





## MEET THE AUTHOR CLIFF YEARGIN

Cliff Yeargin has spent his life as a storyteller, traveling the U.S. as a writer/producer/photographer and editor in broadcast journalism. Yeargin spent most of his career covering sports. His travels took him to dozens of Major League ballparks, World Series, Super Bowls and a host of college sports. His started out at his hometown radio station, WSGC in Elberton, Georgia, followed by stints at WLOS-TV in Asheville, NC and over twenty years with WMAR-TV in Baltimore, MD. In 2009, he returned to his native Georgia, joining CNN as a creative producer/editor, retiring at the end of 2024. He is a graduate of the University of Georgia and now lives in Atlanta. He is the author of the award-winning Jake Eliam ChickenBone Mystery Series. You can follow the ChickenBone series @ cliffyeargin.com



**CL:** How did the idea for “ButterBean ShingALing” come about?

**CY:** Most of the *ChickenBone* Series is about sports, in particular baseball, since the lead character, Jake Eliam, is a lifetime baseball man and ‘reluctant’ PI. But this idea came about after a phone call with a long-time friend and college buddy. We talked at length about our mutual love of Carolina Beach Music, and he spent the bulk of the call telling stories about how many times he had seen the legendary *Swingin’ Medallions*, telling stories about standing on the porch of a fraternity house at Georgia, beer in one hand, sorority girl in the other, listening to ‘*Doubleshot*’. So, I hung up, took the outline I was working on, trashed it, and set down to figure out how to come up with a story that revolved around Carolina Beach Music. Sometimes an idea just falls into your lap, and you have to steal it while you can.

**CL:** What separates this book from other pieces you’ve written? What connects it?

**CY:** What is different is the basic theme detours from sports to music. Three of the books, *Rabbit Shine*, *BirdDog Boogie* and *SweetTater Tango* are all baseball themed. *MudCat Moon* revolves around A Georgia-Alabama football game and *Hoochy Koochy* does involve old music, but is more about Jake ending up in a mess on a Snake Farm. But what connects it to the others is the same gang of main characters. Jake is pulled into his PI job by his best friend Catfish, a former UGA Bulldog football star and owner of the *3 Pigs BBQ*. In each of the books, Jake, Catfish and a host of oddball characters who tag along, do not plan to get deep into trouble...but somehow, they always do, leaving Jake to once again wonder why he let Catfish lead him down another rabbit hole.

**CL:** What can readers expect from your sixth book?

**CY:** More of the same, but with a twist. If you love Southern Carolina beach music, ever got romantic in Myrtle Beach to the Drifters, you will enjoy the ride. Bobby Springs was a rising star on the Fraternity Circuit. On the verge of a hit record, Springs took his own life, a head-first dive off a water tower. Decades later, Sax Simpson, who played horns for him, still believes Springs was

murdered. He teams up with a reporter to find out. Enter Jake Eliam, in debt and indebted to the reporter, he, Catfish and a motely group of help, head deep into the swamps to find the truth. Digging up bones, they must tangle with the most powerful man in South Georgia, plus a swamp filled with angry gators, and Jake is not sure which one is the most dangerous.

**CL:** How does inspiration strike you?

**CY:** I have friends who swear, based on some of the characters I create, that my inspiration comes from a large bottle of Tennessee Sipping Whiskey. But for me, inspiration comes from just observing. Open your eyes and ears and it is amazing what you can gather up to use in a story. And my books are filled with offbeat characters, many of them inspired by people I grew up with. Everybody who grew up deep in the rural south had a nickname. So, I create characters with names, like *DumpTruck*, *BoobyTrap*, *RoadKill* and *Cool Breeze*. I come up with the name first, and the name easily leads to my inspiration for how I will develop the character and what role they will play in the story. The fun part is seeing where you can take them.

**CL:** Do you have any rituals/best practices for writing?

**CY:** I wish I was more disciplined. Many writers use fancy software programs to organize work, some use big boards filled with index cards, others will do dozens of re-writes of each chapter. I come from the messy world of journalism. You learn to work with distractions all around you. Noisy newsrooms, scribbling on a tiny notebook in a snowstorm, in the corner of a locker room, or in a late-night hotel bar on karaoke night. So, my method is a bit flawed. I outline a book on one page of a legal pad, then flush out the chapters and characters on the same pad, maybe ten pages. After that, I shove the cat off the keyboard, sit down, turn on a ballgame in the background and start writing. I go back through it one time, clean it up best I can and move on.

**CL:** What advice can you share with other local aspiring authors?

**CY:** Find your own voice. When I first tried to write fiction, I copied

the style of my favorite writers. After a pile of rejection letters, I went back over my work, and it was easy to tell it was not good. So, I learned to 'dumb' it down to my level, and slowly my own voice emerged. Good or bad, it has got to be *your* voice. Secondly, writing is by nature isolating, and if you are going to invest a large amount your time to a book or especially a series, then create characters you *enjoy* spending time with and can't wait to get back and hang out with them. And if you are serious about writing, then no excuses. Treat it like a job. Sit yourself down in the chair and do the work.

**CL:** How has your environment influenced your work?

**CY:** Two ways. First, my career in journalism. I spent most of my years covering sports. So, you spend a lot of time in locker rooms, dugouts, practice fields, buses, planes, hotels and there is a lot of down time. Sit around with some players, some old coaches, or a group of sportscasters and sportswriters and you can collect enough stories to file away to use for years to come. And then it is the rural, off the beaten path background. I grew up around some real interesting folks, many whom were great liars, but great storytellers! And some were family members. So, when asked where I find my characters, I just tell people I disguise my relatives JUST enough, so they don't recognize themselves.

**CL:** What's your favorite part about writing? Your least favorite?

**CY:** It is simple. The story -- I love storytelling and have been a storyteller all my life. Matter of fact, as mentioned above, during some late-night hotel bar storytelling sessions, there were a good many friends who would tire of me telling some odd, offbeat story and let me know. It did not stop me. Now I just put them in my books. The least favorite part, getting my manuscript back from the Copyeditor marked up in RED like one of my college papers.

**CL:** Who are you currently reading?

**CY:** Two authors right now. Ace Atkins, a Southern mystery writer (and former Auburn Football player) who has a long list of mysteries set in Mississippi or New Orleans. His current, *Don't Let The Devil Ride* is a gritty Southern noir story with a witty edge. The second is a nonfiction book, *Bottom of the 33rd* by Dan Barry, a New York Times columnist. It is the story of the longest baseball game in history. In 1981 a Triple-A Minor League game was suspended after 32 innings, tied at 2-2 at 4 a.m. It resumed two months later, when the Pawtucket Red Sox finally beat the Rochester Red Wings 3-2 in the bottom of the 33rd inning. Two Hall of Famers, Cal Ripken and Wade Boggs played in the game.

**CL:** Why did you start writing? What made you take the plunge?

**CY:** I started in High School. I was terrible at math and science, so I wrangled my way into a journalism class, where I could write for the school paper and yearbook. First time I saw something I wrote in print, I was hooked. Late in my career, I returned to Georgia to work at CNN as an editor. One day, working with our Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta, I listened as he discussed his schedule with his producer. He had a marathon to run, was headed overseas to a war zone, then to LA where his novel was being made into a TV show, PLUS he also had brain surgery on his schedule. When they left, I said aloud... "I am the laziest person I know..." I went home that day and started work on creating the Jake Eliam Series. Doctor's orders. Take The Plunge!

**CL:** What/who is your favorite book/author of all time? Why?

**CY:** Any book by Carl Hiaasen. He began as a columnist for the Miami Herald, railing against development and corruption in South

Florida. That led to novels, comic novels, with names like *Bad Monkey*, *Strip Tease*, *Sick Puppy* and many more. They all feature greedy rich bad guys and a host of flawed sidebar characters that will make you laugh out loud. My favorite is a guy named CHEMO who appears in two of his novels. He's a hit man who lost one of his arms to a barracuda in Biscayne Bay, and Hiaasen decided to give him a Weed Whacker as a prosthesis. That's my kind of writer and my kind of character!

**CL:** What makes your work stand out from other authors in the same genre?

**CY:** When most people pick up a book and the last word in the sub-title is mystery, they have a certain expectation. First, a murder, a slick investigator and 300 pages of twist and turns and on page 299, a stunning twist. Well, if you pick up one of my books expecting that, then you have made a serious purchasing error. It is just a good story. It's more like a bunch of friends sitting around a fire and one guy starts to tell some tall tale. Rambling, running off into the ditch, drinks are getting warm, and you are asking yourself... when the heck is he going to tell us what happened. Then, maybe an hour later, you are leaning into the fire, hanging on for the fun ride to the finish. You just have to empty the cooler and burn through a pile of good oak to get there.

### The following is an excerpt from Cliff Yeargin's book, "ButterBean ShingALing."

"Robert Chase is a rich man, well known for being a do-gooder, as long as he gets all the credit for doing the good. Every year, he opens up his private island and estate for a huge fundraiser event which attracts the richest of the rich," Elvis said. "It attracts a big pile of fraternity and sorority folks from around the South, all with deep pockets and looking for an excuse to party. These are a bunch of old frat guys and sorority gals, so the party is all about Carolina Beach Music. Every year, they wrap it up with a beach-side moonlight concert by the original legendary *Swingin' Medallions*."

"The *Medallions*," Catfish said, "Dang, I fell down a lot of steps, passed out a many of times at some frat house while they played on the front lawn."

"Who are *The Swingin' Medallions*?" I asked.

They both stared at me like I had killed a kitten with my bare hands.

"Jake, you don't know who *The Swingin' Medallions* are?" Elvis asked. "That's like not knowing chicken can be fried."

"What do you think I did most of my life? Every weekend of my life from a teenager until I was forty, I was playing or coaching baseball. Then I was on some bus in the middle of the night, ten hours, rolling toward Topeka. Not a lot of time left to party or dance."

"They don't dance, they *shag*," Elvis said. "Shag is a dance, native to the beaches of the Carolinas."

"Believe it or not," I said. "I know what the Shag is. Introduced to me by a beautiful former hippie lady, who ended up marrying rich and had a fundraiser of her own where folks were enjoying the shag."

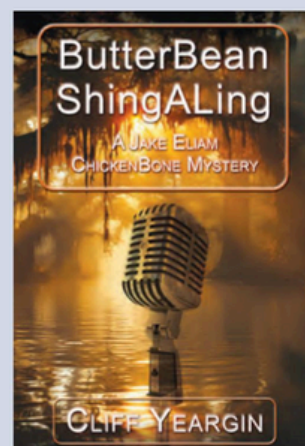
"So, you and the hippie lady did some shagging?"

"We did not. I do not dance. Never have and I never will."

Catfish snorted. "The day you see him dance is the same day you will see a possum win the Kentucky Derby."

"Man," Elvis said. "Baseball messed you up big time."

"It is a cruel game."





# Rabbit Shine

A JAKE ELIAM  
CHICKENBONE MYSTERY

CLIFF YEARGIN

# MudCat Moon

A JAKE ELIAM  
CHICKENBONE MYSTERY

CLIFF YEARGIN

# SweetTater Tango

A JAKE ELIAM  
CHICKENBONE MYSTERY

CLIFF YEARGIN

# Hoochy Koochy

A JAKE ELIAM  
CHICKENBONE MYSTERY

CLIFF YEARGIN

# BirdDog BOOGIE

A JAKE ELIAM  
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