

# Reader Views

Book reviews, for readers, by readers.

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Interview with Mike Johnson  
Author of “Blonde to the Bone”

Mike Johnson’s book, “Blonde to the Bone,” has just been released this week (2/27/06). We are proud to be able to interview Mike in all his excitement. Welcome to Reader Views, Mike.

Irene: “Blonde to the Bone” was just published this week. This is exciting news. Tell our readers the gist of the story.

Mike: Leo Calvet, a fashion magnate, disappears. Daniele and Michele, his feuding, beautiful twin daughters, embark on a baffling journey to find him, following surreptitious clues. Things are not as real as they seem when Michele’s fiancé, Rick, vanishes right before their eyes and the sun stands still. The search takes the sisters, Rick and Jack – Daniele’s “date” – on an extraordinary quest from Washington D.C. to Paris where they discover a terrorist conspiracy to topple the Eiffel Tower. In the course of the adventure, the sisters uncover the truth about their rivalry while each falls in love with the other’s man.

Irene: “Blonde to the Bone” is your second published novel. What inspired you to write it?

Mike: I could say that it was the full moon on a beautiful August night in San Diego. That night in the backyard I had already decided that I was ready to begin another project, and while staring at the moon Blonde to the Bone just came to me – of course it was a take-off on George Thorogood’s song, Bad to the Bone. I just liked the title. Sounded fun. So you could say I reverse-engineered a story that I thought would fit the title, but with enough depth to keep it out of the slapstick comedy arena.

Irene: Although this book is entertaining, it also gives a unique approach to familial problem solving. What was your mission to include this approach in the book?

Mike: No real mission there. My primary intention for the book was entertainment. Something to give the reader a mini-vacation. Just fun. Beyond that, I suppose you could say that I wanted my characters to be “good” and “loving” people. The world will never have too much of people caring for each other, and in my novels I espouse those virtues. But anyone who reads the book will know that the approach presented is impossible considering the current state of technology. I would like to think that Leo is acting like any loving father: willing to go to any extreme to ensure his daughter’s happiness and well-being. I actually worried quite a bit that many readers would hold his approach

against him. Personally I wouldn't advocate spying on one's adult children in order to learn the truth – but it sure would feel good, wouldn't it?

Irene: How did you create the characters in your book?

Mike: I create them on demand. A writer has to ask, "Who needs to be in this book?" With *Blonde to the Bone* for a title, I thought I needed a beautiful young naïve woman (isn't that who we would normally associate with such a phrase?), and thought the idea of identical twins would be much more fun to work with than one character. Thus Michele and Daniele came to life. They are actually the same person with a juxtaposition of internal decisions about two plausible paths to be taken in life by the same individual. Michele chose one way and Daniele the other, from basically the same *Tabla Rosa*. Naturally, any light, entertaining story needs some romance, so Rick and Jack came around. But what was happening? The characters needed problems to be solved. Although I wanted the book to be fun, life is full of serious problems. I think Daniele's problem is probably fairly widespread at one level or another, and something that a great many female readers would understand at a depth of experience beyond my own. I had no intention of making light of what I'm sure are very serious issues for many women, but I do believe that the ability to laugh at life's problems, even the serious ones, makes for a more healthy mental state. And I like to think that most men, as they age and have children, are loving like Leo, and would like to find a means to resolve their daughter's issues. Thus Leo was the catalyst to resolving the conflict. Other characters come and go as needed – though I think I fell in love with Valerie! (Don't tell my wife...)

Irene: How much of "real-life" is there in this book? Is there much of you in "Blonde to the Bone?"

Mike: How can there not be? Writing, especially novels, comes from one's own experience. Even if you're writing something completely unknown to you, you must embrace it before you can write convincingly about it. Therefore, it becomes a part of your own experience. When you express yourself in writing, your personality will, by definition, come out. On the other hand, it is a novel, and completely fictional. None of what happens in the book ever happened to me or anyone else I know, other than minutia, those little things that help to bring life to a scene, or those personality traits that define a character. To say what those things are specifically, I'd have to go back page by page and see which one's came from my personal experience and which one's I projected into characters based upon observations of real people. One does come to mind: In one scene, one of the main characters says he thought the CIA was in a different part of the D.C. area. That was actually me. While on business, I'd driven through Langley a couple of times on my way to Patuxent River, and thought the facility was located there. It wasn't until I was researching that I found, in a global satellite image program, that the CIA is in a different Langley.

To answer your question more directly, I guess I'd have to say I'm a combination of Jack and Rick, leaning toward Jack. Maybe someday when I grow up, I'll be Leo.

Irene: When reading your book, I found that you set up the scenes very well. I felt like I was "right there" with the characters. Would you tell our audience how you set up these scenes so that the reader feels like they could take on the character and be part of the plot?

Mike: I'd say it's a combination of imagination and searching. I imagine myself in every scene and become every character. From there I just look around and write down what I experience, trying to engage all five senses, and look for those details that are common to

everyone. For details that might not be so common to an average American reader, I make a painstaking effort to describe them such that the reader will understand, and thus, share the experience. For example, in an action scene I try to feel what the character is feeling so that I can put those sensations in the writing. If a car is driven off of a pier, the driver would have a feeling of weightlessness. The vicarious experience becomes much more real, and enjoyable, if when the character is feeling it, the reader is feeling it as well.

Irene: What kind of research did you do before you wrote the book? Did you actually visit some of the places you mention in your book?

Mike: My wife and I did go to Paris on vacation, and I did go with the intent of researching locations for the mystery. I was pleasantly surprised at some things I learned, and without giving away too much of the plot, a certain line from a certain monument actually did point to our hotel room. Most of the Parisian scenes were based upon locations that we visited – including a plethora of sidewalk cafés. But *Blonde to the Bone* was a lot of fun to write because I didn't need a lot of research. In the age of the Internet, research is at the tips of our fingers – or primarily the grip of a mouse, in my case. Most of what I needed to know came from web sites – like the CIA example in your previous question. To make the technology in the book plausible, I researched DNA computing – both the current state of technology and projecting the potential out into the future. I have also been to Washington D.C. many times on business. And the original cover art for “*Blonde to the Bone*” was purchased from a Parisian artist halfway across a bridge over the Seine near the Louvre.

In a little side note, I work for a company called Computer Sciences Corporation, who was the sponsor of the Lance Armstrong Tour de France team. Our trip to Paris just happened to coincide with the ending of the Tour de France, and Lance Armstrong was up for his record-breaking seventh Tour de France win. Our return flight was on the morning of the final day of the race. At around eight o'clock or so, we left our hotel (the Hilton Paris) and circled the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs Elysees on our way to the airport. They were already setting up the boulevard for the final race. We were halfway across the Atlantic when the race ended, and the pilot announced over the PA system that Armstrong had won. So I will forever be able to say that I was on the Champs Elysees the day Armstrong made history in the Tour de France. I just didn't happen to see him do it.

Irene: Thank you Mike. Is there anything else that you would like the readers to know about you or your book?

Mike: First of all, many thanks for providing me the opportunity to appear on the Reader Views website! I really appreciate it! “*Blonde to the Bone*” is published by Suncoast Publishing. Readers can visit Suncoast's website to read the first chapter and get a glimpse into the story at <http://www.suncoastbooks.com>. “*Blonde to the Bone*” can be ordered at your local bookstore, but is also available at the following online stores. I hope you enjoy it!