



Jennifer Paulson

Author

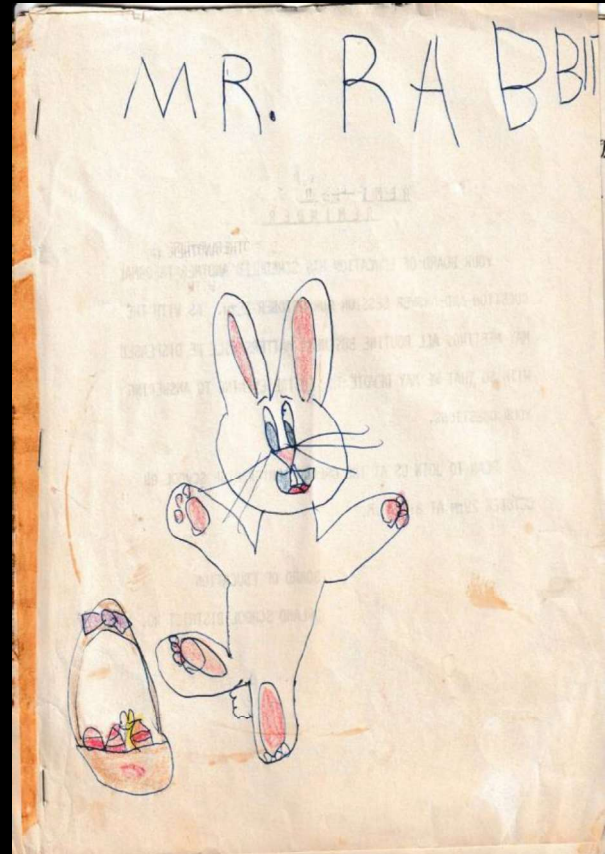
I'm excited to have the opportunity to interview author Jennifer Paulson today. Jennifer is a member of the Florida STAR Fiction Writer's group and an author of intriguing stories that keep you locked to the page. Let's find out more about Jennifer in her own words!

**How long have you been writing?
What kind of fiction do you write?**

Where do I begin? Honestly, I was a writer before I knew it. Before I could even really print (more like scribble), I was penning "books". I'd use my dad's old school board paper, draw scenes on the blank side, and then dictate the prose to my mom to add to the story. And they weren't sweet books. They were pretty darn disturbing.

Especially for a five-year-old. But, my mom, a former English teacher, didn't blink. She fully supported my creative mind and has always been one of my biggest cheerleaders.

I always did well when it came to writing in school. Even my seventh-grade English teacher saw something in me, commending my written words often.



Click on the image to read more about Jennifer's first book.

I was born and raised in the Chicago area, and I had no clue what I wanted to be when I grew up — even during my third year as an undergrad. I picked English with an emphasis on writing as a major. I even minored in criminology briefly when I was at a community college





— I knew I didn't have the stomach to be a police officer, but the criminal mind always fascinated me.

It wasn't until after editing a project for someone that I realized, "Hey, I kind of like this editing thing." I enjoy being able to polish up others' writing, with my knack for spelling and grammar and love of reading. I started thinking I wanted to investigate being an editor, maybe as a copy editor at a newspaper. It seemed to make sense. So, I started exploring and talking to those in the industry.

What inspired you to start writing, and how has your journey as an author evolved over time?

Besides my insanely disturbing books written during my childhood, it was that "I think I want to be an editor" instance that propelled me to start investigating what the heck I could do for work in the real world.

So, I turned to my Uncle Ken, who spent a good portion of his career as a journalist and executive editor with Gannett. His advice?

If you're going to be editing others' work, you need to learn how to write yourself.

Great point. So I began writing for an independent student newspaper at my

college, the University of Illinois at Chicago. They were happy for the free help — and I learned a lot about reporting during that stint.

And I discovered I loved it writing. Sure, I'm a heck of an editor. But my real talent and passion? Storytelling.

I wasn't even done with my undergrad when I started as an intern at a local Chicago suburban newspaper group. I was offered a job before I graduated, and stayed there until I accepted a job at Florida Today in 1999, fed up with the frigid winters and eager for year-round sunshine. When I left that job in 2016, I had been a features writer, as well as a parenting column, dubbed "Momsense." I received my share of journalism awards over the years (including first place with the Florida Society of News Editors for my column in 2015, which brought me to tears).

While I went into healthcare communications in 2016, I always had this book, *Boomerang*, burning in the back of my head. I wanted to write it. I had to. But working full-time, going to grad school and trying to raise a family always put my passion project on the back burner. I worked on it when I could. Which wasn't a whole lot.

Can you describe your creative process? How do you develop your ideas into fully-fledged stories?

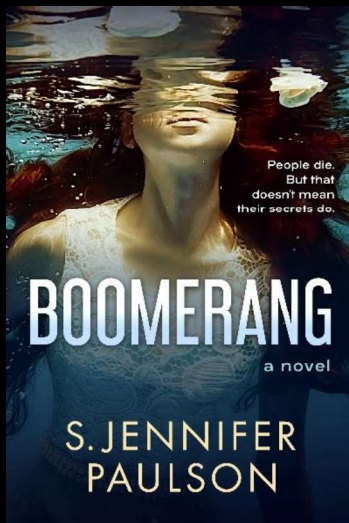
I love domestic thrillers. They're my go-to genre. And something in my gut was telling me I needed to write this story.

When I started writing *Boomerang*, I knew the crux of my narrative. So, I wrote three chapters, decided I hated them, and ripped them up. I started over. And made it a whole lot different than I had originally planned.

I basically have found my formula is to have a loose outline of where I want to go, including characters, locations,

important dates, characteristics, scenery and so on. Then, I sit at my laptop for what seems like an hour – even if it's been eight! I see these characters in my mind. They just come to me. And I just start typing away, trying to capture what I envision in my mind. It's crazy how things just come to me – especially at night, when I'm trying to fall asleep. I'll suddenly get a thought, then scribble it down in my bedside notebook to add to the story.

It just flows. I can't explain it. I see it. And I write it.



Boomerang was partly inspired by the #MeToo movement, and society's shift toward standing up against sexual harassment, assault and abuse. In all my years of reporting, I've covered my share of horrific stories,

including the aftermath of the "Rippers Crew," a group of Chicago-area serial killers who abducted, tortured, sexually assaulted and killed random women in the 1980s. My last newspaper assignment in Illinois was to cover the March 1999 execution of one of these men convicted in the case – it was the last lethal injection in Illinois before a moratorium was enacted on the state's death penalty. (I was in the field and interviewed one of the victim's families, so thankfully, I did not witness the lethal injection. Just google it if you want to know exactly how horrific these crimes were. I can't go into it here. It's utterly disturbing beyond belief.)

Stuff like that gets my mind churning. I'm also a news junkie. I've read some pretty haunting but captivating novels on similar things. I've watched my share of "Law &

Order: SVU." I've seen how assault survivors are sometimes treated during trials. It's not just the accused under the spotlight, but the victims themselves, their personal lives now on public display.

Just in casual conversation with dozens of other women, I felt I had a story to tell – from a somewhat unique angle I don't think I've seen before. It's not a true story based on a specific event – it's just a conglomeration of various thoughts I've had over the years.

What challenges do you face while writing, and how do you overcome them?

One, I am my own harshest critic. I have revised this novel so many times, tweaking scenes and characters. It's easy for me to go down a rabbit hole and get lost. So, staying focused is something I am definitely working on.

The biggest thing is I listen to my gut – it really is my internal compass. For example, there was one integral scene I wrote. But after reading it several times, it just didn't sit right with me. So, I killed it and wrote a new one. One that made more sense.

Two, I also recognize that I am writing about a sensitive subject. It's often in my mind, thinking about who will read Boomerang. The last thing I want to do is pigeonhole anyone. Or upset someone who has experienced something traumatic. That is not my intent at all. This is simply a story. And sometimes, those tales are incredibly troubling. Because that's the real world. It can be so beautiful, yet also so ugly at the same time. Boomerang is nothing more than a deeply dark, twisted tale. Based on real-world atrocities. One I intend to be a gripping page-turner.

Based on feedback from the editor and proofreader I have been working with, so far, it is.

Are there specific themes or messages that you find yourself returning to in your writing? Why are these important to you?

Boomerang is my first novel, so, it's hard to really assess that now. But I am inspired by things I hear, read, see and more. I have at least eight other ideas for other books. And they all seem to harken back to one thing – wild what-ifs? As in, what is the worst that could happen in situation X, Y and Z? And then, my crazy thoughts go from there.

How do you create memorable and relatable characters? Are they inspired by real people or purely from your imagination?

My characters aren't based on a specific incident or story. It's simply one woman's wild imagination mixed with current societal issues. I try to think as if I were each character. What makes them who they are? What are their backgrounds? Their experiences? What has molded them into the people they are today? How do happy lives suddenly get turned upside-down? Where do they go from there? Who might their actions affect? I'm twisted. At least when it comes to my writing genre.

What role does research play in your writing? How do you ensure accuracy and authenticity in your stories?

I research everything I can think of that might apply to the story. I talk to people. I study and look for news stories, features, and whatever else might bolster the story's authenticity, including statistics and resources. And, of course, I had my book go through two developmental edits, as well as having a couple of people proofread it, so if they spot anything problematic I might have missed, I can address it.

Do you have any rituals or habits that help you get into the writing mindset or boost your creativity?

I'll research authors I love and learn about their backstory – how they got to the level of success they have today. Reading how they got started publishing (sometimes on a fluke) inspires me to keep going. Stories of how authors like [Colleen Hoover](#) and Alex Michaelides ([The Silent Patient](#)) found success encourage me.

I find that my happy place to write is at a local kava bar, where I toss on my noise-canceling headphones, drink my kombucha, and get lost for HOURS. (I swear, I must look so unfriendly, but I get in my zone, and there's no stopping me.)

Can you share a particularly memorable fan interaction or a piece of feedback that touched you deeply?

I am so thrilled that my friends, family and acquaintances are cheering me on and excited to read Boomerang. I was so incredibly touched that when I reached out to one of my favorite domestic thriller authors, [Kiersten Modglin](#), just to tell her how much I loved her novels, she actually wrote back to me. I was so moved, especially since I told her I planned to release my first novel. She didn't forget. When I ordered a signed copy of her book, [Hemlock](#), Modglin added an incredibly sweet note, including wishing me well on my first book.

She didn't have to do that. But she did. And that made me that much more of a fan – it demonstrates Modglin truly appreciates her readers.

That notecard sits next to my desk, and I look at it often for inspiration and positivity.

Are there authors or books that have had a significant influence on your writing style or approach?

I was a big fan of Young Adult suspense novelist [Lois Duncan](#) as a kid after reading [Killing Mr. Griffin](#) and [I Know What You Did Last Summer](#). Then, I moved on to [Stephen King](#) when I was in junior high school. I ripped through the 1,000-plus pages of [IT](#) like it was nothing. I was hooked, and began reading [Misery](#), [Cujo](#) and more. (I read this later, but I absolutely was smitten and terrified by [Gerald's Game](#).)

While Colleen Hoover typically doesn't write domestic thrillers, her novel [Verity](#) is what made me become obsessed with her work. Within a year of reading [Verity](#), which a friend recommended, I'd ripped through every CoHo book I could find. Which led me to discover [Tarryn Fisher](#), who collaborated with Hoover, too. Once I read [An Honest Lie](#), [The Wives, I Can Be a Better You](#), [Mud Vein](#) and [F*ck Love](#), I was addicted.

And back to author Kiersten Modglin. I so resonate with her style of writing – it feels so familiar, I think, because it closely parallels mine. Her books are page-turners, and I can't believe the twists and turns she comes up with. For example, I just read [You Can Trust Me](#) – and was blown away by the ending.

I want to be like these authors. And give to others what they have given me – a temporary reprieve from reality with a gripping tale. A chance to momentarily get lost in someone else's (fictional) problems. And forget about their own. If only for a little bit.

What advice do you have for aspiring authors who are just starting their writing journey?

Stop making excuses, like I did. I let my busy life (and fear) be a reason to keep putting it off. As well as fear. Stop being afraid. If you feel an intense yearning to write a book and put it out in the world, do it. Otherwise, you'll never know.

It took me some time and a lot of work on off-hours to finally finish what I've been envisioning for years. Tell yourself it's a priority. Schedule the time to write, even if it's an hour a day.

After some recent changes in my life in 2023, I decided I was done making excuses. I would finally finish and publish [Boomerang](#) in 2024. And I chose [March 19](#) as the release date. Why? It's my birthday. Whether I sell five copies or 500,000, I will always know that I finally had the guts to bring my dream to fruition at age 49. Because the last thing I want is to be on my deathbed, berating myself, "I should have published that book!"

As my dad always says, "no guts, no glory." So, I finally have the guts. I can't wait to see what follows. Hopefully, it will be glorious.

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