

SouthWest Sage

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Charles Greaves Wins Storyteller Award

by Ruth Friesen

Charles Greaves of Santa Fe won the Storyteller Award for *Hush Money* in the SouthWest Writers 2010 annual writing competition. His entries, *Hush Money*, a mystery novel, and *Hard Twisted*, historical fiction, each won first place in their categories.

"Having both books selected as finalists in the SWW contest was a huge honor. Then, attending the banquet and watching both win in their respective categories, I was on cloud nine. Winning the Storyteller was the cherry on the sundae. It was the best night I've ever had with my clothes on," says Greaves.

After spending 25 years as a trial lawyer in Los Angeles, he moved to Santa Fe in 2006 with the fantasy of becoming a writer. Writing pretty much full-time for four years, he finished two novels. The first, *Hush Money*, is a legal thriller set in Pasadena, his old hometown. It's a breezy, first-person yarn with lots of humor and action. The second novel, *Hard Twisted*, written in a tight, Cormac McCarthy-style of third-person prose, is a true-crime story set in the Depression-era West.

"*Hard Twisted* was much more challenging -- my first stab at literary fiction," says Greaves.

The tale that would become *Hard Twisted* began in 1994, when he and his wife were hiking with some friends in a remote canyon in southeastern Utah and they stumbled upon a pair of human skulls. This precipitated a fifteen-year investigation from which he pieced together the story of a young girl kidnapped from Texas by her father's murderer and led on a crime and killing spree across the Southwest.

I asked him which novel he had thought had a better chance of winning. "If you'd forced me to choose, I would have guessed that *Hush Money* had the best shot at winning something. It's humorous, and the voice is strong, and it grabs you right away. *Hard Twisted* is the more challenging

read -- dark and spare. My struggle there was to create empathy for this young girl without being inside her head and without writing a kind of Perils of Pauline melodrama."



Kate Russell Photography

Greaves has no formal training as a writer of fiction, "other than the best training of all, which is that I'm a voracious reader of fiction," he says. He attended the Tony Hillerman conference in Albuquerque two years ago, and subscribes to *The Writer*, "which is helpful, mostly for inspiration."

He has found a routine that fits his lifestyle and sticks to it. "I get up, eat breakfast, walk the dogs, then sit at my computer from around 10:00 to 1:00, eat lunch, then return to the computer until around 4:00, then go for a run. I do that six days a week, and if I miss a day, I tend to get grumpy. Then my wife has to remind me that I'm doing what I love, and that I have nothing to complain about. And she's right, of course, as always."

Novelist Betsy James, Storyteller Judge, said, "There was a very close runner-up, so the choice had me gnawing my fingernails. But because the award is called the "Storyteller," I chose the piece that excelled in a sociable aspect of that art: It was not only tight, clear, and interesting, but damn funny. It takes rare skill to make a solitary reader laugh out loud."

Watch for his books on the bestseller lists soon. Peter Rubie, Fine Print Literary Management and SWW annual awards banquet keynote speaker, requested the manuscript for *Hush Money*, and Greaves also sent it to Tom Colgan at Penguin, who judged the Mystery/Thriller category. He does not yet have an agent.

Charles Greaves has now joined SWW and looks forward to attending some of the programs. "I think I need to spend more time among other writers and less time in my office with the door closed." Welcome and congratulations, Charles.