

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN
ANNOUNCEMENT**

Florida International University
University Graduate School

Master's Thesis Defense

Abstract

Tootsie's Regret and Other Stories

by

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TOOTSIE'S REGRET AND OTHER STORIES is a collection of fifteen interlinked short stories that explore the relationship between Tootsie Plotnik, an aging Jewish gangster-turned-legitimate businessman, and his daughter, Deborah, a middle-aged, recently-divorced food writer who learns of her father's unsavory past. The stories show how Deborah's own divorce colors her perception of her father, while her growing intimacy with the older man forces her to reexamine her assumptions about aging, her father's past, and one's ability to truly know another human being.

The characters and events are loosely based on my family's stories and on historical accounts of Jewish gangster activities and World War II-era events in Miami, New York and Israel. The collection begins with Tootsie's account of the organized-crime-related murder of his best friend, and goes back in time to describe his role in an attack on the German Bund, in smuggling arms to Israel, and in protecting his business during a race riot in Miami. In the closing story, Deborah learns of her father's participation in an underworld assassination.

The style of the stories was influenced and inspired by Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*. Chabon intertwined Yiddish expressions with the noir style of mystery writing to create a genre of "Jew Noir." I have drawn on the structure of Mitch Albom's memoir, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, to create interlinked stories of the protagonist's Sunday visits with her father. Each story is followed by a brief account of a related historical event. Though particular to the Jewish-American experience, the stories echo universal themes about facing the aging and loss of one's parents while accepting them as vulnerable, imperfect human beings.

Date: February 24, 2009
Time: 11:00 a.m.
Place: Biscayne Bay Campus, AC1306

Department: Creative Writing
Major Professor: Dan Wakefield