

# **NEVER LET GO**

**by Gareth Crocker**

## **A book club kit**

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# 1. Author's music choices

During the writing of *Never Let Go*, the author listened to a number of songs during crucial periods in the book. As such, we thought you might enjoy having some of the author's personal music choices playing in the background as you discuss the novel.

Here are the songs, in no particular order:

1. Kavinsky & Lovefoxxx – Nightcall.
2. Riz Ortolani – Oh my love.
3. U2 – Pride (In the name of love).
4. Snow Patrol – Chasing cars.
5. Peter Gabriel – The book of love.
6. Coldplay – Fix you.
7. Shawshank Redemption – The soundtrack.
8. David Gray – This year's love.

## 2. The story behind the story

By Gareth Crocker

Welcome, dear reader, and thank you for deciding that my novel is worthy of your book club. While *Never Let Go* is quite obviously a work of fiction, you should know that it is also something else. Something, in fact, that I only realised several weeks after the novel was completed. Allow me to explain.

As a father of two young girls, I've grown increasingly concerned for my daughters' safety. Concerned, you might say, to the point of obsession. And, simply put, this obsession spiralled so wildly out of control a few years ago that my mind eventually concocted a story in which a child in mortal danger could possibly be saved, even beyond the grave. So as much as *Never Let Go* is a novel, it is also a sort of coping mechanism for its author. It's my psyche's way of trying to deal with the unthinkable. The absolutely unfathomable. *What if something happened to my children?*

Interestingly, I have very little memory of writing the book. In fact, I'm not even sure how long it took to complete. My two nearest guesses are about five months apart. Which, I suppose, should worry the pants off me. But somehow it doesn't. The simple truth is that bringing *Never Let Go* to life was as close to an out-of-body experience as I'm ever likely to have. Some days it felt like someone else entirely was sitting in my studio, churning out the pages.

Which, in its own way, seems a pity. Because I'd like to have a word with that guy, and maybe shake his hand. I'd like to tell him how much I enjoyed what he did on those pages.

### **3. A Q&A with the author**

**Gareth Crocker was born in Johannesburg in 1974. He has a degree in English, Psychology and Communications and has worked as a journalist, copywriter, news editor, public relations manager, publishing editor and, most recently, head of communications and spokesperson for a multinational corporation. Writing is done at night, in a dark room, next to a small window.**

**Q: Married? Children? Animals?**

A: Embarrassing cliché. Married my high school sweetheart in 1999, we've been quietly at war ever since. Have two beautiful children, Jordann Summer (7) and Jennifer Rose (9). Four dogs, three of whom are highly pedigreed. Remaining dog has not seen itself on glossy posters of dog breeds and, as a consequence, lives miserably in the shadow of highly pedigreed siblings. Three cats, one of whom is missing a leg courtesy of a recent successful game of 'fetch' involving a moving car tyre, attached to a moving car wheel, attached to a moving car.

**Q: How long have you been writing?**

A: Since I was nine. I discovered that young girls were rather partial to rhyming couplets so I supplemented my weekly pocket money with paid-for love poems for my poetically challenged male classmates. Measured against a kind of 'tuck shop' index, it was almost certainly the most lucrative writing period of my life. It was apparently something of a gift to be able to rhyme words like 'Doug' and 'Hug'. I was, for a time, master of my world.

**Q: Tell us about your writing as an adult?**

A: After University I was given my first writing opportunity as a cub reporter for a local community newspaper. I later made news editor and freelanced for some of the country's national dailies before realising that if I ever wanted to get married and have a family and not rely solely on media freebies,

I would have to turn my back on newspaper journalism and sell my soul to the corporate world. True to this realisation, I joined a top PR and publishing firm soon thereafter where I toiled for seven years. After becoming fed up with having to deal with useless communication heads at large companies, I decided to become one myself.

**Q: As a journalist, did you ever break any big stories?**

A: Probably my most significant success as a young reporter was discovering the cause of a fatal helicopter crash. I was knocking on people's doors in the area, looking for eyewitness accounts, when a man told me that he had heard a loud bang as the helicopter passed over his house. I promptly walked into his garden and realised that the man's lightning conductor was bent near the top. A paint-match test later confirmed that this is indeed what brought down the chopper. I was treated like a hero at the office by the tea lady and my then fiancé arranged a ticker tape parade around our flat. She was, however, not sufficiently impressed to offer any private bedroom celebration.

**Q: Rumour has it that you were a professional footballer for a time?**

A: Not really. Ultimately, I discovered that I had the heart of Ryan Giggs, but the feet of Gareth Crocker. However, I now turn out for the mighty Rhodes Old Boys football club. If there's a finer football institution in the world, I've certainly not seen it. Our league's a mishmash of accountants, journalists, authors, marketers and dentists. Although some sides clearly seem to have a superior recruitment strategy to us. One team in particular boasts two members of the triumphant 1995 Rugby World Cup winning Springboks. Not that this affords them any special favours. They get kicked to pieces just like the rest of us.

**Q: There's another rumour that you once ran 100 kilometres?**

A: True. And I wasn't alone. A few years ago I took part in South Africa's world-famous Comrades Marathon which is about 90 kilometres long and is run, every year, by several thousand of my

barking mad countrymen. The additional 10 kilometres was performed after the race when my wonderful and caring wife forgot where she parked our car and I had to endure several gruelling laps around a rather large cricket stadium, on bleeding feet, which were now down three toenails. To say I was 'mildly displeased at the additional mileage' would be to employ the most generous of euphemisms.

**Q: We believe you've made a film?**

A: Oddly enough, it's true. It's called *Taken* and tells the story of a young couple who are abducted in their sleep and thrust into a basement and series of underground tunnels. It's the most fun I've ever had. Myself and my two partners financed the film and we did virtually everything ourselves. I wrote the script, co-produced and co-directed the film. If you're unlucky enough, you can still catch it on television these days. The film has a remarkably realistic feel to it, but that's probably because we actually abducted two people in their sleep and thrust them into a basement and series of underground tunnels. There is an outside chance that it's not the worst film ever made. Though I wouldn't bet on it.

**Q: As a South African, was it difficult getting published internationally?**

A: More difficult than I ever imagined. To even get your manuscript read by a publisher you first have to get an agent which, in itself, is a bit of a nightmare. However, the great thing about being fairly young and naïve is that you believe yourself to be almost entirely bulletproof, that you can achieve anything. It was armed with this attitude and inflated sense of self-belief that I loaded up as many manuscripts as I could fit into my backpack and headed off to London a few years ago. I spent eight days walking through a pair of new trainers, going door-to-door, dropping off copies of my first novel with agents. And literary agents, let me tell you, are weird folk. Some of the people I visited flatly refused to open their doors and demanded that I leave the manuscript on the floor. Some looked downright scary. I seriously believe that *Jack The Ripper* could well have been a literary agent.

**Q: Despite that, you actually managed to find an agent in only a few days?**

A: Yes, but I was extremely fortunate. I had just returned to my hotel room after taking in a film, when I noticed there was a message on the hotel phone. It was from one of the agents I had been at earlier that day. It turns out that after I had made my drop off into a large 'manuscript bin' on her patio, she had arrived home only to discover that she was locked out of her office. So, with nothing to do but wait for the locksmith, she dipped her hand into the bin and ... lo and behold ... withdrew my book. When I walked into her office the following day, I was amazed to find piles and piles of unread manuscripts that reached right up to the ceiling. And that, she quietly explained, was only a month's worth. So, the Gods were certainly smiling down on me.

**Q: Did she give you any advice straight off the bat?**

A: Absolutely. She told me to delete the first 136 pages of my manuscript and that I needed to change the ending completely (true story). The bitch didn't even blink (love you, Carolyn).

**Q: Did you get many rejection slips from publishers in the beginning?**

A: There are barren fields where trees once proudly stood that are testimony to my own personal criticism. I've actually still got all the rejection slips which I one day plan to pulp and sculpt into a life-size statue of Mark Hughes, the Welsh footballer.

**Q: We believe there's quite a funny story surrounding your publishing deal?**

A: Absolutely. I received the publishing contract on the one day it snowed in Johannesburg in something like 20 years. A story, I still find hard to believe.

**Q: We believe there's talk of a possible film deal for Finding Jack?**

A: Sort of. The rights have been sold to a prominent film company in Los Angeles and a script has been written, but who knows? They don't call it 'Hollyweird' for nothing. I'm just holding thumbs.

**Q: So how many novels have you written so far and which is your favourite?**

A: I've written five to date: *Malevolence* (first novel, unpublished), *Leaving Jack* (later changed by the Americans to *Finding Jack*), *Journey from Darkness* (co-authored with my father, Llewellyn in 2012), *Never Let Go* (April, 2013) and *King* (working title, to be released in October, 2013). As to my favourite, how could I possibly tell? They're all like badly behaved children really.

**Q: Give us a few interesting anecdotes about yourself.**

- I once wrote a speech for Nelson Mandela. Which he even used.
- I starred as a car hijacker in a short stunt film involving 'Traceur' athletes that were used in a James Bond film (*Casino Royale*). Remarkably, and I say this with much pride, I did all my own stunts, including a 20 foot leap over a railing onto a concrete floor. Hurt like a pair of broken legs, but legs fortunately remained intact.
- I have a quasi career as a radio copywriter having written over 500 radio adverts.
- When I write, I have Morgan Freeman's voice in my head.
- Did I mention I made a film?
- I can juggle up to four items. Five, if they're on fire.



## 4. Questions for discussion

1. The book market has positioned *Never Let Go* as a thriller. The author feels that it's more a love story than anything else. What's your view?
2. Despite Harlan's seemingly far-fetched theory, were you able to relate to Reece's reaction to it and to the decisions he made thereafter?
3. While *Never Let Go* is a work of fiction, aspects of the novel are based on existing theories and philosophies. Supposing that Harlan's theory was indeed possible. Would you risk yourself to correct a traumatic event in your life?
4. Do you feel that Reece was justified in going after William Kemmler?
5. Have you ever experienced any psychic or spiritual phenomena? What was your reaction to it?
6. The issue of Ruby's fate kicks up a classic moral conundrum. In your view, and if you were Reece, would you have gone after Ruby? Or would you not want to interfere in the natural order of things? How much of a role does religion play in your decision?
7. The mysterious men that confront our three protagonists shortly before their date at *The Kodak* reveal little of themselves in the book. Given that the author is in the process of completing book 2 in the series, who do you think these men are? And what do you feel is their purpose?