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BACKGROUND: HOW AND WHY I WROTE “WAKING LAZARUS”

In a way, I started working on *Waking Lazarus* when I was five years old, on the day I went icefishing with my uncle. After a few hours on the ice, we started to make our way back to the car; somewhere along the way, I stepped into an old ice hole which had been crusted over and hidden by snow and wind. Immediately, I plunged into the lake below. My uncle, thanks to a bit of quick thinking, grabbed me and pulled me out of the hole before I slipped out of his reach beneath the ice.

Thirty years later, that scene—still vivid in my mind—became the inspiration for the opening scene of *Waking Lazarus*. Young Jude Allman, icefishing with his father, has the exact same experience and drowns.

A second source of inspiration came when I was attending the University of Montana in Missoula. One of the many odd jobs I held while working my way through school was a university janitor. Everyone on the janitorial staff (including me) ended up cleaning the cadaver storage room in the Chem/Pharm building at some point. The cadavers were always wrapped in black plastic that was, from what any of us could tell, heavy-duty trash bags. A co-worker, fond of practical jokes, once wrapped himself in Hefty bags and lay on the floor of the cadaver room. When the young woman unlucky enough to be cleaning the room opened the door, she was startled to discover one of the room’s cadavers on the floor, instead of the on the gurney. Needless to say, she was even more startled when the cadaver sat up. That image stuck with me.

When I started writing *Waking Lazarus*, those two images—the boy slipping beneath the ice and drowning, and the body in the morgue sitting up—converged and became a story idea: what if there were a man who has struggled with recurring Near Death Experiences throughout his life? What kind of person would he be? What might those Near Death Experiences mean?

I wrote the story originally as a screenplay, which I’ve found makes a wonderful, detailed outline for creating a novel: you get the structure, scenes, and key dialogue on the page, then build from there. The first draft of the screenplay took about two weeks, followed by a couple months of edits and revisions; the first draft of the novel represented two months of work, again followed by several months of drafts and revisions.

To write the book, I set my alarm and woke up at 5:00 am every weekday morning, then spent two hours writing before getting ready for my “day job.”