

Author Interview - Derald Hamilton

Interview by Barbara Miller, Pacific Book Review

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Hello Derald, thank you for taking some time to join us today.

DH: Thank you for inviting me, and for this opportunity.

PBR: I would like to first take a moment to tell you how much I enjoyed reading your book, and what struck me was in your first-person style of writing, I often tended to believe this was your autobiography and not just a fiction novel. How much is “you” and how much is “Ishmael?”

DH: It is fiction. I have been asked that question before. And the only answer I can think to give is, “How much of Mark Twain was Huckleberry Finn? How much was Nick Caraway in *The Great Gatsby*? F. Scott Fitzgerald at a certain time in his life? How much was the unnamed narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*? Ralph Ellison? And foremostly, how much was the Ishmael in *Moby Dick* a portrayal of Herman Melville’s psyche? In my exposure to literature, every time I’ve come across a character named Ishmael, he is always portrayed as somewhat of an outsider. Sol Yurick’s *The Bag* is one such example.

I drew a great deal from the Ishmael persona portrayed in *Moby Dick* and also from the Genesis account of the Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael story. All three of these stories (mine, of course, being the third) give an account of Ishmael being the perennial outsider, the pariah, and the person linked to a community by title, but least desired in the construct of the social order. In the Genesis account, Ishmael is cast out by his father at the behest of his wife. In *Moby Dick*, Ishmael is the sole survivor of the Pequod. This feature serves as a damning indictment by the universal powers that be stipulating that, “You’re not even good enough to kill.” And the Ishmael of *The Call* is also the prototypical pariah of sorts who begins a journey intended for his long deceased twin, thereby occupying a space he has no business occupying. And this is where I drew my biblical motifs.

I also drew from some real life experiences and crafted the scenes the book portrayed. I did go to seminary and portrayed the seminary scenes as I experienced and observed. But my novel is fiction. I may draw from real life, but like any author, I don’t claim to present reality, only its illusion.

PBR: At what point did you decide to compile this chronicle – was it from a notebook or diary that you kept for all those years?

DH: I began writing this novel when I was forty. After I turned forty, I believed I had the right and authority to entertain the notion that I was no longer an amateur liver. So, I began compiling an outline of events, then began the structuring and restructuring of my novel. During the course of that time, I also managed to get four of my short stories published in such anthologies as *Thoughts in Transit* and *Writers for Readers*. It was a

grueling undertaking, but I believed I had something worthwhile to offer the reading public. And this is my first full-length offering. It took several years to complete, and many revisions, but if I'm going to want the public to read my works, I want to make sure they're getting a worthwhile read.

PBR: The most impressionable part of the book, to me, was the story about your twin brother's death at the age of three, and how you "felt" his spirit enter your body. Can you tell us again about this moment?

DH: I harbor major reservations pertaining to the existence and validity of such phenomena. But the use of such a feature, I felt, held great potential as a springboard for the introduction of the novel's biblical motif. But for purposes of maintaining elements of credibility within the context of the sequence, I felt it necessary to familiarize myself with the features deemed to be germane to such an occurrence.

The first instance I found to be relevant to the notion of possession can be found in Mark chapter five, verses one through twenty where Jesus and his disciples come across a man possessed by many demons. They called themselves Legion. When Jesus commands the demons to come out of the man, at their request, Jesus casts them into a herd of swine. The swine, sensing their possession, run off a cliff and are killed by the fall.

In a more contemporary example, the book *No One Gets Out Of Here Alive—The Biography of Jim Morrison*, an account is given of an incident that happened during Jim's childhood where he and his family were driving down a highway in New Mexico near a reservation. While in that proximity, the family observed an auto accident that left several of the tribesmen dead along the side of the road. Jim, upon observing their deaths, stated that he could feel the souls of the tribesmen enter his body – an incident comparable to the biblical account of Legion.

Further investigation of this incident revealed that the totem of this particular tribe of Native Americans was the snake, and Jim, near the end of his life, as an integral part of his performance, could be seen lying on the stage and wiggling around like a snake. Of course, an alternative explanation for such bizarre behavior could also be ascribed to his excessive use of drugs and alcohol. But such a phenomenon does bear out its roots in the Bible.

Within the context of Christianity what might have appeared to Jim as the souls of the tribesman would actually be demonic spirits in the guise of the souls of the tribesman. And taken in this framework, what might have appeared to my protagonist as the soul of his twin, was actually a demonic entity in the guise of his twin, and Ishmael only thinks he is possessed by the soul of his twin. I leave that to the readers' discernment.

However, while in seminary, we also were given the opportunity to attend a non-credited course in esotericism or metaphysics. This discipline holds to the notion that a soul or a spirit cannot literally occupy another person's body, but it can travel alongside that person and communicate telepathically with the individual, as in the instance of having a spirit guide. I remember during the Clinton administration, Hilary Clinton, although allegedly a Methodist, gave credence to this belief and named Eleanor Roosevelt as her spirit guide.

And next we come to the issue of identical twins. I have discovered that in the case of identical twins, there is a strong emotional connection, and it is speculated that they

are even able to communicate with each other telepathically. There have also been instances where they develop a form of communication known as “twin babble” that only they can understand. I remember seeing a dramatization of such a feature on *Law and Order*.

It’s also been said that identical twins have empathic connections. When one is hurt or injured, the other feels a comparable pain. I remember seeing this feature portrayed in the 1960’s version of *The Parent Trap* where the father’s exasperated fiancé slaps one of the twins and the other recoils from the pain brought about by the slap. Of course, the same holds true for pleasure.

I remember seeing this other movie, the name of which escapes me, that takes place during the Viking era. There’s a set of twins introduced in this movie that are referred to as “the two that are one.” In one scene, the hero of the movie has sex with one of the twins, while the other, even though she is miles away, feels the pleasure her twin is experiencing all the way up to the climax of the act.

But getting back to Ishmael and to my biblical motif, in the Genesis account of the two brothers, Isaac is the one chosen to carry out the legacy of his father, and Ishmael is the one who is cast out. But in the instance of my novel, it is Isaac who dies leaving Ishmael, besieged by the torments of his dead twin, inadvertently taking on the role of usurper.

This role begins to assert itself in Ishmael’s early teens when his father is stationed at a military base somewhere in Virginia. As in the biblical account of Abraham, then-Major Abe O’Donnell and his family are consigned to a somewhat insular community where the dictates of their lives are heavily subject to the communal demands, customs, and mores stemming from the order in question, just as in the biblical setting a comparable dynamic is present amid the tribal surroundings. Within this military communal setting, religion plays of major role in how people are called upon to conduct themselves, as is most likely true of the biblical Abraham’s community. And, like the biblical Abraham, Major Abe O’Donnell seeks to impart the will of the social order upon his son, Ishmael.

With the chosen Isaac now dead, Abe O’Donnell is now portrayed passing on both the familial as well as communal legacy to his living son. Yet Ishmael, as the involuntary usurper, cannot even begin to relate to what is going on, and Abe’s efforts are met with resistance right from the get-go.

For instance, upon the family’s arrival at the base, Abe O’Donnell insists that the family start attending chapel services together. Ishmael has never known his father to be a religious man. So, like any inquisitive youth, he asks his father why. Abe, while in a position to be the spiritual head of his family, is still not able to articulate an actual and valid reason for the move like, “So we can all experience the love of Jesus,” or “Have God as a closer part of our lives.” Instead, all he can do is exercise his inborn bent toward autocracy and say, “It’s just a good habit to get into.” And when Ishmael asks why it is a good habit to get into, all his father can do is authoritatively state, “Because it’s just a good habit to get into.” And with that said, he will allow no further debate. He doesn’t even have the capacity to deal straight with his son and say, “Well, you see, we have sort of a religious fanatic for a commanding general, and we need to put up appearances.” That wouldn’t be an acceptable explanation in these surroundings, even if it were true.

It is as a result of this paternal dictate that Ishmael furthers his roll as Isaac's inadvertent usurper. While in attendance at their first base chapel service, Ishmael meets the chaplain's daughter—one Becky Sutton. It is at this juncture that the spirit of Isaac evokes his full fury, anger, and desperation, emphatically telling his usurper sibling, "That's not yours!" It takes all the will young Ishmael can muster to silence his disembodied twin spirit. And why is Isaac doing this? Well, according to biblical accounts, Rebecca is Isaac's wife. "Becky." "Rebecca." Connect the dots.

From there Ishmael continues in his roll as usurper forming a deep friendship with Becky—so deep, in fact, that both seem to develop the intuitive notion that they belong together, and nothing, not even the perceived mocking laughter of Isaac, can drive them apart. Only what Ishmael terms as "the tyrannical dictates of military mission" is successful at driving a wedge between the two of them, leaving them only with a strong resolve to meet again at a later time—a resolve that is only partly neutralized by Ishmael's innate pessimism acquired over a lifetime of experiences.

But Ishmael continues in his role as the usurper. In the biblical account, Abraham places Isaac on the altar as a sacrificial offering. In my novel, Isaac is no longer present, so that role is given over to Ishmael, as Abe disciplines him in such ways as to render him fit to follow the O'Donnell military legacy. When Ishmael fails to respond to such grooming, he is unmercifully rebuffed and rebuked by his father to the point where Abe tells him that he is ashamed to be around him. And all the while, Isaac's mocking laughter remains present.

All this culminates in a near suicide attempt on Ishmael's part when he hears the beckoning of another inner voice. Some might be inclined to call it the voice of God. Others might assume it to be a budding sense of personal autonomy on Ishmael's part. If one is to assume the former, this furthers my biblical motif. Just as God delivered Ishmael and his mother Hagar from death in the dessert, so He rescues Ishmael O'Donnell from destruction at his own hands and endows him with renewed resolve to seek out his own destiny. But He does not deliver him from possession or take away his role as Isaac's usurper.

As is stipulated in scripture, God does not play favorites, but He does have an agenda. In scripture, for purposes of carrying out that agenda, He calls forth certain people. But in *The Call*, He does not call everyone. I remember one New Testament passage where Jesus calls forth Peter, Andrew, Simon, Matthew, and even Judas, saying, "Come, and I will make you fishers of men." Yet, He left Zebadee sitting in the boat.

Even when Ishmael decides he is called into the ministry, he is confronted regarding his role as usurper by both his minister and in a dream by the spectral apparition of the demonic Isaac.

The second part of my novel is presented as a satire aimed at what transpires during the experience of seminary training. My message here is, "Beware of the person standing at the pulpit. What you see is not necessarily what you're getting." But the biblical possession motif continues even through this part of the book, where the demon spirit always reminds Ishmael that what is there is not his. And the most jolting of these reminders come about as Ishmael overhears a conversation between undergrads with regards to his former love, Becky, and her husband. This happens twice, and both instances drive Ishmael to the brink of insanity by the incessant taunts of Isaac who is none too pleased with his brother for usurping his life.

I'm not going to reveal how the matter resolves itself. I want to give my readers some incentive to read the book. But I will tell you that another Isaac shows up, and with only marginal influence from Abe O'Donnell, does fulfill "the O'Donnell legacy."

This Isaac happens to be the illegitimate offspring of Abe O'Donnell and one Tamara Judson, a woman he meets while stationed in Missouri. This serves as a further contrast to the biblical account where Ishmael is the illegitimate son of Abraham and Sarah's handmaiden Hagar. So, near the end, Ishmael is seen properly relegated to the sidelines, while Isaac Judson is seen taking up Abe's banner. And, just as in the biblical account, Isaac (Judson) and Ishmael meet at Abe's funeral.

Of course, a lot more happens at the end than that, but I did want to give you a thorough explanation with regards to the possession incident that happened to Ishmael at the age of three and the role it played in the shaping of his life. The presence of an Isaac was essential for destiny to play out its hand, just as many have speculated that if Napoleon had somehow been removed from the historical time line, someone else would have come by to assume his role, because history, at the time, demanded such an individual.

PBR: So, what then are your thoughts about the afterlife? In your opinion, what does religion have "right" and "wrong" with the customary beliefs?

DH: On this matter, I'll be brief. We miss so much of the point in religion's teachings, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or whatever, if we continue to espouse the glories of Beulahland, Heaven, Nirvana and the like, if it doesn't serve to make us better human beings. And when all things are considered, that's what religion is truly all about. And the second reason why we need religion is for keeping us from dying before our deaths.

True religion is a set appeal to bring out what is best in us. And how do you ascend to a satisfactory afterlife? How do you save your soul? I believe the answer is best articulated in Matthew 25, verses 31-40:

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

I believe that about sums it up. Love, compassion, and charity are the principle attributes that bring out the best in us. Of course, we all fall short. That is where grace comes in.

PBR: Do you feel “called” to write this, and tell your story to others?

DH: No. But I did feel a definite compulsion to write this novel. I’ve always felt a bent toward the ironic, the satirical, and the irreverent. However, unlike my fellow iconoclast Ambrose Bierce, I try to impart upon my readers a sense of what is hopeful, despite the bleakness of the human condition. But as for being called, I remember a certain minister once telling me, “You know son, it takes a very healthy dose of arrogance and a considerable degree of narcissism to stand up before a congregation week after week extolling your humility.” I have to say, I admired that man’s candor—and envied his chutzpah. I could never do that. Just the exposure I accord myself in the writing of this novel is frightening enough. The transparency I’m opening myself up to in this interview, taken in retrospect, can be mighty scary.

PBR: Let’s move on to some lighter topics. What type of books or authors do you most enjoy?

DH: I like humorous fiction. There was one book I read in the science fiction genre where I nearly split a gut laughing. The book was titled *Space for Hire*. It was all about this intergalactic private eye by the name of Sam Space. The story was conveyed in the first person, and there was no mistaking the fact that the voice is that of Humphrey Bogart. I tell you, I never read anything so funny.

Then there’s John Updike’s *A Month of Sundays*. That was required reading for a class I took in seminary. The professor who taught the class told us, “You can laugh if you like, but always be aware of the fact that this can become a very devastating reality for any one of you folks.” It was all about a minister who has affairs with all the women in his congregation. The irony here is accentuated, because the novel takes place at the same time the Watergate scandal is transpiring.

I’ve read practically everything of Norman Mailer’s, but the only work of his I enjoyed and got something out of was his first work, *The Naked and the Dead*. It was a scathing indictment of the military and went even further as an existential prophecy of man’s future, if we dare to stay on the path we’re on. And I believe this work just recently celebrated its sixth-fifth birthday. It would be like a dream if my book lasted so long.

I’ve read all the books by Sinclair Lewis. My favorite of his is *Babbitt*. I often find Mr. Lewis’ satire to go beyond the realm of sardonic wit and into an area of stark reality.

For instance, there is a segment in the novel where the protagonist makes a speech at a businessmen’s convention that takes up several pages, talking about how “we’re all a bunch of regular guys with our adding machines.” This speech is made with satirical intent and is set in the era of what we would term as the Roaring ‘20s, replete with careless attitudes and faulty perceptions destined to bring us to an inevitable crash in 1929. Yet, that same speech, I found, was delivered at the Rotary Club in Sacramento back in 1965 and received a standing ovation.

To me such an occurrence tends to exemplify how closely satire portrays reality. It also illustrates how little we learn from our history, and how often we turn a deaf ear to our prophets.

And, of course, I use to read comic books by the tons. But I gave up on superheroes. I mean, I can only suspend disbelief for so long, and at forty, I decided I had reached my limits.

PBR: This is quite a detailed book for your debut. Are you working on something else nowadays?

DH: I have another book coming out. It should be out sometime in 2012. It's titled *Twice upon a Prequel and Three Shorts*. The book is comprised of two novellas and three short stories. The novellas take two of the supporting characters from *The Call*, Reginald Dexter and Elmo Piggins, and chronicle the events that lead up to their seminary attendance. Going back to a question you posed earlier, I found the Elmo Piggins novella to be a bit painful, as well. I've known people like this. I know there are those among us that find Elmo's type to be quite uplifting and inspirational, but me, when I'm around such people, I get stomach cramps. Reginald Dexter's story was a bit easier for me to write, and, in its own way, quite inspirational, and I actually came away from it feeling better about myself, and life in general.

As for the short stories, your first question was about how much I was like Ishmael O'Donnell. In my short story, "Taken up before the General," I must confess this is as close as I've come to writing my own autobiography, but it's just a snapshot. It's the recounting of an incident that happened back during the sixties when we were stationed in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Daryl McGregor is very much who I was back then – a hapless military brat besieged by the forces of the military social order with all its folkways and mores taking aim at him. And this was indeed painful to write. One of the people who edited this story said she couldn't conceive of writing about something like this and wondered how I was able to do it. Of course, a number of people thought it was funny.

Then there's the story entitled "The War Comes Home," which is written from a woman's perspective. I've been told it's easier for a woman to enter a man's world than it is for a man to enter a woman's world. Oftentimes, for a man, a woman's world can be very threatening, because that world mirrors very acutely the negative aspects of a man's psyche — an area most of us men do not like to see or face up to.

And in "The War Comes Home," the woman's perspective is considerably more damning in that it comes from the perspective of a military wife dutifully trying to keep the home fires burning while her husband, one of our nation's heroes, is out valiantly fighting our nation's battles, a virtuous undertaking made even more pronounced by way of the platitudes espoused by the likes of such people as Mark Levin, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Reagan, and Sean Hannity.

What we don't hear about is the domestic upheavals, familial dysfunctions, and abuse that take place within the homes of these heroes. The only other person I know of who addressed this theme in his fiction was/is Pat Conroy. And I'm told Pat Conroy's mother even used *The Great Santini* as a basis for filing for a divorce. She just handed the book to the judge and said something to the effect of, "Here, your honor. I rest my case."

And finally, there is my short, “A Litter Bit of Wisdom.” And you can draw whatever you’d like from that story.

PBR: We certainly wish you the best of success with *The Call* and your future as an author. Thank you again for sharing your thoughts with us today.

DH: Thank you. It’s been a pleasure and a privilege.

READER VIEWS Interview with Derald W. Hamilton

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of [Reader Views](#) is pleased to interview Derald Hamilton, who is here to discuss his new book “*The Call*.”

Derald Hamilton was born in Santa Cruz, California. His father was a career soldier, so being part of a military family, Derald moved around a lot to numerous bases as a child, both in the U.S. and Germany. When health issues took precedence, Derald and his mother settled in a suburb of Sacramento, while his dad continued moving to wherever the Army assigned him. After high school, Derald enrolled in community college, graduated, and transferred to U.C. Davis where he majored in American Studies and became active in the campus Christian program.

During the time he was active in that program, he received what he interpreted as a call to the ministry, but upon graduating from U.C. Davis, he found himself without the funding necessary to pursue seminary studies. With no scholastic help available, Derald worked at a few temporary jobs and finally secured a clerical job with the State of California. After saving to continue his studies, he enrolled in Phillips Graduate Theological Seminary to pursue a Master’s of Divinity Degree but became disillusioned with church politics. After earning a Master’s Degree in Library Science, he ended up working for the past twenty-seven years in an administrative support job with the Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority. Along the way he acquired Associates Degrees in Technical Writing, Management and Supervision, Business Administration, Accounting, and Word Processing.

Derald continued freelance writing, and at the age of forty, decided he had done enough living to lend credibility to fiction writing. He has since been able to have four of his short stories published, along with non-fiction articles, and, while now sixty-one, has brought his first novel into print.

Tyler: Welcome, Derald. “*The Call*” sounds like such an interesting book. To begin, will you tell us how you first got the idea to write a book about someone attending a seminary? I understand you attended seminary yourself, but what made that experience feel like a good idea for fiction?

Derald: Well, I remember while I was growing up being exposed to a number of books, movies, and television programs about people studying or in training to be such things as doctors, lawyers, policemen and a wide assortment of other occupations. I refer, of course, to such works as “*The Paper Chase*,” “*National Lampoon’s Police Academy*,”

“The New Interns,” “Flatliners” and “Not As A Stranger.” But I never recalled anything in the literary or entertainment annals written with regards to people studying for the priesthood or the ministry, although the movies “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” and “Saturday Night Fever” may have alluded to the subject matter. But the only movie I recall ever coming close was “The Nun’s Story.” And that was serious as heck drama. Of course what can you expect? The movie was made during the 1950’s and back then “serious” was considered the only appropriate way to handle such a topic given the “buttoned down” mind-set of that era.

But a lot’s happened since the ’50s. We’ve had the scandalous money raising tirade of Oral Roberts when he insisted that the Lord was going to call him home if he didn’t raise so much money; we’ve had the incarceration of the renown television evangelist Jim Baker; the sex scandals of Jimmy Swaggart and Billy James Hargas, the massive suicide that took place in Jonestown, and the on-going pedophile/pederasty scandal associated with the Catholic Church to name only a few. So, given all these events that have seen headline coverage, I drew the conclusion that perhaps the time might be right for such a novel that takes the reader inside the cloistered setting that is seminary and probes into the education and training these purported “messengers of the divine” receive. And, having gone through all the aspects associated with seminary training, I believed myself qualified to render an accurate account of the goings on behind the scene. Of course, in doing so, I wasn’t really certain as to what type of response I would receive, especially from those who had undergone similar training. But I was certain of what I had experienced. So, I began drawing from my own observations and experiences to convey a fictitious account of life behind the fictitious cloistered setting of Parkins Theological Seminary. And it is at this point that I would like to insert my disclaimer stipulating that any resemblance of persons living or dead found within the context of “The Call” is purely coincidental. So far, all the reviews I’ve received regarding my novel have been positive. But I can’t seem to help but anticipate a disgruntled clergyman, layman, or someone affiliated with a seminary coming forth spewing fire and brimstone, calling my book “a damnable lie concocted by a warped and perverted mind.” After all, John Steinbeck encountered comparable feedback from a peevishly discontented Oklahoma politician after the release of his novel “The Grapes of Wrath.” Already an elder at my church stated that he was saddened by my portrayal of the seminarians who, as he saw them, “did not appear to have a heart for God.” And I have to disclose that at this point in my life, I’m not even sure what that entails.

Tyler: I’m intrigued by the name Ishmael O’Donnell—he sounds like an Irish Muslim—will you tell us a little about his background and what leads him to attending the seminary?

Derald: Irish Muslim—that’s a good one. Of course I’m sure you’re aware that Ishmael is a name used in other novels like “Moby Dick” by Herman Melville and “The Bag” by Sol Yurick. In each of these works, along with the Genesis account, Ishmael is portrayed as the pariah—the perennial outsider, the person linked to a community by title, but least desired in the construct of a social order. In the Genesis account, Ishmael is cast out by his father at the behest of his wife. In “Moby Dick” Ishmael is the sole survivor of the Pequod. This feature serves as a damning indictment by the universal powers that be. Purportedly, in the sparing of Ishmael, they’re stating, “You’re not even good enough to kill.” And the Ishmael of “The Call” is also the prototypical pariah of

sorts who begins a journey intended for his long deceased twin—casting him in the role of the unintended usurper. And throughout the course of the novel, it is made quite apparent that his apparitional twin is none to happy about it.

As a child, Ishmael is an atheist. His father is a career military man who is frequently absent from the family due to his military assignments not always being conducive to the accommodating of families. And when he is there, he can be quite autocratic in his style of leadership, leaving no room for the questioning of his authority.

Ishmael is often found on the receiving end of his father's heavy handed leadership, escaping the wrath of corporal punishment only by the intercession of his mother whose will is slowly ebbing away after years of dealing with her domineering, manipulative, and strong-willed husband.

Ishmael is also besieged by the constant taunts of the purported spirit of his long dead sibling. But continued exposure to matters of a religious nature and a near all-consuming quest for purification, leads Ishmael to conclude at a certain juncture that he has received a call to the ministry, even though there are numerous influences positioned about him that point to the folly of such a move. Despite all the negative feedback he receives once he has announced his intent to follow through on this endeavor, he does indeed plow his way through numerous obstacles to eventually enroll in and undergo the rigors of the three-year seminary program. And it is during that time when we see a manifold depiction of Ishmael's character development. Whether that development be for the better or the worse I leave to the readers' discernment. I will tell you that some of the things he has to endure appear to be almost Kafkaesque in their design.

Tyler: What kind of a seminary are we talking about—any specific denomination?

Derald: I draw from my own seminary experiences, but basically, what transpires in "The Call" I'd say would be typical of any seminary affiliated with a Protestant denominational structure associated with the Ecumenical Counsel of Churches. That would include such denominations as United Methodist, United Presbyterian, American Baptists, Lutheran Church American Synod, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, and African Methodist Episcopal. The seminary I attended was principally affiliated with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. Of course we also had many students of the United Methodist denomination who gravitated to the seminary as well. But as for the fictitious Parkins, I guess it could be any basic mainline Protestant seminary.

Tyler: The book presents some interesting people who are attracted to the seminary—will you tell us a little about the diversity of the seminarians Ishmael encounters?

Derald: Well, there's Markem McClusky, an Alligator Wrestler from Florida, a little shy of brains but long on strength and charisma. There are a number of students whose parents are part of the clergy and they're in seminary with the intent on fulfilling the family legacy. Then there are those who are embarking on a career change or a second career. Two of my more prominent supporting characters, Leonard DeWilde and Reginald Dexter, for instance, are embarking upon the ministry because they either received a genuine call to it, or their primary vocation forcibly retired them. Then there are the female seminarians who are continually swimming up stream and going against the proverbial notion that ministry is an occupation relegated specifically for men. After all, it is MINister, not WOMINSTER. During the course of my writing this book, incidentally, I discovered that if I were to have waited a few more years before attending

seminary, Gays would be encountering similar adversity. But that issue was only just beginning to emerge while I was in attendance.

Then we have T.J. Whizzer, the former rock musician who flunks out of seminary and becomes a music teacher in the undergraduate music department, and Jessica Bently who is already an ordained Methodist minister but would rather just be a housewife, except for the fact that she hasn't found a husband yet. We have a beer guzzling frat whose name escapes me. And finally, there are Linda and Jerry Cantrell, two psychiatric social workers who are there researching how religion is connected to mental health or illness. One of the more comical aspects of the novel centers around the fact that Jerry is Jewish, but is somehow steam-rolled into performing a baptism in the rural congregation they are assigned to at the urgings of his wife. One of my editors asked me, "What does he do? Perform a baptism wearing a yamalka?" And there are other cast members, but they're generally relegated to the sidelines.

Tyler: Derald, I'm amused and a bit confused by all these characters. Bottom line, are you saying that some people who go to seminary don't have a calling for it? In which case, why do they go—the rock musician for example?

Derald: Some have callings, some do not. While I was in seminary I heard certain students admit they had manufactured the calling. As for T.J. Whizzer, I actually did meet a couple of former rock musicians while in seminary. One of those musicians played backup for Led Zeppelin. The other was with a Christian Rock Group. But T.J. Whizzer is a conglomeration of individuals that emerged during the latter part of the '60s shortly after John Lennon of Beatles fame was heard to make his remark that the group was more popular than Jesus Christ. After said statement had been made, a group of people came to the forefront garbed in hippie attire, calling themselves "the Jesus People" or "Jesus Freaks." I remember back when I was in community college a group of these folks set up tables on the quad with a sign that read, "Jesus is Lord. Come talk with us. Rap awhile." Of course back then the term "Rap" had different connotations than it does now. In fact, some of these folks would even give talks they'd call "Jesus Raps." And pretty soon the pop radio air waves were inundated with what the pop media termed as "Jesus Rock," and such songs as "Spirit In The Sky," "Day By Day," "One Toke Over The Line Sweet Jesus," "Jesus On The Mainline," and even James Taylor interjected a line in one of his songs that said "Look down upon me Jesus." Broadway plays and movies like "Jesus Christ, Superstar" and "Godspell," became all the rage. And the promoters of this trend asserted the notion that Jesus Christ is a rock star and the church is His agent. And down by Costa Mesa, California another phenomenon emerged—mainly the institution of Calvary Chapel that started out as a tent structure that blew down in a wind storm, then was reconstructed as an even larger tent. When it became a larger tent, it also became a virtual magnet for the youth and counter culture drawing hippies, drug addicts, and the like into the fold. It also served as home base for a lot of the Christian Rock groups of the day like "Love Song" and "Children of the Day." A several page spread was done up in "Life Magazine" that featured the head pastor of Calvary Chapel performing baptisms in the Pacific Ocean. On one of the pages there was a picture of a guy wearing baggies and a girl wearing a bikini awaiting baptism. And all at once Jesus was considered the new groove, if I may use the vernacular of the day.

Calvary Chapel also had traditional services that were held for the older members of the congregation, but its chief draw was the Saturday Night youth service/afterglow that

featured Christian Rock music and ushers doing the boogie down the aisles with McDonald's baskets collecting the offering, and sermons that might go something like:

"Hey folks, get hip! Get with the Jesus trip! You don't have to drop acid, man! Drop a little Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! It's free! You can score anytime! And you won't get busted! So get with it gang! God is not only great! God is groovy!"

And a lot of folks involved in like ministries across America felt obligated to spend some time in cloistered halls. Some finished the program. Others did not. I remember this one lead singer of the Christian Rock group "Damascus Road" receiving his Masters of Divinity from a Missionary Baptist Seminary somewhere in East Texas, then continuing his supposed ministry as a Christian Rock singer and evangelist to the youth culture.

As for T. J., he doesn't quite make it. He's not into academia and learning about theological intricacies. He just likes his music. When he is first introduced, he tells everyone present that he is here "to have a little Jesus laid on me." But Jesus is not some kind of groove, nor is He some euphoric substance. He is God, and God can be a stern taskmaster to those called into his service. And if God is not the taskmaster, then the seminary faculty members are. And they are also persistent weeders. Many are weeded out during the course of the curriculum. I remember one of the professors telling me, "You know, there are calls out of the ministry as well."

Tyler: Derald, will you tell us more about the supernatural elements in the story, and why you decided to include a supernatural twist to the story?

Derald: Well, although the purported elements of the supernatural in the context of my novel might contain some elements of the macabre, I found the use of such a feature harbored great potential as a springboard for the introduction of the novel's biblical motif. But for purposes of maintaining elements of credibility within the context of the sequence, I felt it necessary to familiarize myself with the features deemed to be germane to such an occurrence. The first instance I found to be relevant to the notion of possession can be found in Mark chapter five, verses one through twenty where Jesus and his disciples come across a man possessed by many demons. They called themselves Legion. When Jesus commands the demons to come out of the man, at their request, Jesus casts them into a herd of swine. The swine, sensing their possession, run off a cliff and are killed by the fall. I've been told the significance of this passage implies that in many ways our four legged friends have more sense than people in that they'd rather die than harbor those things, yet we humans will live with them until we die of old age if it's in the cards for us to do so.

In a more contemporary instance, the book "No One Gets Out Of Here Alive—The Biography of Jim Morrison," an account is given of an incident that happened during Jim's childhood where he and his family were driving down a highway in New Mexico near a reservation. While in that proximity, the family observed an auto accident that left several of the tribesmen dead along the side of the road. Jim, upon observing their deaths, stated that he could feel the souls of the tribesmen enter his body—an incident comparable to the biblical account of Legion. Further investigation of this incident revealed that the totem of this particular tribe of Native Americans was the snake, and Jim, near the end of his life, as an integral part of his performance, could be seen lying on the stage and wiggling around like a snake. Of course an alternative explanation for such bizarre behavior could also be ascribed to his excessive use of drugs and alcohol. But such a phenomenon does bear out its roots in the Bible. Of course, within the context of

Christianity, what might have appeared to Jim as the souls of the tribesmen would actually be demonic spirits in the guise of the souls of the tribesmen. And taken in this context, what might have appeared to my protagonist as the soul of his twin, was actually a demonic entity in the guise of his twin and Ishmael only thinks he is possessed by the soul of his twin. I leave that to the readers' discretion.

However, while in seminary, we also were given the opportunity to attend a non-credited course in esotericism or metaphysics. This discipline holds to the notion that a soul or a spirit cannot literally occupy another person's body, but it can travel along side that person and communicate telepathically with the individual like in the instance of having a spirit guide. I remember during the Clinton administration, Hilary Clinton, although allegedly a Methodist, gave credence to this belief and named Eleanor Roosevelt as her spirit guide. There was a cover story in one of the issues of "The New American" entitled "Do We Have A Witch In the White House?"

And next we come to the issue of identical twins. All the twins I have known, even the paternal ones, appeared to share a commonality of interest, temperament, and work at like or similar occupations. I knew this one paternal twin who worked in the deli at the Lucky's Supermarket, and her sibling did the same only at a different store. My then wife knew this one set of twins who were in the same occupation as she, mainly the teaching of aerobics. I remember one got married and had a child. My wife and I visited the hospital shortly after the married twin had given birth. The entire family was present, including the other twin, and what I found to be quite noteworthy was the way the twins were tending to the infant, as if they were operating as a singular unit. When I voiced this observation to my then wife she told me matter-of-factly that twins tend to live through each other.

Since that time I have discovered that in the case of identical twins there is a strong emotional connection and it is speculated that they are even able to communicate with each other telepathically. There have also been instances where they develop a form of communication known as "twin babble" that only they can understand. I remember seeing a dramatization of such a feature on "Law and Order."

It's also been said that identical twins have empathic connections. When one is hurt or injured, the other feels a comparable pain. I remember seeing this feature portrayed in the 1960's version of "The Parent Trap" where the father's exasperated fiancée slaps one of the twins and the other recoils from the pain brought about by the slap. Of course the same holds true for pleasure. I remember seeing this other movie, the name of which escapes me, that takes place during what I believe is the Viking era. There is a set of twins introduced in this movie who are referred to at various parts as "the two that are one." In one scene the hero of the movie has sex with one of the twins, while the other, even though she is miles away, feels the pleasure her twin is experiencing all the way up to the climax of the act.

But getting back to Ishmael and to my biblical motif, in the Genesis account of the two brothers, Isaac is the one chosen to carry out the legacy of his father, and Ishmael is the one who is cast out. But in the instance of my novel, it is Isaac who dies leaving Ishmael, besieged by the torments of his dead twin, inadvertently taking on the role of usurper. This roll begins to accentuate itself in Ishmael's early teens when his father is stationed at a military base somewhere in Virginia. Like the biblical account of Abraham, then Major Abe O'Donnell and his family are consigned to a somewhat insular

community where the dictates of their lives are heavily subject to the communal demands, customs, and mores of the order in question. In the instance of this community setting, religion plays of major role in how people are called upon to conduct themselves, as is most likely true of the biblical Abraham's community. And, like the biblical Abraham, Major Abe O'Donnell seeks to impart the will of the social order upon his son, Ishmael. With the chosen Isaac now dead, Abe O'Donnell is now portrayed passing on both the familial as well as community legacy to his son. Yet Ishmael, as the involuntary usurper, cannot even begin to relate to what is going on, and Abe's efforts are met with resistance right from the get go. For instance, upon the family's arrival at the base Abe O'Donnell insists that the family start attending chapel services together. Ishmael has never known his father to be a religious man. So, like any inquisitive youth, he asks his father why. Abe, while in a position to be the spiritual head of his family, is still not able to articulate an actual and valid reason for the move like "So we can all experience the love of Jesus," or "Have God as a closer part of our lives." Instead, all he can do is exercise his inborn bent toward autocracy and say, "It's just a good habit to get into." And when Ishmael asks why it is a good habit to get into, all his father can do is authoritatively state, "Because it's just a good habit to get into." And with that said, he will allow no further debate.

It is as a result of this paternal dictate that Ishmael furthers his roll as Isaac's inadvertent usurper. While in attendance at their first base chapel service, Ishmael meets the chaplain's daughter—one Becky Sutton. It is at this juncture that the spirit of Isaac evokes his full fury, anger, and desperation, emphatically telling his usurper sibling, "That's not your!" And it takes all the will young Ishmael can muster to silence his disembodied twin spirit. And why is Isaac doing this? Well, according to biblical accounts, Rebecca is Isaac's wife. "Becky." "Rebecca." Connect the dots. According to the feedback I've received thus far, nobody has made that connection. One of my editors, who happened to be the wife of one of our ministerial staff members at my church even stated, "I missed that."

From there Ishmael continues in his roll as usurper forming a deep friendship with Becky—so deep, in fact, that both seem to develop the intuitive notion that they belong together, and nothing, not even the perceived mocking laughter of Isaac, can drive them apart. Only what Ishmael terms as "the tyrannical dictates of military mission" is successful at driving a wedge between the two of them, leaving them only with a strong resolve to meet again at a later time—a resolve that is only neutralized in part by Ishmael's innate pessimism he has acquired over a lifetime of past experiences. Their paths do cross to a degree years later, but not in a physical sense.

But Ishmael continues in his roll as the usurper. In the biblical account, Abraham places Isaac on the altar as a sacrificial offering. In my novel, Isaac is no longer present, so that roll is given over to Ishmael as his father continually misrepresents his son to his peer and superior officers, like the time Abe farts in church and turns around and blames Ishmael for his actions, and lies to the chaplains about Ishmael thinking about baptism while Ishmael harbors no such thoughts, and disciplines him in such ways as to render him fit to follow in the O'Donnell military legacy, and when Ishmael fails to responds to such grooming, he is unmercifully rebuffed and rebuked by his father to the point where Abe tells him that he is ashamed to be around him. And all the while the mocking laughter of Isaac remains present. All this culminates in a near suicide attempt on

Ishmael's part when he hears the beaconing of another inner voice. Some might be inclined to call it the voice of God. Others might assume it to be a budding sense of personal autonomy on Ishmael's part. If one is to assume the former as to the latter, this furthers my biblical motif. Just as God delivered Ishmael and his mother Hagar from death in the desert, so He rescues Ishmael O'Donnell from destruction at his own hands and endows him with renewed resolve to seek out his own destiny. But He does not deliver him from possession or take away his roll as Isaac's usurper. As is stipulated in scripture, God does not play favorites. But He does have an agenda, and for purposes of carrying out that agenda, He calls forth certain people to carry it out. But He does not call everyone. I remember one New Testament passage where Jesus calls forth Peter, Andrew, Simon, Matthew, James, John, Simon, Thomas, and even Judas saying, "Come, and I will make you fishers of men." Yet He leaves Zebedee sitting in the boat.

Even when Ishmael deems himself as being called into the ministry, he is confronted with regards to his roll as usurper in a dream by the spectral apparition of the demonic Isaac.

This novel was written to communicate at many levels. The second part of my novel is presented as a satire aimed at what transpires during the acquisition of seminary training. My message here is "beware of the person standing at the pulpit. What you see is not necessarily what you're getting." But the biblical, possession motif continues even through this part of the book where Ishmael continues to be reminded by the demon spirit that what is there is not his. And the most jolting of these reminders come about as Ishmael overhears conversation by undergrads with regards to his former love Becky and her husband. This happens twice, both instances driving Ishmael toward the brink of insanity by the overwhelming taunts of his brother Isaac.

Tyler: Ishmael attends the seminary for "purification." Will you explain just what is meant by that term?

Derald: Well, at a certain point in the novel, Ishmael is strong-armed into signing documentation attesting to the fact that he is his father's mistress's fiancé. This needs to be done for purposes of attaining a visa so she can enter the United States, and his father can't do it because he is married. To do this Ishmael has to appear before a notary. After the deed is done, he feels very dirty. Compound this with being possessed with a dual soul for twenty some years, it creates in Ishmael a desperate longing to be cleansed. So, after an unspecified interval of searching, he receives what he interprets as a "call" to the ministry. Whether God actually calls him or he just manufactured it is left to the discernment of the reader. But whatever it is, it's real to Ishmael, and recollection of said calling is enough to carry Ishmael through three years of seminary study and preparation, in spite of frequent taunting and berating by his dual soul that often takes a major toll on his sanity and frequently leaves him in the throes of convulsions. How this issue is resolved I will leave for the readers to discover for themselves. After all, I'd like to leave the readers with some reasons to read my book. But as Ishmael embarks upon this endeavor, he is inadvertently placing himself upon the sacrificial offering block intended for his brother, as is portrayed in the Genesis account where Abraham offers up Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord. So, subtle family dynamics are always present in the storyline. And sometimes these family dynamics are quite blatant. But Ishmael, as the unintended usurper, is not equipped to fulfill this role and needs to discover an alternate means of purification. So, in the conveying of this story, biblical motif is always a present factor.

Tyler: I mentioned that you attended seminary yourself and were disillusioned by it; I assume that inspired your satire in this work, or is it not fair to call it a satire?

Derald: Well, one of the reasons I wrote the book is because it was a topic not widely written about in the chronicles of literature. And I believe there are numerous elements of satire within the novel's construct, so I guess it is fair to call it a satire. Of course I was not the one who originally labeled it a satire. That was done for me by one of the people who helped me with the novel's editing—one Michelle Pollace. Then there were others who agreed with her, like Sonia Shell and Jo Sarti. I find it best to let other people do my labeling. After all, someone once told me that a writer of the satirical should never announce his book as a satire. Satire is something that announces itself.

I also wrote the book because I have an abundance of knowledge pertaining to what goes on in seminary and the type of people who are drawn to seminary. As for my disillusionment, many of my fellow students were disillusioned, just as people in many other professions may become disillusioned during the course of their involvement with their chosen endeavor. I remember near the end of my seminary sojourn experiencing a good bit of disillusionment and disappointment with myself as well. During one of my units of Clinical Pastoral Education, my supervisor informed me that if I chose to continue to aspire to the ministry, I should get at least four years of counseling. Since that time I have received considerably more counseling than that. Yet, writing this novel was still quite a painful process. But it was a cathartic process as well. Now I find I can laugh at certain things, including myself, whereas before I might have writhed in agony.

Tyler: Derald, can you sum up for us what you initially expected to get out of going to a seminary, and what made you feel disillusioned in the end? I know that's a big question, but maybe just one or two of the major things.

Derald: Well, I started out wanting to become a minister. I was also seeking to further my education beyond that of a baccalaureate. I always felt a bent toward the intellectual, and, as a result of this longing, I went to considerable time and expense to satisfy that craving. But it's something I wouldn't do again. It was a very lonely time for me, and I never did truly feel I belonged there. The setting was a very provincial and parochial one—not the type of setting I had grown use to. Isolation was also ever-present in that setting. We were situated in a small, isolated town with very few recreational outlets. Most of the seminarians were married, and marriages were quite abundant among the undergrads as well. After all, the ratio of men and women were generally one to one and choices were limited. And, after all, in a small town like the one we were in, the only recreation was procreation, especially during the winter months. At one point I even coupled up with an undergraduate art student. We talked of marriage, but her mother didn't like me one bit. She said I was a disgrace to my calling. When my present love interest announced to her mother that we were talking about getting married, her mother threatened to kill herself. Her father didn't seem to care one way or the other. Still, during the time spent in that isolated town, we clung fiercely to each other. And up until that time, I didn't think it was possible for me to be monogamous. But in that town, there wasn't much choice. My father accused us of using each other as crutches, and maybe he was right. I needed something to get me through the ordeal that was seminary, and at that point I seemed to Jesus as more the problem than the solution. I believe it's like what the Lord said in Genesis: "It is not good for man to be alone."

I also noted, as a ministerial student, people would act differently toward me. That became a considerable source of discomfort. And the cliquy amongst the students I hadn't experienced since high school. Caring community was preached, but I experienced anything but that. And the politics amongst the student body was as duplicitous as any taking place within government. I remember one year they were trying to get a certain prominent student elected. So, to assure his election, they schemed and selected the dumbest of the students to run against him providing us with the illusion of a democratic process while assuring the prominent student an easy win.

Also, I remember a friend of mine who attended West Point tell me that at the academy the military was pushed at you so consistently and so stringently that at the end of the program you were either super gung ho, or you couldn't stand it anymore. I found the same dynamic taking place at the seminary. I became so sick of a constant diet of theology, just as the Hebrews got sick of a constant diet of manna. I didn't even have time for outside interests or hobbies. When I returned from seminary, a female friend of mine asked me if I wanted to attend a Bible study. I told her I had had my fill of Bible study for the time being. Later on, when we became romantically involved, she never let me forget that statement.

There were many other factors besides these that aided in my disillusionment. And I believe I already stated, a lot of the disillusionment was with myself. I had the mind of a scholar as evidenced by the plethora of degrees and certificates I acquired during the years I worked for Transit. But I was sadly lacking the heart of a child. The fact that I'm able supposedly to write satire on topics of this nature most likely places me in the category of super cynic and borderline curmudgeon. And as for my having the hide of a rhinoceros, forget it.

Tyler: What do you hope will be the reaction of people to "The Call"? Are you seeking just to entertain them, or do you hope for other reactions beyond that?

Derald: Well, I would hope my novel would liberate as well as entertain. Religion can be quite oppressive, and those who tote the mantle of "God's messengers" wield a great deal of power that they are often prone to misuse, especially if they are accorded with the gift of charisma. And charisma is a very dangerous gift to possess because it masks a multitude of shortcomings and those who possess it are often times not held accountable for their folly and misdeeds. And I'm sure you can name a few political figures who fit this depiction. But one of the items I try to convey in the writings of this novel is that even those who aspire to such lofty ends are simply human beings. As one of the seminary professors in my novel puts it, "God recruits from the human race, and sometimes He recruits some real sons of bitches. David was perhaps the biggest son of a bitch ever recruited by God." So with that in mind I'm hoping my readers would carry away from the reading of my book the message of hope and self-affirmation. After all, the devil will always be around to mock us and point up our flaws, and God might not always appear to be present during one of the devil's tirades. But God did make you, and God does not make junk. And you are so important to Him that He sent His son to die for you. That, in and of itself, makes you a creature of considerable worth in His eyes. So, with that in mind, how dare you not affirm yourself, even when your accusers and condemners surround you?

Tyler: Will you tell us a little about your writing process, such as whether you write at a certain time of day, how you come up with your ideas, and how long it took you to write “The Call”?

Derald: Between the writing, the editing, and the revisions, it took me approximately twenty years to write this book. And even after it went to its final print, a friend of mine still found some typos. Needless to say, I was very frustrated at this discovery. I’ve since eliminated these typos for the e-book. But as for the writing process, I first started out with an idea. Then I mapped it out via outline. Then, following along the outline, I began composing the story via my computer. I’m retired now, but while I was in the process of writing “The Call,” I was also working full time and also composing some short stories and non-fiction articles for a children’s newspaper, a house organ, a community college newspaper, and a monthly anthology.

I would write at whatever time I could fit into my schedule. For me, writing necessitates a clear head, and I frequently lose that commodity after I’ve been at it for a certain length of time. Then it becomes necessary for me to stop and either take a nap, go for a walk, or do something totally unrelated. It’s also necessary for me to become my harshest critic. I had several people aid me in the editing of this book, but I had to do some editing myself as well. Originally my novel was comprised of 735 pages. So a large portion of it had to be eliminated. After all, I’m writing for an audience, so I need to go to great pains to make my story palatable for my reading public. After all, I serve my reading audience; they do not serve me. So, this necessitates my placing myself in the shoes of the reader and opening myself up to the judgment of many.

Tyler: Derald, the book seems very autobiographical based on what I know of your life. Did you have any qualms or hesitations about the autobiographical parts, and what parts, may I ask, are fictional, besides the supernatural parts, I assume?

Derald: My book is fiction. I may have drawn from aspects of the familiar as did Pat Conroy in his novel “The Great Santini,” but like I said in my disclaimer earlier on in this interview, “Any resemblance of any of the characters in this novel, living or dead, is purely coincidental.” And I don’t just say this for the sake of this interview. I remember many years ago cartoonist Al Capp got involved in a lawsuit with folksinger Joan Baez for portraying a character in his cartoon series she thought she resembled. And being a poor, starving artist, I sure don’t want that happening to me.

But yes, there might be some similarities between my protagonist and myself, just as there were, I’m certain, some resemblances between Huckleberry Finn and Mark Twain, Ben Meachum and Pat Conroy, and Nick Caraway of “The Great Gatsby” and F. Scott Fitzgerald. It seems like every author who dares to use the first person narrative falls prey to that question. But personally, I think Ishmael O’Donnell is much more interesting than his creator. By the way, in my next book, which is comprised of two novellas and three short stories, I write primarily in third person. One of the short stories is written in first person, and that comes as close to being autobiographical as I get.

Tyler: Will you be returning to any of the same characters or themes in your next book?

Derald: Yes, my next book does return to some of the same characters and themes. I call my second book “Twice Upon a Prequel” because my two novellas feature two of my secondary characters of “The Call” and the events that transpired in their lives leading up to their enrollment at Parkins. The first novella is entitled “The Astonishing Elmo

Piggins.” If you read “The Call” you’d know that young Elmo winds up in the undergraduate school of religion, but his story is a fascinating one that I feel is worth the telling. One of my editors referred to Elmo as a “little shit.” But even little shits can be fascinating protagonists if you fancy a love/hate relationship.

The second novella I’ve entitled “The Rebirth of Reginald Dexter.” And if there is a message to be garnered within the context of this piece, it is from the pen of Dylan Thomas who admonishes us to “not go gentle into that good night” and to “rage, rage against the coming light.” I present Reginald as a man confronted with a superimposed old age by the social powers that be. He is forcibly retired from his job at the university and, for all intents and purposes, is ousted from a profession he has served faithfully for close to forty years. Yet, he still feels robust and vigorous enough to set out to reinvent himself, and, with the guidance of his pastor/mentor, begins to set in motion the wheels of this change. It’s a humorous, upbeat story that illustrates the notion that it’s never too late for a change in both career and life, regardless of what society may tell you.

Two of my shorts deal with the military family theme. You asked me earlier if my novel was autobiographical. My short story “Taken Up Before The General” is somewhat autobiographical in that it is based on an incident that transpired while we were stationed in Germany. The name I use is fictitious, but the story follows what transpired almost to the letter.

My other story, “The War Comes Home,” I write from the female perspective. They say it’s easier for a woman to enter a man’s world than it is for a man to enter a woman’s. A woman’s world is a world that is highly threatening to a man in that when entering it the man is forced to see the flaws and foibles of himself that he really desperately wants to avoid seeing. But “The War Comes Home” is my second attempt at viewing life from the female perspective, and based on the comments I received from female readers, it appears pretty safe to assume that I’ve given a pretty accurate representation of the world from the feminine vision. And, like most men, I found this perspective to be gut-wrenching. And near the story’s end, I often find myself weeping. It’s the story of a military wife who is faced with the arduous task of preparing both her family and herself for her husband’s reentry into the family structure after he has been absent for three years fighting one of our country’s many “police actions.” Many of my readers have told me that the story presents a biting, bitter commentary with regards to the human condition.

And as for my last story, my short short I entitle “A Liter Bit of Wisdom,” I leave for you to draw your own conclusions.

Tyler: Derald, when I introduced you, I didn’t mention that you have long had writing aspirations, beginning in college where you took a class that discouraged you. If you knew then what you know now about writing, what would you have done differently in terms of your writing?

Derald: Probably nothing. What people disparaged most about my writing and about me personally was the fact that I was so young and callow and that I did not have enough life experience about me to validate me as a writer. So, I just put these aspirations aside until I got older. Knowing what I know now, there are a number of things I would probably do differently were I given a chance to do them again. Unfortunately, life does not come with do overs. But as for my writing, I can’t think of anything I would or could change.

I just try to give my best effort and hope my presentation bodes well with my readers.

Tyler: You mentioned early on in this interview Herman Melville's use of Ishmael in "Moby Dick," and you've mentioned some other writers like Pat Conroy in this interview, so all that makes me curious, besides the Bible, what would you say have been your greatest influences from other writers or books?

Derald: Well, Sinclair Lewis' "Elmer Gantry" was a great influence. The book sort of brought to mind what President Harry S. Truman once said regarding politics and affluence. He said, "You can't get rich playing politics. Take my word for it. It just can't be done. You show me a man who gets rich playing politics and I'll show you a crook!" I find the same holds true for religion. But Elmer Gantry is such a man, and throughout the book we find Mr. Gantry is somewhat less than a paragon of virtue, yet we find him endowed with the gift or charisma, and with what generally accompanies a man with such a gift, an overactive libido. And, of course, he has a way of conveniently pushing aside the little used commodity of conscience.

Author John Updike was also a great influence. One of his books, "A Month of Sundays" tells of a minister who has affairs with all the women in his congregation. To add to the irony of the tale, we find the story set during the time of the Watergate scandal. It was required reading in one of the courses I took while in seminary. I remember the professor of the course telling us with regards to the novel, "Laugh if you like, but also be warned. As the shepherd of a flock, you are subject to such vulnerability." Mr. Updike's other works, like the Rabbit series and "The Witches of Eastwick" were also a great influence in the way they portrayed the clergy and the church setting.

Then we already mentioned Pat Conroy's "The Great Santini." This book portrayed a family atmosphere not unlike the one I grew up in, the only difference being that Ben Meachum, at the end of the novel, winds up being a copy of his father. Most military fathers, I found, want their prodigy taking after them, and many of them are successful to one degree or the other. My father was no exception. The only problem in the fulfilling of this desire is his, at times, forgetting that he was not my natural father, so genetically his inclinations were not ingrained in me. I always found the military upbringing to be very oppressive.

There is a non-fiction book I read that provided me with an analytical and diagnostic perspective on the military family structure. It is entitled "Military Brats." Its author's name is Mary Edward Wertsch. Throughout her book she cites excerpts from "The Great Santini" as she places under a microscope the inner workings of military family structure dynamics. I found the book highly insightful and it opened my eyes to the reasons why certain things were present in my family environment. The only thing I found to be wrong with the book is that near its end Ms. Wertsch winds up extolling with pride how privileged and honored she felt being a part of a military family structure. For me, being part of a military family structure was a source of pure agony that I'd just assume put behind me. But even now, as I too quickly approach my old age I still find myself feeling the pain and resentment of past abuses. Earlier on in this interview I mentioned that I was married once. And during the course of the marriage I was soon to discover that I married my father. Then, about a year after the divorce I found myself linked up with another lady with similar attributes. I recently managed to break this cycle by going through e-Harmony. We haven't married as yet, but it's the greatest relationship I've ever been a part of.

Also there were a number of books that inspired me with regards to the aspects of biblical motif. I believe the most influential one was John Steinbeck's "East of Eden." Throughout the Genesis accounts there were frequent tales of two brothers, like Jacob and Esau, Ishmael and Isaac. In Steinbeck's case, he used the model of Cain and Abel. Well, I figured if he could pull it off with Cain and Abel, I felt the same could be done in the instance of Isaac and Ishmael. And, as you've most likely observed in the reading of both "East of Eden" and "The Call," it's the bad boy or the least desired who is held up as the protagonist. There's another novel I remember reading some time ago entitled "After The Flood" that told of the exploits of Noah's sons after dry land was found, and this novel was told in first person narrative by the voice of bad boy Ham. He was the one who didn't avert his gaze as the brothers covered up their father while he was lying passed out, drunk, and naked. It's a funny book. I found its humor comparable to a Mel Brooks movie.

Tyler: Derald, when I introduced you I mentioned that you also play the banjo and enjoy bluegrass music. Do you feel there's any connection between your writing style and musical interests, or one influencing the other?

Derald: There probably is, although I haven't quite figured out what it could be. I'll need to get back to you on that one. I spent a lot of time in the south when I was young, and bluegrass was an integral part of that cultural. I love the banjo. I take lessons and I wish I could play it better than I do. I've also played the guitar, clarinet, and saxophone. But the banjo remains my favorite.

Tyler: Thank you, Derald, for the opportunity to interview you about "The Call." Before we go, will you tell us about your website address and what additional information about "The Call" can be found there?

Derald: Well, it's got my biography, the prologue of "The Call," and attachments of my reviews, my press release, my interview with Pacific Book Review, a magnificently done trailer put together by author Kim McDougal, and an announcement of my future up-and-coming work entitled "Twice Upon a Prequel and Three Shorts."

I'm anticipating other reviews that will be added on to my website in due course, and I'll most likely be adding this interview on to my website as well. It's a matter of my adding on as I go. And hopefully I'll be getting some visitors during that time.

Incidentally, my website is dhamiltonbooks.com. And you can email me at dhthecall12@aol.com. I welcome emails. And not just positive ones. Even the critical are welcome. Without the critiques, I can't grow as a writer.