

# AN INTERVIEW WITH

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**Robert Gussin, author of**  
*Trash Talk*

**What prompted you to write *Trash Talk*?**

*When my wife decided to write novels, she began to attend writers meetings. She convinced me to accompany her to one close to our home and I was so taken by the quick-wit and dynamic personalities of the writers that I came back inspired and enthusiastic. That energy combined with my incurable sports addiction sparked *Trash Talk*.*

**Even though the book is lighthearted, it does have a serious undercurrent. What do you hope to convey regarding environmental issues?**

*First let me say that several of the Florida based writers that I met often bring humor into books that address some very serious topics. Carl Hiaasen and Tim Dorsey are good examples. Like John D. MacDonald before them, they never fail to tackle tough environmental issues in their novels. That was the spark that stimulated me to write a humorous sports book that brings up many environmental themes. I forced a group of pro athletes into the world of the professional environmentalist. At first tensions were sky high, but with time the athletes gained understanding and interest. Since pro athletes have such momentous impact on young people throughout the world, I thought that by demonstrating their heroes' behavioral changes and involvement in such an important social issue, the story could have a positive influence on the readers of all ages.*

**How did your background as a medical researcher help you in writing *Trash Talk*?**

*I was able to put a little more legitimacy into some of the scientific aspects of the environmental issues. I also have had significant involvement in planning and running scientific meetings so the activities of the meeting planning committee are very realistic. My background also made it easy for me to provide the scientist personality and behavior to the environmentalists.*

**What do you think is the benefit in presenting a serious topic in a lighthearted fashion?**

*In the case of Trash Talk the book should appeal to the huge population of sports fans who will hopefully gain more insight into some of the environmental issues. On the other hand, a serious book about environmental issues will appeal to the environmental activists and that segment of the population dedicated to these issues. Unfortunately, the latter group is much smaller. Maybe Trash Talk will help to enlarge this group.*

**Where did you get the idea for the book?**

*It came to me at the writers meeting. I began to think about environmental issues that might provide an opportunity for some fun in a story and garbage came to mind. From here it was just a short hop to trash and then my sports enthusiast brain lit up: trash talk—what if athletes mistook an environmental meeting for a verbal insult meeting? Athletes, being the experts, would show up only to hear talk of compactors, recycling, etc. That would make for an explosive confrontation. Once I got to that point all I had to do was figure out how to get the athletes to go to the meeting in the first place. After I had that answer the real fun began.*

**Do you think, generally, that athletes' behavior today is out-of-control?**

*I think that the behavior of many athletes is admirable. But there are too many fights, both on and off the fields and halls of sports, too many instances of battery or abuse involving athletes. Many of our young people look at these athletes as heroes and emulate and imitate their behavior. So there cannot be too much tolerance for seriously bad behavior by pro athletes.*

**What sort of commentary do you want to make on the professional sports world?**

*The professional sports world is made up of the most talented people in their fields --the very, very few out of the hundreds of thousands who were able to reach the pinnacle . They are young and are always under the scrutiny of the public. They are worshipped and they are hated. They are under enormous pressure. For the most part they can be proud of the way they handle themselves and represent their sport. But they must work hard to fulfill the responsibility that comes with their fame and adulation, and minimize irresponsible behavior. They can also gain respect by participation in charitable social programs and issues. There appears to be significant progress in the latter.*

**How difficult was the transition from author of scientific publications and contributor to academic textbooks to humorist?**

*Fairly easy. I really got a kick out of writing the book. I actually made myself laugh as I wrote parts of *Trash Talk*. I hope it will make others laugh as well.*

**What was the easiest part of writing *Trash Talk*?**

*The humor was the easiest part. I have had enough and observed enough incidents in my life that were either funny at the time or in hindsight that the vignettes brought back some great memories.*

**What was the hardest part of writing *Trash Talk*?**

*The hardest part was building the characters as the story went on. I really did not want to create any bad guys in the story so I tried to change the characters in subtle ways that made them stronger in some cases and nicer or more understanding in others. In some cases ordinary people became heroes and in others, "bigger than life" heroes became almost ordinary people.*

**What is your hope for *Trash Talk*?**

*That it's a big success!! Really, I hope that people get a good laugh from the book and also see that there is some serious importance to the ending. I also hope that my friends, colleagues and associates who think of me as a reasonably serious and stable person will continue to talk to me and admit that they know me!*

**What do you want people to take away from the book?**

*A smile and an even greater affection for athletes and environmentalists.*

**Are any of the characters in *Trash Talk* based on real people?**

*In part they are all based on real people but in many cases I combine the personalities and characteristics of more than one individual into one character. So in the end they are all fictitious.*

**Are any of the characters autobiographical?**

*Like most kids I used to fantasize about being a pro athlete. I used to kid around and say that I was almost a pro basketball player. I just missed it by a foot. If I had been a foot taller I could have been. Today I guess that would be a foot and a half to two feet taller!*

**I understand that the book is scientifically sound in that it contains certain factoids about the environment and environmental issues. What was your reasoning in including these?**

*I wouldn't call the book scientifically sound exactly but most of the environmental material came from my research into the environmental literature. I think that this gives the book more status with the environmentalists and more meaning for the reader. In addition it was easier for me to use real facts and issues than to try and make them up.*

**Why did you choose Sarasota as the setting for the book?**

*I live there and what an ideal setting for a meeting!! Great weather, fabulous restaurants, wonderful entertainment and an ocean with magnificent white sand beaches – Why would I pick any other place?!!*

**Do you have another book in the works?**

*I have started one but it is very different: a serious mystery involving the pharmaceutical industry.*

**Even though *Trash Talk* is humorous, it has a certain 'feel-good' element to it and your writing conveys a certain sort of optimism about people. Is that your view?**

*Absolutely. I have had a positive view about people all my life. I like to find the good side.*

**Your wife is also a successful author. Do you seek her advice on writing, and vice versa?**

*We have great interactions - in every way. I need more advice than she does and she is very generous. She is an outstanding writer. I am more like the student.*