

[Music]

>> [Background Music] This is Matt Raymond from the Library of Congress. Each year, tens of thousands of book lovers of all ages visit the nation's capital to celebrate the joys of reading and lifelong literacy of the National Book Festival sponsored by the Library of Congress and hosted by First Lady Laura Bush. Now on its 7th year, this free event held on the National Mall Saturday, September 29th, will spark readers' passion for learning as they interact with the nation's best selling authors, illustrators and poets. Even those not attending the National Book Festival in person can access the events online. Prerecorded interviews with well-known authors will be available through the National Book Festival website in podcast format. To download you can visit www.loc.gov/bookfest.

[Music]

We're now privileged to talk with a writer who is local to the Washington, DC area and a number one New York Times best-selling author for the past decade, David Baldacci. Mr. Baldacci's famous thrillers have been translated into more than 40 languages and sold in more than 85 countries. He's the author of 12 award-winning novels. Mr. Baldacci's latest book "Simple Genius" explores the very real technological race that's going on in our world right now and also includes a hunt for hidden treasure rumored to be buried in Bedford, Virginia. Mr. Baldacci, thank you very much for joining us today.

>> Thank you.

>> And from where I'm sitting right now, Bedford, Virginia isn't too far of a drive, maybe you can offer some clues as to where that treasure is?

>> Yeah. It's a very complicated sort of clue I can offer you that had to be settled, some of the best minds in the [inaudible] field. And I'm not sure that I will be the best person to let you in on any secrets to how to find the treasure. But I would say that if you go down the Bedford, Virginia [inaudible], you get permission on the property owner before we go on there and start digging because you might find some buckshot sailing over your head.

>> Well, a good advice for anybody. Mr. Baldacci, you've been a frequent participant of the National Book Festival. In fact, you've been quite an emissary and representative actually for the Library of Congress. Why do you think this event is an important one for people to attend?

>> Well, I--you know, it's--our world today is so dominated by, you know, athletes and musicians and actors and actresses and the book world where so much creativity is established and feeds almost of the types of fields is often overlooked. But I know that there are millions of book lovers out there. We just don't have enough venues to allow them to express their enthusiasm. And the National Book Festival is a perfect place to allow, people from all over the country to come to Washington DC and celebrate books and reading and the power of creativity. And I think that's what it's--why it's such a magnet. I think that's why it's so

important. I wish we had more of these events across the country. But at least we have a superb National Book Festival here.

>> You mentioned creativity. And you started writing creatively at a very early age. Do you have any advice perhaps for any young writers who might be looking for inspiration as they're coming up?

>> I would tell them to read a lot. I mean, I don't go and get self help books from the library or the bookstore. You can go to the library and check out the masters for free and sort of break down your favorite books, why you love them so much. Because really you have to study the elements and the craft of writing and what goes into making a great book, great characters, well, how do you create a great character, you know, minute detail by minute detail or narrative pacing, narrative drive, how you write believable dialog which sounds real as opposed to being wooden. So if you read a lot as I did when I was a child and became mesmerized by storytelling with words, all of a sudden you feel a real passion for wanting to do it yourself. All kids want to be creative. Oftentimes when they reach adulthood, the creativity has been pounded out of them as they sort of go off and do whatever job they're in. But if you don't lose that creativity as you grow up and you maintain a passion to both reading and writing, I think those are essential elements if you want a [inaudible] career as a writer.

>> Now, you've talked in the past about your sort of transition from one career into another. And you have a bit of a nontraditional background in that you were a lawyer for nine years. How do you think the career of being a lawyer and a fiction writer have complemented each other and how did you find time to write while you were practicing law?

>> Well, luckily I didn't need a whole lot of sleep. When I was a kid I carried morning newspapers for seven years about when I was 11 till I was 18. So I get up 3 o'clock in the morning, every morning, 365 days a year. And--but aside from that, if you really have a passion to do it, you'll find the time. And many writers who aren't published yet, they cover out little [inaudible] time throughout the day usually late at night or very early in the morning because that's the time for them to have the outlet that they need for their creativity. During the day I was a lawyer and I was paid to write things for other people. But at night, you know, in the middle of the night what I wrote, that was my outlet. And I would race down the stairs to my little cubby-hole and sit down and start creating my fictional worlds. And it was such an amazing outlet for me. And one that I needed very much because, you know, I didn't hate being a lawyer but it certainly wasn't one pathway I wanted to spend my life. I wanted to be a fulltime writer. And that passion carried me through a lot of rejections, years of disappointments. So the passion is kind of like the body armor that, you know, the bad things bounce off and you really need that because you're going to get rejected, you're going to be disappointed, you're going to be frustrated if you want to have a career as a writer.

>> Now, who were some of your influences either in terms of books or authors when you were growing up? And are there any authors or books that you and your children today enjoy reading together?

>> Yeah. We--I had a lot of influences growing up. You know, I grew up from Virginia so I read a lot of a typical southern fiction writers, everybody from Walker Percy to Lee Smith, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Truman Capote, and even Faulkner, and Harper Lee, obviously. And--but I also grew up bringing the likes of "Alfred Hitchcock and Three Investigators". The series about three kids who were detectives and all of the Agatha Christie works and all of the Conan Doyle works including horror stories that he wrote in addition of the Sherlock Holmes tales. And it's just a passion for [inaudible] and weaving a plot and making people believe that what you're writing down is something they really need to read and enjoy. But I like both entertainment and form in my novels. And even though I write fiction, I do lot of research for every one. I sort of approach it like a brief that I'm compiling for a legal case and I do the research. And I think that level of authenticity brings added pleasure for that person who is reading the book that this allows him to think that, you know, I'm learning something at the same time that I'm being entertained. And our kids read a lot in our house [inaudible] books as you can imagine. We just finished the "Deathly Hallows" the latest Harry Potter adventure. We listen to it on tape and then read the book separately. And we discuss them and talk about them. And sometimes my kids read a book and they don't like the ending, I'll them to go write another ending and then we can talk about it and see why they think theirs is better. Again kids really love to be creative. And if kids emulate their parents, I have so many parents that come up to me and say, "I can't get my kids to read" or "he's on the computer." And my first question is, "Well, do you read?" And they say, "Well, you know, I get home and I got emails to send off. I usually am on the computer." And I said, "Well, if you're on the computer, the kids are on the computer. If you're reading a book, the kids are reading a book, make it a family affair."

>> Absolutely. You talked a little bit earlier about good writers having details and realistic dialog. You've been credited really by top government officials for getting it right in terms of your fiction, very realistic, really and absorbing kind of experience. Can you talk about your research process?

>> Yeah. It's, you know, it's interesting. When I approach a book, by looking over different subject matters, I have to sort of try to master if I'm going to write this novel. And then I will sort of break it down, you know, subject by subject and then who will I get to talk to that will inform me about his. What sort of books do I need to read beforehand to prepare myself so I can talk intelligently with these people in these different fields. And when I go out, I don't go out with a series of questions. I go out more as a conversationalist and I'll sit down with people in various fields and this type of conversation about, you know, the story that I'm writing. I'll tell them some of the plot, what do they think about it, do they agree with it or not agree with it. How would they do it differently? You know, why do they do their job, what's in their heart and when they're out there doing something like a secret service agent flying all over the world and willing to sacrifice his or her life for the president, things like that. Anybody can write about the hardware. And, you know, you can do the Tom Clancy stuff and write in

great detail about, you know, missiles and guns and tanks and planes, not to take away from that. But, for me, you know I bite some of that in my novels but I want to get into the hearts and heads of the people who do these sorts of work that I find fascinating. And then at the end of the day, we get all these research mass. You realize as a fiction writer you have to leave 99 percent of them out because you're not writing a textbook. But I have to take that 99 percent, synthesize it down into one percent that will go into the book, integrate it completely throughout the novel in little bits and pieces along the dialog here, a narrative paragraph there. Because the last thing you wanted to write is a flipbook. And a flipbook is where writers did a lot of research, very proud of it, doesn't want to leave any of it out, doesn't want to take the time to integrate it, takes a big chunk of it, fix it right in the middle of the book and reader is reading along and [inaudible] into this morass and realizes what it is and they flip, flip, flip, flip, flip, flip past all that stuff to get back to the story. So when you're writing fiction, you have to do [inaudible] have to sort of swallow your pride and realize you have to leave most of it out.

>> Now, you came to the library last year around the time your book, "The Collectors" came out which of course the Library of Congress was almost a central character in that book--

>> Yes.

>> --as part of our Books & Beyond series. And you talked about in your research process actually a specific story about a conversation that was overheard on a train. I wonder if you might be able to share that.

>> Yes. I was--it was sort of a very humbling experience for me. I was on an Amtrak [inaudible] train, I was sharing a table with two businessmen I didn't know and they were on their phones and doing work and I was on my cell phone and I was calling a medical examiner in the Bronx in New York who's a friend of mine and she sort of specializes on an area that I needed to write about in a novel I wrote called "Split Second". And all I wanted to do on the phone was to make an appointment with her to meet with her face to face when I got to New York. Unfortunately she told me she was leaving the country in a couple of hours to go overseas on a special assignment and will be gone for several weeks, so I could either talk to her then on the phone or I would have to wait till she got back. So I would through my series of questions and my first question to her was, well, you know here's how I want to kill the guy and she, you know-- and I explained my poison technique and then I told her I had to be sure that, you know, the police wouldn't even know that I killed him because obviously the murderer wanted to get away. And then I said, I had to be further, you know, guaranteed that the medical examiner, someone like yourself will be fooled if I did away with this person. And I asked her a few more questions and she gave me a few more answers and I ended the conversation by saying, "And I have to tell you, doctor, if I ever need to kill anybody else I'm just going to be sure to call you." And then I hang up and I looked up and the poor guy, he was diagonally across from me, had spilled his coffee from his neck to his lap and the other guy sitting across from me was just staring at me with his hands up in the

air. And then I saw the Amtrak, you know, stewards coming towards me and it was a long day, I didn't get to New York for quite a while.

>> Well, that's--

>> So the [inaudible]--the last acknowledgment in "Split Second" because of that, you know, fiasco was a public apology to any passengers in the Amtrak [inaudible] train who might have overheard me talking about that and I apologize to them.

>> Immortalized in [inaudible] that's great. If we could talk about another one of your previous books for a second and you mentioned Harper Lee earlier, your book "Wish You Well" has been compared favorably of course to the classic "To Kill a Mockingbird" and you said it's the one you get the most fan mail for. Why do you think this novel has touched so many people and what goes into the decision to write such a personal story that's linked to your own family history?

>> Well, I think the last question first, it was a very difficult one because it was so different from anything that I had written before and it was personal because I was dealing with past lives, it's my ancestors and past generations of people that I knew. But it was a story I think that I was in many ways born to write because as a child growing up, my grandmother, maternal grandmother lived with us for the last 10 years of her life and I listened to all these stories about the mountains and my mother talked to me about it too. Well, she was a little more reluctant to talk about her life there and we go to the mountains several times when I was a child and there was just sort of this instant attachment to it for me, so rustic, so wild. You know, it's different than anything I've ever experienced before. And I felt over the years that I had to write this story at some point, it was just sort of bursting inside of me, so that's why I decided to write, "Wish You Well". But, you know, it was so different in many ways but it had so many universal themes in it, and I think that's why people kind of become so attached to it, and might be so often about it. And it's themes of being an outsider and at some point in our lives everyone is an outsider, they don't feel like there's a place where they belong, they feel very alone. There is dealing with grief and tragedy, abrupt departures of people that you love from your life and they'll be gone forever and you have to learn to adapt and to deal with that. And then, you know learning to just live in a totally different place and also look inside yourself and make that an answer to the question, how much do you love someone, and will you love someone, someone that you can face the truth of yourself that you've been denying all along, that you have been, you know, saying I'm not going to say this, I'm not going to admit this even to myself. That's a very difficult decision to make, particularly if you're a young child who's moving from girl to early adulthood. And there's so many elements and themes in the book that I think people could find something they can relate to strongly. And it's a very emotional and very dramatic book in many ways and I think it hits every emotion that people have and it can make you laugh, it can make you cry, it can make you ponder things in your own life. And it was that sort of a book I think that really stuck with people and they wanted to talk to me about it and comment about it and pass it on to generation to generation. I've had so many great

grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers, fathers, who had passed [inaudible] to family, friends, children, grandchildren 'cause they want people to understand that life that came before are critically important to the futures that their own descendants will have, and that like is not very much different that, you know, everybody who's experienced this loss and happiness and tragedy and sadness and things like that, well, all of our ancestor experience have very same emotions and with those very same things. So, there were the lessons to be learned and that connection amongst generations really I think is what constitutes [inaudible] many ways.

>> Now, earlier we mentioned the Library of Congress being something of a character in "The Collectors". Now, in "Wish You Well", the Virginia landscape is almost one of the novel's characters. Can you talk about some of the places that inspire you and how those inspired your writing?

>> Yeah, place is very important for me. And I think I certainly got that from reading so much southern fiction because in southern fiction place is critically important. And it really does become another character fully defined in fleshed out character and most novels like that. So for me, I like to visit places that I write about. I've been all over Virginia, I've been all over Washington, DC. Then you absorb the atmosphere, you see little details in your mind's eye sometimes that reading about it or talking to someone about it you would miss. You know at "The Camel Club", Mount Zion Cemetery, most people don't know about it, that's in--tucked away in a little corner of Georgetown. Not many people go there. It's not very well known. There are lots of other much better known cemeteries nearby. But it was just a little piece of grass with a few tombstones that really caught my eye and that's why I wanted to set Oliver Stone in "The Camel Club", you know, there in that place. I just got back from Europe where I did a book tour over there. And one reason I did this book tour and went to the countries that I did is that a book that I'm working on right now, the same character--and the character in the book takes the same journey. And I took a high speed ferry across the Irish Sea, that I took out an express train from Wales to London because this character did the same thing. I visited Amsterdam because she goes to Amsterdam. So, I've been to those places before, but I wanted to see it again, and I wanted to walk the streets and talk to the people. And an author has to have a very discerning eye. And when you walk by you have to see exactly what's there, doorway or an alleyway, or a street or a light or a person on a corner. And then, all of a sudden, throwing a bit of imagination, realize the potential of what could be out there if you change the facts a little bit or come up--come at it with a different angle. And that's why I always try to do whenever I'm traveling anywhere [inaudible] a story idea or a place or a location or an element might strike me. And all of a sudden, I realize I could do that in the story. I do that all the time. I can't turn it off. It's just a part of me.

>> Now, we were talking just a little bit ago about "Wish You Well" and another I guess special thing about that novel is that it was a name that you have now brought to your foundation. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your foundation and why you set it up.

>> Well, the Wish You Well Foundation was founded about four years ago. And my wife and I had given to lots of charities over the years and sort of here and there and everywhere. And we wanted to sort of focus our giving and obviously a charitable endeavor that's very important to us is literacy. The United States seem to be a very high literacy nation. In reality it's not, there are the--the last national literacy census survey was done in 2003 and of the nearly 200 million adults in the United States [inaudible] among five levels of literacy, five being the highest, one being the lowest. A hundred million adults have a population grade at the two lowest levels of literacy. Fifty million were totally illiterate and another 50 million were about barely literate. That's a problem in a democratic nation. That's a problem in any country. So, when you think of the United States as vastly [inaudible] illiterate nation, most people pooh-pooh that and say that's preposterous, particularly up in an area like Washington, DC where everybody has, you know, five advanced degrees and can speak multiple languages. So, that's an anomaly in this country and that's not how the United States is anymore. So, the Wish You Well Foundation, we take grant applications from organizations all over the country. We have a board of directors. We meet quarterly. We go through all these applications. We fund programs and we scrutinize their operations. We ask them to send the financial information, operational information. And we do that because sometimes let's see--we'll see an organization different [inaudible] to have laid upon one or two donors, then we will tell them we will give you the money, but it's got to be a matching grant. You have to find that matching grant from somebody else that you haven't used yet before. And that makes them go out and, you know, redouble their efforts on their fundraising, because you really have to have a strong fundraising [inaudible]. You can't rely on one or two people with all the decisions because they might go away. Or we might see operationally, they might be doing something that's very close to another organization or that would be their complementary to another organization in their location, they might be very heavy on creative content, the other organization might have a lot of tutors and we try to put them together. And we funded programs about 28 states and counting thus far. And some big programs, some small programs. And last year we started with Feeding Body and Mind program where we partnered with America's Second Harvest which [inaudible] all the nation's food banks because poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand. It's a big target audience. So, in my book signing tour for "The Collectors", we have these big white boxes that are going to all the book signings and we collected about 35,000 books. Whatever city I'm in, there's a ship to label in the box and as soon as it falls, UPS or--that I could pick it up and takes it right to that local area food bank. So, if I'm in Phoenix, it goes Phoenix. If I'm in Seattle, it goes from Seattle. In the "Simple Genius" book tour this year in April, we collected over 150,000 books at my book tour.

>> Wow.

>> And we've got the--you know, Authors Union has endorsed it now, the American Publishers has endorsed it, we go to all the major publishers in New York. They're on board with it. They're going to get all their authors to go out with the big white boxes, and we're going to start recycling and collecting tens and millions of books, getting them in the

local food banks and getting them out to people who really need them. Because our philosophy is--and I think the food bank signed on to this. They think it's a fantastic program. In all their food banks their common response is then send as many books as you possibly can. You need food to survive but it doesn't get you out of the cycle of poverty, it just keeps your marching in place. But books can get you out of that cycle of poverty. And particularly for parents who were impoverished and illiterate and who have children, the last thing you wanted for those kids when they're adults is to be going into a food bank with their kids. And that's just how that cycle works. So, books, reading and literacy can bust them out of that cycle and that's what we're trying to do.

>> And of course your foundation is one of the Library of Congress' reading promotion partners. We appreciate that. What is the website for your foundation?

>> It's wishyouwellfoundation.org and it's feedingbodyandmind.com.

>> Great. If we could turn the clock back just a little bit to your first novel, "Absolute Power" which obviously everybody know is very successful, made into a major motion picture with Clint Eastwood and Gene Hackman. Talk a little bit about your involvement in that film. And as sort of a segue, I hear at least all kinds of rumors about maybe new projects for the screen, big screen or small screen. Can you talk about any of those as well?

>> Sure. "Absolute Power" was, you know, it was a total anomaly because things don't happen absolutely in Hollywood. It's don't--I don't know what happened. It was--all the moons were in alignment. Clint Eastwood signed on and then everything was perfect. That's just, you know, not how it really works out there. My involvement was minimal although it was very fun and I had a lot of enthusiasm for it. I worked some with Bill Goldman, William Goldman into the screenplay. He came down to DC and we went around some of the locations in the book. And he would call me from time to time when he was writing the script. I could hear him like typing the keys on the keyboard and he was asking my thoughts and impressions and opinions about different things. And we went to the filming, some of it in Baltimore and Washington, so we have to meet all the stars, which was terrific. I mean who wouldn't want to meet, you know, somebody like Clint Eastwood. And--so that was a great experience. We went to all the world premiers in LA and DC and in London. And it was great. I mean to see, you know, your work up on the screen even though they had to change the movie from the book dramatically for different reasons and I've written scripts and worked out in Hollywood some, so I understand that they're very much apples and oranges. And so, I--we do have some projects that are percolating out there and hopefully one of the most that we've--I've sold the rights of "The Christmas Train" to Lifetime Television and they're supposed to be filming that for a Lifetime Christmas movie in Canada in January to February to be on air in Christmas of '08. "The Camel Club" were in discussions to turn that into a network television series.

>> Right.

>> And the same with my "King & Maxwell" series, "Simple Genius" now we'll get in a split second. And the winner right now is that with two different actresses, two different screenwriters, we have the producer on board who was one of the producers of "Departed" who's working very fervently to try to get the winner made to a major motion picture. So, hopefully some of those projects will stick. There's never a guarantee. My rule now is that I'll believe it what I see it on the screen that it's actually going to happen. But, we're working hard to put these things together. And I--different thing and a different [inaudible], we don't send books out to studios anymore because they just don't read, one. Two, and they don't really make movies anymore and you have to sort of go out and gather the elements you need, the producer, or director, actor, writer and then go into a studio with a take on the material. This is how we would turn it into a movie and the studio, you know, hopefully will say, "OK, I agree with that. Here's the check. I'll make the movie." And that's how we do it.

>> Well, if "The Camel Club" comes to television and we'll certainly welcome them into the real Library of Congress as opposed to the fictional version, so we--

>> Yeah.

>> --we're eager for that.

>> Yes.

>> You said apples and oranges and you've written seven screenplays, how was the process of writing a novel different than writing for the screen?

>> We have wide latitude as a novelist and you're sort of the master and commander. No one questions what you do. And at the end of the day your decision is the final one and absolute. You have absolute power really. With the screenplay, you were sort of at the bottom of the feeding chain. And you are beholden and answer to higher powers than yourself. And it's a director's town in DC or in Hollywood, and you just have to sort of go to those marching orders. And it's a very technical format for writing a story and there are million different things that you have to understand when you're writing it, the central structure is three act.. Every movie you'll ever go to see is built on a three-act structure. The first 10 pages sets up the major characters and the underlying dilemma that they have to overcome and obstacles. The first act is about 20 pages are 20 minutes. The second act carries the most action in the film. It's probably 60 pages, 60 minutes long. You have the third act that might be 15 to 25 minutes longer then three to five minute resolution at the end. And you have to work within those parameters. If your first act is 50 pages long, you have an immediate problem. If you haven't set up the dilemma within the first 10 minutes of the film, you have a problem. And every scene has to have at least two reasons why it's in there. When you go into a scene, you have to know how you're going to exit the scene. And I've been out in directors meetings and producer meetings out on Hollywood where their challenge--you know, they will challenge, you know, every word that I've written in the script. You know, why is it there, why is that person saying it, why is that narrative piece here in the

first action being the second act, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And I think it makes you a better writer because it makes you think about things that you otherwise might not have thought about. It makes you think in a level of detail that's just extraordinary actually. And so I think it's actually made me a better novelist but at the end of the day, I enjoy writing novels more because you really do have the final say and you can write the story the way you want to write it and you can write it as long as you want to write it. Because the screenplay, if you get much past--for [inaudible] write a comedy, if you get much past 105 pages, that's a problem, for a thriller, mystery if you get past 120 pages, that's a problem. So, if you, you know, bring in a script that's 140, 150 pages long, that's, you know, two and a half hours and it's romantic comedy, nobody's going to look at it.

>> Yeah. Now all these different genres, screenplays, novels and you've also ventured into writing for children with your "Freddy and the French Fries" series. What was--

>> Yes.

>> --your inspiration for Freddy? And are you planning to write anymore children's books in the future?

>> The "Freddy and the French Fries" series came about as bedtime stories for my kid because when you're a writer it's not enough to just read to your kids at night. They expect you because you're so creative and you have this great imagination to come up with stories. And my, at that time, six-year-old daughter sort of challenged me to, you know, come up with a really cool bedtime series for them and so just off the top of my head it was "Freddy and the French Fries". And I told them those stories over the years. And then my kid's school had an auction, they had an auction to raise money. It's a parochial school--to raise money for the school. My wife had the idea, "Why don't you write down the first Freddy story, go on and read it to the first graders." And back then my son was in first grade and I did and I did all the stupid faces and I made complete fool of myself but the kids loved it and then we--my wife worked with each of the kids in the first grade beginning in the page of the story and they did an illustration for that page in their own hand. The [inaudible] liked the book and they were given the illustrative credits and the book was auctioned off the school auction and brought in a lot of money for the school. And I thought it would end there but one day I was talking to my agent in New York and he asked me what I was doing, and I told him about the silly little story that I've written for the school. And he asked me to send it up to him and I did and he really liked it and they sent it to Little, Brown and they really liked it so we did two of those books and they were fun. They were very [inaudible] for me because it gave me a break from, you know, some of the other types of books that I've been writing over the years. My older brother Rudy who was an artist, he did the illustrations for the "Freddy and the French Fries" series. It's a lot of fun to work with him. I don't know if I'll write anymore of those, I mean I'm really glad that I wrote the first two. It was just fun to be able to write something that, you know, my kids at the early age can read and that other kids who might read them and then be turned on to other books in the future. And like that a lot of children's

author might say, you know, we're critically important to your career because if kids don't read, these kids are not going to read your books when they get big [inaudible] with them.

>> Well, David Baldacci, we greatly appreciate your time today but I would be remiss if I didn't ask about your next novel "Stone Cold" which is hitting bookstores in November. Any secrets you can share with us from that novel?

>> Well, I left the--I left an enormous cliffhanger at the end in "The Collectors" and I've been getting so many emails from people who are furious about it. They want me to, you know, if I don't write this book soon, they will hunt me down and beat me to death I guess. "Stone Cold" will take care of all the issues that I left hanging in "The Collectors". Annabelle Conroy, Alex Ford is back, the secret service agent. He played a much more prominent role in "Stone Cold" and you'll learn a lot more about Oliver Stone, about his past and that past comes back to haunt him in "Stone Cold" finally. And there's, you know, quite a few sort of titanic struggles in this book and there are several endings in his book too as I worked through all the baggage of his past. And, well, I think I was shocked by the ending when I wrote it. I didn't think the book was going to end the way that it did but--so, I think that I'm shocked. I think the readers will be shocked as well. But it will be well worth the wait. And the cliffhanger that I left going in "The Collectors" people will--everything will be answered.

>> Very intriguing. And do you often take cues from your readers in terms of their reaction that influences what you'll end up writing?

>> Well, I--you know, people always--I've been on a panel one time with a bunch of other authors and the question was, who do you write for. And every other author in the panel said I write for my readers and they got to me and I said, well, I'm sorry I don't mean this to sound selfish but I write for myself. And if you write for readers, so I'm not saying it's a bad thing but sometimes you try to satisfy what they want and some readers like predictability. They want their, you know, particularly with the recurring characters, they want them to do the same sort of thing in every book. And some writers cater to that. Or the same sort of subject matter and you don't get outside the little comfortable box that you have. With me, I try to chase things sort of I find interesting or that I don't know a lot about but I want to know a lot about. And so when I write for myself I'm hoping that because I have passion for what I'm writing about, that passion will come through in the pages and entertain people to make them want to read my books. But I do--I have to write for myself because you spend a year or longer of your life with each projects, you'd better be interested in it. And if you're trying to cater to somebody else's desires and wants, the same level of passion doesn't come through because you're always, you know, it's what they want, it's not what you want, and as a writer I think you need to write about things that you want to write about.

>> Well, David Baldacci, thank you once again. And we look forward to hearing more from you at the National Book Festival on Saturday, September 29th on your National Mall from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event is

free and open to the public. If you want more details in the list of participating authors, you can visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. So it's Matt Raymond from the Library of Congress. Thank you for listening.

[Music]