

Q & A with author C.R. Cardin

Q. What inspired you to write Case Study?

A. Dr. Taylor Case has been on my mind for ten years. She is the product of “MacGyver,” “Indiana Jones,” “The Wild Wild West” starring Robert Conrad, and Julia Baker (Diahann Carroll’s character of the Julia TV show) which means she is manifested from childhood exposure to TV and film. Originally she was a chemistry professor, but I upgraded her skills to match the advances in technology. I wanted Taylor to be a strong, independent woman motivated by something she couldn’t control. Granted she comes from a privileged household and education, but the point of the story is that we all have our demons.

Q. The title “Case Study” is a play on the main character, Professor Taylor Case’s name. Why do you think she will be an appealing main character to readers?

A. “Case Study” plays on many levels. As students we are given case studies to learn from. Taylor is also an educator. “Case Study” is Taylor’s personal learning experience about how to forgive herself. Case is not a one-dimensional protagonist. Dr. Case possesses an unusual amalgam of traits; a passionate lover and a quiet person, shy and assertive, self-sacrificing and indulgent, insular and giving of herself. Dedicated to family and students, and driven to put herself at risk.

Q. What about the role of Dr. Haas in the novel?

A. Alex Haas is the mirror that Taylor can see herself in. As you might imagine, Taylor is comforted by hard science; things that make sense and can be proven. Alex begins to soften those edges and reminds Taylor that there is a little more to life if she can just forgive herself.

Q. The plot centers around the abduction of a child and Professor Case trying to find and rescue the child from the predator. At the same time, the case hits home for Professor Case because her own brother was abducted. What, as the author, did you hope to gain by this similarity between the abduction and Case’s past?

A. A good book always has a parallel story and irony. It’s this tragic event that causes Taylor to react in an extreme manner because it is similar to her past. She holds herself responsible, unable to shed the guilt until she realizes that she had the power to forgive herself all along.

Q. What did you find most interesting in your research while writing “Case Study”?

A. Believe it or not, it was the use of breadcrumbs to clean the oil paintings; the composition of Vermeer’s paint; all the art history. You may have picked up on the parallelism with Caravaggio’s David.

Q. Chris, will you tell us a little bit more about the importance of art to the plot of “Case Study”?

A. Most people would not put works of art and forensics together (that is the idea behind the cover by the way). It is through art that Dr. Haas breaks through to Taylor. First they bond by using science to analyze a potentially priceless masterpiece. Then through a conversation they have about Carravagio, his style, and a particular painting of his that they both have seen, the moment after David slays Goliath, Taylor ever so subtly gives in to the notion that there may be a light at the end of the tunnel she has been living in.

Q. Since Taylor is a professor of forensics, you give a lot of details about forensics in the book. You are apparently knowledgeable about forensics. Have you always had an interest in it?

A. I was introduced to the double helix in high school biology class. At the time I asked the teacher, “How does that the one cell, or zygote that is formed when egg and sperm meet, know how to make all the other kinds of cells?” I was a little ahead of my time. Today we know that the secret lies in stem cells and the particular kind of DNA they have. What got me thinking about it again was the OJ trial. And then the initiative of mapping the entire human genome received broad press. And now we have bio-chips. I can’t keep up!

I read books on the human genome and of course, Watson’s “DNA: The Secret of Life.” But the most detailed research involved understanding the step-by-step laboratory procedures in processing DNA. That took a while.

Q. How is forensics used in the plot of “Case Study”?

A. Well, everyone who watches CSI knows about DNA but the show really doesn’t explain the science or the procedures (and sometimes it bends the rules). I felt the need to give better insight but not enough to bore the reader. Since Taylor is a scientist it is important to share some of the details of her world. It also illustrates the contrast between her lab (computer printouts and sterile utensils) versus Dr. Haas’s (oil on canvas and breadcrumbs).

Q. Do you have any favorite authors or books that influenced your writing of mysteries and thrillers?

A. This started at a very young age, seven, I believe. I read Ellery Queen and especially loved solving the one page mystery puzzles. I could not put down the “Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators” series. Three boys have a secret fort in the middle of a junkyard where they meet to solve mysteries. And of course, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s, Sherlock Holmes.