

Ten Questions for Frank “Fraver” Verlizzo

1. Why leave your career as a prominent designer of Broadway and Off-Broadway theatrical posters to write books?

After five decades of producing work I was extremely proud of, I hit a bit of a wall. I began to have the feeling I was repeating myself. I also had the impression the type of posters I love to create were no longer the style of the day. Then COVID hit! Although I was still busy designing, I began noodling around with writing. My noodling became the germ of the idea that ultimately became *Scenery of the Crime*.

2. What surprised you most about the journey from designing to writing?

I think I was most surprised by the amount of freedom I had in the creative process. Poster design is a collaborative process with producers, authors, directors, designers and sometimes star names all weighing in on the process. Writing, by comparison, is a solitary art. I sit down with a piece of paper (figuratively) and an idea, and just write. No one is looking over my shoulder or making comments along the way.

3. How different was it writing your mystery book, *Scenery of the Crime* from writing your coffee table book, *Fraver By Design-Five Decades of Theater Poster Art*?

My processes in writing *Fraver By Design-Five Decades of Theater Poster Art* and *Scenery of the Crime* were different—and the same. They were the same in that I used storytelling to get across an idea. They were different because in the *Design* book I was recounting actual experiences in the development of my poster art over the years, while in *Scenery*, although I may have used those same experiences as a backdrop, the entire world of the mystery story was created from my imagination.

4. What inspired you to write your first mystery book?

It was the time of COVID and we were all housebound. I was not immune to malaise that was gripping the country and the world. As a means of escape I thought I would attempt to fulfill a deep-rooted ambition, and attempt to write, not just a book, but a mystery novel. I was also in the process of phasing out of my lifelong career as a theatre poster artist. Having created the advertising images for some of the most iconic Broadway productions of the 20th century—*Sweeney Todd*, *The Lion King*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Deathtrap* and so many others, I now wanted to explore my creativity as a mystery writer.

5. Can you tell us a bit about your book and what genre it falls into?

I believe *Scenery of the Crime* best fits into the “cozy mystery” genre. By definition a cozy mystery is characterized by lightheartedness, minimal violence, a focus on amateur sleuths, and small, intimate communities. That is what I attempted to capture in my writing. To do it, I dipped into my behind-the-scenes knowledge of the tightly knit theatrical community of late 1970s Broadway.

6. Are there any interesting characters in your mystery book you would like to share?

I certainly feel that ad execs Vic Senso and Bettie Balboa are the types of characters with whom you'll enjoy spending time. They are devoted friends who share a playful sense of humor. They have a deep love and curiosity about all things concerning the legitimate theatre. To quote Richard Ridge from BroadwayWorld.com, "Broadway snoops Vic Senso and Bettie Balboa are the '*Will and Grace*' of the cozy mystery genre!"

7. What was the most challenging part of the writing process for you as a first-time author?

I would say two things were particularly daunting. First, the blank page, which includes coming up with a good first sentence to begin the story. Along the way, your mind tells you things like: "who wants to read what you wrote?," or "its all been said by others and much better," and a million other negative things. The second was the fear that I couldn't create a compelling mystery that wasn't obvious from the get-go.

To get past these negatives I simply told myself that I was only writing for a readership of one—ME! And if I liked it sufficiently, then, and only then, would I share it. My husband, Joe Ligammari, is my harshest critic and greatest cheerleader. He's also proven adept at solving every mystery movie we've ever watched before the ending. *Scenery of the Crime* even managed to flummox him.

8. Who are some of your literary influences, and how have they impacted your own writing style?

My mom was a voracious reader and taught me to love books. We were both great fans of the mystery genre. As an adult, I expanded into the realms of Charles Dickens, Truman Capote, Ian Fleming, Carson McCullers and many other great authors. In terms of mysteries, I greatly admire Patricia Highsmith, Anthony Horowitz, Donald E. Westlake, and Simone St. James. Reading any of their books is an education in excellent writing.

9. What makes your book series unique and/or different?

I hope people find the colorful cast of characters and vibrant locale of 1970s New York City/Broadway compelling. I'd like to think, in paying homage to Agatha Christie, Cornell Woolrich, Damon Runyon and Erle Stanley Gardiner, I put them in a cocktail shaker and concocted a Retro Broadway Martini!

10. Do you have plans for future books, or are you already working on your next project?

Since this is the Retro Broadway Mystery Series there will be at least two more books that will be published uniting the main characters to share new adventures. The next one, *Sanity Claus* is slated for publication later this year. The plot revolves around a Christmas-obsessed,

multi-sibling show business family. Each one is successful in a different area of The Arts and Entertainment, but united in—what else?—a murder mystery.