

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Curt Weeden, author of *Book of Nathan*

Tell us a little about yourself, how and when you started writing.

First serious writing experiences were as a journalist for a chain of weekly newspapers in Rhode Island (Phoenix Times Publishing Company). Moved from reporter to news editor before leaving the newspaper field to attend graduate school in New York City (NYU). Dabbled in fiction writing over the years but made no serious moves in that direction until leaving my post as vice president of Johnson & Johnson (2000).

What inspired you to write your novel?

Most of my professional career has centered on addressing social challenges/problems. The novel – although deliberately comedic and light – deals with extremism and how it can cripple attempts to resolve critical issues. The novel is intended to generate more interest in my speaking engagements, which will increasingly touch on sensitive issues such as population expansion and its impact on global stability.

How did you use your life experience or professional background to enrich your story?

The characters, venues and many of the situations (e.g. Ellis Island special event, homeless shelter activities, etc.) are all based on real-life experiences. Having been involved with building business-nonprofit partnerships for over 30 years, I have been afforded a wide perspective on people and events that have been stirred into *Book of Nathan*.

Anything autobiographical in your novel?

There are some autobiographical overtones to the book. But it is largely a novel about others I have met over the years.

Are any characters based on people you know?

In a very general way. Douglas Kool, the slippery fund-raising consultant, is a very familiar character in my world. The other main actors in the novel are composites of individuals who have been in and out of my life (other than Twyla Tharp, the “erotic dancer” who conducts extra-curricular activities!). The wealthy investment banker (Arthur Silverstein) is based partly on very well-to-do people who are friends and more distant associates – however, none are quite as devious or issue-driven to the point of being dangerous.

Would you say that your novel is more plot driven or character driven?

The plot -- the quest for a previously lost book of the Bible – drives the story. However, the characters are vital to the tone and pace of the book.

Who is your favorite or most sympathetic character? Why?

The lead character is Rick Bullock and clearly the individual who is closest to my own interests and values. The one-time history professor, Doc Waters, brings high but misdirected intellect into the story. However, it is Bullock who is the most compelling character in the book.

Who is your least sympathetic character? Why?

Clearly, it's the investment banker Arthur Silverstein and to a slightly lesser degree Judith Russett, the head of the Quia Vita, the aggressive pro-life organization. Both these characters illustrate how extreme views and decisions make it so difficult to find a middle ground where social challenges can be reasonably addressed.

What part of writing your book did you find the most challenging?

Time. For this author, fiction writing is a demanding task and output does not come about easily. The book was written in conjunction with another business book (to be released January 2011 by Jossey-Bass - Wiley). Coupled with managing a consulting business and allocating time to be a husband, father and grandfather, the effort was trying.

What do you hope that readers will take away from your book?

The book is intended for as wide an audience as possible given the important message(s) that wind through its pages. The “take-away” is (as mentioned) the danger of extremism in addressing any issue (political, religious, social). In addition, the book hints at the risky course the planet is taking by not addressing unchecked population expansion (the central theme of an earlier book this author wrote: *How Women Can Beat Terrorism*) and how the vociferous abortion debate clouds this very serious global problem.

How do you dial up the tension to keep your readers on the edge of their seats?

Tension and locking in a reader is largely a credit to co-author Richard Marek whose main role was to heavily edit the original manuscript. Dick is among the very best editors in the nation as is evident by his stable of authors he has aided over the years.

What writers have inspired you?

Interestingly, many of the great writers have not been inspirational but intimidating. I do not have the talent to match the “gold standard” writers of the past or the popular authors of contemporary fiction. A number of relatively new authors reviewed *Book of Nathan* and I was honored to read some of their books. More widely recognized writers like Janet Evanovich were kind enough to comment on *Book of Nathan*. There are a battery of writers I enjoy reading such as Pat Conroy, Harlan Coben, James Patterson among others. New novelists such as Kathryn Stockett (*The Help*) are brilliant. I am also amazed at how so many journalists can turn a timely topic into a story that has all the compelling elements of a fascinating novel. To come even close to some of these far more gifted writers would be a great accomplishment for me.

What is the writing process like for you?

Very difficult. So much has been written about the solitude and self-discipline that goes into writing. But until one goes through the exercise, it is not something truly understood. Most of my writing is during the early part of the day (7:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.) and on airplanes going to/from business meetings and speeches.

What is the best piece of advice about writing that you’ve ever received?

Richard Marek has been my most ardent critic and important teacher. He has taught me that so often what you consider your own good writing is only half as good as you think – and sometimes deeply flawed. But he also has shown me what it takes to whittle a barely passable set of words into a reasonable sentence or two. The message: find someone you respect and trust to honestly evaluate your work, recommend improvements and be thick-skinned enough to take the suggestions to heart.

What is the worst piece of advice about writing that you’ve ever received?

That I am strictly a non-fiction writer. Granted, my non-fiction books and articles are probably at a higher standard than *Book of Nathan*. However, if I had listened to the few people who have told me not to waste my time with fiction, *Book of Nathan* would not be a reality.

What’s next for you? Any new books in the pipeline?

As mentioned, a business book for January 2011 (completed) and another novel titled *Dutch Island*. The novel is about a small island off the coast of Jamestown, Rhode Island that is now a publicly owned, undeveloped park. The island was once the property of Daniel Weeden, an ancestor who was deeded the island by Benedict Arnold, the grandfather of the notorious traitor. The novel is set in contemporary times and centers on a series of murders that can only be resolved if the original deed to the island can be located. It stars many of the same characters as are in *Book of Nathan*.

Any final words you would like to say about yourself, your novel, or life in general?

Hopefully *Book of Nathan* will be more than a “good read.” My aspiration for the book is to use it as a door-opener for discussion and thought about concerns and challenges important to all of us. Fiction can be a terrific gateway to new ideas and more open thinking. The true measure of *Book of Nathan*’s success will be how far it takes me (and others) toward this goal.