

An Interview with

## Tony Kordyban

### **OK, what's with the title of this book? What is Hamtramck?**

For three drafts it was “The Detroit Identity.” But heading into print I felt that it just didn't give the flavor of the book. My book is not a bang-bang crime thriller murder mystery. It's odd-ball characters doing quirky things, with a little crime and mystery folded in. Hamtramck is a suburb of Detroit, a small city of its own totally surrounded by Detroit. It's where I grew up, went to high school, learned to play basketball. Hamtramck is a working town of ethnic neighborhoods. The kind of place where guys walk to the corner bar on Saturday night, then walk to the corner church on Sunday morning. Back then it was mostly Polish. They even have a statue of Pope John Paul II right in the middle of town. Hamtramck has a flavor all its own, and I thought it would make a great setting for my story. Hamtramck is like another character in the book. I'm tired of every novel being in New York or LA.

### **And what's a loose meat sandwich, and how can there be a king of it?**

In Detroit there's a hot dog place on every block. We call them Coney Islands. That is the fast food of choice, a hot dog buried under runny chili and raw onions. Number two or three on the menu is the loose hamburger or loose meat sandwich. Basically a Sloppy Joe. I always thought loose meat sandwich was the stupidest name for food ever. It just sounds so horrible, who would ever order it? All the Coney Islands are owned by Greeks, at least according to the first names on the signs over the door. I was curious, are they all owned by one guy? Some King of the Coney Islands? And how come you never hear of this guy? Is there some shady story behind all these places? And what if there were a chain of second tier sandwich shops, specializing in loose meat sandwiches instead of Coneys? What would the tycoon behind those be like? Maybe he lives on a big ranch full of loose cattle. Who knows? That's not what the book is about really. I just wonder about things like that, and I thought the title would make people curious enough to read the story.

### **It's not about Loose Meat Sandwiches?**

Eventually. A guy named Terry has got himself in trouble. The kind that should be familiar to a lot of people these days. He took out a big mortgage on his house and then lost his job. The financial pressure is on, his marriage is going down the tubes, so he's desperate enough to go back to Detroit when he hears about a job opening there. I say desperate, because he grew up there, but left as soon as he could, because he thought he was too good for that town. But his troubles get bumped up a notch in Detroit. For one thing, everybody keeps telling him his best friend Johnny just died. The weird thing is he doesn't remember having a best friend named Johnny. Even the State Police want Terry to explain how his best friend ended up dead all of a sudden.

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**That doesn't sound very funny.**

It's not a collection of ha-ha jokes. I wrote a story that I thought was realistic. But I tend to see the absurd in everything, so when I write down life as I see it, my readers tell me it's very funny to them.

**Can you give me an example of that from the book?**

One reader told me she loved the story about the coffee brush. It's the event that breaks up Terry and his wife. Terry is a coffee nut – buys special beans, grinds them, has this dedicated brush just for cleaning the thermal carafe. The brush isn't supposed to be used to wash any other dishes so that flavors don't get transferred to the coffee. One night he comes home and finds his wife scrubbing out the trash can with it. He goes berserk. She says, "What's the big deal? I always rinse off the brush after." Later on she admits she had to clean the trash can for nearly an hour so he'd "catch" her at it when he got home. That kind of behavior in a family seems perfectly normal to me. But my reader said she nearly wet her pants reading it.

**So you wrote a funny murder mystery?**

It's not "Agatha Christie Meets Abbott and Costello." Terry gets tangled up in some shady business, because his Johnny has been "borrowing" his identity for years. The roots of the problem go all the way back to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when Terry first met Johnny. Their story includes a high school basketball game mutiny, a small war between Detroit street gangs, and the formation of a garage band that composes songs about Richard Nixon, raffle tickets and the Ukrainian National Anthem. So it's not a series of clues to figure out who did a murder. It's not about death at all. It's about people trying to figure out what kind of life they want to have. And here's a spoiler of sorts: after the mystery is revealed, you still aren't sure who's the good guy and who's the bad guy.

**Is "Loose Meat" autobiographical?**

You're supposed to write what you know, so I suppose at least in part. But not intentionally. The characters are, let's say, inspired by real people I've known over the years. I've mashed together events and personalities from different people, and thrown in a lot of my own invention to get new characters. My friends might recognize a few things, but on the whole the book is fiction. It's way more fun than my real life ever was.

**Is this your first book?**

My first novel to be published. I've always been a writer, cranking out poems, short stories, cartoons, plays, since third or fourth grade. I published a couple of technical books a few years ago. They're on how to keep electronics from overheating. They are written in a story-telling style, not like your typical textbook. Case studies, with a humorous tone, to keep people interested. They were published the traditional way, by ASME Press, a big technical book publisher.

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### **But not “Loose Meat?”**

“The Loose Meat Sandwich King” is self-published. It was an experiment for me. I have sent manuscripts to publishers in the past, and like most writers, I never got anywhere. That process is an incredibly slow and frustrating crap shoot. Self publishing is very different these days. I heard a story on the radio about some guy who writes thrillers and self publishes them on Amazon as e-books. Tom Clancy-style stuff. He supposedly wrote fifteen books and pulls in, I think they said \$60,000 a month. And publishing that way doesn’t cost him a dime. Write the book, post the file on-line, and wait for the cash to roll in. Or so the urban legend goes. So after I wrote the book, I thought I’d give it a try. I released it as an e-book, then as a print-to-order paperback through CreateSpace. My up-front costs were very reasonable, so I wasn’t taking a huge gamble. Amazon takes care of the selling and the printing and the order fulfilling. When a book sells I collect my share. The only hard part now is getting the word out to all the literary world that my new masterpiece is available.

### **Who do you see as the typical reader for this book?**

I wrote it especially for left-handed women, 18 to 34 years old, that didn’t finish high school. No, seriously, I’m not sure my book is targeted toward any particular group of people. My tag line, though, is READ FOR FUN. If I had to describe the audience for my work, it would be people who read for fun. As opposed to people who read novels because they think they HAVE to. Those very, very important books about the struggle of an Afghan war refugee to rebuild her home in a New Orleans slum after Hurricane Katrina. That actually sounds like a pretty good book, but that’s not what my book is like at all. Yeah, my story shares human insights and delves a little bit into the nature of good and evil, but that’s all under the surface of a fun, fast-moving story with quirky characters. It’s more like “Tom Sawyer” than “Moby Dick.” What demographic was Mark Twain shooting for again?

### **Are you planning for this to be a series? Is a sequel in the works?**



That’s not what I had in mind when I wrote it. But if there is enough interest I could bring Hamtramck out for another spin. I at least have a title for a sequel (which my daughter hates): “Loose Meat II: The Loosening.”