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Q&A ABOUT “WAKING LAZARUS” WITH TL HINES

Q1. Where did you get the idea for Waking Lazarus?

A1. A few separate incidents from my own life sparked the idea. First, when I was a young child—about five years old—I fell through the ice while icefishing with my uncle. My uncle, fortunately, was able to grab me and pull me out of the water before I slipped beneath the ice. That incident etched itself in my memory, and I can still vividly recall the shock of the icy water as I plunged into the lake.

Second, when I was attending the University of Montana and pursuing my BA in English Literature, one of my many odd jobs was janitor in the University’s Chem/Pharm building. During my time there, I had to clean the cadaver storage room, where cadavers were wrapped in black plastic that looked very much like garbage bags. One of my fellow workers, a practical joker, wrapped himself in garbage bags one evening and lay on the floor. When the young lady unlucky enough to be cleaning that night came into the room and turned on the lights (it wasn’t my night to clean the cadaver room, thankfully), she was startled to see a cadaver on the floor. She was even more startled when the cadaver sat up.

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 (the technical, but somewhat misleading, term for a person who has died and come back to life)? What kind of person would he be? What might those Near Death Experiences mean?

Q2. What is Waking Lazarus about?

A2. *Waking Lazarus* a supernatural suspense novel, in the vein of Dean Koontz. It follows Jude Allman, who has literally died and come back to life three times, becoming something of a cult celebrity in the process. He has a best-selling autobiography. Talk show appearances. Even a TV Movie of the Week. But the bright spotlight of fame has also made him increasingly paranoid—paranoid enough to change his identity and hide in Montana.

Six years after his disappearance, children in the region surrounding Jude begin

disappearing. Jude discovers the key to stopping the abductions, but it means he'll have to unravel the mysteries of his own deaths first.

On the deeper, thematic level, *Waking Lazarus* is about destiny, and the resulting responsibility—or burden—of doing what we're called to do. That's part of why the novel is named *Waking Lazarus*, a Biblically-inspired title from the book of John: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him." Jude is like Lazarus on a couple of levels. First, and most obvious, he's been miraculously returned to life three separate times. Second, I picture him slumbering in secret, waiting to be awakened by his true calling.

Q3. Getting published is only half the battle. What about marketing the book?

A3. I know a lot of authors feel uncomfortable promoting their work. My background is in marketing and advertising, however, so I'm more than happy to be a PT Barnum when it comes to my work.

To help launch *Waking Lazarus*, I created a unique online venture at my web site called the Other Side (inspired by the novel, in which Jude Allman goes to the Other Side each time he dies). At the Other Side, people can sign up to be Volunteer Book Publicists, telling others about the book, convincing their local libraries to carry the book, and so on. I even print and send free business cards to any Volunteer Publicist who wants them.

In return, Volunteer Publicists get inside access, including a free companion e-booklet filled with more than 100 "behind the scenes" tidbits and notes about the novel. They also get chances to win unique prizes such as an iPod Nano, a share of my first royalty statement, or a role in my next novel, coming in 2007.

I was inspired, in part by the open source movement for software: I wanted to take an open source approach to the launch of a book, and open the door on the publishing process to anyone who wanted to take a peek. To date, more than 100 people have signed up for the project at www.tlhines.com.

As I said before, call me PT Barnum.

Q4. Who or what inspired you to be a writer?

A4. As a young boy, I was a voracious reader. At the tender young age of 12, shortly after graduating from Hardy Boys mysteries, I discovered JRR Tolkien and other SF/Fantasy authors such as Jack L. Chalker and Piers Anthony. But the big breakthrough came when I picked up a paperback called *The Shining* by a really obscure writer named Stephen King. I devoured the book in one day, and I felt something inside me shift. Until then, I guess I'd always assumed books were products that rolled off some assembly line like cans of corn. When I closed *The*

Shining, however, I finally realized the magic of the written word, and I knew I wanted to be part of that magic.

So, blame Stephen King.

Q5. How did you get published?

A5. The short answer is “Divine Providence.” The somewhat longer answer involves more than 80 rejections from literary agents before my book was discovered through my blog.

In 2002, I finished a novel, revised it, polished it, and decided I was ready to venture into the big wide world of publishing. I drafted a query letter, revised it with help from some friends, polished it, and sent it out. And sent it out. And sent it out. Revised it slightly and sent it out. And sent it out. And sent it out. I did this, mmm, about 60 times—until I’d exhausted my list of legitimate ABA (American Bookseller Association) agents who handled my genre. During all of this, I’d been wondering if I really should try to be selling my book to the CBA (Christian Booksellers Association) instead—it did, after all, have some strong spiritual overtones. So, I built a list of CBA agents and began querying them. Same result: nothing. Mind you, I had some close calls during all this, including a few agents who said they’d like to read something else.

Seeing no other realistic options, I chalked the first book up to experience, put it in a drawer (figuratively speaking), and began writing another. After nine or so months, I had it in pretty good shape, and felt it was time to start querying again. So, yes, I started at the top of my previously-assembled agent list again. If an agent had responded positively to my first book, I reminded her and asked if she wanted to see the next one. I got a lot of reads, but still no offer.

After exhausting about half of my agent list on queries for the second book, I decided I was wasting too much time and energy worrying about becoming a published novelist.

So, I stopped. I began writing a third book, and put a moratorium on new queries. I decided I’d simply write, and concentrate on that alone. Publication, well, I’d worry about that at some undefined future date.

That’s when the magic happened.

Not long after my decision, in April of 2005, I received an email from Dave Long, an Acquisitions Editor for Bethany House Publishers. “Discovered your blog,” it said, “and downloaded the first chapter of your book. Don’t know if you’d be interested in pursuing publication with a CBA publisher, but I’d like to see more.” The book he was referring to was the first book I’d written—the one I frankly hadn’t opened and looked at for more than a year. Well, heck, so what if I hadn’t been trying to market that particular book? He wanted a partial; I sent him a partial. Dave wrote back, asking for the whole thing, so I sent that to him. A month later, he wrote back to say he was taking it to editorial review, pitching it to the rest of the publishing house. *Well, that’s farther than I’ve been before*, I thought. *Cool.*

About a month later, I woke up on the morning of June 21st (my birthday, incidentally), turned to my wife, and said: “Hey, maybe I’ll get a publishing contract as a birthday gift.” We both snickered because, well, because. My comment was said as—and received as—a joke.

By now, you’re probably thinking I received The Call on my birthday, aren’t you? A wonderful, unexpected, fairy tale resolution. A Christmas miracle in June. Well, it didn’t quite happen that way. Instead, The Call came on June 22nd...the day after my birthday.

I’ve since told Dave he was a day late with my birthday gift.

Not that I’m complaining.

Q6. Is Waking Lazarus a “religious” book?

Q6. Hmm. Depends on your definition of “religious book.” *Waking Lazarus* is being published by Bethany House Publishers, a well-known name in the CBA (Christian Booksellers Association) industry. So in the sense that it’s a book written by a Christian, and published by a Christian publisher, yes, I suppose it’s a “religious” book.

But I wouldn’t say it’s any more “religious” than, say, *The Da Vinci Code*. (In fact, I would say it’s less so, because, unlike *The Da Vinci Code*, the main threads of *Waking Lazarus* don’t have anything to do with church history or doctrine.)

My faith is an integral part of who I am, and so the world of *Waking Lazarus* naturally reflects some of that. But not overtly so. Nowhere in the book will you find a big conversion scene, or a thinly-disguised sermon telling you to repent. It’s a novel, not a tract.

At its heart, *Waking Lazarus* is a suspense/mystery novel with elements of the supernatural in it. So I think it could easily be shelved with general market mysteries, psychological horror novels, or suspense/thrillers. Despite this, I’m well aware most booksellers will stick it with “religious fiction” on its shelves, simply because it comes from a “religious” publisher.

I’m fine with that because, frankly, I’m happy to be shelved anywhere in the bookstore. But let me say again, I didn’t write this novel to preach to anyone. In fact, if you read it and think it’s preachy, email me and let me know; I’ll buy it back from you.