Man of many talents

Crime writer pens breakout novel

### Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

It is a risk that many writers face: stereotyped early in their careers, there is a temptation on the part of many readers to pigeonhole successful authors as capable of writing only one sort of book. Some writers never break out of their molds; others resort to using different pen names for different genres. The British novelist Ruth Rendell, for example, has won considerable fame for her Inspector Wexford mysteries; but when she wants to pen a thriller, she often writes as Barbara Vine.

This week's author is a case in point. Having written several highly successful humorous mysteries, he decided to branch out and create a suspense novel. His readers are in for a surprise: a standalone thriller with an intricate yet believable plot, it largely avoids graphic violence and explicit language, yet still manages to tell a fast-paced, gripping tale.

Linwood Barclay

When he is not writing columns for the *Toronto Star*, Linwood Barclay is a much sought-after MC on the after-dinner circuit, his satirical wit focusing a critical spotlight on some of the more bizarre aspects of contemporary urban and political life. He has published a humorous take on parenting titled *Father Knows Zilch*, and lampoons Ontario politics in *Mike Harris Made Me Eat My Dog*.
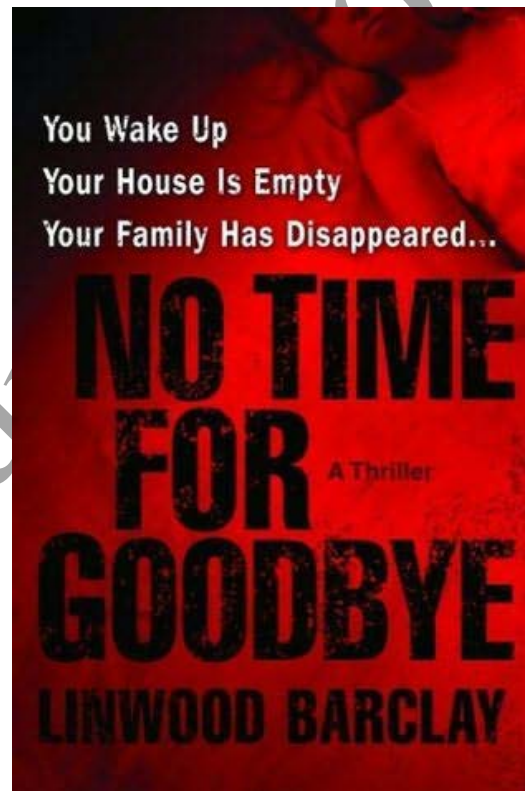
But the Connecticut-born author has a number of other tricks up his copious sleeve. His memoir, *Last Resort: Coming of Age in Cottage Country*, was shortlisted for the 2001 Stephen Leacock Award for Humour, and since then he has penned a series of comic novels featuring Zack Walker, a Toronto-based science fiction writer trying to cope (often unsuccessfully) with crime in suburbia.

Linwood and his wife Neetha have two grown children and live near Toronto.

No Time for Goodbye
(Bantam Books 2007)

Milford, Connecticut, May 1983: fourteen-year-old Cynthia Bigge groggily awakens, her stomach still in turmoil from a drunken binge the night before. When she hadn't made her 8 PM curfew her mother had phoned her friend's house, putting the lie to Cynthia's claim that she would be there. Her father had finally tracked her down sitting in her boyfriend's car, drinking and making out. It hadn't been a pretty scene: he'd humiliated her, then hauled her home. She'd run upstairs to her room hurling threats in her wake, and eventually passed out on her bed.

The next morning, dreading a confrontation with her parents, Cynthia tiptoed gingerly downstairs, only to find no one there. Her parents' cars were gone, too. She'd have to face them when she returned from school.

By the end of the day, though, when they still hadn't shown up, Cynthia phoned the police. Her entire family, including her brother Todd, had simply disappeared from the face of the earth.

There were whispers and suspicions, of course. Some people thought she must have been involved, perhaps had even murdered her brother and parents. But no bodies were ever found.

Nearly twenty-five years later Cynthia is still working at rebuilding her life. Married to a local high school teacher, Terry Archer, she has an eight-year-old daughter named Grace. But the memories refuse to go away, and Cynthia's life continues to be defined by the events of that night so many years ago. She sees danger around every corner, and has become overprotective about her daughter, insisting on walking the third-grader to school each day. When Terry suggests that Grace needs a little space she lashes out at him for trivializing her concerns.

Terry begins to take Cynthia's fears more seriously when she gets an anonymous call, telling her that her family forgives her for what she did. Then her aunt confides to Terry that she had been receiving money over the years for Cynthia's education, with a warning never to tell Cynthia nor try to find out where it came from.

One day Cynthia spots a man at a local shopping mall who looks very much like her brother. She confronts him, but he shows her ID that confirms he's someone else, from out of state. The man tells her she needs help, and Terry is inclined to agree.

The issue gets murkier when a psychic contacts them, claiming that she can help, demanding money in return. Terry and Cynthia argue over her obsession, but when they return home they find a man's hat on the kitchen table; her father's initials are in the brim.

Cynthia hires a private detective, who discovers that her father had no driver's license, no social security number, and never filed a tax return. It's as if he never existed. Then the PI disappears as well.

Memories can be good or bad, and events from the past can bring joy or heartbreak, sometimes even terror, to the present. Cynthia and Terry will have their lives turned inside out before they finally learn what happened to her family, and in the process, several people—some guilty, others innocent—will die.

Engrossing and original

No Time for Goodbye marks a radical departure for Toronto author Linwood Barclay. With five successful novels in the Zack Walker series he already has a well-established audience, and readers will recognize aspects of the often-bumbling Zack Walker in Terry Archer. But make no mistake: *No Time* is a real change of pace – a thriller that substitutes suspense for laughs, and keeps readers on the edge of their seats. The novel has already done extremely well, selling over 400,000 copies in Germany to date, and is rapidly closing in on half a million sales there.

An engrossing and original tale, I predict that *No Time for Goodbye* will do very well in North America, and might just be the breakout novel that will move Linwood Barclay to the top of the thriller lists. And for readers who like *No Time*, some excellent news: Linwood's next book, another stand-alone thriller, is due out this Fall and will be called *Too Close to Home*. The premise is an intriguing one: what would it be like to live next door to a house where everyone is killed?   And then what if you learn the killers went to the wrong house?

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