



A Conversation with JACQUES COUVILLON debut author of *THE CHICKEN DANCE*



The Chicken Dance is a unique and vivid tribute to small-town America with a big dash of Louisiana spice, both its people and the place. Can you tell us how you came to create such dynamic and colorful characters, and why you chose to set them in Horse Island, Louisiana?

Horse Island, Louisiana

I grew up on a farm in Cow Island, Louisiana. It's a great community with tons of friendly, interesting and creative people. Horse Island is nothing like Cow Island, though. We don't trade eggs for haircuts. Although my father did trade my first car for a boat motor. Cow Island is mostly farmland. When I created Horse Island, I imagined Cow Island and this neighboring town, Kaplan, merging.

Horse Island Food and Furniture

There was a food and furniture store in a nearby town from where I grew up. I always thought it was the strangest thing. But the combo must work because it's been in business for years. I've actually never visited it. When I created Horse Island Food and Furniture, I just imagined what it would look like. I think that was more fun than if I had seen the original and tried to describe it.

Chicken Judging Contests

When I was in high school, I was in a club called Future Farmers of America. We'd get to compete in different types of contests ranging from judging the quality of animals to identifying different types of plants. I was on the poultry judging team. I didn't have the talent that Don did though. I never even placed.

K.C. and the Sunshine Band

A friend of mine bought me a book about the 1970's and inside was a music CD. I was playing it one day while I was writing the scene where Mr. Bufford steals Henrietta from

the Dairy Festival. I don't know why, but I was having a hard time writing it. Then, "Shake Your Booty," started playing and I was inspired. I ran out after that and bought a KC and The Sunshine Band CD and listened to it over and over while I wrote. And sometimes I'd imagine music playing in the background while the action of the scene was occurring. Also, I'm not going to lie. I love musicals. And so I thought it would be cool if Don created his own little musical in his head.

Don Schmidt

Although Don is not based on me, he does have a lot of my qualities. I'm often intimidated by people and I usually sing songs in my head to relax. I love to tell stories and so it was fun to write from a kid's perspective. I think stories lose their momentum if you're too busy trying to write them perfectly. By writing from Don's perspective, I could tell the story the way it evolved in my head instead of worrying about how to phrase it. It helped to create a raw, unfiltered and honest voice.

Janice Schmidt

Although she is loosely based on one of my brothers, who I love dearly and wouldn't want to ever change, she is a fusion of people I've encountered throughout my life. I've always been fascinated with the relationships between parents and their children and what motivates each of them. Janice is the creation of many of these relationships.

Dick Schmidt

I didn't want Don to have a father like Janice and have two parents that were always on his case. It would just be too sad. I wanted a passive aggressive father to balance the roughness of Janice. I needed Don to have some hope. But I also didn't want Dick to be parent of the year. How could he with a wife like Janice?

Dawn

Not everyone can handle the pressures of being a teenager. It doesn't make them crazy or abnormal or a bad person. I used Dawn to show how even though we may hate our childhood and what we experienced; we will use these experiences later on in life.

Leon Leonard

Leon was based on a few of the bullies I encountered growing up. I always wondered what fueled them to behave the way that they did. Sometimes I could figure out what they were all about. Then I was able to break them and gain their friendship, just like Don broke Leon and gained his.

Bobby Bufford

I think I created Bobby Bufford from his name alone. It just reminds me of a man who is always ready to make a deal and always ready to romance the ladies.

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