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# GERHARD JOHANNES DRESSEN

## BACKGROUND

I was born on 8 April 1958, in a small German town on the Dutch border between Mönchengladbach and Aachen. When I look back, my life to this day has been like the Beatles' song "The Long and Winding Road". And this road led uphill and downhill, had peaks that I climbed, and valleys I walked through.

On paper, it all looks completely unspectacular: school and teacher training in Aachen (German and Catholic Theology) – and then, instead of a traineeship, voluntary work at the Rheinische Post. And that's when I knew! writing, and especially journalism, was just the right thing for me.

First writing for the local press for years and then ending up with an editing job at head office? That was nothing for me! I've always found the drudgery of routines extremely boring. So I shifted to the other side of the desk – to join the communications department of a German global corporation. I saw a lot of things happen over the 20 years I worked there: the restructuring work in Saxony-Anhalt after the fall of the German Wall. Then developing worldwide PR projects, the inside illumination of handbags, and regularly flying Swiss concept cars around the globe. And I always came to the same realisation. It's the extraordinary story you're telling that counts So that's what I did for another ten years as a freelance journalist and communications consultant.

I have two grown-up daughters who have long since flown the coop. I live with the best wife in the world in a cosy terraced house in a small village between Düsseldorf and Cologne. (The benefit of this: we serve the local beer from both regions ...)

### **On the topic of writing**

In my case there was no road to Damascus where my eyes were opened and I was struck by a flash of realisation: you were born to write! I've always been writing stuff – and even managed to twist my primary school teacher around my little finger with my essays.

Reports, commentaries, interviews, speeches, and press releases have all been a big part of my career. But writing a thriller that stretches out over 300 or 400 pages? Or getting dialogue down on paper without it sounding wooden? I was more than a little daunted by this. And getting a tale of fiction down on paper wasn't something I'd run into before. As a journalist I find it hard to write something without there being some connection to reality. Fiction was never really my thing.

Then, two years ago, the story for my debut novel "To Torch a Fake" was suddenly there. My friend Norbert Schroeder, director of Classic Cars at TÜV Süd (a German vehicle inspection and testing organisation) and one of the most renowned classic car appraisers on the planet, was telling me about a multimillion scam involving faked Porsches. (He naturally got to write the foreword to my 'educational book' – as he calls it.) That set the background to the plot. In writing my thriller and breathing life into the characters that appear in it, I drew extensively on the rich resources of my classic car friends. A never-ending source of inspiration – to be accessed for future thrillers.

## **Hobbies**

To make one thing clear first: writing isn't one of them. Because writing can be quite exhausting. And I don't so much mean the labour of cleverly stringing together well-chosen sentences. That comes quite easily to me, to be honest but less modest. What I find exhausting is the job of developing a gripping story without it suffering any gaps in logic and the plot. Getting the plot together is always an exercise in patience for me. You see, I'm an impatient writer who likes to tick off the tasks I've set myself as quickly as possible. And that's just not how to get the plot in the bag. You can't force the story. Not even a mediocre one. It develops slowly over a matter of weeks, not hours. It needs to mature and come together bit by bit. I've spent nights tossing and turning while only half awake, willing my plot to thicken! The crazy thing is that, while I can rarely remember my dreams in the morning, the elements of the storyline are still with me at the breakfast table. And I don't have a notepad lying by my bedside. I can't exactly figure out what my brain does during the night. After all, I'm not a neuroscientist. BUT it does work and manages to piece bits and bobs together, layer after layer, until a good storyline emerges. Having finished writing my debut novel, I've now got faith in this process. I know and trust that at some point the right ideas will come to me. As the Bible teaches: good things come to those who wait!

Back to the hobbies. When I've performed all the loving cares a husband and father tasks himself with, I enjoy flying RC aeroplane models. When my glider is up in the sky and I'm guiding it through rising and falling thermal drafts, this is a hobby that gives me wings. And for these moments of sheer happiness, I don't need a fizzy

sweetened drink in a can. (Though a cold beer to celebrate a successful landing is never a bad idea ...)

And then there are the classic cars – happy memories and elated emotions on wheels. (I myself drive an old BMW 728i from the last millennium ...) I love the smell of petrol and oil on visiting my friends' workshops. I'm always keen to enjoy an after-work beer with them, to hear their stories and funny anecdotes, and to bathe in that wonderful world of technical jargon. I can never get enough of old cars and celebrate them with a childlike joy. Boys and their toys! I appreciate the aesthetics of their shapeliness and the high quality of their engineering. Only problem is: I have two left hands! Which is another reason I stick to writing fuel fiction. As my friends from the workshop say: "Forget meddling around with wrenches. a writer should stick to his book!" And now and again it does indeed pay off to listen to one's friends.