

The First Two Pages: *Reason to Doubt*

By Nancy Cole Silverman (Henry Press)

I spent nearly twenty-five years in news and talk radio. Most of it writing news and commercial copy. Short, concise, thirty- and sixty-second spots with an opening, a middle and an end.

When a listener would call in to report an incident—read that *breaking news*—the station would dispatch a reporter and in the interim take what information they could substantiate over the phone. Usually, within minutes, we would have the beginning basics of a story. The who, the what, the where and the when, with details to follow. Stay tuned.

It was a race with our competitors to see who could get the story first, and I learned early on the importance of a story's lead. In a newsroom, the rule of order for the top of the hour news story was simple: If it bleeds, it leads.

Listeners, just like readers, need to be entertained.

The idea that it's important to grab a reader's eyes or a listener's ears quickly has always stuck with me. It's the reason I like to open with a scene in each of my books. And when I sat down to write *Reason to Doubt*, book five of the Carol Childs Mysteries, it seemed the easiest way to get right to the heart of the drama.

In the opening scene, I wanted to establish Carol's strained relationship with her daughter, who had just returned from her first year away at college with a boyfriend in tow, while hinting at the trouble to follow. Time of year and location also needed to be included, and I wanted a clever way that would connect with readers while showing the action of my characters.

I chose a typical beach scene with Carol and kids posed on the sand for a family photo. Something that demonstrated a family unit yet positioned the boyfriend/photographer as an outsider, and someone with whom Carol is less than comfortable.

“Say Cheeeese.”

The photographer stood barefoot in the sand with his jeans rolled up around his ankles and looked out from behind his black Nikon, winked at my daughter, and snapped off a series of shots while Cate, Charlie and I did our best not to squint into the California sun.

“Come on people, work with me. You too, Mom. Big smile.”

I gritted my teeth. I had been wearing the same pasted grin on my face since my daughter had returned home from college with an aspiring young fashion photographer in tow. In Cate's eyes, Pete Pompidou was handsome, talented and destined to be the next Richard Avedon.

And, at the time, she had no reason to believe otherwise.

I liked the scene because it was a snapshot. Just enough to convey the relationship of my characters with each other and allow me to move on quickly to what I refer to as the obligatory Who-Am-I paragraph so necessary to series novels.

My name is Carol Childs. I'm a forty-year-old investigative reporter for KTLK, a talk radio station in Los Angeles, and for the last seven months, I've been investigating the deaths of three young fashion models. Victims of a serial killer, who we in the press had tagged the Model Slayer. The Model Slayer is my story, a story I broke after finding the first victim tied to a tree with her hands strung up above her head. News of the murders has terrorized the city and been the top story on every news outlet in town. And, up until my phone rang in my office two weeks after our little beachside photo shoot, a story I had no idea was about to become personal or that my daughter might be involved.

The above paragraph is always tricky to write. If it sticks out like a sore thumb, it can require numerous rewrites. But in a series novel, where the protagonist needs to be reintroduced in the first couple of pages, it should never appear to be obtrusive. Here I liked the way I was able to blend in clues from the news story Carol's been working on with the idea that she's about to find out she's not only covering a news story but may very well be part of it.

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Nancy Cole Silverman spent nearly twenty-five in Los Angeles Talk Radio, beginning her career on the talent side as one for the first female voices on the air, to the business side, where she retired as one of two female general managers in the nation's second largest radio market. After a successful career in the radio industry, Silverman turned to writing fiction. Her crime-focused novels and short stories have attracted readers throughout America. Her Carol Childs Mysteries series (Henry Press) features a single-mom whose "day job" as a reporter at a busy Los Angeles radio station often leads to long nights as a crime-solver. Silverman lives in Los Angeles with her husband and a thoroughly pampered standard poodle.