WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO WRITE FOR THEM?

WAS IT YOUR OWN CHILDREN?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I HAD AN EDITOR CALL ME AND SAY, HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WRITING FOR KIDS?

I SAID, ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?

HAVE YOU READ -- ARE YOU NUTS?

THEY SAID NO, NO, YOU SHOULD TRY IT.

MY STEPSON AT THE TIME WAS 11 OR 12.

MY NIECE AND NEPHEWS WERE ALL ABOUT THE SAME AGE.

I NEVER LET THEM READ ANY OF THE GROWN-UP NOVELS, OBVIOUSLY.

THEY JUST WEREN'T OLD ENOUGH, I THOUGHT.

THEY WERE ALWAYS SAYING, UNCLE CARL, CAN WE READ -- I

THOUGHT, YOU KNOW WHAT, IT WOULD BE NICE TO WRITE A BOOK

THAT I COULD GIVE THEM THAT WOULD HAVE THE SAME SORT OF

SMART-ASS SENSIBILITY AND THE SAME SORT OF IRREVERENCE,

WHICH KIDS DIG, BUT AT THE SAME TIME -- YOU KNOW, OBVIOUSLY,

IT WOULDN'T HAVE SOME OF THE ADULT MOMENTS OR THE VIOLENCE

THAT SOME OF THE OTHER BOOKS HAVE AND JUST GIVE THEM

SOMETHING THEY CAN READ AND GET A FLAVOR FOR IT.

THAT'S WHY I WROTE "HOOT" HAVING NO IDEA THAT IT WOULD

BECOME AS POPULAR, HAVING NO CLUE AT ALL ANYONE WOULD BE

INTERESTED BESIDES THEM.

>>Cathy Unruh: YOUR WHOLE BODY OF WORK IS DESCRIBED
SOMETIMES AS YOU BEING AN ADVOCATE FOR REALISTIC GROWTH,
DECENT GOVERNMENT IN FLORIDA, TRYING TO GET THE BAD GUYS.
WHO ARE THE BAD GUYS, AND WHERE DOES FLORIDA STAND NOW IN
THE GROWTH AND DECENT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT?

>>Carl Hiaasen: WELL, I MEAN, EVERY DAY IS A NEW COMEDY IN
THAT AREA.

WE CAN'T EVEN HAVE AN ELECTION IN THIS STATE WITHOUT
SCREWING IT UP.

I'M NOT THAT OPTIMISTIC.

I DO THINK THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT HAVING NOW, WHAT,
ALMOST 18.5 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE STATE IS THAT THE
CONSTITUENCY FOR SANE GROWTH MANAGEMENT HAS NEVER BEEN
GREATER.

A LOT OF THE PEOPLE WHO MOVED HERE HAD NO IDEA WHAT THEY
WERE GETTING INTO, NONE.

THEY THOUGHT LOW TAXES, NICE FLORIDA SUNSHINE, AND THEN THEY
FIND, HEY, GUESS WHAT, WE'RE IN A STATE THAT'S URBANIZING
ITSELF FASTER THAN ANY OTHER IN THE UNION.

AND THAT'S THE SCARY THING.

THEY ARE DISCOVERING, OH, TRAFFIC, FORGET ABOUT IT.

CRIME, FORGET ABOUT IT.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, THESE PROBLEMS ARE HERE, AND THEY DON'T
LIKE IT.

THEY ARE SAYING, YOU KNOW WHAT, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

THERE'S A BETTER WAY TO GROW, AND THERE'S A SMARTER WAY TO GROW.

AND SO INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, IT'S THE NEWCOMERS THAT ARE REALLY SPEARHEADING SOME OF THESE MOVEMENTS.

THAT'S A CAUSE FOR OPTIMISM, I THINK, BUT IN TERMS OF THE CORRUPTION LEVEL, OF COURSE, NOT.

AS LONG AS YOU HAVE AS MUCH MONEY TO BE MADE BY SELLING OUT, WHETHER IT'S A LITTLE TINY COUNTY COMMISSION IN THE PANHANDLE OR WHETHER IT'S MIAMI CITY COMMISSION, WHICH DOES IT ON A GRAND SCALE, ALTHOUGH CLUMSILY SOMETIMES.

WHenever you have the temptation of corruption, you're going to have people succumb to it, and they do it all the time in Florida.

THE FBI COULD LITERALLY HAVE AN OFFICE IN EVERY MAJOR CITY IN FLORIDA.

CORRUPTION UNIT IN EVERY MAJOR CITY AND BE WORKING 80-HOUR WEEKS.

IT WOULD NEVER END.

>>Cathy Unruh: SO YOU ARE STILL A LITTLE BIT PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE OVERALL?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I THINK THE CLIMATE OF THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO PEOPLE NOW, BUT THE BACKLASH IS WHAT'S INTERESTING.

PEOPLE ARE NOT PUTTING UP WITH A LOT OF IT ANYMORE.

YOU KNOW, THE BUSIEST U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE IN THE COUNTRY

FOR CORRUPTION PROSECUTIONS, SOUTH FLORIDA.

>>Cathy Unruh: NOW, YOUR LATEST BOOK, WHICH IS COMING OUT SOON, IS ABOUT GOLF.

IT'S A FACTUAL BOOK.

IT'S YOU GETTING BACK ON THE GOLF COURSE AFTER 32 YEARS.

>>Carl Hiaasen: 32 YEARS, YEAH.

>>Cathy Unruh: WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

DOES THAT TELL US YOU ARE GETTING READY TO HEAD INTO RETIREMENT?

>>Carl Hiaasen: NO.

IT'S SOME MEASURE OF DESPERATION.

I HAD LIVED IN THE KEYS FOR MANY YEARS.

I'M A FLY FISHERMAN.

I LIKE IT.

WE MOVED TO VERO BEACH.

I STILL HAVE A PLACE IN THE KEYS.

HAD SOME FRIENDS FROM HIGH SCHOOL THAT I USED TO PLAY GOLF WITH IN HIGH SCHOOL WHO TALKED ME INTO GOING BACK -- I HAD GIVEN IT UP WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE.

32 YEARS I DIDN'T TOUCH A GOLF CLUB, WHICH THE SMARTEST MOVE I HAD EVER MADE.

THEY SAID, OH, COME ON.

SO I GOT BACK INTO IT, AND I GOT KIND OF HOOKED AGAIN.

MY EDITOR SAID, WHY DON'T YOU KEEP A JOURNAL, BECAUSE TERRIBLE THINGS ARE HAPPENING TO YOU ON THE GOLF COURSE, AND

YOU'RE CAUSING A LOT OF TROUBLE, AND BY THE WAY, AND THIS WILL BE FUNNY.

I'M SAYING, IN OTHER WORDS, THE WORSE I DO ON THE GOLF COURSE, THE HAPPIER YOU'LL BE WITH THIS BOOK.

HE SAID, ABSOLUTELY.

HE SAID THAT'S THE WHOLE TRAJECTORY OF THE BOOK.

WE HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT YOU'LL BE A COMPLETE HACKER AGAIN, AND WE THINK IT WILL BE FUNNY.

SO THAT'S THE BOOK.

>>Cathy Unruh: WERE YOU A COMPLETE HACKER?

>>Carl Hiaasen: NOT A COMPLETE HACKER.

BUT I'M PRETTY CLOSE.

ON SOME DAYS I'M QUITE A HACKER.

ON OTHER DAYS THERE ARE FLASHES OF COMPETENCE, AND THAT'S ALL I CAN BOAST.

BUT IT ALSO BECAME PART OF A MEMOIR.

IT'S CALLED THE "DOWNHILL LIE," BECAUSE WHEN MEN IN THEIR 50s THINK THEY CAN DO SOMETHING BETTER THAN THEY DID IN THEIR 20s -- ANYWAY --

>>Cathy Unruh: YOU DON'T THINK ANYBODY CAN, ANY MEN IN THEIR 50S?

YOU HAVE A LOT OF GOLFERS WATCHING THIS.

>>Carl Hiaasen: MAYBE THEY CAN.

ALSO, MY DAD GOT ME STARTED WHEN I WAS A KID.

HE PASSED AWAY AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, AND I LOST MY INTEREST

COMPLETELY IN GOLF PARTLY BECAUSE OF THAT.

SO GETTING BACK INTO IT BROUGHT BACK A LOT OF MEMORIES OF MY CHILDHOOD AND MY TIME WITH HIM.

AND ALSO MY YOUNGEST SON, WHO IS NOW EIGHT, HAS TAKEN UP GOLF, AND HE LOVES IT.

I'M LIKE THE PACINO CHARACTER IN THE GODFATHER.

I TRY TO BREAK AWAY AND KEEP GETTING SUCKED BACK INTO IT.

IT'S MORE PERSONAL THAN ANY BOOK I HAVE EVER WRITTEN.

THAT'S GOT ME A LITTLE WORRIED.

>>Cathy Unruh: SOON YOU'LL BE TOURING THE WHOLE COUNTRY TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK AND TALKING ABOUT FLORIDA.

A QUICK LAST QUESTION, AND I THINK THIS WILL BE THE LAST ONE.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR FLORIDA OR AN ADVOCATE AGAINST FLORIDA, ESPECIALLY AS YOU TRAVEL THE COUNTRY?

>>Carl Hiaasen: I SEE MYSELF AS A DEFENDER OF FLORIDA AS A PLACE, AS A CHARACTER, AS AN ENTITY UNTO ITSELF.

I'M NOT GOING TO GO OUT AND SELL FLORIDA AND TELL PEOPLE TO MOVE HERE.

BUT WHAT I DO TELL THEM IS WE NEED MORE OF THE RIGHT KIND OF PEOPLE HERE AND LESS OF THE WRONG KIND OF PEOPLE.

WHEN WE GOT A REPORT LIKE WE DID THE OTHER DAY THAT MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE LEAVING FLORIDA THAN EVER, YOU KNOW, I'M NOT BREAKING OUT THE BOX OF KLEENEX FOR THAT.

I SAY SAYONARA, ADIOS, GOOD RIDDANCE.

HONESTLY.

WE NEED MORE FOLKS WHO LOVE THIS PLACE FOR WHAT IT IS AND WHO ARE NOT COMING HERE TO EXPLOIT IT, AND MAKE MONEY AND RIP IT OFF AND THEN LEAVE, WHICH HAS BEEN THE HISTORY OF THIS PLACE FOR 200 YEARS.

>>Cathy Unruh: WELL, I FOR ONE AM GLAD THAT YOU ARE STILL HERE.

ENJOY YOUR WORK VERY MUCH.

THANK YOU FOR BEING WITH US.

WE APPRECIATE IT.

>>Carl Hiaasen: THANK YOU. THANKS FOR HAVING ME.

>>Cathy Unruh: IF YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ON CARL HIAASEN AND HIS WORK, YOU CAN VISIT HIS WEB SITE.

IT'S WWW.CARLHIAASEN.COM.

WATCH THE SPELLING OF THE LAST NAME.

THAT CAN REALLY TRIP YOU UP.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "UP CLOSE."

I'LL SEE YOU NEXT TIME.