

# TAKE A CLUE FROM AL ROKER

/ By **Ruth Bashinsky** / Photo courtesy of **NBC**

If Al Roker is your favorite weatherman, you might want to add favorite author to your list of kudos.

In December, *The Boulevard* caught up with Roker when he was at the Book Revue in Huntington to sign copies of his newest whodunit, *The Midnight Show Murders*. During the Q&A session, Roker revealed a down-to-earth and witty side of himself – from talking about bagging frozen chickens when he was a kid to telling audience members what he did in the cold weather while attending SUNY Oswego. “There was July 4 and then there was winter,” noted Roker. “I ate a lot.”

He also shared with fans how he makes waking up at 3:30 a.m. look so easy and what it feels like to be the subject of a skit on *Saturday Night Live*. “Keenan Thompson doing an SNL sketch ... that is kind of how you know you made it.”

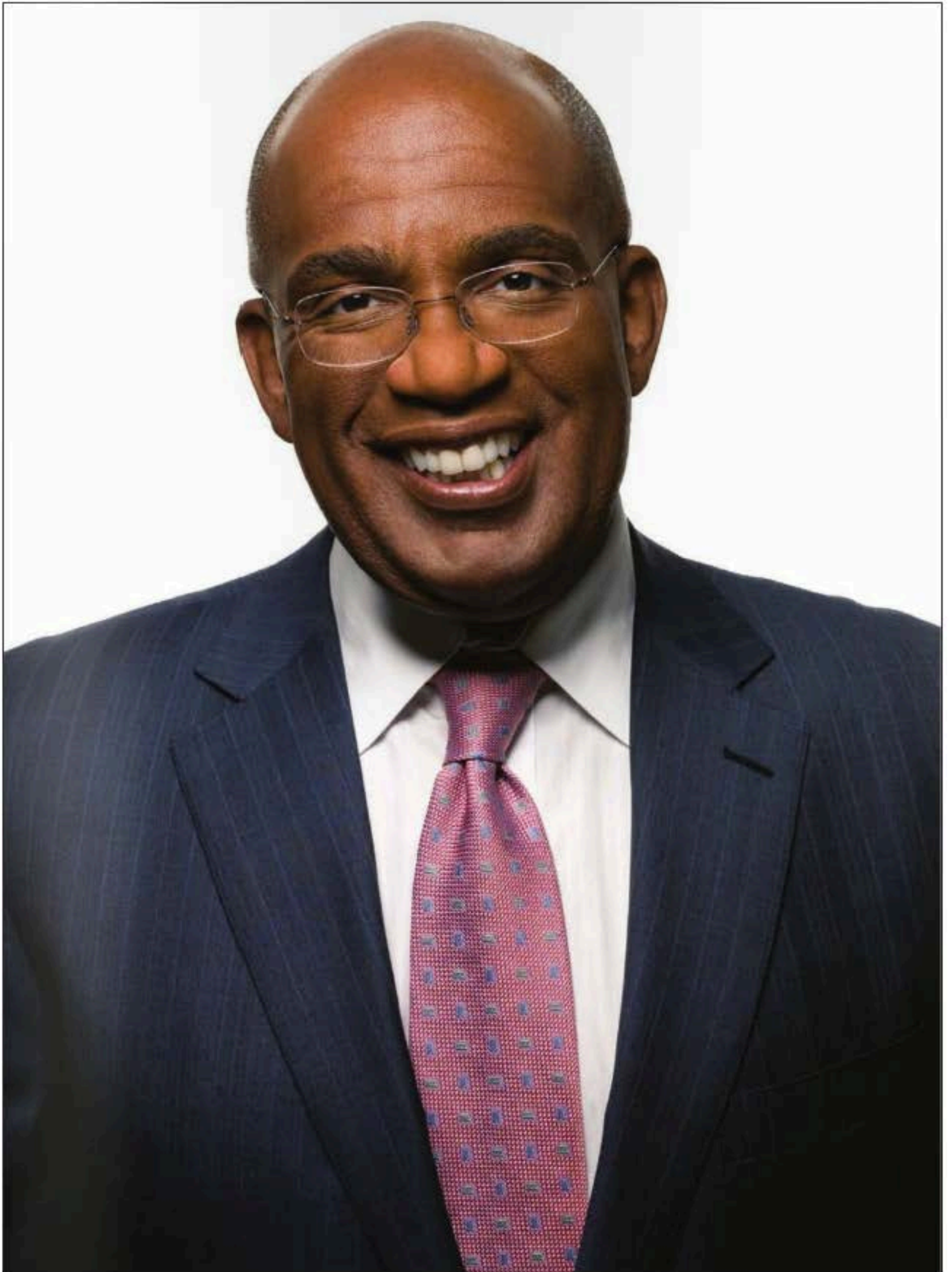
*The Midnight Show Murders* is a sequel to Roker’s 2009 book, *The Morning Show Murders*, continuing with celebrity chef (and reluctant detective) Billy Blessing. In his new thriller, Blessing takes a break from his morning show duties and heads West to play sidekick on a new late night talk show. The first night of the

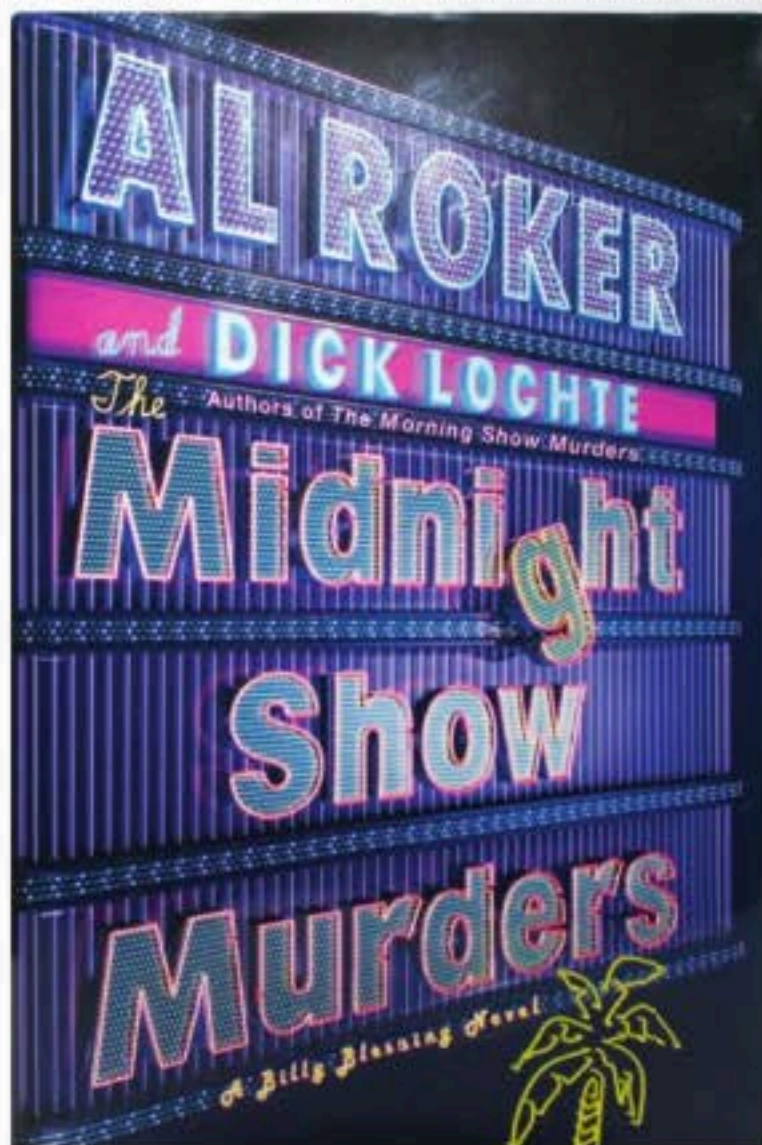
show the host is murdered. Billy Blessing is on the case trying to solve the mystery.

When asked how similar Al Roker is to Blessing, Roker was downright funny. “Well, you know he is bald. He is black. He is on a morning talk show. He knows about food. We have a passing resemblance. He is better looking. He looks more like a stockier Eddie Murphy.”

Roker, who describes his book as a fun version of the show *Law & Order*, collaborated on both of his Billy Blessing novels with popular crime writer Dick Lochte. Roker explains that he comes up with the ideas and Lochte shows him how to get there. “I work with a great mystery writer. He gives me some guidance. He is a terrific plotter,” says Roker, who praised Lochte during an appearance on *The Today Show* when he was interviewed about the book.

Much of his inspiration, he says, comes from the daily headlines and what is in the news. For his current book, he chose the late night talk controversies with Jay Leno and Conan O’Brien as his plot, since it was the big story of the last year.





Comparing it to other mystery novels, Roker describes *The Midnight Show Murders* as light and humorous. He is certain readers can expect a good time. "There is nothing grisly or gruesome. It is a little more tongue-in-cheek. [For] mystery fans, this leans more toward Carl Hiaasen and Janet Evanovich's style rather than James Patterson or Patricia Cornwell."

Should his book ever make it to the small or big screen, Roker already has an idea who should play the lead character. And it isn't himself. "If Terence Howard is not available, Anthony Anderson. Any number of handsome African-American males. Or if [one] is not available, Pee Wee Herman."

With authoring five books (two cookbooks, a memoir and two mystery novels), his work on *Today*, his own show on The Weather Channel and running a production company, one wonders where the married father of three not only finds the time, but if he gets any sleep at all.

"Everyone makes a big deal. You are doing this. You are doing that," says Roker. "My wife, Deborah Roberts, is in television and she travels a lot. I think the average couple has to deal with the same issues. We are very blessed. We have resources. We have a great babysitter. There are a lot of people who struggle with daycare and childcare without half the resources we have and do just as good, if not a better job."

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A person who obviously does not require much sleep, Roker is used to starting his day when most of the world is still asleep. "My dad was a bus driver and got up at 4 a.m. It is no big deal. I never slept a lot as a child and it drove my mom crazy. If you live out here on Long Island and you commute into the city, odds are you are not getting up very much later than I am. I have it relatively easy ... I am home in time to make dinner. If you live out here odds are both members of the family are working and commuting. It is a hassle [but] I am not doing anything that most people aren't doing."

As busy as he is, it is evident that Roker doesn't waste a moment. "I wrote most of the book on my iPad. I travel a lot and spend a lot of time in airport waiting rooms, train stations and on airplanes ... literally on trains, planes and automobiles."

Indeed, creating his own fictitious world has been so entertaining that Roker is already writing his next Billy Blessing book. "It is fun creating your own set of characters and having them behave the way you tell them to as opposed to non-fiction, which is already set in stone since you are dealing with real people in real situations."

Roker, who grew up with a mother who was an avid mystery reader, became a mystery buff himself by age 7, enjoying classics such as *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Hardy Boys*. Today, he admires the work of Harlan Koban, Linda Fairstein, Lee Childs and Walter Mosley, among others. "There are so many terrific mystery writers out there. I am in awe of all of them."

Fans can look forward to the next Billy Blessing novel coming out this year. Without giving too much away Roker offers one clue: "Daytime or even maybe cable news. I think there are a number of cable news hosts who deserve to die," he jokes. ■