

On writing *Wild Place*

It's been two years since the release of your second novel *The Wife and the Widow* (to critical acclaim, no less). What have you been up to in that time?

Thanks to Covid, I've spent a lot of time inside. I kept myself busy writing and producing Clickbait, the Netflix series I co-created with Tony Ayres, and co-writing (with Natalie Erika James) Apartment 7A, a feature film for Paramount. I also moved back to the Mornington Peninsula, which is where I grew up.

Your new novel *Wild Place* is set in 1989 in a fictional suburb in the area you grew up in. How did you go about creating Camp Hill?

Camp Hill is a combination of Mount Martha and Mornington, which is where I grew up. I like creating fictional towns set in real areas because it allows you to take liberties, while also feeling firmly planted in a particular place. In this case it was particularly fun, because in a sense, I'm writing about the world of my childhood.

Heavy Metal plays an important role in this book and we open to a quote from Motley Crue. Are these bands you'd listened to a lot before researching this book?

Listening to heavy metal of the 80s ended up being a big part of my research. I never really listened to that sort of music before writing *Wild Place* (I was always more of a The Smiths guy) but the deeper I delved into the era of Satanic Panic, the more relevant that music became. It's hard to imagine, but back in the 80s and 90s, concerned parents were terrified of this stuff!

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When did you first become interested in the Satanic Panic?

Satanic Panic was a wave of mass hysteria and moral panic that took place in the 80s and 90s. I've been interested in it for a long time, probably since learning about The West Memphis Three, a group of teenagers who were wrongly convicted of murder in the early 90s, largely based on the way they dressed and the kind of music they liked. But I didn't know I wanted to write about it until the pandemic hit. Early during the first lockdown, I was amazed at how quickly conspiracy theories emerged, and how many people seemed eager to believe them. Then there was Q'Anon! It became clear that the more scared/angry/outraged people are, the lower their standards of evidence become. That felt like a really fun thing to write about, which is why I came back to Satanic Panic.

The protagonist, Tom Witter, is the kind of character you walk passed every day in your street and never think twice about but there's a dark undertone to his every day normality. How did you craft this character?

My last book, *The Wife and The Widow*, was about women. In lots of ways, *Wild Place* is about men. So I started with a dorky, forgettable, suburban dad, then just kept peeling back the layers.

A white-knuckle descent
into a street near you.

WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE
DO BAD THINGS?

WILD PLACE

CHRISTIAN WHITE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE NOWHERE CHILD*