2. BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Sidney Sheldon was born on February 11, 1917, in Chicago, Illinois. His parents, of Russian Jewish ancestry, were Ascher "Otto" Schechtel (1894–1967), manager of a jewelry store, and Natalie Marcus. At 10, Sidney made his first sale, $5 for a poem. During the Depression, he worked at a variety of jobs, and after graduating from Denver East High School, he attended Northwestern University and contributed short plays to drama groups. Graduating in 1937, he moved to Hollywood, California, where he reviewed scripts and worked on a number of B-movies plots, developing his writing talent. When World War II broke out, he joined the Army Air Force, serving as a pilot, but returned to civilian life as soon as the military would release him near the end of the war. Moving to New York City, he began writing musicals for the Broadway stage, while still writing screenplays for both MGM and Paramount Studios. In 1947, he won an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay for the movie, "The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer" (1947).
When television became the new popular medium, he decided to try his hand in it. "I suppose I needed money," he remembered. "I met Patty Duke one day at lunch. So I produced *The Patty Duke Show*, and I did something nobody else in TV ever did. For seven years, I wrote almost every single episode of the series."

Sheldon created, produced and wrote *I Dream of Jeannie* in his co-production capacity with Screen Gems. He wrote all but two dozen scripts in five years, sometimes using three pseudonyms (Mark Rowane, Allan Devon, Christopher Golato) while simultaneously writing scripts for *The Patty Duke Show*. He also used the same pseudonyms in writing all seventeen episodes of *Nancy*. He later admitted that he did this because he felt his name was appearing too often in the credits as creator, producer, copyright owner and writer of these series. He also wrote for the series *Hart to Hart*.

Production for *I Dream of Jeannie* ended in 1970 after five seasons. It was "During the last year of *I Dream of Jeannie*, I decided to try a novel," he said in 1982. "Each morning from 9 until noon, I had a secretary at the studio take all calls. I mean every single call. I wrote each morning or rather, dictated and then I faced the TV business."

In 1969, Sheldon wrote his first novel, *The Naked Face*, which earned him a nomination for the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America in the category of *Best First Novel*. His next novel, *The Other Side of Midnight*, climbed to 1 on *The New York Times* Best Seller list as did several ensuing novels, a number of which were also made into motion pictures or TV
miniseries. His novels often featured determined women who persevere in a tough world run by hostile men. The novels contained a lot of suspense and devices to keep the reader turning the page:

“\textquoteblock{I try to write my books so the reader can't put them down,}” he explained in a 1982 interview. "\textquoteblock{I try to construct them so when the reader gets to the end of a chapter, he or she has to read just one more chapter. It's the technique of the old Saturday afternoon serial: leave the guy hanging on the edge of the cliff at the end of the chapter.}"

Most of his readers were women. Asked why this was the case he said: "I like to write about women who are talented and capable, but most important, retain their femininity. Women have tremendous power their femininity, because men can't do without it." Books were Sheldon's favorite medium. "\textquoteblock{I love writing books,}" he commented. "\textquoteblock{Movies are a collaborative medium, and everyone is second-guessing you. When you do a novel you're on your own. It's a freedom that doesn't exist in any other medium.}"

Sheldon was married for 30 years to Jorja Curtright, a stage and film actress who later became an interior designer. She appeared in a Season One episode of \textit{I Dream of Jeannie}. She died of a heart attack in 1985.

He married Alexandra Kostoff, a former child actress and an advertising executive of Bulgarian origin, in Las Vegas in 1989. His daughter, Mary Sheldon, became a novelist as well.

Sheldon died on January 30, 2007 from complications arising from pneumonia at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, California. His
remains were cremated, the ashes interred in Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery.

Sheldon won an Academy Award for Writing Original Screenplay (1947) for *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*, a Tony Award (1959) for his musical *Redhead*, and was nominated for an Emmy Award for his work on *I Dream of Jeannie*, an NBC sitcom.