

Former Resident's Latest Novel Draws on Real Life Inspirations

Former Livingston resident Dr. Alan Winter is a long-time periodontist who has a second career going as a novelist. He has recently published his latest novel, *Island Bluffs*, a thriller/love/ghost story with inspirations drawn from real life.

A 1965 graduate of Livingston High School, Dr. Winter now lives in Bernardsville. His family, however, lived in Livingston for 20 years, and to this day, he retains close ties to his hometown. He caught the "creative writing bug" more than 30 years ago, and ever since has been working on novels and screenplays in between work and family duties.

His latest novel, Winter says, "is a story of forgiveness, of understanding the dark side of the human spirit. It plumbs the age-old question: are children and grandchildren accountable for the sins of their parents?"

It features a recurring character of Winter's, forensic dentist Carly Mason. In her latest adventure, she and her husband, a widower named Gabe Berk (née Berkowitz), are trying – unsuccessfully – to start a family.

This leads them to an eccentric scientist, a survivor of the Mengele twin experiments, who runs an exclusive fertility clinic near the Jersey shore. The doctor agrees to help Carly in exchange for a Faustian bargain: Carly must agree to carry as twins her own biological child and an unrelated child for whom she will serve as a surrogate. This baby is to be given up at birth with no questions asked. The reader soon learns that this is not the first time this doctor has offered – and been taken up on – this bizarre deal.

To be near the clinic, the Berks move to the fictional shore town of Island Bluffs with Gabe's 17 year old daughter, Megan, and his father, Yehuda. Like the mysterious doctor, Yehuda is a Holocaust survivor.

Things get suspicious when the Berks receive a visit from a mysterious stranger looking to purchase the house they have just moved into – an old house which is apparently haunted.

In quick order, Yehuda befriends the ghost who haunts their house; Gabe's daughter, Megan, becomes involved with the son of an ex-Nazi; and the town elders become determined to run the Berks out of Island Bluffs to protect a long-held secret. As the story unfolds, we learn that a German U-boat sank off the coast near

Island Bluffs during World War II, and that the fertility doctor has been working on his own way of righting the wrongs of the Holocaust.

Winter's latest thriller had a number of inspirations in real life, he explains. "September 11 was not the first modern-day attack on the continental United States," he explains. "It started on January 12, 1942 when the freighter *Cyclops* sunk off the coast of Nantucket, and it didn't stop until mid-June, 1942. Here's the scorecard: in six months, 397 American ships were sunk off our Atlantic seaboard; 5,000 lives and 2,000,000 tons of shipping were lost. This was the greatest naval defeat and the worst direct attack on America in our history, and it doesn't even have a name! Call it the 'Massacre of the Atlantic.' "

In addition, "A German U-2 boat was discovered off the New Jersey coast in 1992, and reports have circulated that a lone survivor of that U-boat has been living in Jersey since World War II."

The Berks' haunted dream home? "A house, bought in foreclosure, was purchased on the Jersey shore by a Manhattan couple. In it was found a hidden attic room, a ship-to-shore radio, Nazi pamphlets, sea-rations, rain gear for 20 men... and a ghost. The American-owned fertilizer company that formerly owned this house tried to buy it from the couple for a fabulous sum of money after they applied for a building permit to expand the structure. They apparently wanted to preserve the house's secrets and protect their involvement in them." This latter scenario was not a news story, Winter notes, but, rather, an experience related to him by one of his patients. An inquiry in the dentist's chair resulted in the admission that the man was tired, because "the ghost in my house kept me up last night." Intrigued, Winter had to get the whole story.

Winter recounts, "It was an amazing tale about a ghost that Burt said he saw and thought was a young girl. He and his wife called it 'Polly.' At the same time – this was back in the early 1990s – a stranger came to his door and offered to buy his house from him. He declined, saying he had only just moved in. As the days went by, Burt and his wife had more experiences with the ghost - like music playing when there were no radios on in the house. They then submitted plans to the town to remodel the house and when

they did, the stranger returned, this time offering a blank check to buy the house. Again, they turned him down.

"Burt, being a lawyer, researched more about his house. As best I can recall, he found out that a company had owned his house and had forgotten about it. A mortgage wasn't paid, and the house had gone into foreclosure. A representative of the company was the one trying to buy the house. As for the ghost, Burt discovered that a fishing boat had sunk off the nearby coast at the end of World War II, and he linked this occurrence to his 'Polly.' I trusted Burt and that everything he told me was true, from his perspective. I am not a journalist – although I strive for accuracy – and Burt's story rang true for me."

A lot of the story recalls the horrors of the Holocaust and reverberates with the themes of forgiveness across the generations. Although none of his relatives were involved directly in the Holocaust, Winter says, "I have met many, many Holocaust survivors through the years. All people can relate to these horrors. As a writer, I did not find it difficult to reach deep down inside and find the emotions that the survivors in my story would have experienced."

In *Island Bluffs*, Winter explains, the doctor, a survivor of Mengele's ghastly experiments, "pursues a lifelong dream of better understanding the horrors the Nazis inflicted, not only on the Jews, but on so many others, and how something like this can be avoided in the future."

He notes, "As a writer, it is important that no two characters have the same perspective on anything, and that the more conflict there is, the better the story, and the truer it can be to human nature. The doctor, for all his pain and suffering, has a glorious solution to making this a better world – and the means to carry it out. The question that the book asks and one that challenges the reader is, 'Has he gone too far in his quest to create a loving environment where hate and genocide will no longer occur? Can good be so good as to circle back and be an evil end to accomplish the good it seeks?'"

Winter says it's up to the reader to decide!

Island Bluffs will be out soon in paperback as well as in Amazon Kindle and Barnes & Noble Nook ebook editions.