

## **An Interview with the Author: Mark Kestigian**

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### **Tell us about yourself and your background?**

I grew up mostly in the New England region of the United States. I originally planned on being an anthropologist, but always had a keen interest in journalism. While in high school, I used to cover my own high school basketball and baseball games for the local paper. I never told the coaches about it and no one ever figured out who this mysterious journalist named 'Lance Hale II' was!

### **What was the motivation to write the book?**

After spending a few years as a reporter and editor for newspapers in Bloomington, Indiana, Cincinnati, Ohio and Norwich, Connecticut, I became very keen to take my writing to another level and getting a novel published became my ultimate challenge. It's taken me just 30 years to achieve this goal!

### **What is your new book, *One Off*, about?**

There have been many books about journalism and journalists, but *One Off* tries to integrate a typical reporter's daily trials with this same person's attempting to determine his own identity. Everyone is a 'one off' to borrow an expression, but some are more 'one off' than others and this novel hopefully gives readers an insight into a person who is literally drowning in a dyslexic gene pool.

The genesis of the book stems in part from my experiences working for newspapers in Indiana, Ohio and Connecticut as well as from that age-old issue of family trees and how bent and twisted most of them are when you prune away a limb or three. In the case of this book's main character, Walt, he decides to return home after 15 years in the mideastern wilderness to sift through his family issues. These include his dad's dad having murdered someone in his homeland before emigrating to America and determining just how he's related on his Mum's side to a true blue-blooded *Mayflower* voyager– along with the original Adams Family (that's John and John Quincy, not Gomez and Morticia).

### **One of the characters is a one-eared old-school journalist with an Armenian background – a description that loosely fits you. Where do you stop and Walt begins?**

We share a most unusual birth defect, but apart from that we don't have a lot in common. If we were related, it's more than likely I'd be asked to donate part or all of my kidneys as given the amount of alcohol he consumes, he's likely to be in need of help soon.

One story we share in common is how this most distinctive defect kept us out of harm's way during the Vietnam War. America's – and Americans – part in the Vietnam War were way past positive by the time I checked in for my physical. Military physicians were well attuned to attempts by perfectly healthy specimens trying to pass off recurring hang nails or occasional bouts of acne as underlying grave illnesses making them unfit for combat. The physicals could take hours not only because of the sheer

number of young men waiting to be examined, but because of the battery of physical and psychological tests they put everyone through. That is, everyone but me. I didn't even have to strip down to my underwear as a spotter for the main medical men took one look and ushered me to the exit. I never knew if it was because he was so unsettled by my appearance or by the thought it could be contagious. Rather than the more usual looks of fear and horror, my last memory is the sight of so many other young men looking longingly, even enviously at me. How lucky was I to be born with only one of something that normally came in pairs?

**Did you really have a pet ox when you were growing up?**

I did. His name was Simon and he came from an historical village I used to work at during summer breaks. He was the only male born one spring and they were keen to turn him into veal so I offered to give him a home at my family's farm in western Massachusetts. We spent a fair bit of time getting to know one another. We used to go for walks across the cornfields and pastures. When we started, he was the size of an Alsatian. It wasn't long before he weighed nearly 2,000 pounds (900 kilograms) and sported the meanest set of longhorns this side of the Mississippi. He taught me a lot about patience and respect.

**In another life you've managed to win on a couple of TV game shows. What's the secret to winning?**

Being a trivia junkie and not being afraid to fail. For every time I've won something, there have been two more times I came away empty handed.

**What do you like doing when you're not writing?**

My wife and I enjoy 'extreme gardening' at our home in Dandenong Ranges. We call it that simply because as a result of the block's lay-out, it's difficult to get any machinery inside the front gate, which means we do practically everything by hand.

**About the Author**

Mark Kestigian grew up in the New England region of the USA. He originally trained to become an anthropologist, but after years of covering his own high school basketball and baseball games for the local paper (under the moniker Lance Hale II) he fell into the path of journalism and spent many years as a reporter in Ohio and New England.

After moving to Australia in the 1980s Mark has published articles on a wide range of topics and co-written two guidebooks. He is a TV quiz show champion (he actually won the car) but his proudest achievement is having a pet ox while growing up. *One Off* is his first novel, published by Red All Over Publishing.

**About the Publisher**

Red All Over Publishing is an independent publisher formed in Melbourne in 2012. Red All Over has a commitment to delivering stories with great characters and great plots (and hopefully both). For further details: [redallover.com.au](http://redallover.com.au)