

THE MEMORY BOX
Eva Lesko Natiello
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Contact Eva Lesko Natiello, info@evanatiello.com

Q & A with author Eva Lesko Natiello

Q: Where did the idea for THE MEMORY BOX come from?

A: The impetus for THE MEMORY BOX came from an article featured in The New York Times titled “In Searching We Trust” which pronounced “‘vanity searches’ (like the ones done on Google) the ‘hottest new power game.’” It mentioned that a 17-year-old boy who was living in Los Angeles, Googled himself and discovered he was on a missing persons list in Canada. He had no idea until he Googled himself, that he was a victim of parental abduction. The fact that someone could find out something so personal about himself from a Google search was a fascinating concept to me.

Q: Why did you choose the suburbs as the setting for THE MEMORY BOX and is it based on the town you live in?

There are a couple of reasons I chose Farhaven, a suburban town which is loosely based on the town New Jersey town I live in. I’ve always been intrigued by stories which have beautiful, upscale settings which juxtapose a dark, subversive storyline. The Stepford wives introduced me to this idea. It provides the first misconception to the reader, that only upstanding people could live in a place like this. The other reason it seemed right for the story was when I started to write The Memory Box, I was relatively new to the suburbs. I had just moved to New Jersey from New York City. It presented an instant learning curve. With my young children starting school, I was plopped into a new social circle of suburban moms. There is a definite way things are done in the suburbs that’s different from the way they’re done in the city. I knew instantly that I wanted to set this psychological suspense in a bucolic, upscale suburb where the community of stay-at-home moms, a sub-culture all its own, would help highlight the juxtaposition of conformity and deception.

Q: You've talked about the "He was a great neighbor" phenomenon. Can you explain that?

A: Well, do you ever watch the local news and see a handcuffed crazy person being hauled out of their home because it's been discovered that he's been doing something deviant for years. Something terrible. And the camera crew of the news program camps out in front of this guy's house, trying to get neighbors to speak on camera about said crazy person. Someone will inevitably say, "He was a great neighbor" or "He was really friendly" or "He was great with my kids" or "He helped me shovel my driveway when I had the flu." I call that the "He was a great neighbor" phenomenon. It's about not really knowing who lives next to you. It's also about the fact that the craziest, cruelest, badest people in the world will offer to shovel your driveway when you have the flu.

Q: THE MEMORY BOX is your first novel. Did you always want to be a novelist?

A: I must admit I never wanted to be a novelist. At different times of my life I wanted to be an astronaut, an actress, a singer, in the film industry, a travel or sitcom writer, a cupcake judge and, according to a third-grade personal essay I wrote, a baseball player. I am not one of those people who claim that from a very young age they knew they wanted to write a book. I started to write THE MEMORY BOX as a way to channel my creativity and myself into something. It was very soon after I had taken a sabbatical from my career as a communications executive in the cosmetics industry and I moved with my family from NYC to the NJ suburbs. I was experiencing the culture shock of a new career and a new town in which I knew no one. The suburbs as a stay-at-home mom, was very new to me. Writing THE MEMORY BOX was my way of staying creative, strategic and communicative, even if it was with a book!

Q: If writers reveal some of themselves in their writing what is revealed about you in THE MEMORY BOX?

A: Definitely my fear of losing my memory. I think about it every day. For a very long time, I've had what I refer to as "police paranoia," particularly when I'm driving. If I see a police car in my rear view mirror, I always think he's going to pull me over. Even though I'm doing

nothing wrong. The next thing I fear, is that he will want to question me for something I did a long time ago, of which I have no recollection. Thankfully, these are the crazy musings of a fiction writer, and they are not fears which have any merit.

Q: You call *The Memory Box* a marriage thriller, what is that exactly?

A: The marriage thriller is the newest sub-genre of thrillers, and mainly of the psychological thriller category. There has been a spurt of thrillers recently in this category, like *Gone Girl*, *The Husband's Secret*, *The Silent Wife*, to name a few. One of the reasons I think this type of psychological thriller is so hot right now, is while a married couple's relationship has always been a fascination to outsiders, it's especially so because these days practically everything is knowable; all you have to do is Google it! It truly is the last bastion of privacy. What goes on in someone's marriage? Only the couple knows. So when things are not so up to snuff, and we as readers get to be voyeurs, what's more delicious than that?!

Q: In reference to your writing process, do you outline the entire book before writing?

A: No. I'm definitely not that organized. When I started to write *The Memory Box*, I knew the beginning and the end. I was always certain of those two things. And after the many years it has been since I started writing it, they have never changed. I did utilize an outline very late in the game, when I had to keep track of the sequence of things. When you write suspense and there are plot twists, it's important to stay organized with timing especially. I actually drew up many versions of calendars for September 2006 and October 2006, the two months during which most of the book takes place. I also have many sketches of the floor plan of Caroline's house. It's very important to note that if a character walks down a hall from the den and made a right into the kitchen in Chapter 3, that she doesn't walk down the hall from the den and make a left into the kitchen in Chapter 7. Most readers are very visual. Even if they don't realize it, they see the book unfold as if it were a movie. They would pick up on a wrong turn in a heartbeat.

Q: How do you get creatively juiced-up?

A: Having experienced writing slumps and creative quagmires, I have some go-to remedies. If I've got some time on my hands and nothing's urgent, I will read a good book. Often, a fascinating character or setting or an author's voice will nudge me out of my slump. If I need a quicker antidote, I'll watch a movie, like anything from Wes Anderson will inspire everything

and anything from visual compositions, dialogue ideas, character quirks, even the soundtracks from his movies will stir the creative juices. Which brings me to my last creative defibrillator: music. I go for a drive and listen to my favorite songwriters. There's something about the combination of driving (where all my big ideas happen) and listening to the work of great lyricists.