

From: Lorie Ham [mailto:mysteryrat@hotmail.com]

Author interview questions:

1.. name: Ken Kuhlken

2.. Publisher: Poisoned Pen Press

3.. Release date of your latest book: February 2008

4.. What is the title of your latest book? *The Vagabond Virgins*. Genre? *Mystery* A little bit about it? The 1979 Mexican elections are nearing, and the Holy Virgin keeps showing up in villages around Baja California, prophesying and warning *campesinos* that plagues will desolate Mexico unless they vote the corrupt *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* out of power. Alvaro Hickey, a San Diego law student and sometime private investigator, is already intrigued by this Virgin and fervently wishing her success in her mission when a woman contacts him and claims the Virgin is actually her missing sister. She wants Alvaro to help unite them.

5.. How long have you been writing? Forever, as a hobby, but devotedly since I quit being a rock musician, thirty-some years ago.

6.. When did your first novel come out? 1980 What was it called? *Midheaven* A little about it? In the early seventies, on the shores of Lake Tahoe, a bright, lovely, and troubled high school senior gives up drugs, embraces God and the Bible, and falls for her English teacher, all in the same month.

7.. Have you always written mysteries(or whatever genre that you currently write)? No. If not what else have you written? Midheaven was considered literary or mainstream. Lots of my short stories came out in literary magazines.

8.. What brought you to choose the setting and characters in your latest book? Most of it happens in rural Baja California, in the mountains and on the beaches, a region I know fairly well and find mysterious and under-written about. **Tell me a little about the setting and main character.** Baja California is a rather wild place, with which Alvaro Hickey, the main character, is quite familiar. He spent several years as an orphaned street kid in Tijuana, before he picked the lock on the trunk of private investigator Tom Hickey's car and smuggled himself across the border. Now he's a musician, a law student working for an immigration attorney, and a fellow deeply inspired by beauty, particularly the female kind.

9.. What is the main reason that you write? Obsession, I guess.

10.. Do you write to entertain or is there something more you want the readers to take away from your work? To entertain readers (and myself) for sure, but I also try to create something readers and I will find memorable or worth thinking about.

11.. Do you have a schedule for your writing or just write whenever you can? I have a schedule, but it regularly gets interrupted.

12.. Do you outline? I usually write a sketchy outline then go back and rewrite it every fifty pages or

so. And because I know it's likely to change, I don't labor much over it. Mostly it's an opportunity to brainstorm. And when I've got a completed draft, I'll often make a scene-by-scene outline, a few key elements of each scene, to give myself a new perspective.

13.. If you had your ideal, what time of day would you prefer to write? Early morning and for as long as inspiration and/or caffeine keeps me going.

14.. Day job? I'm also president of an online college, at www.perelandra.info

15.. Did you find it difficult to get published in the beginning? Difficult compared to what? Maybe not to, say, pitch in the World Series, but I worked hard at writing for close to ten years and graduated from two writing programs, at San Diego State and the University of Iowa.

16.. Do you have a great rejection/critique or acceptance story you'd like to share? Lots of them. One is, I had tried to give up writing. And when I mentioned this to my friends Gayle and Dennis Lynds, they asked to read a mss. of mine. After they read it, they suggested I make the character (a WW II military police officer) into a former private investigator and send it to the St. Martins/Private Eye Writers of America best first PI novel contest. I did, and won, and became a mystery writer.

17.. What kind of promotion do you find most effective? I'm still trying to figure that out. If anybody who reads this knows, please enlighten me.

18.. Most interesting book signing story-in a

bookstore or other venue? My friend Alan Russell and I have gone on several book signing road trips and written them up in a couple small books we call Road Kill and No Cats, No Chocolate. They're available through my website or Alan's. But one story I think isn't included: Alan and I were at a chain store, and I got so bummed at having people pass us by with no more than a "Which way are the cookbooks?" I tossed a book of mine into the basket of a woman who passed by looking the other way. A few minutes later a clerk returned the book to me, and gave me a sneer.

19.. Future writing goals? Keep it up. Complete the Hickey family series, which will commence in the late 1920s (the earliest now is 1942) and end sometime in the 1990s (the latest, the one I'm working on now, is 1985). And I'd like to finish to my satisfaction a novel called Brother Best, which I think gives a better feel for the '60s than any I've read or written. I started working on it in 1974.

20.. Heroes? Jesus Christ, Mother Teresa and people like her.

21.. Person you would most like to meet dead or alive? Napoleon, Nietzsche, Goethe, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Solomon. Not that I'm a fan or them all, but I bet they'd be fun to talk to or whatever.

22.. What do you read? Friends' books, and Ruth Rendell, Tony Hillerman, Dickens, Dostoyevski, Flannery O'Connor, Jane Austen, Jim Thompson, James M. Cain, Patricia Highsmith, Ross Macdonald

23.. What are your hobbies? Guitar, golf. Is reading a hobby or part of my job?

24.. Favorite TV or movies? I don't watch much TV, but I used to like Joan of Arcadia, Rockford Files, WKRP in Cincinnati, Mary Hartman. Some especially fine movies, Raising Arizona, Chinatown, The Usual Suspects, The Maltese Falcon, The Great Dictator.

25.. Pets? Two cats, one black and one white

26.. Family? Three kids, Darcy (31), a teacher; Cody (28) a teacher; and Zoë (5), a student; a wife, Pam (age withheld), a college professor and writer.

27.. What part of the country/world do you live in? Southwest

28.. Any advice for aspiring or beginning writers? Go to my website and download a pdf called Writing and the Spirit. It's got plenty of advice.

29.. Anything you would like to add? My website also has short stories, articles and such. And anyone who signs up for the newsletter doesn't have to worry about getting pestered. I'm too busy to make up a newsletter any more than a couple times a year.

30.. Website? www.kenkuhlken.net

31.. Where can people purchase your books? Their favorite mystery bookseller should have them. If not, they can tell that bookseller to wise up and go to one of the online booksellers. If they don't know of any, my website has links.