

*Elizabeth George*

68: Writing Psychological Suspense

Gabriela Pereira: Hello, and welcome to DIY MFA Radio, the show that will help you write more, write better, write smarter. I'm Gabriela Pereira, instigator of DIY MFA, and your host for this podcast. Now, let's talk writing.

Hello. Hello, word nerds. Gabriela here, and I cannot wait to share today's episode with you. Today, I am talking to Elizabeth George, who is a writer of Psychological Suspense. In this interview, we are going to talk about her process; everything from how she develops her characters, to how she handles point of view, to how she finds and researches her settings for her books.

So, listen in because she gives a lot of really interesting nuggets of information on the how-to side of writing. Before we dive into today's episode, I wanted to remind you that the show notes are over at diymfa.com/068, because it's Episode 68. Now, without further ado, here's that interview.

Hello. Hello, word nerds. Gabriela here, and welcome back to DIY MFA Radio. I am so excited for today's interview with Elizabeth George. Here's a little bit about her before we get started.

Elizabeth George is the author of highly acclaimed novels of Psychological Suspense. She has won a ton of awards; and her latest book, *A Banquet of Consequences*, is out right now.

Today, we're going to be talking about her process in writing this book and in crafting this really awesome book of Psychological Suspense and Mystery. So, welcome, Elizabeth. How are you?

Elizabeth George: I'm fine. And it's great to be here. Thank you for-- Thank you for having me.

GP: It's my pleasure. I cannot wait to pick your brain about this awesome book. So, let's just dive on in, shall we?

EG: Sure.

GP: So, one of the things-- So, as you may already know, DIY MFA is a Do-It-Yourself alternative to a Master's in Writing. And so, I work with a lot of students around the world; student writers who are hoping to, eventually, publish their books.

One of the things that we talk about a lot is the introduction of their characters. Like, when do you introduce the character in the book? When do you hold back a character? One of the things I thought was really fascinating with *A Banquet of Consequences* is that the main characters – the detectives in this book – don't show up for quite some time in the beginning.

So, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, sort of your decision in holding these characters back a little bit – and, sort of, the thought process, why you structured things the way you did.



EG: Sure, I'm happy to do that. You know, really, novels can begin in three different places; they can begin at the beginning, before the beginning, and after the beginning. And in this particular novel, I decided to begin it before the beginning, which is something that I don't do very often.

What the reader sees is the backstory, and that's why the first section of the book is called 39 Months Before. So, usually, the backstory of a novel is something that the reader discovers in a crime novel, for example, through the investigation that occurs.

But because the backstory of this novel is really critical to the reader's growing understanding of the personality of one of the characters, I decided to actually investigate the backstory first.

So, that necessitates really meeting a great number of characters in there, and getting to know their circumstances prior to any crime occurring and prior to the first visit that they have with the main characters... I mean, by the continuing characters who are the criminalists.

GP: And that I thought was really fascinating because, you know, usually in a crime novel, it starts with the crime, right? Like that's kind of the – I don't want to say 'formula', because there's no real formula for writing, but usually, there's either a body or some sort of big crime, right?

You know, the book starts with a bang; and this book really kind of builds up to that. So, how do you do that? Like, how, as a writer-- I mean, clearly, this isn't the first book in your series, so it was a calculated decision to do it this way. What motivated you to sort of build up more slowly as opposed to, sort of, starting with the 'big bang', as it were?

EG: I think it was because, you know, if I look back and say, 'Okay, what was that-- What was that decision?' Well, I think it allows you to have a lot more compassion for some of the characters and a greater understanding of ultimately what's behind everything else that happens in the book.

But the key here I think is compassion; that I think it's important for the reader to see William Goldacre and see what afflicts him in those initial scenes – you know, part of what happens to William. And if you were just to hear about that, it wouldn't have nearly the impact it does, is to be involved with him for a while first.

GP: Exactly. And you know, it's interesting too because I noticed that there's also a lot of compassion for all of the supporting casts. Like we get into each of their heads at some point. Like we get into William's head – we get into Lily's head, at the beginning – we also get into Caroline's head, the mother-figure, and she's a really interesting, complex character. Can you talk a little bit about her?

EG: Yeah. I think the reader discovers fairly early on that Caroline Goldacre certainly hasn't been the ideal mother, and it's not the ideal mother-in-law or ideal friend or wife or any of those things. And that she's-- She's pretty, you know-- She's got some pretty troubling aspects to her character that are revealed over time.

And so, really what I wanted to take a look at was a particular kind of personality disorder that a human being can have. And in this case, the personality disorder was what's called borderline personality. I wanted to see that play out as to-- I wanted the reader to see how something like borderline personality plays out in the relationships that person would have with other people.

And that's what you are seeing as Caroline moves through the book and you see her relationships with her son – Charlie – and with his estranged wife, India; and of course, with Clare Abbott...



whom Caroline works for, and with Clare's assistant and Caroline's husband and her former husband too. So, there's a huge number of people that she's had an effect on; and that's part of what we're looking at in the book.

GP: It's interesting how you talk about how she's had an effect, because I, sort of, see her as being like the pebble in the middle of like the ripples that kind of ripple out in the story; and she just sort of affects everyone around her, which is really kind of fascinating.

EG: Yeah. And Sharon, you know, that's really the-- What happens with mental illness is that the person who is ill has this enormous impact on everyone around them. And generally, what happens is that the system in which the ill person is begins to function around the ill person instead of acting as independent individuals pursuing their own lives because there's a sense that somehow everything has to be taken care of to appease the person who's ill.

GP: Right. And it's interesting too because Caroline has her sort of complexity, but Will also is struggling with a different type of challenge. Can you talk a little bit about that, and, sort of, how you developed his character?

EG: Yeah, sure. Well, you know, Will has several problems as well. One of his problems has been his inability to actually work with other people in a way that's productive and in a partnership – and because of that, he has really had a lot of personal failures in business.

He's a very talented landscape garden designer, but he can't, he can't work in conjunction with a client. He just has to-- He has to have a situation where he's allowed to pursue his own vision; and if he's allowed to do that, it'll actually come out quite beautifully.

But his, you know, most clients don't want to give carte blanche to someone who's working on their property; so that's been a huge problem for him. Additionally, you know, on top of that problem, he has a psychopathological difficulty called coprolalia, in which the person under stress begins to speak in kind of a, not a nonsense language.

The words are all identifiable, but it's a spewing force of, kind of, nonsense sentences that intermingle with a lot of foul language; and under extreme stress, that's what he starts doing. And they call it the-- His family calls it the wording. And so, he's afflicted with that as well.

GP: And it's interesting too, because they're tiptoeing around him as well as Caroline's own challenges.

EG: Yeah.

GP: It's an interesting sort of-- Oh, go ahead.

EG: No, I'm just going to say, so you can imagine the pressure is placed upon Caroline's husband, Alistair, because he's taken on this woman and her greatly disturbed son; and you know, that's been his life choice, but it has been enormously challenging.

GP: Absolutely. And then, of course, the brother, Charlie, is an interesting and also complex character because he's a psychotherapist, a psychiatrist – both?

EG: He's a psychotherapist.

GP: So, you know, he's kind of-- In some ways, it's almost like he's compensating for the fact that he's been surrounded by this in his life and trying to fix other people. But of course, he can't fix the people closest to him, so he's an interesting character. How did you, kind of, develop his character?

EG: Well, as with all my characters, I create them in advance. So, I knew that Charlie was going to be a psychotherapist and that he was going to be deeply, deeply affected by his brother's death and his failure to, not only his failure to save his brother – but ultimately, his failure to recognize what was at the core of his brother's suffering.

And because of that, he himself now has encountered sort of a combination of crippling guilt and crippling grief that have rendered him useless as a psychotherapist – and ultimately, have cost him his marriage. Because after two years of him not being able to move forward in his life past his grief, his wife just can't stand it anymore and leaves him. So, he's dealing with that as well.

GP: Right. So, you know, it's interesting too because we've talked a bit about the, I guess, the criminalists, as you referred to them – like the ones who are being investigate-d, but the investigators are also really interesting; and these are the recurring characters in your series, correct?

EG: Uh-huh.

GP: Like Thomas Lynley and Barbara Havers. So, Barbara is struggling with sort of her own issues, and she certainly seems – I haven't read your previous books – but the setup, obviously, is that she is different in this book than she has been. Can you talk a little bit about the decision to give her this new sort of attitude-makeover, and also how that's impacted the book?

EG: Sure. In the book that precedes *A Banquet of Consequences*, Barbara has become embroiled in a situation in Italy. And she has next-door neighbors who she's become involved with over the years. And the daughter of the next-door neighbor has been taken by her mother to Italy. Although initially they don't know that's where she is; they just know that she has disappeared.

But what happens is that she, this little girl becomes, is kidnapped in Italy from a marketplace in the town of Lucca, and that then sets Barbara up to go to Italy. And when she does this, she goes to Italy without leave to do so, and gets in huge trouble. Before doing that, she has given information to a really scurrilous London tabloid.

And so, as a police person giving information to this London tabloid; she's in big trouble for doing that. So, she's got this double-problem at the end of that book; she's in real trouble with her superior officers.

So, when *A Banquet of Consequences* opens, what Barbara has been doing is absolutely 100% toeing the line so that she doesn't get transferred to the north of England. But the problem in toeing the line is that she's sort of just become this 'yes person', and she doesn't offer any kind of ideas or arguments against what anybody else is proposing about a given case.

So, she's really become less than use useful as a police officer and what her partner Lynley wants to do, and as he is encouraged by the departmental secretary Dorothea Herman, what he wants to do is to bring Havers back to using her brain correctly without going off the rails again.

So, he's in a-- He's in a delicate position of trying to get her back where she once was, and Barbara herself is in a delicate position of being able to use her head without her heart intruding.



GP: You know, and it's interesting too because one of the things that struck me going, back to the very beginning of our discussion, the fact that you hold back Barbara and Thomas Lynley, in some ways, it's almost like that reflects the fact that she has sort of tucked her head down in this book – that she's not like 'in your face' on the very first page of the book.

It sort of reflects this new facet of her personality, which I thought really kind of worked so well for both her character development and also for introducing the story – you know, the criminalist first. Were you thinking about things in those terms when you were holding her back?

EG: No, no. No, not at all. That's pretty cool though that you saw it that way. No, no. I wasn't. I was just thinking about where I wanted to begin the story, where was the natural place to begin it? So, everything, anything else beyond that was really unconscious on my part.

GP: Well, it worked really well; I really enjoyed that aspect of it. Another thing that struck me is sort of the different facets of feminism in this book. So, like, it's not a book about feminism, right? But it's certainly there's a lot of feminism and a lot of, like, commentary on sort of the different women characters because you have the main, you know – Abbott, I forget her first name, does she--

EG: Clare Abbott. Clare.

GP: Yeah, Clare Abbott. You know, she's a big feminist author. And then you have these other-- You know, you have Barbara who is sort of tucking her head down at the beginning of the book – and then you have her friend, the secretary of the department, secretary who's sort of the polar opposite and very, like, pretty and charming, kind of, girly-girl.

So, it's very interesting how you sort of pulled out all these different-- I mean, were you thinking in terms of like the sort of like, what were-- How did that work, like when you were pulling together the different female characters, and did that tie into the idea of Clare being a feminist author? Or did it just sort of coincide?

EG: No, I think it just coincided. I was not really conscious of that. Dorothy Herriman is one of the continuing characters in the novels; and from the very beginning, she's been this sort of fashion plate who is very interested in – what otherwise might be considered – the superficial aspects of being a female.

So, you know, she loves clothes, she loves hairstyles, she dresses to the nines. She's, you know, always perfectly turned out, a great fan of those members of the royal family who actually dress decently.

You know, those kinds of things have defined her really from the very first moment that she was created, which – I think her first appearance is in 1988 in the first book. But I'm not positive about that. So, she was already, you know, set in position. And you know, I really didn't-- Oh, sorry.

GP: Although I was going to say that she does get a little bit of a, like, you add some depths to her though. Like when they go on that shopping trip, like that first shopping trip that the two go together, I thought it was interesting because she is very much, you know, dressed to the nines and whatnot – but then we sort of learn there's a twist to it.

There's, she shops in like, you know, these 'discount market' kind of places and not these fancy boutiques. So, we kind of get like, there's a little something else going on with her too, so I thought that was really cool.



EG: Oh, sure. Yeah, because she's-- You know, she's this fashion plate, but she's managed to do it on a secretary salary from Scotland Yard, which, of course, is, you're not going to be able to go into any designer shops with that, but she's figured out a way to shop in the open-air markets in London.

And that open-air market actually exists, and those are the prices, the price in the book is the prices that I saw on the garments there. And what she's figured out is how to-- You know, she puts it, 'It's just amazing what a steam iron and changing out buttons can do for an outfit.'

So, she would-- You know, when she's spending any higher amount of money, she's spending it on buttons to put onto these different outfits that she has bought. And so, that, plus ironing them really well makes them look completely different. So, she's very clever and she's very resourceful.

GP: Absolutely. And I think it's, you know, that sort of is what fascinated me with this book is that, like I was mentioning earlier, you know, it's not a book about feminism other than the main, you know, Clare Abbott being a feminist author.

But that we get these very complex views of the female characters, that there's definitely a lot of layers going on with them, which I think really makes them interesting and pop off the page that, you know, this girly girl character is also, you know, not just a fashion plate, that she is resourceful, that she is clever, that she has all these like, other things going on in her life. So, I thought that was really fascinating-- go ahead.

EG: Because you know-- Oh, go ahead.

GP: No, no, please.

EG: No, I was just going to say-- I was just going to say that that's really kind of an interesting way to look at it, because I've actually never thought about it that way. You know, ultimately, I'm just trying to write a good novel. But when I look--

When you look at it from the terms, you know, just as female characters portraying various aspects of being a woman, then, you know, I can look at that and see, 'Well, yeah, I mean actually every possible kind of female woman is -- you know, a female woman -- every kind of woman is sort of depicted in the books in that.'

So, you have Dorothy Herman, you know, the Girly Girl -- and you have Rory, the editor, who really has been in love with Clare Abbott for years and who's herself is recovering from a terrible crime that was committed against her.

And then you have Clare, the feminists, and then you have motherhood depicted through Caroline Goldacre. So, it's a really kind of like every possible permutation of what it is to be female in western civilization is being looked at right now.

GP: Exactly. And let's not forget the sort of surrogate daughter characters. You have India, who's kind of in the 'perfect surrogate daughter' or trying to be, and how Caroline sort of imposed that role on her. And then, you have Lily, who's kind of been rebelling against that role the short time that she's with William or Will.

EG: Yeah, exactly.

GP: So, it's really-- I thought it was really kind of cool how you touched on feminism without writing about feminism. Like I thought it was just really kind of neat the way you did that. So, let's talk about the men now. Let's talk about the guys because they're definitely--

I mean, clearly, they're a lot of male characters in this book, but they're also very complex in different ways. We've talked about William and Charlie – but Alastair really fascinated me, sort of his decision to take on this family that for better or for worse, often worse, has a lot of issues. How did that character come to you?

EG: Well, in the character of Alistair, I wanted to explore what happens to someone – in this case, a man – whose sense of self has been diminished by the difference in what he thought he was going to do with his life and what he ended up doing with his life.

So, Alistair had pictured himself becoming, you know, this career army officer, possibly a member of the SAS, really being this great heroic figure and taking on the bad guys, but he has a disability – in that, one of his legs is shorter than the other, and that precludes his involvement with the military.

So, he's had to kind of create a self that isn't the self he thought that he would end up with. So, he feels as a result, less than, and because he feels less than, it makes him really vulnerable to Caroline Goldacre's advance upon him because she's quite beautiful and extremely sexy.

And so, all of a sudden, you know, here he is at what the British call a pantomime, which is a sort of a Christmas pageant that they do every year, in all over England.

And he's there with, I think, his nieces and nephews; and, you know, at the bar in the interval getting a drink and is approached by this really beautiful woman who engages him in conversation; and he is completely vulnerable to that because he has such a low sense of who he really is. And so, now we get to look at what that has done to his life as well.

GP: Exactly. And you know, the other thing too is sort of how he – I mean, the whole – what he decides to do with his life, like taking on this family, the whole bakery thing – and like sort of becoming almost like a baker, not celebrity, I'm trying to think--

Like a little-- He has like a little baking empire at this point, you know, later in the book, with multiple shops and everything, when clearly, that wasn't really what he had anticipated for himself. So, the characters--

One of the things that I really love about the characters in this book is how they're deeply flawed; and yet, still really sympathetic. And, you know, you've talked about this a little bit at the beginning, sort of the compassion element – but in terms of nuts and bolts, one of the things I noticed was that it was really about the point of view.

Like the fact that we could get into the different characters' heads allows us to sort of process the world around them the way they would process it. So, is this something that you do, and that you've done in the previous novels – like the multiple point of view from all the different characters? Is this something new? Can you talk about that?

EG: No. No, no. I've always-- I always did multiple viewpoints. I started out with my very first novel, doing that. So, I use a third-person shifting point of view. So, what that allows me to do is not only to explore characters in greater depth, but see the scene through the character's eyes and influenced by the character's attitude toward the events and toward the other characters.



So, that adds a richness to it that wouldn't otherwise be there if I was just having every scene seen through the eyes of a single character. It also makes plotting a complicated novel easier – in that, you don't have to have your main character on stage all the time because you have these other viewpoint characters.

So, the plotting becomes easier, but then so, the reader's ability to learn and attach to the lives of the characters becomes enriched because they're actually inside the character's head. So, that was one of the reasons why I made that decision early-on to use multiple viewpoints.

GP: I love it. And you know, it's cool too because there are definitely a few scenes where we don't see-- I don't think we see many scenes where it's the exact same scene from different characters' points of view, but we'll see like one scene and then it kind of picks up in the next, like the next moment in a different character's point of view.

And what that does, which is I think really awesome, is that it kind of allows the character's perceptions of the same moment to be in conflict. So, like, one character kind of sees themselves in one light and sort of the situation in a particular light – but then when it shifts to the other character's point of view, we kind of see that, like it wasn't quite what that first character saw it as.

And so, that also, I think, kind of allows-- It sort of creates that tension, which I thought was really exciting and interesting.

EG: I appreciate that.

GP: So, how do you keep track of all that-- Like, how do you keep track of that stuff? Yeah.

EG: Yeah. What I do is I have a document that I create as I go along, and I call it the chapter summaries. And what it does is it tells me as I've written the chapter, I list for myself the things that occurred in that chapter and from each character's point of view.

So, I have that to refer to as I build the novel, I can look back and see, 'Oh, okay, you know, he thought this or she thought that, or this happened or that happened, and that will influence what happens next.'

But if I didn't have that document and if I didn't keep adding to that document as I went along, I would just forget tons and tons of stuff. And so, it really makes the process of writing a complicated novel a lot easier than it otherwise would be.

GP: Absolutely. I mean, you mentioned that it makes the plotting easier in terms of, you know, because like logically, you can take the reader where the reader needs to go – but I would imagine it probably makes the writing a little bit more complicated because you have to keep all of these different chess pieces, sort of, you know, on the board--

EG: Well, yeah.

GP: -so you know where everyone is.

EG: Yeah. Yeah. And, part of the purpose of the chapter summaries is that I can see with a glance what has gone before; and what has gone before determines what's going to happen next in the ensuing scenes because, you know, I'm trying to set the whole thing up so that it's – you have



causality with one scene causing another scene to happen somewhere along the line, but it's impossible to do that if you forget what the preliminary scenes were.

So, that document really helps. It really, really helps doing, doing that; and I don't have to continue to look back in the manuscript to find out what was going on.

GP: Love it. And, in terms-- I mean, you mentioned that this book is different from your previous ones in that you did give a lot of backstory at the beginning. Do you tend to-- Do you skip time like that? Like, in this book you kind of had, you know, 39 Months Before, and then we kind of skipped to the present. Have you done something like that in your previous book, or was this new and how do you deal with timeline jumps in your writing?

EG: I've done some-- I've done unusual things with time in previous books, but not-- The way I've done it has been a little bit different. For example, in a book called *A Traitor to Memory*, there is, you have the main story that's going on, and then you also have the journal entries being made by this young man under psychiatric care.

And the journal entries actually predate the book itself, but you do have to read the dates to see that; and sometimes people just sort of ignore the dates and that could lead to some serious confusion about who knew what when. That was deliberate on my part because I wanted the, you know, I wanted the journal to go back in time and then catch us up to the present time.

So, I've done-- I've done that sort of thing, that sort of thing before playing around with time like that. But I have-- I don't think I have expended quite as much energy and as much time on the backstory as I did in this book.

You know, in a book called *Missing Joseph*, I have, it begins in three different, you know, and there's three different periods that begin the book; it's I think it's called November... it's November: The Rain, December The Fog, January-- No, or something like that – no, I think it's--

Anyway, so it's November, December, and then the main book begins in January. So, you have these two months prior and what happens in those two months, and that's critical to an understanding of why the characters go to the north of England.

And so, you needed that as an explanation of why they're up in this particular area of England when the book, when the main story starts. So, I've done that kind of thing before, but not to this extent.

GP: Gotcha. So, let's talk a little bit about process, because this kind of ties into what I was wondering. You know, when you're writing, whether it's with timeline jumps or with the interlocking journals or what have you, do you write in chronological order or do you write in like book order? Or do you skip around all over the place?

EG: I write in book order. So, although there have been times when I've realized that although there's going to be, let's say, a journal – in this book, in whatever book – that I have to, at a certain point, just write the journal to the very end of the journal, even though it won't be in one big piece like that when it appears in the book.

So, I always start out writing chronologically – always – and most of my books are, they're all chronological anyway, so I go right to the end of the novel in chronological order, but sometimes there's the interjection of a second piece of a second literary device and that I may write in its entirety and then insert later on.



So, I did that with *A Traitor to Memory* with the journal. I did it with the long letter to Inspector Lynley, that is the secondary document in *Playing for the Ashes*. And I did it with the sociologist report in *This Body of Death*.

In the case of each of those, the reader comes along and reads part of the journal or part of the report and then goes on with the regular novel. And it's only until the end that you're able to figure out why that's there.

GP: Gotcha. That's really tough because if you're-- I mean, I guess it makes sense if you write the whole journal or the whole document, but like, I would never be able to wrap my head around writing the pieces to fit into the book.

EG: Yeah. That's why, yeah. Yeah. That's why, I've only been able to carry it so far. Like usually, I could get about 150 pages, let's say, into that secondary document – the journal, the report, whatever it was. And I'm, you know, going back and forth between that and the novel.

So, it's, I'm writing it as it would appear in the final manuscript – but usually about 150 pages into that secondary document, I have to stop and just finish the secondary document; and then put it in, you know, when it comes up in the main book. So, I've never been able to do a thing where I go back and forth throughout the entire time of writing the book. It doesn't work for me. If that makes sense.

GP: Yeah, I would imagine it would be-- No, it makes total sense. I would imagine it would be really hard because you also want the pieces of the journal or whatever the secondary document is to fit and reflect the pieces of the dramatic action that's happening around it. So, like, it's hard to attain that.

EG: Yeah. Then the tricky bit then is to insert the document into the manuscript afterwards and figure out where it best fits. The toughest one for me was the sociologist's report in *This Body of Death*, that was just, ugh – that was really, really tough to put into the rest of the novel to find the logical places for it. It was really difficult, but I finally managed it.

GP: That's awesome. So, what does-- What's a day in the writing life of Elizabeth George look like?

EG: Well, they're all pretty much the same. You know, when I'm at home working-- I'm on book tour right now, so I'm not doing, I'm not working on a novel. But usually, what it is, is I get up quite early usually around 5:00 in the morning and sometimes at 4:30.

I begin my day with exercise and then go over to my office which is close to the house, but not part of the house – I have an office upstairs. It's really above the garage. It's a really nice big space because it comprises my office and my assistant's office; and it also has a small kitchen and a bathroom, and so I can be up there for many, many hours undisturbed.

So, I usually get over to my office about, probably about 6:00, and I'm there in the office usually until about noon. And during that time, I'm working on my novel, and I'm also taking a break and using the break to study Italian.

And I do that until, you know, until about noon when I go back, over to the house, finish my workout, get ready for... and then get ready for the rest of my day. So, the rest of my day usually begins the time I've eaten lunch and stuff... usually begins about two o'clock in the afternoon.



GP: Cool. It's always fascinating to me, sort of, different writers' processes and like-- Waking up early is like a recurring theme of something that a lot of writers talk about that sort of helps you kind of get the day going. So, as we get close to wrapping up this interview, what's next for you? Do you have any new projects coming up?

EG: Yeah, I've just completed the fourth of my Young Adult novels. And it is now in production in New York. And then, when I'm finished with the book tour, I will at that point, begin the next Lynley novel, which will take place in Shropshire, which is northwest of London. That will be the next project, and that will then occupy me probably for the next 18 months.

GP: Very cool, and how do-- You're writing Young Adult novels and then also the Lynley novels, like, is it tough to shift from one universe to another?

EG: The shift to Young Adult novel was extraordinarily difficult, but the difficulties were not so much about story, but they were about point of view and structure – well, really, point of view, largely – because what I didn't understand in making the movement to Young Adult is that the young adults alone have to fuel the action in the story.

And while there can be adults in the story – and that was my determination was that I would have adult characters – and while the adults interact with the kids, it's the kids themselves who move the story forward. And I didn't understand that initially when I began the Young Adult process and had to learn that through not only trial-and-error, but also complete rewrites of the novels that I was doing.

GP: That's really fascinating. So, what motivated you to go into writing Young Adult, in addition? I mean, this came up fairly more recently than the Lynley novels, right?

EG: Yeah, yeah, correct.

GP: So, what motivated you to make that shift?

EG: Well, there really was a dual motivation. The first was that I had read the first of the Stephenie Meyer's books – the Twi-- what I called the Twilight books. And I had just read, the only one I had read was Twilight. And it was because there was so much hoop plot that this was a number of years ago.

And when I read the book, I realized that that the author had never been to the Pacific Northwest, despite the fact that she was actually writing about it. And, you know, you could tell. I mean, because I had been to Forks, so I knew what Forks was like; and her forks, the Forks that she had in the book wasn't anything like the real Forks.

And so, that got me thinking about the idea of setting a book in the Pacific Northwest, making it a Young Adult book, having it in an actual location – in this case, Langley Washington.

But using the actual Langley to write the book so that if people read the book and came to Langley, they would see exactly what the book says is there. You know, they would see-- We have this old abandoned tavern called The Dog House. Well, it's been listed as a historic building, so it's still there and it will continue to be there.

And, part of the action, the book takes place in that building – so that's there. You know, the pizzeria is there, the motel is there. I mean, everything, everything is exactly as it's depicted in the



book. I thought that would be fun for people to be able to go to a place, see it, and actually walk in the footsteps of the characters. And so, that was a secondary reason as well.

GP: That's really cool because, and it sort of ties back to *A Banquet of Consequences*, and the idea that setting really is a crucial element to *A Banquet of Consequences* as well. I mean, the different settings within London, and then the settings up in Dorset as well are very, you know, they pop off the page. So, how do you research settings for the Lynley books?

EG: I have always gone to the location to do the research. I've never been-- Well, of course, when I began writing, there was no internet. So, you know, I was going to say, I've never been an internet writer or a Wikipedia writer or anything like that. Those things didn't exist when I first started attempting these novels, which was in 1983.

And so, if you wanted to have write realistically about a place in England, then you know, it behooved you to go to that place. So, what I would do, and what I continue to do, because it really works for me, is to select a location, go do a preliminary trip there to check it out, to see if it'll work for me.

And then go back and explore the location more thoroughly so that I can get not only a working knowledge of what the place is like – but also, I will be able just to describe it in such a way that the reader will get a real good sense of the place and see it even as a place they might want to go visit because that was-- I love that in books. I love it when a writer makes the place so real to me that I want to go to that place.

GP: Exactly.

EG: As a matter of fact, I did a book signing last night where a woman-- Oh yeah, she read about Lucca, Italy – which is in my book, that takes place in Italy – and found it so fascinating that she went there to see what it was like, and she said, Oh my God, yeah, it was exactly the way-- exactly the way you described it." So, that was great. But you can't do that unless you go there.

GP: Absolutely. And that's really high praise to have someone be so inspired by a book you've written that they want to travel to the place; like, that's so cool. It's really cool.

EG: Thank you. It's really cool.

GP: I always end each interview with the same question, what is your number one tweetable tip for writers?

EG: My number one tweetable tip for writers is suit up and show up. In other words, you have to, you have to-- You have to suit up and show up at your computer or your tablet or whatever it is, if you're going to succeed in this in this world of writing, and you have to do it daily,

GP: Love it. Could not have said it better myself. Thank you so much for being on the show. This was a fantastic interview. I had a blast chatting with you.

EG: Thanks very much.

GP: All right, word nerds, thank you so much for listening. Keep writing and keep being awesome.

