



What's Happening With... Michael A. Kahn

by Brian Skupin

Michael Kahn and his wife were living in Chicago, near the train tracks, and at 11:30 one night when a train passed by Kahn wondered who would be traveling at that time of night, and why. He decided to find out.

"So the next night at 11:30, with my wife seeing me off at door, in tears like a war bride, I went and rode the train, and wrote an article about it for *Chicago* magazine." He wrote a few more articles but didn't try his hand at fiction.

A few years later, Kahn, a teacher, decided on a lark to apply to law school, and was accepted to Harvard.

"I couldn't believe it! I got the elementary school teacher slot, I guess."

After law school he joined a Chicago firm and ended up traveling a lot so he read paperback mysteries to pass the time he spent on airplanes. On his return home his wife would ask if he'd enjoyed the latest book. He often replied, "Not a bad book, Marge, but I could do better."

Then one day after this conversation took place his wife added, "Why don't you write a book, or shut up?"

Slightly shocked, he asked what she meant. "I don't want to be eighty years old and hear you still saying that," she replied.

So he started working on his first book.

"All of us have one novel in us, sickeningly autobiographical. That's what mine became. So I set it aside and tried to think how I could avoid that. One day I thought, 'What if the main character was a woman?'" Kahn says. "Even then, it took me ten drafts of the first chapter to get her away from being me in drag."

Kahn wrote every night after work for three hours, and when he was done had written *The Canaan Legacy*, a mystery featuring Rachel Gold, a Chicago attorney who

leaves a large firm to go out on her own. The senior partner of a large law firm has died, and his will specifies that a trust fund should be set up to maintain his pet's grave, but he never had a pet...

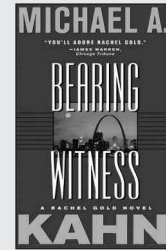
"My wife read it, and said it would win the Pulitzer, and my mother told me it would win the Nobel, so I needed another opinion." A friend of a friend was a junior editor at Viking, and she loved it. But the manuscript ended up on another editor's desk for months, with no action, so Kahn used the enthusiastic response from the junior editor to attract an agent, and the book was published in 1988.

"That was the coolest—I finally had something my kids could take to Show and Tell. Before that I had nothing. Here's some interrogatories."

Although he had no intention of writing a series, Kahn was persuaded to continue and to date there have been eight snappy legal thrillers about Rachel, her friends Jacki (formerly Jack), law Professor Benny Goldberg, and the Orthodox Jewish love interest she meets along the way, Jonathan Wolf. During this time the Kahns moved from Chicago to St. Louis, and therefore so did Rachel.

After writing *Trophy Widow*, Kahn took a break, which is understandable since Kahn has also raised five daughters with his wife, and maintained a high-powered legal career specializing in intellectual property law.

Readers will be interested to know that Kahn has written and published another book, using the pseudonym Michael Baron. In 2005 Doubleday published *The Mourning Sexton*, about an ex-convict lawyer who tries to rebuild his life and legal career after his drug habit and embezzlement lands him in jail.



A MICHAEL A. KAHN READING LIST

RACHEL GOLD SERIES

The Canaan Legacy, 1988
(re-issued as *Grave Designs*, 1992)

Death Benefits, 1992

Firm Ambitions, 1994

Due Diligence, 1995

Sheer Gall, 1996

Bearing Witness, 1999

Trophy Widow, 2002

AS BY MICHAEL BARON

The Mourning Sexton, 2005

Kahn has also just started work on a new book, about a mailroom employee with Asperger's Syndrome who starts to suspect the suicidal leap off the top of the firm's parking garage by a young female attorney was in fact a murder.

But his heart will always be with his series character, and there is good news: Kahn has just finished the eighth book in the Rachel Gold series.

"All those years, I missed Rachel. Tell your readers that I missed her more than they did." The latest book will contain some surprises, in that it is seven years after the last book, and there is major news concerning Jonathan, who finally managed to get together with Rachel in *Trophy Widow*.

"She will have been through some tough times," Kahn says, "but she's still on an even keel, still plucky. Benny is still her best friend.

"She's definitely still Rachel." ✦

Brian Skupin is the co-publisher of Mystery Scene. Lost track of a favorite writer? Contact <brianskupin@mysteryscenemag.com>.