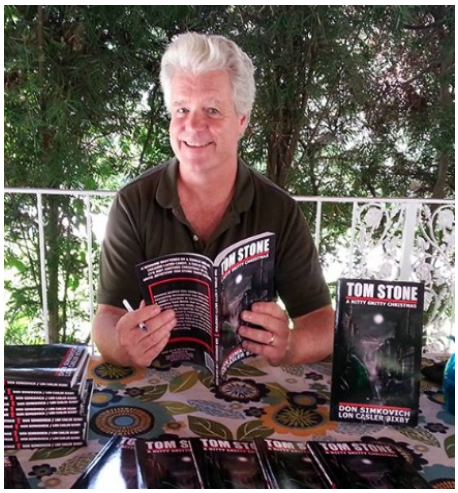
An Interview with Don Simkovich



January, 2020 Featured Guest
at
Time with Tannia
(http://timewithtannia.com)

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés

1. You define yourself as an author, journalist, marketing content writer and voice-over narrator. Which one of them define you better?

A journalist with marketing capabilities has really been my career. I hosted a radio spot series for 22 years on holidays and cultures around the world, so I do come at my creativity from a journalistic point of view.

I've done video narration and have done some on-camera acting but I've never fully developed my voice-over career or offered it as widely as I should. My voice is a distinguishing trait.

Writing fiction is becoming easier, although I also studied it at the University of Pittsburgh.

2. Let us begin to unfold "Don" to our readers. You describe your Tom Stone detective book as "detective stories with a heart" Isn't the "heart" somehow entwine in every detective story?

In our first three novels, we make Tom Stone's family a focus—and especially his relationship with a young boy in a foster care group home. Our 2nd story, ***Tom Stone: Sweltering Summer Nights***, focuses a lot on Stone's relationship with his oldest daughter.

In our fourth novel, ***Tom Stone: One Shot, One Kill***, Stone's friends gets involved in tracking

down a sniper.

How does your narrative bring about the difference between you vs the others on the market?

Los Angeles is a disjointed city in many ways, so Stone's family and friends bring a sense of camaraderie that's different from most detective novels. Ours doesn't fit a traditional pattern of a Who Done It, and the stories lean toward being mostly thrillers.

3. Not all authors are able to co-author with an award-winning author but you were able to do it successfully with Lon Casler Bixby.

Lon and I both provide ideas and then yield them—in other words, we're willing to say "here's where I think the story should go" and then we can listen and accept if the other has a better direction. We are in agreement on the general direction a story should take. That's key!

We have our different strengths. I can get the narrative started and he's good at refining and remembering key details. We come from two different perspectives. Lon has written screenplays and worked in film production while I come from a journalist point of view and fiction author.

Where can one seek or find co-authoring opportunities?

Writer's groups are the best places. If you hit it off with someone then that's important. I'd say try writing a short story or short story collection together.

Lon and I staged a pilot for a comedy he wrote years ago so we had worked with each other briefly.

What are the challenges and benefits of doing so?

Writing a novel or novel series with a partner is like any business partnership. You have to give ideas and then be willing to let the other person adjust and refine those ideas. Giving up something as internalized as a story idea is tough.

If one is stronger in editing and story structure than the other, then that's a benefit. You have to harness your complimentary skills.

How do you find the perfect balance?

You must have mutual respect and trust each other's abilities. Agree on the overall direction the story is heading and agree on a general ending. Outline at least a little and then be willing to adjust that outline with each other if ideas develop.

That provides an agreed upon framework and creates a boundary that's understood and you both agree on.

4. You have published four Tom Stone books and read in amazon that the fifth one is in the making. Are the books stand alone stories or a series?

Each novel can be read by itself as a complete story. The first three novels fit together quite well to create a whole while the fourth one is comprehensive. We draw on the earlier stories a bit but it's definitely standalone.

Share with our readers a brief summary of each book and where to buy them.

Each novel is available on Amazon. Click on the title for the link.

Tom Stone: A Nitty Gritty Christmas

Tom Stone chases a wanna-be drug lord through a maze of Los Angeles neighborhoods, trying to discover who's using candy to smuggle cocaine. Stone finds himself trapped, facing certain death at the very hands of the men he was hunting.

Tom Stone: Sweltering Summer Nights

Two murders and a cocaine trail threaten dreams of riches for Anthony Angelino, owner of the High Tide marijuana dispensary in East Hollywood. He was arrested by Tom Stone on suspicion of smuggling cocaine, but the courts set him free. The drug cartel that he double-crossed is angry. When Stone's high school-age daughter is found browsing in the High Tide, Stone starts tracking Angelino and learns the price of betrayal.

Tom Stone: Day of the Dead

Multiple murders with one grisly connection have Detectives Tom Stone and Jake Sharpe pursuing every lead. Their main suspect, Anthony Angelino dreams of a new empire, but his past catches up.

Halloween twists into Day of the Dead celebrations on Santa Monica pier as cocaine's promised riches weave a tale of bloody betrayal, shattered friendships, and loves both lost—and won.

Tom Stone: One Shot, One Kill

The wealthy of Los Angeles are targets in this gripping thriller novel.

Detective Tom Stone hunts for a vigilante sniper dishing out revenge among the city's wealthy who finance the flow of drugs into the city. A blood-thirsty drug cartel emerges and fights for supremacy as the powerful are toppled.

5. Now let us talk about your journalism experiences. Under this umbrella you have done: Brand Journalism, Ghost Writing, and Marketing Content. For those readers who are not familiar with these terms, please give us a brief description of each. Do you considered your journalism expertise led you to those opportunities?

My love for crafting stories and messages led me to the various directions my writing has taken. My first job was in radio news in State College, PA after internships in Pittsburgh.

Brand Journalism is a newer term that fits me well. When I write blogs or ghostwrite a book for a client, I dig into the topic using questions like a journalist and then consider how the client's brand meets the needs of the potential customer/client.

Ghost Writing is writing books or blogs using the voice and the persona of the client. I did this writing radio scripts years ago for one founder of a nonprofit. I ghostwrote a book for a dental specialist who works with cancer patients. My fiction work gives me the ability to think like the client and write in their voice.

Marketing Content is the text, images and videos used in crafting everything from brochures and press releases to blogs and books.

6. How would you define excellent journalist? Fake news has spread like wild fire with social media and other online venues, how can a reader and/or viewer is able to sort out the “fake” from the “truth” when news is based on sensationalism?

Quality journalism looks at both sides of an issue while trying to let the reader or viewer determine their own conclusion. Sadly, that’s totally vanished with the array of political and social debates occurring.

Be wary of sensational sounding headlines. Try to skim stories for facts that don’t sound like opinions and then check another source from a different viewpoint.

You have to do your own research.

Is the following statement from BBC News food for thoughts or an admission of guilt? “BBC News we don't report the news. We make the news.”

That quote really does push the credibility but the BBC is seen as a high standard for journalism around the globe. So the context may not make it seem as partisan as we see in U.S. society today.

7. Ghostwriting is an art which some people categorized as a business transaction while others tend to label it as “immoral” Where do you draw the line? Would you recommend it to others? The darkside of ghostwriting?

I’ve ghostwritten radio scripts for the founder of a nonprofit, blogs for various companies and health professionals and I ghostwrote a book for a dentist who works with cancer patients. I take the knowledge and convictions in their minds and write it out for them. I become their voice.

It’s a matter of helping them achieve an end—and that is, completing a book or greater reach through blogs.

It’s perfectly ethical because I’m sticking to who they are and I’m not embellishing any accomplishments and I’m not plagiarizing from other sources.

I think ghostwriting fiction is odd, which brings up another point. The author James Patterson has released about 144 novels at last count. He’s written with other authors and I wonder how many books with just his name on them may be the works of others that he’s overseen and supervised.

In either case, the client is in charge and has to approve the end product. I would imagine Patterson would be supervising quite closely so it stays close to his style.

I definitely recommend someone who has a message brewing in them but doesn’t have the time or expertise to lay it all out to consider hiring a ghostwriter. The writer will interview and should be able to know the client well in order to capture voice and mannerisms and the use of analogies.

For my dental client, he had a dry sense of humor so I incorporated that.

Ghostwriting could be immoral or unethical if I, as the writer, am making outrageous claims as though it’s my client talking and neither one of us cares. But that could also be the ethics line being crossed by a PR firm in creating any type of content.

8. Now we leave the writing behind and move on to your vocal cords. You are also a voice-over narrator. How did you get started and what are some of the requirements to be best in the market? Share with us one blooper and your best recording experience.

My “voice” experience comes from hosting a radio spot series for 22 years along with introducing segments for some CD products. I’ve narrated industrial content for health products and nonprofit videos.

Voice acting is completely different and, although I’ve done some acting, I’ve not marketed myself as a voice actor.

My step in that direction is to record audiobooks of our novels.

Audiophile magazine is a good place to start for discovering standards.

A friend of mine who is a nationally recognized voice talent told me to write out the lines of radio commercials and do those with different voices. Listen to the familiar voices, highlight the material in the copy that needs its own unique expression and bring in your personality.

9. Would you agree with me that voice-over narration is a heavily misunderstood and underpaid business for beginners and/or not famous actors? For those readers considering getting into this business, what are some of the do's, the don'ts and the myths associated with it? Is it profitable?

With today’s technology much can be done from home if you live outside the major markets. I think it’s like any form of communication. Your audience as a narrator or voice actor are the casting directors or marketing pros who work through ad agencies or directly with corporate clients.

You need to honestly compare yourself and know the extent of your abilities and have a platform where others can listen to your samples.

Practice and consistency are key. Knowing the ins-and-outs of unions like AFTRA and non-union work is essential. Good places to start include hosting podcasts reading audio books on LibriVox.

It’s a niche industry and can be very profitable.

10. How our readers can contact you?

Contact me through my website, social media and email.

Web: www.donsimkovich.com

Twitter: @donsimko

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/don.simkovich

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/donsimkovich/

Amazon: Don Simkovich

11. A word of advice to creative readers who are trying to define themselves.

(did you mean creative writers? – I've answered two ways)

Creative readers trying to define themselves will enjoy their genre and begin doing book reviews. Those help the author immensely.

Creative writers should aim to master a genre or style of writing and produce a body of work in that genre or style. I believe in branching out but it's tough to do. It's in my nature to be a generalist and not many can or should do my approach.

"Creative" can mean so many things whether it's memoir writing, human interest journalism or fiction. Take where your interest is strongest and develop a reputation in that area.

Your questions are wonderfully insightful, Tannia.

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *El Espejo de mi Alma* (BoD 2015) .
Author's website: timewithtannia.com **Stock photography website:**
https://www.bigstockphoto.com/search/?contributor=Boricua63&safesearch=n
Gift Shop: http://www.zazzle.com/teolpuertorico

READERS' COMMENTS:

Date Received:	January 8, 2020
Name:	Tannia
Comments:	"Your questions are wonderfully insightful, Tannia. " Thanks for that compliment. It was a pleasure to interview you. I learned a lot and know my readers share my opinion. Keep it up!

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