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## AUTHOR INTERVIEW: Hallie Ephron, part one

By [Kathleen Bolton](#) | January 23, 2009 | [3 Comments](#)



The reviews for Hallie Ephron's debut suspense novel, [NEVER TELL A LIE](#), have been raves:

"Lovers of classic mysteries will adore Hallie Ephron's *Never Tell a Lie* ... You can imagine Hitchcock curling up with this one." — *USA Today*.

"Ephron doesn't miss a searing beat as she plunges the Roses into an abyss of suspicion. A surprise toward the end provides the perfect twist to this deliciously creepy tale of obsession." — *Publisher's Weekly Starred Review*.

Pretty good for someone who never wanted to become a writer.

Ephron came from a famous writing family (sisters Norah, Delia, and Amy are noted screenplay writers) and her parents were screenwriters Henry and Phoebe Ephron, who wrote classic movies like *The Desk Set* and *Carousel*. An illustrious writing pedigree had been bred in her bones, but Hallie avoided the family industry for years.

Stints as a teacher, a technical writer, and education consultant ensued. But when she teamed up with Donald Davidoff, a neuropsychologist at Harvard's McLean Hospital, to create fictional forensic neuropsychologist Dr. Peter Zak and investigator Annie Squires, she found her love of fiction. Under the shared pseudonym [G. H. Ephron](#), they published five series mystery novels.

Her solo effort, [NEVER TELL A LIE](#), is smoothly professional, incredibly nail-biting, and deceptively spare. A story about a pregnant woman whose life is turned upside down by a chance encounter at her garage sale, *NEVER TELL A LIE* is a novel I inhaled in about two days — because I couldn't put it down.

We are pleased to present part one of our interview with Hallie Ephron.

**Q: When did you realize that writing was the career for you? How bumpy was your road to publication?**

Hallie Ephron: I spent a lot of years—decades in fact—insisting that I was NOT a writer. Because...I didn't write. Then I got a call from a journalist asking if she could write a piece about me because I was the only sister who didn't write. That did it. I figured if anyone was going to write about me not writing it was going to be me.

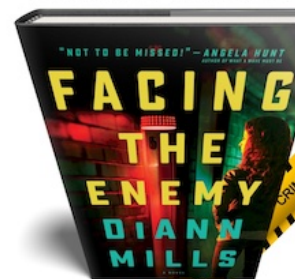
The first thing I wrote was for a creative writing assignment: "The history of my hair." I submitted it to NPR and they took it. I thought, "This is easy." Not! Fortunately that one success fueled me for years of rejection. I wrote a gazillion essays, short stories and an unpublished novel before I sold my first book.

**Q: You were the second half of a writing duo with Donald Davidoff and wrote five mysteries under the pen name G.H. Ephron. Why did you decide to collaborate for your first novels? What are some of the things writers who are thinking about a partnership should know?**

HE: Don is a dear friend who is also a forensic neuropsychologist. He evaluates people accused of serious crimes. Collaborating was a pleasure—he had so many great ideas and experiences that we could turn into fiction, and I got to do all the writing.

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My tips for a successful partnership: First and foremost, keep your sense of humor. And when you have to split the proceeds, remember that you also got to split the expenses and share the work.

**Q: You've spent some time as a "journeyman" in this profession: book reviewer, collaborator, and a couple of non-fiction books. Did you feel like the longish process helped you cope with the hard work of writing novels?**

HE: You got that right. Completing a book-length manuscript is a long haul—like knitting a miles-long muffler, though I don't knit. After you've complete a few, it's easier to believe that this time out you will, eventually, type THE END.

**Q: What is the most surprising thing you've learned? What has been the hardest part about being a writer?**

HE: The hardest part is recognizing that readers may not love love love the parts that I love love love. It's a cliché, but you've got to be willing to "kill your darlings" – I inter them in a file in case I change my mind later.

**Q: Do you have an example of a darling you killed and when you realized you needed to cut it out?**

HE: I just checked and the "out" file where I put all my murdered darlings is 234 pages long. Really. Here's a line a that went into the rubbish:

Melinda's voice felt like a fingernail on a chalk board.

(CLICHE!)

And another:

No matter how much chaos reigned, David had time out for hugs.

(Icky sweet, toothache time)

**Q: What is it like to be part of a famous writing family? More pressure? Less? How do they support your endeavors, and what did you learn from them?**

HE: I couldn't get started writing until I got to the point in my life when I no longer cared if people compared my work to my sisters'. I decided it was okay to try and fail; not okay to fail to try. They've been enormously supportive and I often call to ask for advice, particularly about the business side. But honestly, when we get together we do not talk about writing. We talk about food.

**Q: You are also a mystery/thriller book reviewer for the Boston Globe, wrote [WRITING AND SELLING YOUR MYSTERY NOVEL](#) , and you teach workshops on writing mysteries. What are some of the tropes or mistakes in this genre that you see, and, as a reader, make the book fail for you? What are some of the key elements to a good mystery?**

HE: Where to begin? When I read unpublished manuscripts, the mistake I see most often is that the writer begins with what I call a back-story dump—lots of lovely information about the main character and the situation. Five or six chapter later, the real story gets going. Those opening chapters usually need to be cut, and tidbits from them layered into the beginning of the novel.

For me, the key element of a great mystery is credible surprise—like that moment at the end of The Sixth Sense when you realize that the main character is dead. And what do you want to do? Watch the movie again to see where the filmmaker hid all the clues that you missed the first time through.

Click [HERE](#) for part two of our interview with Hallie, where she talks about the craft of writing a good mystery novel, what writers need to do to promote themselves, and her next project. Don't miss it!



### Kathleen Bolton

Kathleen Bolton is co-founder of Writer Unboxed. She writes under a variety of pseudonyms, including [Ani Bolton](#) .

She has written two novels as [Cassidy Calloway](#) :  
Confessions of a First Daughter, and Secrets of a First

Daughter—both books in a YA series about the misadventures of the U.S. President's teen-aged daughter, published by HarperCollins, and Tamara Blake, for the novel [Slumber](#) .

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**[Therese Walsh](#)** on January 23, 2009 at 9:00 am

*I decided it was okay to try and fail; not okay to fail to try.*

What a great line! I'm looking forward to part two of this interview. Thanks so much, Kath and Hallie.



**[Kristan](#)** on January 23, 2009 at 12:27 pm

Great interview! I especially like hearing her take on partnership, and coming from a family of writers (dealing with that pressure), and most of all, THIS:

““This is easy.” Not! Fortunately that one success fueled me for years of rejection. I wrote a gazillion essays, short stories and an unpublished novel before I sold my first book.”

THANKS. I needed to hear that. :)



**[thea mcginnis](#)** on January 23, 2009 at 6:01 pm

really interesting interview. i agree with that classic 'info dump' mistake. must get her book. thanks, WU!



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