

RHODES SCHOLAR

#7
2020

Power of the Humanities





Working to Become a Mystery Writer at 74

Ron Katz (Missouri & Balliol 1967) is a reformed attorney and aspiring writer living in Silicon Valley. He is also a board member of the Association of American Rhodes Scholars. Here, he reflects on his journey from law to literature.

I very much enjoyed my career as a trial lawyer, but I hoped that I would be able to do something else as well before it was too late. Having practised law for over 40 years by 2016, the question was how to transition from the billable hour to the fulfillable hour.

That was a difficult question for me because the post-initial-career phase of my life appeared to have far less structure than the previous stages. Luckily I came across a programme at Stanford – the Distinguished Careers Institute – for people in my exact position. The programme, similar to one that is now being considered for senior Rhodes Scholars, emphasised lifelong learning and intergenerational connection.

For a year, I was in a cohort of 35 peers. We met as a group twice a week, discussing, remarkably frankly, our life journeys. More importantly, we had access to all the classes offered by Stanford. Some of the classes I took related to my prior experience, but some were purely exploratory. One of those was on the history of the mystery novel. I had always enjoyed reading mysteries, but analysing them in depth guided by a professor learned in the field added a new dimension for me. Also, I benefited from the savvy advice of John Evans, who teaches creative writing at Stanford.

I decided that I would like to try my hand at writing a mystery, but all I came up with while I was at Stanford was a concept – a Baby Boomer detective couple along the lines of Nick and Nora Charles of *The Thin Man* – and a title, ‘The Mystery of the Missing Reading Glasses’. Because losing reading glasses is a near-universal experience among those of a certain age, the title always got a laugh when I mentioned it, which kept the idea alive in the back of my mind as I continued my life transition.

What actually caused me to start writing was the growing popularity of the dismissive phrase ‘Ok, boomer’. Because it irritated me that the 77,000,000 members of the Boomer generation could be disrespected simply because of their age, I created a ‘woke’ couple, Barb and Bernie Silver, aka ‘The Sleuthing Silvers’.

The idea was that they would specialise in problems, as their logo states, ‘Where Age Is An Edge’, for example going undercover at an assisted-living facility. The writing part was easier than I anticipated – I decided it would be best to start with short stories rather than longer forms – because of my familiarity with the subject matter.

Getting published was also easier than anticipated, as there are many e-zines devoted to the mystery genre. My children pointed out, however, that publishing is very 20th century; much better to be online, they advised. That is how the website www.thesleuthingsilvers.com was born. If this series of stories entertains even a minuscule percentage of the 77,000,000, I will be very pleased.



“Where Age is an Edge”