

## Q and A with Michael Mehas

### Why did you write this book?

*Stolen Boy* is a story that had to be told. Many of the real-life people this book was based upon had been demonized so badly by law enforcement officials and the media that I felt this desperate need to reveal the true humanity in the situation. Nobody else had done that. The participants had been so maligned. And this thing had turned into such a Greek tragedy for everyone involved. Entire families were shattered. And people were never told anything other than how terrible these kids were. People never learned about the interrelations of the family members involved, the intricacies of these delicate parent-child relationships. Why these kids acted the way they did, why they did the things they were accused of. These were real people, not just some characters in a fictional plot. And I wanted to capture that. The way these families and kids suffered in life the same problems that plague all of us, and how that caused them to reach this particular conclusion. It was sad to say, but I could very much relate to a lot of what went on with these kids. (Nick Cassavetes used to say the same thing when we were working together. What they did wasn't that far off from what we

were doing when we were kids trying to find our own paths. But we were lucky. In spite of ourselves, we didn't end up killing each other. So if *Stolen Boy* helps even one lost soul out there trying to find his way then I think it will have been well worth all the trouble I've experienced in trying to tell my story.

### Why did you fictionalize true events in *Stolen Boy*?

Two men's lives are still at stake. Jesse Rugge has appealed his life sentence. The victim's family, Jesse Hollywood's family, even the families of all the other participants are still

suffering the devastating effects of what happened seven summers ago. I couldn't do that to these people. I didn't want what I had to say to be taken literally and used to hurt Jesse Hollywood in his trial. I couldn't call out their names in True Crime fashion. The wounds are still too deep. So I dramatized it. And you know what? In many respects, fictionalizing the story allowed me to get closer to the truth.

### Would you really risk going to jail for a murderer?

First of all, Jesse James Hollywood is not a murderer. He's been charged with murder, but he's been proven guilty of nothing. Of course, getting a fair trial after all the negative publicity he's gotten is still going to be quite a trick for his attorney. But the truth is, I'm not going to have anything to do with the prosecution trying to kill him. They're going after the death penalty. The previous prosecutor on the case and the victim's family and many others want Jesse dead. They've already got the death penalty against co-defendant Ryan Hoyt. And they tried to get it against Jesse Rugge. There's a lot of ill emotions behind this trial. And I don't really want any part of that. But I keep hearing

these rumors about the new prosecutor on the case wanting information from me concerning Hollywood's family and associates. And of course they're not going to get it. Not from me. I won't help them. But in the same light, I don't think I'll end up going to jail either. There's no reason for it. When reasonable minds prevail – which I think they will in this case – I believe they will conclude that jail won't do anybody any good. Jails are not meant for writers like me. They're not meant for socialites like Paris Hilton. We have too many people already filling too many jails. So I think we'll figure out a better way.

