

NBC UNIVERSAL

Moderator: Kellie Kulikowsky
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Operator: Ladies and gentleman, thank you for standing by today. Welcome to the The Firm conference call. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen-only mode.

Afterwards we will conduct a question and answer session. At that time if you have a question, please press a 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. If at any time during the conference you need to reach an operator, please press star 0.

As a reminder this conference is being recorded, Wednesday, December 14, 2011. I will now like to turn the conference over to Kellie Kulikowsky. Please go ahead.

Kellie Kulikowsky: Good afternoon and thank you for joining The Firm conference call today. The Firm premieres on Sunday, January 8th from 9 to 11 p.m. and will then move to its regular time period on Thursday, January 12th at 10 p.m. I would like to welcome best-selling author and exec producer John Grisham and executive producer Lukas Reiter to the call. I would like to open it up for questions.

Operator: Ladies and gentleman, if you would like to register a question please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. You'll hear a three tone prompt to acknowledge your request.

If your question has been answered and you'd like to withdraw your registration, please press the 1 followed by the 3. If you're using a speaker phone, please lift your handset before entering your request.

Once again, to register a question please press 1 4 on your telephone. Our first question comes from the line of (Jay Bobbin) with Tribune. Please proceed.

(Jay Bobbin): Mr. Grisham, hi, thanks for doing this. The Client obviously was done as a series. Was there anything about that that gave you certain requirements or thoughts about doing The Firm as a series at this point?

John Grisham: It certainly gave me great hesitation because it was such a dreadful show and a painful experience. I didn't want to do it again for a long time and forgot about television, you know, over the years.

And never really forgot about the film but films have become very, very difficult to make for a bunch of different reasons. But The Client, you know, did not last long for a lot of valid reasons.

I was not excited about The Firm, didn't really think about The Firm as a TV show until Luke Reiter appeared on the scene and showed me a script and when I read Luke's script a couple three years ago I thought it was very good and kind of got excited about the idea of, you know, a weekly drama.

(Jay Bobbin): If I could follow on that quickly, having read that script, are you (vetting) each script for the series or what's your ongoing involvement, the level of that?

John Grisham: I don't read every script. I've read a lot of them. My involvement is, has been so far to talk to Luke, pass along big ideas about where the series might go. Again, reading some of the scripts but I don't like to spend a lot of the time reading scripts. I don't care, you know, what they're adapted from.

But after the first - the initial script and the two or three that followed, I realized that the series was in, you know, really good hands and I still feel that way today.

I've seen the pilot. I saw it a couple of weeks ago and Luke has offered to send me each episode as they finish them and I don't want to see them. I want to see the pilot but I want to sit back on Thursday night with everybody else and watch the show.

Lukas Reiter: The cuts of each individual - hey, this is Lukas Reiter talking - the cuts of each individual episode, you know, are one thing but, you know, I think, John, you're being a bit modest just in that the macro picture of the show of how we're approaching it, the way that we came into the story and also the big central conspiracy at the heart of the show has really greatly benefited from my work with John and just talking with John about the characters and the series and where it's going.

The central conspiracy was very much a collaboration in concept between John and I and we are working hard over here in the writers room every day to carry out that vision.

(Jay Bobbin): Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Tracy Grant with TheStarScoop.com. Please proceed.

Tracy Grant: Hi there Mr. Grisham, thanks for taking time. And I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about what we can expect from the two-hour premiere. We're really looking forward to it.

John Grisham: It's very well done. It's very entertaining. It's, you know, I love suspense. That's what I write, that's what I like to watch, that's what I think about. I'm always trying to create a story that will keep readers up all night turning pages, skipping work, skipping meals, calling - you know, that's what I strive to do whenever I have a good suspenseful story.

The TV. show pilot is very much the same way. It's a lot of action but also a lot of good drama where you see the characters stop and think and reflect and, you know, they're real people. And it's a really good cast.

Josh Lucas is terrific. He's got all the makings and mannerisms and charisma of a real star. He's very, very good in the role and it's been, you know, a lot of fun watching somebody else's sort of vision of these characters ten years after we last saw them. And that's where the story picks up.

A lot of good legal intrigue. A lot of courtroom stuff, lawyer-client problems, big law firm intrigue, all the stuff I love to write about.

Lukas Reiter: We really are along the lines of that. You know, part of the show - we really are - we're picking up ten years later and so the show really is the next chapter of the story.

So I think people who know the novel, people who know the film and love it - and I started from a place of being a huge fan, you know, of the original material - you know, we're trying to carry on the spirit of that storytelling and continue the story of whatever happened to Mitch and Abby McDeere.

And so all of the - I mean, I write - I've written legal dramas for most of my career and so the difference here I think - largely because of John's involvement - is that we're really trying to create a legal thriller every week.

All that action, all that suspense, all of the adrenaline rush that people have come to love and expect from a great John Grisham novel, we're trying to incorporate into the stories that we're telling every week both in the stand alone cases that begin and end in every episode and in the big central conspiracy that arcs over the first season.

Tracy Grant: Absolutely. Thank you so much, guys.

John Grisham: You're welcome.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Tom Wilson with Simply TV. Please proceed.

Tom Wilson: Hi, guys. Thanks for your time. My question to Lukas. Was there ever any talk of trying to get Tom Cruise to play the lead of...Was that ever a faint possibility?

Lukas Reiter: That - I don't think that was every really raised as a possibility. And I think that - and honestly I'm not sure - while I love Tom Cruise's work - I'm not sure that that was part of our thinking here.

Because while it is Mitch McDeere, the truth is because the story picks up ten years later, it's a very different character, it's a very different place that we find Mitch McDeere in his life having just gone through 10 years of witness protection.

And so I really think this isn't about Josh Lucas playing the character that Tom Cruise played as Mitch McDeere. I think because it's a different place in that character's life, it really feels like it needs a different characterization.

And so Josh really has come in to inhabit this character and this new story and from the minute he started I just felt like he owned it, created this new version or this - he picked up where Mitch would be now in his life so naturally and organically and all of the intelligence, all of the resourcefulness, all of the heart that we've come to expect from Mitch McDeere is there just in a new version of the guy.

Tom Wilson: Okay. You said it picks up 10 years later. Where are the characters in their lives at this point?

Lukas Reiter: Right. So 10 years later and for those of you who know the back story and if you don't the pilot - or the premiere episode rather will immediately fill in what little information viewers would be interested to know as back story and that is that - so having taken or participated in taking down the law firm up in Bandini, Lambert and Locke in Memphis.

At the end of that story he felt that he was - Mitch felt that he was free and clear, that he had come up with a fairly ingenious solution that assisted the feds in taking down the law firm but did not incur the wrath of the Moralto mob.

And what you find out at the beginning of our story is that while Mitch thought he was free and clear, some things happened that he did not anticipate that actually make him and his family the target of the Moralto family's rage and desire for revenge.

And so while Mitch is an incredibly independent guy, you know, his autonomy is incredibly important to him, there's that great moment at the end of the film where Terrence says to him, you know, why did you do all of this, what did you get out of all of this, you know, you didn't get anything. He said, yes, I did because you don't run me and they don't run me.

And so that autonomy was always such a part of the character as we try to continue the story and so he naturally wouldn't have wanted to go into witness protection but there are some things that make that a necessary decision for him.

And so the family for the last 10 years has been on the run and what's happened now, where we find them is the head of the Moralto family out of Chicago, Joey Moralto, Senior has recently died in prison.

Mitch now believes now the threat is behind him, that perhaps this is the event that should be eh impetus for his family to come out of hiding to reclaim their lives, to reclaim their future.

They resurface in Washington, D.C. with Mitch intending to start a solo practice in the area - they're living in Virginia, in Northern Virginia. And so we find the McDeere's after quite an experience over the last 10 years trying to get back to the life that they put on hold when they went into witness protection only to find that some of the past dangers are still out there and

there are a series of new complications ahead of them that we unfold over the course of the season.

Tom Wilson: Right Okay. And finally I'd just like to ask the book and the movie were very successful. Given that success are you worried that fans of the previous projects will expect (unintelligible) enjoy the show as much as they did those?

John Grisham: No, I'm not worried at all. And I'll tell you I'm not worried because I'm convinced the show is going to be a success but also personally I've had so much success because of that one book that nothing could, you know, worry me about it now.

The book was published 20 years ago in '91. The movie came out two years later in '93. It was a big box office success, it had a big cast, you know. It's still the highest grossing movie domestic and worldwide of any of the eight or nine films that have been adapted from my books. And it's, you know, sold now I don't know between 15 and 20 million copies and 40 languages.

So, believe me, I've had my share of success from the original story. And what we're doing now is to me is just pure fun to watch it on TV. I mean, it's fun because Luke's doing all the work. It's nice to be able to collaborate with somebody who just kind of listens to your ideas and goes off and has to do all the work.

For me I'm so looking forward to January the 8th to sit back with my family and watch two hours of The Firm. I'm not worried about success or failure, I want to see because of all the hard work that Luke and the cast and crew have put into it and it deserves a good audience but I'm not worried about them.

Tom Wilson: Okay. Thank you so much for your time and good luck with this.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Paul Arca with Shakefire.com.
Please proceed.

Paul Arca: Good afternoon, guys.

John Grisham: Good afternoon.

Paul Arca: John, I just want to say my mom is a humongous fan of her and I buy her all the books that you've written...

John Grisham: She must be very intelligent.

Paul Arca: Yeah, she has The Litigators sitting under the tree right now wrapped up but she doesn't know it.

John Grisham: I like her.

Paul Arca: She's going to be really jealous, you know, when I tell her that I got to talk to you today. But I also had a chance to interview Molly Parker a couple of weeks ago and she was really excited about the show also. I was just wondering what was it about Molly Parker that made her ideal for the role of Abby in the show?

John Grisham: Well, you're asking the wrong person because I've learned a long time ago when it comes to casting these dramas, I have no talent, no expertise whatsoever.

I'm often asked when we're going a movie, when we used to do movies, they would send me videos of certain actors or shows and, you know, and always getting my input on casting and I finally just stopped doing it.

I said, you know, this is not something I know anything about. There are experts that know about casting and I know nothing so you can ask Luke that question.

Lukas Reiter: Well, it is an art and who knows what makes a decision the right decision but I can tell you what I responded to and I think what we all responded to on the creative team about Molly from the beginning was there's just such a soulfulness in her as an actress, an intelligence, a soulfulness that really comes through in everything that she does.

And really at the heart of this story has always been the relationship between Mitch and Abby in many ways. And the way that they are partners and the way that they really talk to each other and listen to each other and the way that they disagree about fighting in a mean-spirited way and that requires a certain kind of an actress to cover that type of a woman.

And I really felt that - and we felt that Molly could do a great job and we've been right I'm happy to say.

Paul Arca: Awesome and can't wait to watch the show with my mom and you guys have a happy holidays. Thank you.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of (Reg Seaton) with (unintelligible).com. Please proceed.

(Reg Seaton): All right. My first question is for Mr. Grisham. With The Firm as a TV series, where do you think Mitch can go as a character on TV that you've always wanted to take him or perhaps couldn't?

John Grisham: I can't say I wanted to take Mitch anywhere. You know, when I left Mitch in the book he was pretty much on the run and probably facing a lifetime of that because he had ticked off some really nasty people.

The movie was different, a very different ending but I've never been one to go back and think about sequels or think about finding a character. I've never - knock on wood - I've yet to suffer from writer's block. If one day I get a good dose of it, a good case of it, I may have to go back and resurrect some of these old characters and start writing sequels but I hope not.

So when I was finished with Mitch and Abby, I was, you know, as a creator, I was done with them. What the cool thing about the TV show is that each week you get to watch Mitch in action as a real lawyer with different cases. And that's what I've always wanted to see on television.

I've enjoyed some TV shows over the years because you see, you know, the good ones. You see good lawyers in courtroom situations or dealing with clients or even the visiting of the jail, you know, all this intrigue, and, again, I like to read about, like to watch and like to write about. So I think that's where

Mitch is going to really be fleshed out as a character with his interactions with real clients.

And then what's great about the series or great about the premiere is that you've got - you always know, you always know that there's some bad, bad guys still back there and they're not going to go away and they're still after you. And the suspense is really well done.

(Reg Seaton): And since you both worked within the legal systems, both of you guys, how has that experience translated into a more effective working relationship before the series?

John Grisham: Luke?

Lukas Reiter: Well, I've - it's been a great transition from my time as a prosecutor, you know, not the least of why because now thankfully all the homicide victims are acting and it's - I think everything that I write, the way I approach stories are certainly impacted from some of those early experiences.

I think just, you know, I've said before that writers and lawyers have one critical trait in common and that is the ability to think about the same thing for an irrational amount of time.

And so certainly just having that perspective on the way I approach stories from my time as an attorney makes a big difference. I don't know, John, would you say maybe it gives you and I just a short hand in the way we think about cases and stories and approach ideas?

John Grisham: Yeah, it's also like books about lawyers and trials and firms. I can read five pages of a book about a trial or thriller or whatever and normally I can tell you

if the author is a lawyer or was a lawyer because there's just a certain amount of authenticity that you naturally bring the process when you've lived it and when you know what you're talking about.

And Lukas - I mean, I certainly lived it for 10 years, not a long career but long enough and what's really beneficial in working with Luke is the fact that he did too. He's been in courtrooms, he's worked the tough cases and that is something that's invaluable. It's something you really can't teach and something you really can't research. You just know it because you've lived it and that, again, has really helped the process.

Lukas Reiter: And it's really helped in the writers room as well. I mean, among the other writer producers on the project we have a former federal prosecutor, USC law professor, Chief of Staff for the Lieutenant Governor of California. We've got a guy who handled homicide cases from the defense perspective in New York. So we've got those voices helping us shape where we're headed.

(Reg Seaton) Great, thanks, guys. Good luck with the series.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Bill Keveney with USA Today, please proceed.

Bill Keveney: Hi, Mr. Grisham, where - what did you think of the idea of distancing this 10 years from, you know, where both the book and the film left off?

John Grisham: Well, I thought it was a very smart idea because you've got to put a lot of distance between Mitch and Abby in their past because you can't run from the mafia. And it's kind of the old fashioned mafia. You know, they're notorious for always finding their man.

Even though - so you had to have at least ten years to get away from the very real threat that Mitch faced when he blew up the law firm in Memphis and because he was a marked man.

And he thinks that ten years is long enough. He is also determined after the years, he's tired of witness protection, he's tired of, you know, life on the run. He's going to - says to hell with it, I'm going to have a normal life. And you really want that to happen but you're really worried about what is going to happen.

Bill Keveney: So you don't think it would have been possible to just pick up immediately after like where the book left off?

John Grisham: Not where the book left off, no.

Bill Keveney: Okay. Lukas, has there been any thought of doing that or was it always the concept to have some distance between them?

Lukas Reiter: Well, so as John mentioned the book and the movie have different endings and our series in - because of where Mitch ends up at the end of the book we began as a jumping off point our series with the ending in the film where Mitch and Abby returned to Boston to start their lives again.

Mitch references starting his own practice and so that allowed us to tell a story about a Mitch McDeere that was still an attorney, still interested in practicing

law and we could move forward from there in a way that was different than the story that we would have been telling had we picked up at the end of the novel.

So that's definitely where we started from and I think that it became the right move for us to approach it ten years later because you really felt that this character had been through an experience and is coming out on the other side of it we hope with a new perspective and a new sort of objective to recapture some of the hope that he had for his life.

You know, all of the potential that Mitch McDeere had in the novel, all of that - all of the great law that he wanted to make, all of the great accomplishments that he wanted to be part of were denied him.

And so I think it's fun to come into the story and interesting to come into the story of a character who has had a bright future denied and what happens now. And I think the ten years created that for us and it's part of what attracted me to the idea.

Bill Keveney: Okay. Thank you very much.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Paige Albiniak with New York Post. Please proceed.

Paige Albiniak: Hi, so for Lukas, you cast them Juliette Lewis and Callum Keith to play this couple that if I understand it correctly they're both close to Mitch and Abby and they both work for Mitch and Abby because Callum plays his brother. Correct?

Lukas Reiter: Correct.

Paige Albiniak: So I just was wondering - now I don't remember them in the original series - but I was wondering from your point of view why were these characters important and especially the way that you structured them? What are they bringing to the series?

Lukas Reiter: Well, I think John really began the relationship between Mitch and Ray so well. From the beginning of meeting Ray in the novel he just leaps out at you as a character that you want to know and want to know more about and what to understand the dynamic of Mitch and Ray as brothers.

And so certainly I was excited about keeping Ray a part of the family. I think their relationship and how close they are and how Mitch and Ray talk to each other is a big part of our show.

And also as far as Juliette Lewis' character which is Tammy Hemphill, so you see in the film the beginning seeds of some romantic interest between Ray and Tammy there.

And so with that as the kernel of inspiration we took them into a relationship together and Tammy's actually made the decision to stay with Ray and put her own life on hold and go into witness protection with him because she loves him. And so she is still part of their lives, part of the family, if you will, and so that's how come she's there in the firm and working with the crew.

And certainly that was a big part of the way we approach this is it is a legal show within a real sense. It's within the legal genre but what I hope makes it feel different to you guys and to viewers is that it's got a family at its core.

This is about Mitch and his wife and their child and his brother and the woman that he loves, Tammy.

And the way that they talk to each other and the way that they relate to each other, the fact that they discuss these cases in the kitchen of the McDeere house, it is not a show about lawyers processing legal cases, it's a story about a family and their lives and their work and what interests them and how they relate to each other. So Ray and Tammy had to be there and Callum and Juliette are doing great work.

Paige Albiniak: So actually now that you mention Tammy I'm like oh, yeah, I remember her but didn't she have very big blond hair in the movie?

Lukas Reiter: One of the great things about the character is that she would change her hair color I've always imagined for her own entertainment. Yeah, so the character is a bit eccentric and Juliette has really brought her back to life.

Paige Albiniak: And for Mr. Grisham, I just wanted to ask you - we talked a lot about family being at the core and the partnership of Mitch and Abby. And I just wondered when you first wrote the book, why was it important to you that Mitch and Abby have the kind of relationship that they do and was that anything that you drew from your own life?

And then I also was wondering don't you think Abby would be pretty annoyed by now that she keeps having to be in witness protection and run from the mob for no fault of her own? I'm actually kind of kidding but I was like as a wife wouldn't you get annoyed by this after a while?

John Grisham: Well, your first question is very difficult to answer because as I told Luke or told him initially he had a lot of questions about what was I thinking when I wrote this and what was I thinking when I wrote that.

When I started writing this book in 1987 I didn't know if I was going to finish it or if it was going to get published or - I had no idea it would become a bestseller.

I can't tell you what I was thinking a long time ago. I just finished writing the first book and it didn't sell and so I was trying to write something that might be a bit more commercial and profitable and popular I guess.

But I really can't - I've never gone back and read the book. I've never gone back and read any of my books over the past twenty-some odd years because I'm always when I'm through with them, I'm through with them. I'm onto something - I'm onto the next book.

So when Luke appeared on the scene with this script and we had lunch in New York and he had a whole list of questions about, you know, about the writing of the firm I just said, Luke, put those questions away because I don't remember and right now you know far more about this story than I do because I haven't looked at it in 20 years. And so that's the way I'll answer the first part of your question.

The second part about Abby, I'm sure she'd be irritated. You know, who wouldn't be irritated if your life to witness protection, your identity, your home and everything. I'm sure there was a lot of conflict between Mitch and Abby in those two years - I mean those 10 years. That would only be natural. But, you know, hey, she loves her man and she sticks with him and now she's got her own TV show.

Paige Albiniak: So Lukas, is that any factor as the way you play Abby or does she sort of bring her own issues into it, you know, like I'm kind of sick of this or any of that?

Lukas Reiter: Well, yes in the sense that Mitch and Abby do talk in the show about how they're feeling about how they felt about being in witness protection, how they felt about being out of witness protection, whether or not this readjustment to a more normal life is working, how it affects their marriage.

So Abby is a strong character who's very willing to voice when she's feeling good or concerned about what's going on in their life. So, sure, that - but I think John's very correct when he says that she is a McDeere and she loves Mitch and supports the choices that they've had to make and understands them.

You know, I think don't that she feels that any of the things that have happened to them as a result of having to go into the witness protection were Mitch's doings so she would in any way resent him for it. I think that she understands that she has a smart and in many ways heroic husband who ended up, you know, dealing with the consequences of decisions they would make again if they had to.

Paige Albiniak: All right. Thank you guys.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

John Grisham: Thanks.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Josh Maloney with Niagara Frontier.
Please proceed.

Josh Maloney: Hi, guys, thanks for your time today.

John Grisham: Yes, sir.

Josh Maloney: So you guys have talked a little bit about what makes the series different. You know, obviously you guys really sort of set the bar for this kind of writing and this kind of, you know, court-based action. What do you guys think of the current landscape? What do you think about sort of the other type legal-type shows that are out there nowadays?

John Grisham: Go, Luke.

Lukas Reiter: Well, I think there are - I've been very excited by the fact that legal stories continue to captivate audiences. I think there is great legal storytelling on the air today and on network air. I'm a fan of The Good Wife and the storytelling that they're doing over there.

But I think that what we're up to is quite different in tone. You know, it has - it's a bit of a different way to approach a legal story and that it's got an action component that's inherent in the material. It's got all of the potential to be telling great legal stories every week and it's got a family drama at its core.

So I'm thrilled that legal stories are still being told and being told well and I hope that we can bring our version of that to NBC any minute now.

John Maloney: Right. And, you know, Mr. Grisham, obviously all of your books, quite obviously you're a genius when it comes to this topic. I'm wondering though

how often are you approached by a producer or by a television network to either revisit your characters or put a new spin on the books for something like you're doing right now?

John Grisham: How often? Not that often. I would say maybe a couple times a year. I mean, there are always a lot of phone calls. Most of them, you know, I don't even know about.

But when something fairly serious comes across, we'll sit down and look at the idea and I'll give it some time. It almost always goes away. I mean, this is the only TV series. There are a lot of proposals floating around but most of them I just don't want to pursue.

Occasionally somebody will do what Luke did, have the idea and then write a really good script. That's rare because I take a look at a lot of bad scripts. I don't finish them but, you know, it was a really unusual moment when this idea was pitched to me and then it was followed up with a very well-written solid script.

So that's - I would say this is very unusual and to answer your question it doesn't happen that often.

John Maloney: All right. Great. Thanks, guys.

Lukas Reiter: I'm going to put that on a loop, John, and just play that here in the office.

John Grisham: Go ahead.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Alice Chapman Newgen with the Times Courier. Please proceed.

Alice Chapman-Newgen: Hi. I appreciate you guys taking this call. What I would like to know - this is for both of you - when did you become interested in law and writing and which came first? Did you always have an interest in both or as a child? I'd like to know a little bit about your background in that respect?

John Grisham: I never thought about being a writer when I was a kid, when I was a student, even when I was a law student. It came later in life. I was about 30 years old and I was sort of the lightning bolt hit with this idea about a courtroom drama in a small town in Mississippi as seen through the eyes of this young idealistic attorney. And I kind of fancied myself as being him because that was the life I was living. You know, the guy was about to starve to death.

It became *A Time to Kill* which was the first fiction I ever wrote and it didn't sell. It was published in '89. It did not do anything but by then I was in the habit of pursuing my little secret hobby, you know, every day, writing something.

And the next book was *The Firm*. And, you know, around my house we still measure time as BF and AF, before *The Firm* and after *The Firm* because that changed everything. I stopped being a lawyer immediately and started writing books.

Lukas Reiter: And I guess from my part, the part of the law that may be attracted me to it and that I found interesting at first was the storytelling aspect of it and that's why as a law student and then as a young lawyer I gravitated toward courtroom work and became an assistant district attorney.

And then probably - and I didn't even do it for all that long but after not too long and spending a little time in a bureau there in Queens called homicide

investigations I think I had - I quickly came to a place where I felt that it was maybe time for me to imagine a job where the hours were a little better and the victims were fictional. Somehow I made my way to writing.

Alice Chapman-Newgen: Tell me a little something about the witness protection program that the average person probably doesn't know and how long a person would usually be in the program.

John Grisham: Luke, you're probably more fluent in that program today than I am.

Lukas Reiter: Yeah, wow, the - I honestly would not be the one to ask about statistics about the average person in the witness protection program. We've certainly done some research as far as what experience is like and how it can help shape the story that we're telling and the back story for the McDeeres but, boy, there would be better folks than I to tell you the statistics about averages in the program itself.

John Grisham: And also over the years I've kind of picked around the edges around the witness protection program trying to research for other books. And you really don't get much information. The firewall goes up with the FBI and they really don't want you - they don't want to talk about it. They don't really want you to know and they don't want you to write about it. So I've never - I've never been able to get much information about the program.

Alice Chapman-Newgen: So does that cause problems since they don't want to discuss information with you? Do you go by what you have learned on your own pretty much?

John Grisham: You just make it up. That's the world of fiction. If you want to create something - you know, I hate to do research. I'd much rather just create

something than have to stop and go do the research. I'm terrible at research and pretty good at fictionalizing things so that's what I do. I'm very lazy about research. I'd rather just make it up.

Alice Chapman-Newgen: That's interesting. Thank you very much, both of you.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Bill Brioux with the Canadian Press Starweek Magazine. Please proceed.

Bill Brioux: Hi, good afternoon, gentleman. Thank you for doing the call. I've seen your pilot. It's very entertaining and well cast. So congratulations.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Bill Brioux: Thank you, Mr. Grisham, for saying you hate to do research. I'm going to stop if you're a success. I think we're all off the hook. I was curious - and you've kind of answered this a bit or suggested - it was so long ago - but when you're writing a novel do you ever have an act in your head for a character and, if so, did McDeere look more like Tom Cruise than Josh Lucas?

John Grisham: Well, what happened with The Firm, I actually sold the film rights to The Firm in January of 1990 to Paramount before I sold the book rights and it was an overnight deal that happened and just came out of nowhere and it was really weird the way it went down.

So the movie went first. I mean, the movie rights. I sold the book rights to Doubleday. We published the book in '91 and the movie came out two years later.

From the very beginning of that process, I did not have any input into the process because I was, you know, a rookie unknown writer and that's the way things go and I understood that. But it was mentioned and rumored throughout the whole process that they were going to go after Tom Cruise and they go Tom Cruise and it was a big commercial success.

And so I thought this will be easy. The Pelican Brief was the next one up. It came out six months after The Firm, Christmas of '93. And from the very beginning Alan Pakula who was the director of The Pelican Brief said we're going to get Julia Roberts and they did.

So I thought, this is easy. Just pick out the star you want and you go sign them up to be in your movie. And that's about the last time it happened to be honest. I've found over the years that it's really, you rarely, rarely get the person you want or the person you're even dreaming about to star in your film.

Bill Brioux: When you're actually writing it, do you see yourself as these characters?
Early, early on do you have an actor in your head?

John Grisham: No, not actors. If you'll notice when you read one of my books I spend very little time giving a lot of physical description to my characters. I get bored with that as a reader when somebody goes for a page and a half trying to describe someone's face or physical attributes. To me it's a waste of time. I hit the high points and let it go.

Occasionally I'll see a face somewhere in a catalogue or a magazine or something and clip that out and put it on the wall but it's never of an actor. So to answer your question I can think of only one time.

Matthew McConaughey of course his first big film was A Time to Kill and I was writing a book a few years later and I kept thinking this would be a great role for Matthew. Of course, it didn't happen and the film's never been made. I think this happened one time when I actually had somebody in mind.

Bill Brioux: That's interesting. Just to follow - you mentioned earlier I think you said you sold 15 million copies of The Firm. That's a staggering number of books. We're hearing that books aren't selling - it's a little more challenging today, books and newspapers and everything. Do you see movies and TV shows as essential in continuing to drive book sales and get people to read books?

John Grisham: It's going to be intriguing to see what happens with the paperback book sales of The Firm when the TV series starts. Doubleday is, to say the least, very enthusiastic. There's a lot of optimism. There's a TV tie in addition with Josh Lucas on the cover of the paperback you'll see, you know, all over the place, airports, wherever.

Again, it's a first for me because it didn't affect book sales when The Client came out because the show didn't last very long but it's going to be very, very intriguing to see what happens over the next few months.

You know, we're always going to have book stores and you're always going to have books and films and movies. I don't care what happens to the Kindles and E-Readers. People are always going to buy books.

The problem with book selling today is we have 3000 fewer book stores today than we had 15 years ago and they're closing all the time. At the same time in the past couple of years my last two books we issued the digital book the same day as the print version and across the board the numbers have gone up. And not just for me but for a lot of commercial authors. We're seeing overall sales go up because more readers are coming online and they love their Kindles and iPads and Nooks and so maybe it's a good thing.

Bill Brioux: Well, that's great to hear. Thank you for your time.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Andrea Baillie with Canadian Press. Please proceed.

Andrea Baillie: Hi, question for Luke. Luke, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about your familiarity with the source materials. It's such a special book to a lot of people. Do you remember, you know, what time in your life that you read it and what impact it had on you and do you feel a responsibility to satisfy hardcore fans of the book as well as new viewers?

Lukas Reiter: I began this process, you know, as really just a fan of the source material. You know, I do love the book and I also love the film and I've seen it many, many, many times. And I had read the book more than once and have certainly read it many times now as we've ramped up our series.

You know, I - having read it more than once I can tell you that I do remember reading it on the train - on the E and F train - on my way out to Queens as a

young prosecutor. So, you know, it is very cool and a bit surreal to be part of a continuation of that story all these years later.

And as to whether there's, you know, pressure associated with that, certainly it's a story that I love and I take incredibly seriously the importance of continuing it as well as possible and in a way that I and fans of the original will recognize and appreciate.

Some of that pressure I have to say is alleviated by John his involvement and his generosity and the fact that he's been a part of continuing the story and talking to me about how we're continuing the story.

And so I think if I were doing this without him and without his guidance in many ways, I would be feeling that pressure a lot more but I'm lucky to not be in that position.

Andrea Baillie: Just one more quick question. The Memphis feel was such a big part of the book but they can't go back there or is it possible to weave that into future episodes? I know it wasn't in the pilot but can you give a hint about that?

Lukas Reiter: You know, that city may not be part of our story but these characters are, you know, the same in some senses. You know, Mitch and his brother and Abby being from Kentucky and so there's a certain sense of the character that sort of fit in Memphis.

And so some of that characterization carries over into whatever city you place the McDeeres in. And so it's true, we're not in Memphis but the spirit of the story and Memphis was such a great place for that to begin is still there even though we're in another city.

Andrea Baillie: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

John Grisham: Thanks.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of (David Lilmaggie) from the Daily Newspaper (Expressin). Please proceed.

(David Lilmaggie): Thank you so much. To Mr. Grisham, I was wondering, what do you think it is with your writing that makes it work so well when adapted to TV series or movies?

John Grisham: Yeah, I've been asked that question a few times over the years. It's a very simple writing style. There's nothing fancy. There's, you know, no stylistic tricks up my sleeve.

I start with point A and go to point B and C. When I get to Z I better be finished or something's wrong. It's kind of one scene after another and I think that appeals to filmmakers and screenwriters.

I love to write dialogue. It comes naturally and easily for me. And, again, most of a screenplay is dialogue. So I would say those two factors.

David (Lilmaggie): Thank you so much. Mr. Reiter, your opinion on the same question?

Lukas Reiter: I would just say that for any - certainly speaking for myself and probably I'd imagine for any writer who is, you know, continuing a story or adapting material - the thing that I look for from the start is are these characters that you care about and the thing that John does so well - did so well on The Firm

and does so well in all of his books is he just has a way of making you care about the people that he's telling you about.

And so when you've got characters that you care about and you get them into danger and there is suspense about whether they're going to be okay or whether they're going to succeed, that is timeless and that is something that John has mastered.

And so - and that is something that will always be interesting to people and to writers like myself whether it's Hitchcock or John Grisham, that kind of suspense when it's involving characters that you've come to love in the way that John makes you love them is always going to get the interest of people like me who are trying to write television series or films based on great stories.

David (Lilmaggie): Thank you so much. We're looking forward to the series up in Sweden as well.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Great, thank you.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of (Patrick Darcy) with (unintelligible) TV. Please proceed.

(Patrick Darcy): You mentioned a lot of suspense in the show and things like (unintelligible). I'm just wondering if there's any sort of or any moment or scene that you can talk about or reveal that kind of stands out from the premiere?

John Grisham: Well, for me, it happens right off the bat. It opens with a very, very suspenseful sort of a chase scene and for people - for fans of the book and the movie and people who know the story, Mitch finally gets to a pay phone because he can't use his cell phone and calls Abby and he says, Abby, it's happening again. And at that moment, you know, you know they're in really hot water. It really sets the tone for the two-hour show.

Lukas Reiter: And I would just add - without giving away any of our twists, you know, that sequence there at the top that takes Mitch to a meeting in a hotel room, ends in what I hope is a very suspenseful way. I can't wait for people to see it because I think that's indicative of the kind of shocking suspenseful stuff that we're going for every week.

Patrick Darcy: Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thanks.

Operator: Our last question comes from the line of Earl Dittman with Wireless Digital Journal. Please proceed.

Earl Dittman: Hi, guys, how are you all this evening?

John Grisham: Hi, Earl, how are you doing?

Earl Dittman: Doing great. Doing great. I guess, Lukas first, real quickly, you've actually had some practice with this, great shows like The Practice, Law and Order. So this is pretty good fertile territory for you. You've done a lot of work in that. Are you coming to it with a lot of knowledge about the law and writing about the law?

Lukas Reiter: I am. I've been lucky to write some terrific legal shows over the years and to have had the good fortune of spending several years watching and learning from great writers like David Kelly.

So it's terrific having written all of those shows to be writing this one because I think one of the things that's great about this construct and the way that we're doing it is that I really get to pull from each of those prior experiences some of the best kinds of stories and tell them all through the vehicle of The Firm. And that's really terrific.

You know, stories that worked on The Practice that may not have been right for Law and Order, that's always been a question, you know, is this story that's right for this show.

And one of the great things about this show is I think we really have the ability to be telling all of the best kind of legal stories from each of those universes within our show?

Earl Dittman: That's great. Mr. Grisham, finally I'll have to ask, you have a lot of books out there that haven't been turned into movies. Is there any of them close to being made to another movie or is it really that tough to get movies made even if they're great books?

John Grisham: Well, thank you. It's really tough. The business has changed so much in the past ten years. There are probably four or five books that are being adapted right now and they're in some phase of development which means nothing is being done.

It's just - I can't tell you when anybody is actually thinking about actually filming a movie. There's some scripts bouncing around, you know, but this is -

for the past ten years it seems like I've had four or five different deals or projects or options or whatever, balls in the air and just nothing.

And really it's nothing - I don't think I'm at fault because I don't get involved in the filmmaking process. I reserve the right to look over the script and make notes and make ideas but I rarely get involved in the process.

And I hope I've not had the reputation over the years of somebody that's very hard to deal with. I would love to see every book adapted to film or TV because I enjoy watching good movies and good TV.

And, you know, I would love to see it done and we don't ask for a zillion bucks like we used to get back in the good old days. So we're ready to deal but it's just the financing and the industry's changed so much, it's hard to get them made.

Earl Dittman: Well, thank God for The Firm and thank God for television.

John Grisham: Thank you.

Earl Dittman: Well, thank you, guys. We're looking forward to it and I hope the best of luck. So you just have 12 episodes so far filmed?

Lukas Reiter: Yes, we're shooting our 10th now and preparing to shoot the 11th.

Earl Dittman: Well, all right. Thank you, guys. Best of luck.

John Grisham: Thanks a lot.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you.

Kellie Kulikowsky: Thank you everyone. That's all the time we have for today. I'd like to thank John Grisham and Lukas Reiter for speaking with everyone. We greatly appreciate it. If anyone has any questions, please feel free to call me at 818-777-3006. Thank you.

Lukas Reiter: Thank you, John.

John Grisham: Thanks a lot. See you, Luke. Good luck.

Lukas Reiter: All right. Take care.

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