

A Conversation with Patti Sheehy about Stalked: The Boy Who Said No

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

I was a big reader as a child, and began writing press releases and marketing materials when I worked for a public relations firm in Manhattan. I had done extensive magazine writing and produced award-winning publications, but had never written a book before ***The Boy Who Said No: An Escape to Freedom***. This was a whole new experience for me.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

Meeting Frank Mederos, and learning of his adventures while escaping Cuba, inspired me to write my first novel. Once he escaped, I was eager to learn about his relationship with Magda and his life in America, so I worked with him to write my second novel. Frank has led an extraordinary life. Despite his hardships, he maintains his sense of humor and a positive outlook on life. His story is one of love, loss, determination, courage, and the life-saving power of friendship.

I've gotten to know Frank Mederos very well over the past few years, which made it easier to write his story.

HOW DID YOU USE YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE OR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO ENRICH YOUR STORY?

Life experiences come in many forms. Even though we came from different countries, Frank and my childhoods were very similar, both full of family, friends, and innocent mischief. Losing my husband fairly early in life helped me to relate to and describe Frank's losses. My strong family ties helped me understand the sacrifice Frank made in leaving his family to come to the States, and his longing for them once he arrived.

My degree in history served me well, as did my magazine and other writing experiences.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR NOVEL IS MORE PLOT DRIVEN OR CHARACTER DRIVEN?

Like my first novel, *Stalked: The Boy Who Said No* is both plot and character driven. The characters that readers met in my first novel—Frank Mederos, Magda, Lieutenant Pino and Lazo—are central to the plot of my second novel. The novel is set in both Cuba and America. Three threads run through the story: Frank's struggle as an immigrant and his life with Magda; Lazo's complicated life in Cuba; and Lt. Pino's desire to revenge Frank's defection from Cuba's Special Forces.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Frank and Magda are the most sympathetic characters. Frank's love for Magda and the couple's struggle to survive is heartwarming and heart wrenching. I cried when I wrote a certain chapter about Magda, and I hope I was able to convey Frank's heartbreak and loss.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

You can't beat Lieutenant Pino as an obstinate, ruthless, and unsympathetic character. Years later, he is still obsessed with killing the man who eluded and embarrassed him: Special Forces member, Frank Mederos.

WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

In my second book, I faced the challenge of handling the back-story in a way that would be interesting for readers whether they had read the first book or not. Describing Pino's trial and Frank's interviews with the CIA enabled me to relate pertinent information so it was at once fresh and familiar. Keeping all the treads of the story organized in a way that would not confuse the reader was also a challenge.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR BOOK?

I hope readers will gain a better understanding of the challenges facing new immigrants to America. I hope they will come to value our freedoms even more, and will realize what a privilege it is to be an American.

HOW DO YOU DIAL UP THE TENSION TO KEEP YOUR READERS ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEATS?

I try to keep the reader guessing what will happen next through foreshadowing and allowing them to discover information a little at a time.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

Writing for me is pleasure mixed with a nagging concern that I am doing justice to the story.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

Write, write, write. Let problematic areas simmer. Let your mind wander; the best ideas come while showering or taking a walk. Maintain a balance between improving your writing and letting it go. Don't get stuck in trying to achieve perfection, or your writing will never see the light of day. Don't give up.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY NEW BOOKS IN THE PIPELINE?

Frank Mederos and I are talking about writing a third book about what happened to Cuban spies in the US when the Soviet Union fell.

WHAT HAVE YOU TAKEN AWAY FROM THIS EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH FRANK MEDEROS THAT YOU MOST WANT TO SHARE?

It has been wonderful to work with Frank Mederos and bring to life his compelling stories of his escape from Cuba and his life in America. I have been very gratified at the response to ***The Boy Who Said No: An Escape to Freedom***, and I hope readers will find my second book equally exciting.

Frank's message to the world is "never give up", even when facing certain death. He has proved the value of positive thinking, and I am going to continue promoting my books until as many people as possible have read Frank's amazing story.