

Paretsky Questions

Sylvia Dixon has been a fan of Sara Paretsky's books for many years and so leapt at the chance of shooting some quick-fire questions at the creator behind V.I. Warshawski!

S.D. - Your descriptions of run down Chicago are both superb and depressing. Have things changed since you started writing these books?

S.P. - Things have changed dramatically. We've lost a lot of heavy industry and thus well paying jobs for less educated people. There are neighbourhoods with 40% unemployment. At the same time, race relations in the city are much better even if there's still a distance to travel. The gap between the 1% and the 99 is less noticeable in Chicago than in New York.

S.D. - Similarly corruption, racism, sexism and the struggles of the poor to get by are the heart of your stories and continue in the latest one. Do you feel that anything has changed over the years?

S.P. - Poverty and poor schools continue to be a serious problem in African American neighbourhoods. At the same time the work place is integrated in ways it never used to be, from top to bottom in the business world.

S.D. - In this book you cleverly introduce Boom Boom's niece as an even more headstrong and passionate advocate against injustice. Do you think Warshawski has mellowed? Will Bernardine Fouchard return to maintain a maverick voice as Warshawski matures (relatively speaking!)?

S.P. - It's sad to think that V I may have become more risk averse with time - being with Bernie makes her realise what she used to put her mother through! I don't see a role for Bernie in the immediate future, but that could change.

S.D. - I notice that there are several references to London in this book, particularly in relation to Lotty's past. Do you spend much time on this side of the pond?

S.P. - I only get to the UK about once a year, sad to say.

S.D. - In some of your books - I am thinking particularly of Guardian Angel - there are some philosophical passages discussing VI's strong attachment to her mother and the way that it influences her relationships with others, pushing away anyone who gets too close. Do you think VI has managed to overcome this yet?

S.P. - V I is close to Jake, but that may be about to change. She remains chary of close attachments because of her fear of abandonment - even when one is aware of a problem, one doesn't necessarily change.

S.D. - How much of V I is you?

S.P. - I would say that V I is my active presence in the world, both in what she says and what she does.

S.D. - How much do you get involved in the political scene? VI is rarely without her gun - are you an advocate of the current gun laws in the States?

S.P. - In recent years I haven't had the energy for as much direct action as I used to undertake. As for the gun laws - or lack thereof - they madden, depress and terrify me. The US currently has essentially no restrictions on gun ownership but a constantly increasing grab bag of restrictions on women's access to reproductive health.

S.D. - Finally, not a question but a note of thanks. I have so much enjoyed your books over the years and V I Warshawski is one of my all time heroes. Thank you so much.

S.P. - Thank-you for those kind words!