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Interview With Author Fred Stawitz



When did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

I connected at a very young age with the idea that I needed a creative

outlet. This occurred in elementary school when I sold my first song lyric to a neighbor for two cents and my first illustration to a classmate for a nickel. Obviously these were different times and a different economy. I experimented with writing in high school by creating my own version of the monologues that Rod Serling used to introduce episodes of the television classic Twilight Zone. After college, I wrote a few articles for professional journals but not until enrolling in a series of video production courses did the idea of writing as a commercial pursuit strike me. My first efforts were in screenwriting. When a couple of my screenplays placed in a national competition that provided me encouragement to view writing as a serious pursuit. The constraints of screenwriting guided me to adopt a style of storytelling that is concise, fast-paced, and visual.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My first inspiration was a minister at the church I attended with my parents when I was young. For some reason, I became intrigued with his use of words to convey his message during the sermon. Each Sunday, I would sit spellbound listening to him lead his sheep to the pasture.

How do you create the characters in your books? Are they based on people you know?

In Homeboy's Soul, the characters created themselves as this is a true story based on coauthor Don Armijo's life in one of the most violent street gangs in Los Angeles County. All I had to do was refine and highlight distinctive characteristics to make each character stand out from the others. When I write fiction, the characters arise from the demands of the story. Some are based on people I know. Most are composites of the vast array of strange, unusual, and some absolutely weird folks I had the fortune to meet in my work and travels on this planet.

What is the one book you think everyone should read?

The one book that everyone should read is Homeboy's Soul. While that may sound self-serving, I make the recommendation for reasons that serve society. Regardless of race or region, gangs present a major obstacle for many children pursuing a K-12 education in communities throughout this country. If everyone in America had a better understanding of the damage gangs are doing to our children and to our communities, then most citizens would demand that corrective action be taken immediately. Homeboy's Soul reveals how gangs operate and the damage they do to any individuals who come in contact with them. It is

absolutely amazing that we as Americans allow gangs to terrorize even one community and disrupt the education of so many children when we have at our disposal the tools to eliminate their negative influences.

If you weren't a writer, what be your profession?

I've never really thought in terms of "being" a profession. I drove a truck cross-country for several years but never called myself as a truck driver. I taught school for a decade but never thought of myself as a classroom teacher. I developed desktop simulations of complex space shuttle systems for astronauts but did not see myself as a programmer. My path through life is guided more by a curious attraction to learning how the world functions or malfunctions as the case may be and sharing what I learn with others.

If you could trade places with anyone in the world, past or present, real or fiction, who would it be and why?

I would not trade places with anyone. While I admire the lives some people enjoy, and the opportunities that financial success affords them, I am content with the idea that life has provided me a fairly interesting set of experiences. I look back with a smile at my history of experiential learning--some discoveries came easily, some not without a measure of pain or heartache. But the road to here and now has always been an adventure, and I expect that where it leads from here to be no less intriguing.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only have 3 things, what would they be?

If I were stranded on a desert island and could have only three things, I would want a magnifying glass, a large Army knife, and a container for water. Yes, I watch Survivor Man. The magnifying glass can be used to start a fire. The knife facilitates hunting and construction of a shelter. And, the container is essential for boiling water assuming there is a source of fresh water on the island. If there is no fresh water then I'd exchange the container for a desalination still. No one lives for more than a few days without water.

What is your favorite movie of all time?

Not sure I have a favorite movie. I am attracted to stories that let characters realize their inner strength against formidable odds. For example, the children in Rabbit Proof Fence, the girl in Whale Rider,

Corrie and Betsy ten Boom in *The Hiding Place* or even Marlee Matlin's character in *Children of a Lesser God*. I enjoy seeing characters overcome oppression whether presented by repressive regimes, antiquated traditions or unwarranted self-limitations.

What is the one thing that you want all your fans to know?

What I would want for anyone is that he or she knows happiness! I find happiness in discovery. The world has so many wonderful things to offer that I am constantly amazed at what lies around the next corner. My advice would be to find the path to happiness then do all in your power to return there often.

If you could invite 5 people to dinner, who would they be and why?

If I could invite five people to dinner, I would invite my wife and my late parents. It would be good to see mom and dad again and let them know that the path they set me upon as a child has turned out well. I would also invite my brother because my parents would want an update on grandchildren and great grandchildren added to the family since their passing. That leaves one empty seat which I would offer to Cindy, the dog I had while growing up. A young boy forming his thoughts about the world could not ask for a more faithful friend than Cindy.

If you could use a time machine, would you go to the past or check out the future?

The time machine created in the mind of H.G. Wells could travel both to the past and the future. I like that model. Just as the time traveler in Wells' classic, I would not be beyond the temptation to visit the past with the intention of altering the future even if only to move the human race one step closer to its full potential for humane behavior.

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