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An Interview with p.m.terrell

Q: You have written several critically acclaimed contemporary suspense/thrillers, but your latest book is historical. Why did you change genres?

A: My father was researching our genealogy when he came across the story of one of our ancestors, Mary Neely, who was captured by Shawnee Indians at the height of the Revolutionary War and held in captivity for two years before she managed to escape. The courage of this remarkable woman—who was only 19 years old when captured—intrigued me. When we found out the British were actually paying the Indians to capture the settlers' women and children, that was the conspiracy theory I needed to make the leap.

Q: Did your background as a suspense writer help in writing a historical novel?

A: It helped tremendously because my stories are driven by action and conflict. I found that Mary's ordeal was so extraordinary, it was easy to end each chapter with a cliff-hanger. I did make a concerted effort to avoid the type of flowery dialogue we often see in historical books, and the book also doesn't get bogged down with scenery and descriptions because of my suspense writer background.

Q: What is the name of your latest release, and what genre is it considered?

A: The name is "Songbirds are Free". The Indians heard Mary singing right before they attacked, and they loved the sound of her voice—which might have saved her life. They initiated her into their tribe and renamed her "Songbird", at which point she turned to the only person present who could speak English and said, "But songbirds are free." I spent two years researching her story and verifying the historical accuracy, but because I had to use my imagination to complete the dialogue and fill in the necessary details, it is considered "historical fiction" along the lines of *Killer Angels*.

Q: Is promoting historical fiction any different from contemporary suspense?

A: It is quite a bit different, because it reaches a different audience. I was careful to write the book with the same type of suspense my fans expect—so I wouldn't lose them—but historical fiction, especially when it is based on a true story and real characters, has opened up the National Park Service and State Museums, more libraries, and historical societies. In fact, the big launch for the new book will be held at Mansker's Station in Nashville, Tennessee, at a Revolutionary War Fall Encampment.

Q: You did a couple of different promotional efforts with your newest book. Tell us about those.

A: For the first time, I participated in a Pre-Release Book Tour, which consisted of following Mary's trail from Nashville, Tennessee through Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, calling on museums and park service bookstores, and letting them know about Mary's story. I also have a book trailer on my web site at pnterrell.com, which shows actual photographs of the location where she was abducted and real places where she was taken. And for the first time, I have a web site dedicated to a book—maryneely.com has dozens of photographs chronicling her story.

Q: Are you working on anything else right now?

A: Yes. I am finishing a contemporary suspense/thriller that is due to be released in the fall of 2008. And then the prequel to Mary Neely's story, an adventure story about her family's migration westward before her capture, is due out in the fall of 2009.