

# MEDIA KIT

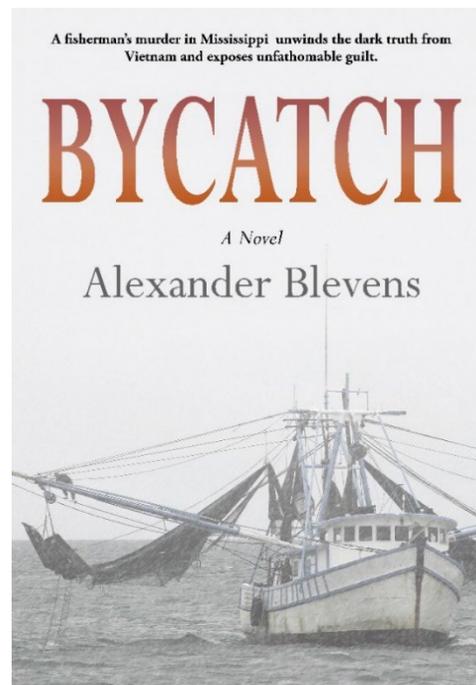
## BYCATCH

A Novel by Alexander Blevens

*A fisherman's murder in Mississippi unwinds the dark truth from Vietnam and exposes unfathomable guilt.*

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# PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release 5/11/2022

## Coast Doctor Pens Powerful Novel About Vietnam Refugees

*Bycatch explores guilt and forgiveness as cultures tangle on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*

**BILOXI, MS** — In *Bycatch*, the debut novel by Alexander Blevens, the lives of two soldiers — one American, one Vietnamese — intersect unexpectedly and fatally. Published May 30, 2022, by TouchPoint Press, *Bycatch* connects the Vietnam War to the shrimp-rich waters of Biloxi with profound effect.

*“Bycatch will touch the hearts of many Vietnamese War refugees who resettled in America.”*

— **Trang Pham-Bui, Emmy Award-winning journalist.**

**BYCATCH** — Rex Thompson has not spoken of the felony he committed in Vietnam for over two decades. When his ne'er-do-well sons scuttle a shrimp boat in the Biloxi Bay and drown an immigrant fisherman who had witnessed this crime, Rex is flooded with remorse but remains silent. His secrets wash away in the muddy tide until the fisherman's daughter, Anh Truong, stumbles upon a wartime journal and confronts Rex with a tale her murdered father never told. As a dragnet encircles his sons, Rex's life of poor choices unravels, and he must decide to continue his charade or seek mercy from those he harmed.

**AUTHOR** — Alexander Blevens is an Air Force veteran and a retired orthopaedic surgeon who lives and writes in Mississippi. Originally from California, he married a “New Orleans belle” and developed a keen eye for all things Southern.

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# BYCATCH

A Novel by Alexander Blevens

“A helluva story.”— **Robert Lindsey, author of the National Bestseller *The Falcon and the Snowman***

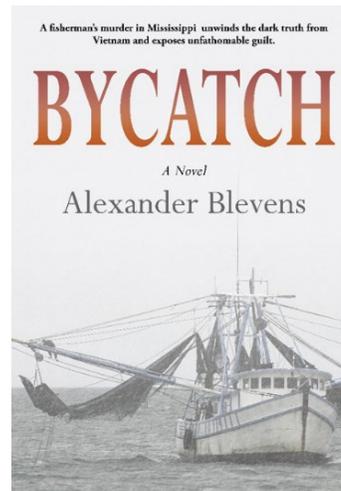
## FROM THE COVER

**A fisherman’s murder in Mississippi unwinds the dark truth from Vietnam and exposes unfathomable guilt.**

Rex Thompson has not spoken of the felony he committed in Vietnam for over two decades. When his ne’er-do-well sons scuttle a shrimp boat in the Biloxi Bay and drown an immigrant fisherman who had witnessed this crime, Rex is flooded with remorse but remains silent.

His secrets seem to wash away in the muddy tide until the fisherman’s daughter, Anh Truong, stumbles upon a wartime journal and confronts Rex with a tale her murdered father never told. As a dragnet encircles his sons, Rex’s life of poor choices unravels, and he must decide to continue his charade or seek mercy from those he harmed.

*Bycatch* is a story soaked with greed and forgiveness while Southern and Vietnamese cultures tangle on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.



## PRODUCT INFORMATION

**GENRE:** Southern Fiction, Suspense  
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## THE AUTHOR

Alexander Blevens is an Air Force veteran and a retired orthopaedic surgeon who lives and writes in Mississippi. Originally from California, he married a “New Orleans belle” and developed a keen eye for all things Southern.



## PRAISE FOR BYCATCH

“With empathy, an eye for detail, and a fascinating cast of characters—not to mention a helluva story—Alexander Blevens has delivered a suspenseful debut novel reaching deep into a community few of us know.”

— **Robert Lindsey, author of the National Bestseller *The Falcon and the Snowman: A True Story of Friendship and Espionage*.**

“Exceptionally well-written, this novel is a magnificent and worthy read.”

— **NancyKay Wessman, author of *Katrina, Mississippi: Voices from Ground Zero*.**

“Bycatch will touch the hearts of many Vietnamese War refugees who resettled in America.”

— **Trang Pham-Bui, Emmy Award-winning journalist.**

“. . . absorbing story pivoting on contrasting dualities of culture, time, and circumstance”

— **Robert E. Hirsch, author of *The Dark Ages Saga of Tristan de Saint-Germain* series.**

“Weaved into the breakneck pace is a very human story of guilt and redemption.”

— **Tom McGraw, author of *The Starving Detectives Series*.**

“It’s a good haul in a strong net.”

— **Cecil George Brown, author of *D’Leaux, Mississippi-From Moss to Tuckertown*.**

## CONTACT

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Alexander Blevens was born and raised in Northern California. He studied medicine and orthopaedics at Northwestern and Loyola Universities in Chicago before joining the Air Force and coming to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. Four years later, he joined a local orthopaedic group where he specialized in hand surgery until his recent retirement. Alex has always been a storyteller; his sister once said he could “retell a two-hour movie plot in four hours.” His retirement has opened time to pursue his passion for writing, travel, woodworking, sports, and family.

## ABOUT TOUCHPOINT PRESS

TouchPoint Press, a traditional royalty paying publisher of digital and print fiction and nonfiction, strives to be innovative and energetic in all we do from acquisitions to promotion before and after publication. Our staff is comprised of professionals whose collective experience in publishing, editing, journalism, design, and marketing set the stage behind our growing list of fiction and nonfiction titles.

## EDITORIAL REVIEW - BYCATCH

It's 1970 and twenty-three-year-old Senior Airman Rex Thompson, on his second tour in Vietnam, is about to improve his prospects for the future. He opens the safe he has access to and helps himself to \$46,000, money the US government has sent to the South Vietnamese Army for their use. Unfortunately, he's caught in the act by Captain Nguyen Duc Dung. Rather than arrest Thompson, Dung makes him return the money to the safe and then reports the incident to his superiors. Later that same day, Rex goes back, and this time undetected, he takes the money from the safe.

When the theft is discovered, Dung is charged with "the failure to safeguard the valuable assets of the armed forces of South Vietnam," but rather than be court-martialed, he's sent on a military suicide mission. These events set the stage for the tragic unfolding of *Bycatch* by Alexander Blevens.

Flash forward twenty-three years to a dark night on Biloxi Bay as two young men work to scuttle a shrimp trawler resting at anchor just off shore. The trawler once belonged to Rex. He operated it with his two sons, Jake and Pigeon, until it was repossessed due to his drinking and gambling. It was bought from the bank by none other than Captain Dung, the same man who took the rap for Thompson's theft. Dung is now Don Nguyen and a prosperous shrimper in Biloxi. Rex has disappeared and Jake and Pigeon, motivated by misguided revenge, are scuttling the boat.

But when the boat sinks, the new owner goes down with it, and Jake and Pigeon inadvertently become murderers. As an investigation gets underway, Rex resurfaces sober and saved. It doesn't take him long to figure out what happened and who the murderers are. How can he save his sons from lengthy prison terms when, ultimately, he is responsible?

Meanwhile, as Nguyen's daughter struggles to come to terms with her father's death, she begins to learn more about his past and the role Rex played in it. But rather than condemn Rex and his sons, she seeks closure by trying to find something positive that can be salvaged from this tragic event, these damaged people, and their broken lives.

*Bycatch* by Alexander Blevens is a big, entertaining story that speaks to universal themes of family, honor, culture, faith, and history. The narrative is supported by numerous realistic characters and an impeccably researched plot that is flawlessly structured and presented

.— **San Francisco Book Review.**

# INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER BLEVENS

## *What inspired you to write **Bycatch**?*

I live on a ribbon of coastline in Mississippi which is rich in history, culture, and natural resources. Nothing is static here where the sandy soil meets the vast Gulf of Mexico. Hurricane-driven waves of wind and water cut barrier islands in half, toss ships and barges across highways, and wipe away whole neighborhoods. Waves of immigrants, drawn to the water's seafood bounty, move in and out, displacing those who came before them. For these fishermen, harvest ebbs and flows, year to year.

It is in this fluid backdrop that the story of *Bycatch* takes place. I wanted to write a tale to remind us of the hardships and sacrifices made when the Vietnamese came to America after the fall of Saigon. A generation of immigrants has passed in the struggle for these refugees to assimilate into Biloxi. Their story makes the lives of all Americans richer.

## *How would you describe the themes of **Bycatch**?*

There are two major themes that wind throughout the story that can be posed as questions. The first is “what does it mean to be a good father?” Rex Thompson, the protagonist struggles with this the entire book. The second, “can you forgive someone who does not know the extent of their harm?” This question haunts Linh Nguyen after the death of her husband and propels her daughter Anh to act.

## *You use a quote by Kahlil Gibran in the front of your book. What does this mean to you?*

The quote is:

*"Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you."*

I take this to mean that our children are their own persons, with wants and needs, resources and abilities unique to them, provided by God, and in turn will lead lives of their own making. We can only influence them to a point. This theme resonates in *Bycatch*.

***For Bycatch you describe the entanglement of two cultures, one Southern the other Vietnamese. Did you find it difficult to write about these two disparate people?***

Of course, I have lived on the Coast for thirty-one years and with an outsider's eye, observed local customs, dialect, family life, and history. Writing about the Vietnamese immigrants posed a unique challenge. I have never been to Southeast Asia or lived in the Vietnamese community. I wanted to be accurate and sensitive to my portrayal of their complex culture, traditions, and language. Google translate wasn't going to help me—I translated the word for fire into Vietnamese online in an early draft only to learn later that the Vietnamese word I had chosen meant candle flame rather than major fire. I had the Vietnamese pilot screaming “candle flame, candle flame” as his boat was engulfed in fire. Fortunately, I befriended Tran Pham-Bui, an Emmy Award-winning journalist who was born in Vietnam. She walked me through the complexity of her language, social graces, and family relationships.

# BOOK EXCERPT - BYCATCH

## CHAPTER 1

*Biloxi, Mississippi, August 16, 1993*

Wooden blades slapped the dark, still water, pulling a flat-bottomed skiff across the Biloxi Bay. Jake crouched low at the bow and trained his eyes on a single white light ahead. His younger brother Pigeon worked the oars. Both were in their early twenties, lean and muscular. A single black skimmer glided over the water, beating its wings past the boat through the summer's thick, humid air. No moon or stars filled the midnight sky, just as the brothers had hoped. They had a task to do, a score to settle.

At the far end of the bay, six hundred yards off Deer Island, a trawler rested at anchor. From its boom, a bright halogen beam lit up huge nets hanging from outriggers on either side of the vessel. With forty-two feet at the waterline, she had the classic, graceful lines of a Gulf Coast shrimper. Across the transom and bow, the name *Miss Anh* arched in newly gilded letters. Her gold nameboard, green pilothouse, and red hull presented a semblance of Christmas.

Jake felt the gentle vibration of an electric generator as he grabbed the trawler's anchor line to steady the skiff. Without a sound, Pigeon stowed the oars and pulled on heavy knit gloves. He dragged a canvas sack from beneath his seat and gave it to Jake. Sweat beaded on Pigeon's brow and ran into the corners of his eyes. He eased himself over the skiff's gunwale and into the warm bay. Jake pulled a length of cable—looped at each end—out of the sack. Holding on to one end of the coil, he handed the remainder over the side. For a moment, the heavy wire dragged Pigeon's head underwater.

"Gimme that float," Pigeon mouthed as he struggled at the surface.

Jake tossed a square white seat cushion to his brother. Pigeon trapped the pad under his arm then played out the cable with one hand as he side-kicked along the hull of the *Miss Anh*. At the stern, he grabbed a tire bumper hanging from the back rail to rest a moment. Looking up to the transom and the new golden letters, he mumbled, "Those bastards." Then he took a deep breath, released the cushion, and sank into the inky water.

The brothers had been raised on the Mississippi Gulf Coast since they were teenagers and had spent most of their days helping their father run this same boat. They knew every cleat and line, every block and winch, and every seam of its wooden hull.

The free end of the cable pulled on Pigeon's arm as he made his way, by memory and feel, down six feet to the propeller. In the darkness, he guided the wire loop around the prop shaft and over one of the brass blades. Pigeon jerked twice on the cable to signal Jake that his job was complete.

Jake secured the other end of the cable to the two-inch line leading to the trawler's anchor—fifteen feet below and fast in the muddy bottom of the bay. He then let his end of the cable slide down the rope and under the surface. The cable now hung beneath the *Miss Anh* from anchor line to propeller.

Moments later, Pigeon popped up on the far side of the skiff with a loud gasp for air. His wet blond hair draped over his face. Breathless, he grabbed the rail with both hands.

"Dammit, git in," Jake whispered as he scrambled to help Pigeon climb into the small boat. "Git in."

Pigeon put his foot on the lower end of an outboard motor and flipped over the stern, landing shoulder-first at the bottom of the boat. "Shit," he hissed, then squirmed onto the stern thwart.

Jake set the oars, spun the skiff, and pulled away from the trawler with jerking strokes. Darkness filled the quickly expanding space between trawler and skiff. When they were out of earshot, Pigeon fired up the outboard, handled the tiller, and motored toward the Point—toward the mainland shore where casino lights cast brilliant purple, green, and yellow streaks across the smooth water.

The skiff drew a V-shaped wake as it skimmed under the highway drawbridge and around Point Cadet. The brothers followed the channel markers, red and green, into Back Bay. They passed boatyards and dry docks filled with schooners, catboats, prams, and cabin cruisers; aging warehouses left dilapidated after long-forgotten storms; colorful shrimp boats tied up to docks with their outriggers pointing to the night sky; and shrimp packing plants with darkened windows and empty lots. On the Point, behind the wharves, plants, and boatyards was a tidy neighborhood of small clapboard houses arranged in blocks going north, south, east, and west. For three centuries, successive waves of immigrant fishermen and their families—the Spanish, the French, the Yugoslavs, and the Vietnamese—occupied this low-lying spit of land between the bays.

The brothers glided by bulkheads protecting the broad lawns of stately homes and private docks jutting out into the shallow water. Six-inch round Styrofoam balls, floating on the surface and painted in colorful patterns to claim the crab traps below, slipped by. Further up the channel, where Back Bay narrowed, a thick strip of salt grass abutted the dark pine forest at the water's edge, obscuring the transition from land to sea. Thin crosscut canals in the dull marsh, leading to shacks hidden in the woods, flashed with reflected light as the boat passed.

Hours before daybreak, before the release of the Coast's nighttime slumber and stillness, Pigeon ran the skiff through a narrow cut in the salt grass and onto the muddy bank of an old fishing camp their father used to rent.

On impact, Jake lurched forward in the boat. *It wasn't right*, he thought. Then he pulled a slight smile over his face as he reconciled with what was to become of the *Miss Anh* in just a few hours.

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