

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Alan S. Evans, author of *Spirit Horses*

Start to finish, how long did it take you to write *Spirit Horses*?

When I started to write *Spirit Horses*, I really had no intention of pursuing publication. I was simply writing for my own pleasure. As the story began to evolve my enthusiasm grew, and my writing pace quickened. From a rough version to a manuscript worthy of submitting to a publisher took me approximately three years.

How did you get the idea?

One evening while watching the national news, I saw an interview with a man who had lost his wife and two small children in a plane crash. As a family man I couldn't fathom how I might deal with such an unthinkable tragedy. I felt so much empathy for the guy, but I was also inspired by his incredible strength of character. This brief news story spawned the idea for *Spirit Horses*.

What part of the writing process came easiest for you?

The creative process was almost effortless. Once I started the ball rolling the story seemed to write itself. I would often wake up in the middle of the night with ideas, and would have to write them down before I could go back to sleep. At the risk of sounding cliché, the story took on a life of its own, and as a writer it kept drawing me back until I finished. I hope that readers will feel that same pull.

What part of the writing process was most difficult?

Having a story in your head is one thing, but turning it into a believable, true-to-life saga, is quite a challenge. Solid research, along with many rewrites, became very time consuming, but necessary in order to connect the dots in a way that made the book realistic.

How did you get the ideas for the characters in *Spirit Horses*? Are any of the characters based on people you know?

I felt I was able to delve into Shane Carson's plight with his family because the family was similar to my own. I attempted to use this similarity as a catalyst to bring out the feelings, and emotional punch in my writing. All of the other people in the story were simply products of my imagination.

How are you most similar to your protagonist, Shane Carson? How are you most different?

I've seen a lot of writers who tapped into what is familiar in their lives when writing their first book. Although Shane Carson is in no way based on me, we are both horse trainers and family men. Unlike Shane, I have never traveled around the country as a clinician or acquired national fame as a trainer. I do feel most people will be able to relate to his weaknesses and strengths. Those were my intensions anyhow. In many ways I guess he is the type of person I aspire to be.

What do you think is Shane's most admirable quality?

His willingness to face danger, even when the odds are stacked against him. I also admire how he doesn't burden others with his problems.

What do you think is Shane's least admirable quality?

I would have to say his weakness for alcohol and how he uses it to cover his pain. In part, it is his dependence on alcohol that makes him reluctant to move on with his life after the tragedy.

How did your work as a horse trainer influence *Spirit Horses*?

When I started this book my influence was centered on my passion for working with horses. My first draft actually ended up with too many training scenes. Several of these were eventually deleted as the book developed into much more than just a horse story.

Is there really such a thing as a “Spirit Horse?”

The herd of wild mustangs in my book came solely from the depths of my own imagination. In my research I did not come across any reference to the term “spirit horses” within the Native American cultures I looked into. This is not to say that it does not exist. I did, however, hear the expression in a movie once, and have seen a piece of artwork entitled “A Horse Named Spirit”. This all happened after I wrote the book.

What type of research did you do when crafting the story?

The Internet was my main source for information. I can’t tell you how many hours I spent surfing. Interviews with a geologist and discussions with people who had spent time in the area of the Wind River were very helpful. I also rented every video and DVD I could find about northwest Wyoming. The horsemanship and training came from my own 30 years of experience.

Why did you choose Tennessee as the setting for Spirit Horses?

There was no significant reason other than its scenery. I was looking for an area where I thought Shane would like to live, and I’ve always loved that part of the country. As a storyteller I did feel it was important for the Carson’s farm to be far enough away from northwest Wyoming to show a contrast in lifestyle.

Is there any similarity between training horses and writing a novel? If so, how are they similar?

It takes countless hours of skill, patience, and dedication to properly train a performance horse. To a layman’s eye the end result can appear effortless, so they may never know the amount of hard work that was involved. Writing a novel, then carrying it through to publication can compare in many ways to this analogy. I never realized, until after I finished Spirit Horses, how much time writing a novel entailed.

In the novel, Shane Carson uses an interesting philosophy for training horses. Is that similar to your own techniques?

Yes. The techniques and experiences I have gained through the years are the same ones Shane Carson uses in my novel. His character is based around a traveling clinician much like the character in the famous story, The Horse Whisperer. Believe it or not, there really are talented trainers who travel the country dazzling large crowds with their skills and abilities.

How did you get started working with horses?

I’ve been working with horses since I was a kid. It wasn’t until my mid twenties when I was fortunate enough to meet a couple of very special trainers who took me under their wings. Apparently they saw some potential. Since then I’ve made a good living for my family as a trainer. But, I always keep myself open to learn more. Most of the quality trainers I know remain humble and thirsting for knowledge.

What is the most surprising thing you could share about horses that the average person might not know?

I don’t think the average person realizes the sensitivity of a horse. These are huge animals that can feel a tiny gnat land on a single hair, and then react. Achieving a willing partnership from your horse and connecting into this level of sensitivity is an incredible feeling.

What is the biggest challenge you face in working with horses?

Probably hooking the horses up with their people before they go home. But, this is also the part I enjoy the most.

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Do you have another novel in the works, and if so, what is the next book about?

Yes, I do. Although I plan to write a sequel to *Spirit Horses* in the future, my next novel is a completely different story. It's an intriguing tale about the orphan son of an American Marine and a young Lebanese woman. The child is adopted in the Middle East by an American couple who raise the boy in Kansas. After growing up he joins the service in order to become a U.S. Army medic in Iraq. While fighting for the coalition, injuries and a mistaken identity draw the character into a ruthless world of spies and terrorism. This is an emotional, action-packed thriller with an unpredictable ending.