

An Interview with *Buying Time* Author Pamela Samuels Young

1. What inspired you to begin writing legal thrillers after careers in journalism and law?

I've always loved reading mysteries, particularly those that involve fascinating legal cases. It bothered me, however, that the legal thrillers I read never depicted women and African-American attorneys. So . . . I decided to fill the void. I knew pretty early that I wanted to be a writer, having worked on school newspapers in junior high, high school and college. When I decided to major in journalism at the University of Southern California, I didn't give much thought to creative writing. At the age of 18, I didn't have the guts to even consider a career as a novelist. The writers I enjoyed reading – James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Joan Didion – were incredibly talented literary writers. I knew I didn't have that kind of poetic writing talent. So I pursued a career in journalism and later, earned a law degree. Flash forward several years and I somehow gathered the courage to give fiction writing a try.

2. What motivated you to write *Buying Time*?

I was at a party chatting with a guy who mentioned that he was a viatical broker. I had never heard of the viatical industry before, and once he explained what it was, I knew immediately that it would make an excellent setting for a mystery novel. This is an industry most people know very little about and it's rife with opportunities for fraud and abuse. When I began scouring the internet for more information, I indeed learned that both investors and terminally ill patients are frequently the targets of viatical scams.

3. What is your process for creating a novel?

I will spend anywhere from a few weeks to as long as three months outlining a book before I sit down to write. I also mull over my story quite a bit. I'm thinking about it in the shower, while I'm standing in line at the grocery store, and during my 45-minute commute to work. Even during the outlining stage, I can almost see each chapter as if it were a scene in a movie. Only after I have a completed outline do I start writing. And when I write, I go from page one to the last page without doing much editing along the way. For me, it's psychologically motivating to complete that first draft, even if it's so bad I'd never dare show it to anyone. Once I have a first draft, then the real writing starts. I revise, and revise and revise some more. That process can last six months or more.

4. What are some of your favorite authors or books (past, present, or future)?

The book that had the greatest impact on me as a kid was Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*. I can still remember stumbling across a copy of the book at my aunt's house when I was about twelve. It was the first book I can remember reading that had African-American characters and I was thrilled to be

reading about people who looked like me. It was also a very gritty and graphic coming of age story. I promptly "borrowed" the book without asking for permission for fear that my aunt would think I was too young to be reading such a sexually graphic book. After that, I developed an insatiable appetite for African-American fiction. That led me to Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison and other truly great literary authors.

These days, I read more mysteries than anything else. Some of my favorite authors include Walter Mosley, Greg Iles, Sandra Brown, Tami Hoag, James Patterson, Valerie Wilson Wesley, and John Grisham. I love a good plot and I think all of these writers write very entertaining novels. I also enjoy women's fiction and I'll buy anything Terry McMillan decides to write.

5. What advice would you give to aspiring authors?

Master your craft! Take the time to study writing the same way you would study any other profession. Also, read like a writer. When you read a book you enjoy, study the author's writing style and the book's story structure. Ask yourself why the book was a great read. One of the most helpful things I did as a new writer was outline John Grisham's *The Firm* and examine the story structure. It helped me tremendously in learning how to build suspense.

6. What have you learned about the book industry so far?

I learned that it's an extremely tough business, even more so now that the economy is in the tank. As a result, you have to have faith in your talent and keep going despite the rejection. I've worked in both television news and law and I never faced anything close to the level of rejection that I ran up against trying to become a published novelist. In fact, getting into law school and passing the California Bar exam were *way* easier than trying to get a book deal. I also learned that you have to think like a businessperson, not a writer. My books are products. I have to be inventive and unrelenting about getting my product to readers. I focus heavily on connecting with book clubs. During a trip to the D.C. area, I met with three book clubs, made an appearance at a reception at a friend's home, and took part in a panel discussion at a bookstore, *all on the same day*. It was exhausting, but I reached a lot of people. Book clubs are social networks and they are great sources for word-of-mouth buzz. If the book club members enjoyed reading one of my books, it's likely that they're going to mention it to their friends, family and co-workers.

7. Have you received any sound advice from fellow authors?

Bestselling Christian fiction author Victoria Christopher Murray told me that producing a book a year was what helped to propel her to bestseller status. Her fan base has followed her with each book and continues to grow. It's definitely my goal to publish a new book every year, though my legal practice and the promotional demands make that difficult to accomplish.

- 8. Your life is extremely busy! What is one piece of advice you can give to aspiring writers who are also juggling full-time careers and personal lives?**
Learn to say "no" and don't feel guilty about it. Right now, I'm practicing law, promoting my books *every* weekend and working on my next novel. I'm also on the Board of Directors of the Southern California Chapter of Mystery Writers of America and I write articles on fiction writing twice a month for BizyMoms.com. I love teaching, but gave up my position as an adjunct professor at the University of Redlands School of Business because of the time commitment. I wish I could do it all, but there simply aren't enough hours in the day. When I'm not practicing law, my primary focus is on finishing my next book, promoting my current ones and making sure I spend some quality time with my husband.
- 9. What are you currently working on?**
I'm currently working on my fifth novel, *Attorney-Client Privilege*. It's the fourth novel in my Vernetta Henderson series. In *Attorney-Client Privilege*, Vernetta litigates a gender discrimination lawsuit. Her opponent—a rather unscrupulous, female dynamo—will do anything to win because if she doesn't, it could mean the collapse of a multi-million dollar corporation.
- 10. What do you want the world to know most about you?**
That I grew up in Compton, California, which I'm very proud of. When I mention my hometown, some people automatically assume that I dodged bullets on the way to school every day. But it was nothing like that. I had two strong, hard-working parents, who still live in Compton today. The foundation they laid — faith in God, hard work and education — is responsible for who I am and everything I have achieved. I am quite proud to be a product of Compton.