

Did you know these 20 facts about the novel MAYDAY?

1. Wayne Kovok first appeared as a minor character in *COURAGE FOR BEGINNERS*.
2. The original working title for *MAYDAY* was *Wayne Kovok Flies Again*
3. While writing, I had a picture of Robert Duvall on my desk. I thought of him as Grandpa Dalton.
4. I spent a year researching plane crashes. The Congo crash, featured in the opening chapter, haunted me most.
5. There are more than 70 confirmed, true facts in *MAYDAY*. My favorite is the history of Arlington National Cemetery.
6. I watched a kid in my neighborhood sprint to the bus every morning for a year. I rooted for him. It gave me the idea to include running as a theme in *MAYDAY*.
7. I spent an inordinate amount of time researching the weight and dimensions of the world's largest matzo ball.
8. Like Wayne, I practiced watching and pretending to support planes as they flew over my house.
9. Caddo Lake State Park in Uncertain, Texas is a key setting in the book. My family camps there every year.
10. The Hamburger Store in Jefferson, Texas, is a real restaurant.
11. My daughter got so interested in Wayne's wind speed research that she did her science fair project on wind. It was called *BLOWN AWAY*.
12. To get a solid understanding of what a pilot would do in an emergency, I interviewed American Airlines First Officer and Air Force Lt. Colonel Gavin Tade.
13. In one scene, a Blue Jay lands on a mouse trap with tragic consequences. That happened in my backyard after I set a trap using a piece of dog food as bait.
14. Before the book was complete, my youngest daughter drew a picture of an imagined *MAYDAY* book cover. It featured a tennis shoe with wings.
15. I was reluctant to write a middle-grade story about a close grandparent relationship. My husband changed my mind. He works in medicine and told me he's seeing more and more grandparents bringing kids into their appointments and having an active role in kids' lives.
16. I wrote that final sentence of the book very early in the drafting process because author John Irving said he often waits to begin writing a novel until he knows the final line. I challenged myself to do that.
17. I wrote the whole first draft in a burst of excitement over a six week period. It was only about 30,000 words, however.
18. Wayne's mother creates a Wall of Honor, showcasing photos of Wayne's ancestors. I have a similar collage of photos in my house.
19. I put homages in each of my novels. For example, the last name of my favorite author appears on page four of *MAYDAY*.
20. I'm still collecting facts I think Wayne would use.