

## Attention: Booking/ Show Ideas

TO BOOK JEFF COHEN  
OR FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
CONTACT:

**Bruce Bortz**  
Publisher  
Bancroft Press  
410-358-0658  
bruceb@  
bancroftpress.com



### *Writing Humor is No Laughing Matter—Or Is It?*

Having written what probably feels like a zillion screenplays without many (or is it any?) selling, but having sold the very first novel he ever wrote—*For Whom the Minivan Rolls*—it seems like Jeff Cohen has finally found his niche. And with the praise for the newest book in his Aaron Tucker Mystery Series, *A Farewell to Legs* (November 2003), mounting almost beyond control (not that we'd ever want to control the mounting of praise), it also seems that Cohen has a break-out hit on his hands.

Since Jeffrey Cohen is on the brink of the superstardom that comes with having a wildly popular, top-selling book that is simply on everybody's lips (boy, isn't that a weird mental image?), a couple of us editors here at Bancroft decided to pick Jeff's brain about the whole humor-mystery-writing-thing.

This is what he had to say:



**SINCE I BEGAN** writing "humorous mysteries," (and "humorous," by the way, is the comedy equivalent of the word "pleasant," which means it's just funny enough to be considered not

depressing), a good number of people have asked me why I concentrate on this particular sub-genre. At least I consider it a good number of people—I've always thought two was a good number.

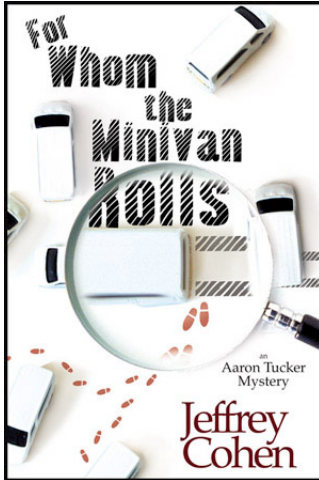
It's hard to answer that question, particularly since I haven't given it a moment's thought. But the reason could lie in this particular bit of personal psychology—

the highlight of my entire writing "career" came not when the first book was published, not when the (uniformly enthusiastic, if I must say so myself) reviews came in, not even when people I didn't know went out of their way to tell me they enjoyed it. All those things were incredibly nice, but they weren't the highlight.

**THE HIGHLIGHT WAS WHEN** Larry Gelbart said I had written something witty.

"Jeff Cohen's *Minivan* rolls merrily along -- accent on the *merrily*. Mr. Cohen's ideas on marriage and murder (often cut from two ends of the same bolt) are wise, wicked, and witty. Surprisingly tender, too, regarding the responsibilities and trials of being a parent -- fathering a delightful book in the process."

-- LARRY GELBART



Gelbart, who among those who follow comedy is considered God's summer replacement, read the first Aaron Tucker mystery, *For Whom the Minivan Rolls*, and

sent back a note saying he found it "wise, wicked and witty." Among other things. That was enough to put me into hyperspace for a month. It would have been longer, but there were parent/teacher conferences I had to attend.

**THE FACT THAT IT WAS A COMPLIMENT** from one of my all-time writing heroes, and that said hero is a giant in the world of comedy, holds the key to the "humorous mystery" question. I've always been drawn to comedy, for one thing because I find laughing more fun than crying. It also struck me, at a very early age, that I was crying perfectly well often enough without any help from popular entertainment, but that laughter, while it did occur on a day-to-day basis, could always use a helping hand.

"I declare Jeffrey Cohen 'King of the Zingers.' His Aaron Tucker character doesn't know when to stop . . . and that's the good news. *Legs* definitely has legs."  
**-- TIM COCKEY, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF SUCH MYSTERIES AS *MURDER IN THE HEARSE DEGREE*, AND FELLOW PUN-LOVER**

"Because we make them laugh," Groucho Marx once said of himself and other comedians, "people don't understand how important we are to their sanity." If anyone knew, it was Groucho. I don't think of the Aaron Tucker books as mysteries with humor in them; I consider them comedies that have a murder mystery to keep them going. Do you remember who the murderer was in *The Thin Man*? Do you remember Nick and Nora Charles? I rest my case.

"Equal parts Mel Brooks, Groucho Marx, and Woody Allen sweetened with enlightened sexual politics and well-mixed with the completely original mind of Jeffrey Cohen. Sheer reading pleasure." -- **ELLEN PALL, AUTHOR, *CORPSE DE BALLET* AND *SLIGHTLY ABRIDGED***

**WHEN *MINIVAN* WAS RATTLING** around in my head, I thought it was going to be a screenplay, but Aaron Tucker wanted to tell the story himself, and first-person narrative is remarkably difficult to pull off in screenplay format. Since I assiduously avoid all things that are remarkably difficult to pull off (including neckties), I decided to try telling Aaron's story the way he wanted it told—directly to the audience (who became the reader).

By the time I got to the current book, *A Farewell to Legs*, Aaron was more confident in his story-telling skills, if not his sleuthing abilities. He still got to rail about the things that irritate him (which number in the millions), but he also knew now how to unfold the tale in a manner that would (hopefully) keep the pages turning.

**I ALSO WANTED TO PUT A FACE** on Asperger Syndrome, a neurological condition much like high-functioning autism

that about 2 million Americans, including my 14-year-old son, have, and that everyone else needs to understand. Again, humor was essential in making this condition more understandable to "civilians" who don't deal with it every day. If you can't find humor in a boy who can walk around all day with his shirt on backwards and then chuckle about it himself, perhaps you've been reading too much Kafka.

**THE TRICK WITH WRITING** "humorous fiction" is never to make the book funny. If the character has a comedic point of view, it will be funny. There's not much that's amusing about two guys carrying a piano up the stairs, unless the two guys are Laurel and Hardy in *The Music Box*. Cowboys eating beans around a campfire? Yawn! Unless they live in the Mel Brooks universe of *Blazing Saddles*.

I believe the Aaron Tucker books are funny because Aaron has a point of view that skews toward irreverence and sarcasm. He and his beloved wife Abigail Stein communicate through wit because that's the way they *choose* to communicate.

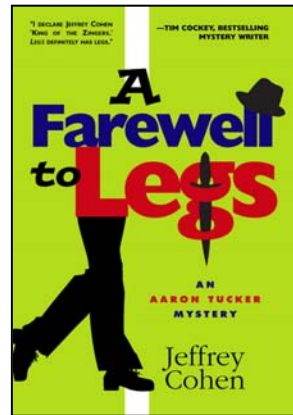
"A crackerjack mystery with a prize inside: it's laugh-out-loud funny to boot! I hope Aaron Tucker's lack of success with screenplays translates into a long and full career solving crime with wit and whine."  
-- DAN FIORELLA, ROVING EDITOR, *CRACKED MAGAZINE*, AND CONTRIBUTING WRITER, "PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION"

Consider this bit of dialogue, from *A Farewell to Legs*, at a moment when Abby has made her husband a pancake breakfast:

"Are those for me?" I asked.

Abby nodded. "I thought you might like a special breakfast after you worked so hard on this story."

"I am hopelessly in love with you," I said.



"Don't be," she answered. "Be hopefully in love with me." I got myself a plate and she actually flipped two pancakes onto it for me . . .

"Mmmm," I appreciated. "You make a mean pancake, my love."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'll try to make a kinder one next time."

"Someday I must pay for you to take a course in receiving a compliment," I suggested.

If they didn't choose to say things with a little humor, the scene might have played like this:

"Are these for me?" I asked.

Abby nodded. "I thought you might like a special breakfast after you worked so hard on this story."

"Thanks," I said.

"You're welcome."

I took a bite. "These are very good," I told Abby.

“Thank you. I’m glad you like them.”

Not quite the same thing, I think.

In the final analysis (final for today; my brain hurts), I think I write comedy because I think we need more comedy, and I write mysteries because, well, I like

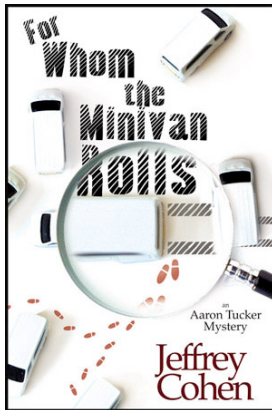
mysteries. The fact that both these genres—mystery and comedy—are not quite as... respected as the “literary” novels we read about in scholarly journals reflects a deep, troubling problem facing our society’s soul.

But who wants to read about *that*?

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***The Best Medicine: Book Jeffrey Cohen To Bring Wit, Warmth, and Wisdom To Your Show***

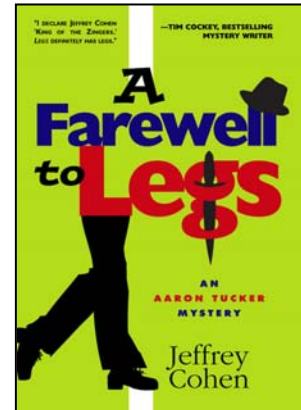
Jeffrey Cohen is available in person to locations in the New York and New Jersey areas, and by phone nationwide. To book him as a guest, or to receive more information, please contact:



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bruceb@  
bancroftpress.com



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**Sample Interview Questions Jeff Would Love To Answer**

You are a freelance writer who works at home, lives in New Jersey, stands 5'4" tall, and has a wife who's an attorney, a daughter, and a son with Asperger Syndrome. Your character, Aaron Tucker, is a freelance writer who works at home, lives in New Jersey, stands 5'4" tall, and has a wife who's an attorney, a daughter and a son with Asperger Syndrome. Which one of you wrote the book?

Now that *Minivan* has been optioned by Mike Sullivan Productions, which did “Growing Pains” among other syndicated sit-coms, who would you cast in an Aaron Tucker movie?

New Jersey plays a large role in the book. Do you think the Garden State takes too much teasing?

Isn't a minivan behind the times? Shouldn't it be, "For Whom the SUV Rolls?"

## Author Bio

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### *The Life of Aaron Tu—We Mean, Jeffrey Cohen*



**CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF**, Jeffrey Cohen was not born in the log cabin he helped his father build. Rather, he was born in Irvington, New Jersey, which

has never seen a log cabin that wasn't, at some time or another, turned into a tavern.

**AFTER A CHILDHOOD** of normal duration, Cohen attended Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, so as to maintain a record of never having left the Garden State for more than two weeks at a time, something which has never been equaled (or attempted) by anyone else. He studied English (when actually attending classes and not lounging at the student newspaper office), but, after graduation, decided to work as a journalist anyway.

Finding work (after a fashion) at the *Passaic Herald-News*, he served as a municipal reporter for well over six months, establishing new lows in news gathering,

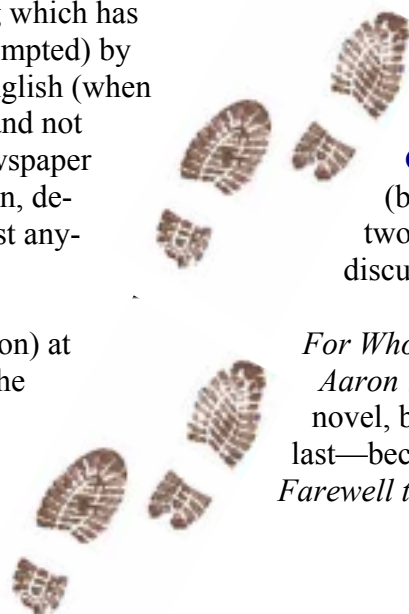
but managing, in his final work for the newspaper, to quote Chico Marx.

**FOLLOWING A HIDEOUS FORAY** into public relations, Cohen eventually became a trade journalist, and covered the consumer electronics business until someone asked him to stop. Since 1985, he has been a freelance reporter and writer, writing for such publications as *The New York Times*, *TV Guide*, *USA Weekend*, *Premiere*, *American Baby*, and *The Newark Star-Ledger*, among many others.

He is also the author of more than 20 feature-length screenplays, some of which are actually good. His work has been developed by Jim Henson Productions, CBS, Gross-Weston Productions, Ken Walz Productions, and others.

**COHEN LIVES IN NEW JERSEY** (big surprise!) with his wife and two children, who prefer not to discuss him when he's in the room.

*For Whom the Minivan Rolls: An Aaron Tucker Mystery* is his first novel, but almost certainly not his last—because the widely-anticipated *A Farewell to Legs* has just been released.



## Exciting News!

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### *Aaron Tucker Series Optioned by Mike Sullivan Productions*

**IN AN ANSWER TO THE PRAYERS**, wishes, and hopes of many Aaron Tucker fans, the slight sleuth may soon be finding his way onto the small screen. He could very well find his way onto the big screen, as well, but it will be much harder to see him there, as he doesn't take up very much room.

I absolutely could not put *Minivan* down. The only thing better would be a movie based on the book, or the next installment in the series, which I'm anxiously awaiting." -- **LORI SHERY, CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, ASPERGER SYNDROME EDUCATION NETWORK, INC. (ASPEN®)**

**AFTER MONTHS OF SHOPPING** *For Whom the Minivan Rolls* to various production companies in the land of Hollywood, Jeffrey Cohen and his publisher, Bancroft Press, have decided to strike a deal with Mike Sullivan Productions to option the film and television rights to the Aaron Tucker Mystery Series.

"The whole notion of a stay-at-home dad is ripe for a TV sitcom. Attention television networks!" -- **DICK KERNAN, RADIO HOST, "THE SUNDAY TIMES"**

**MIKE SULLIVAN PRODUCTIONS** is most widely known for their hit television sitcom, "Growing Pains," which ran for seven seasons. Bancroft Press and Cohen feel the company is a great match because of their history with warm, family-based comedy, which fits the Aaron Tucker ticket to a T.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOOK** series into either a feature film or television series (or both) is already underway, and will be ongoing for a number of months. For news and updates on Aaron's screen debut, visit the newly revamped (it's already been revamped once) website, [www.aarontucker.com](http://www.aarontucker.com).

### *Top Ten Reasons to Have Jeffrey Cohen on Your Show*

1. Because *someone* needs to stop Jeff from attempting his 45-day kitchen vigil in honor of magician David Blaine's 44-day stint in a plastic box over the Thames (Press release available upon request).
2. Because no one can keep a straight face while reading an Aaron Tucker Mystery.
3. Because no one can keep a straight face while talking to Jeff.
4. Not to mention listening to Jeff talk.
5. Because there is no better guest to enlighten you and your audience on the subject of Asperger Syndrome.
6. Because Jeff needs his spirits lifted since *Minivan* was rejected by Oprah's Book Club.
7. Because you know you want to ask him: what's with the Hemingway references?
8. Because he'll be one of the funniest, most memorable guests you've ever had.
9. Because Jeff knows ways to woo a working wife only a stay-at-home dad can know
10. Because, in a few months, *Legs* and Jeff (not to mention Jeff's legs) will be so hot, he won't have a moment to spare. So book him now!