



## Campbell Armstrong

Tuesday 28 May 2013 / [Obituaries](#)

### **Novelist;**

Born: February 25, 1944; Died: March 1, 2013.

Campbell Armstrong, who has died aged 69, was a best-selling thriller writer who found success with four Glasgow crime novels featuring the Jewish detective Lou Perlman. He wrote more than 25 books including the novelisation of the Steven Spielberg blockbuster *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

He was born Thomas Campbell Black in Govan, in the shadows of the shipyards where his father worked as an engineer, and his earliest memories were of that part of the city. While still living in a tenement in the area he was listening to the radio when he heard Dylan Thomas reading *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*. The effect on the six-year-old boy was immediate – Campbell decided at that moment he would become a writer.

When he was 11 he went to Whitehill Senior Secondary School in the east end of Glasgow. He was a voracious reader and, apart from Thomas, his earliest influences was Robert Louis Stevenson, although he soon discovered Sartre, Camus, Dos Passos and Kerouac.

He listened to folk music and jazz rather than pop music, reading about Woody Guthrie and listening to John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*. There was always a restless quality about him, a need for new experiences to add to his repertoire and the early signs of the wanderlust were already appearing.

### **Promoted stories**

He was brought up to believe education was the way to a better life, but Campbell had other ideas. He decided to leave school before sitting any Highers because, in his own words, if he was going to be a writer who needed a leaving certificate anyway? The only downside was that quitting school meant separation from his wonderful English teacher, Walter Wyatt.

His first job was at Cuthbertson's music shop in Sauchiehall Street. He was the only male in the basement record department where he met the red-haired Eileen Altman who eventually became his wife and mother of his three sons.

He left Glasgow with Eileen, eventually getting a philosophy degree at the University of Sussex and later had a successful and distinguished career as an editor with Weidenfield & Nicolson. Alcohol had always been a big part of the Glasgow scene and it emerged as one of Campbell's demons. Boozy old Glasgow and long lunches in the publishing business became a pattern, which he repeated throughout his life.

He took a post teaching creative writing at the University of New York in upstate Oswego, then later moved to the University of Arizona. His drinking probably led to the breakdown of his marriage. He later married Rebecca Armstrong who managed to help him control the drinking and encouraged him to write full-time. They lived in Sedona, Arizona.

He wrote 27 books in all, mostly thrillers, three plays, and there was also a memoir in 2000, *I Hope You Have a Good Life*. His detective, Lou Perlman, appeared in four novels set in Glasgow: *Bad Fire* in 2002, *The Last Darkness* in 2003, *White Rage* the following year, and *Butcher* in 2006. He also wrote the novelisation of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Dressed to Kill* for Brian de Palma. The film rights to his novel *Jig* were bought, but the movie never materialised.

Over his career, he learned to become an entertainer – first writing to entertain himself and then the reader – and his research was always immaculate, whether the book was set in Manila, San Francisco or Glasgow. Every detail was finely considered, crafted and accurate.

When he decided to buy a 30-room house in County Offaly in Ireland, he did it without telling Rebecca. He said he wanted to get away from the gun culture in the US and the tax he would save in Ireland would go to the local community to renovate the house instead of helping the US arms race.

On his blog he described the trips he made back to Glasgow from Ireland, having been surprised by how much the city had changed when he first came back in 1990.

"I realised after a few visits that many of the changes that had so startled me in 1990 were cosmetic – an underlying Glasgowness hadn't been touched at all.

"There was the same merciless banter, that barbed dry humour I'd never found in any other city. The give and take between vendors and customers at the Barras had never been so sharp, and the quick-witted criticism of highly paid but hapless players at football matches was as caustic as it had always been."

He is survived by his wife Rebecca, sons Iain, Stephen and Keiron and stepdaughter Leda.