

A CONVERSATION with TJ TURNER about

LAND OF WOLVES: THE RETURN OF LINCOLN'S BODYGUARD

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

I started writing when I was quite young. I'm not sure exactly what age I was, but I know my early writing career took a tremendous bump when my Dad brought home our very first Apple IIGS computer. I could actually type in the stories now! Mostly I wrote science fiction, and I remember calculating that I needed to get my first novel published by around 10 years old if I wanted to surpass Isaac Asimov's book count. I submitted story after story to what I believed was the only literary journal in the world, *Asimov's Science Fiction*. And that was when I started learning about rejection! I kept writing though, not daring to show anyone. During my undergraduate studies I submitted often to the campus literary magazine, under a pseudonym of course—engineers don't do creative writing, and I was in a hardcore engineering program. Finally, my wife Nancy threw out the challenge. Actually, it was an off-hand remark to the effect that I would never write a novel. In fairness to her, I hadn't told her of my secret writing life. Her comment still got to me, and in an effort to prove her wrong, I penned the first novel. It was truly terrible. But then I got an idea for another, and my writing got better. And then *Lincoln's Bodyguard* popped into my creative thoughts, and I devoted everything I had learned before it into this novel. Then the story of Joseph and Molly took hold, and *Land of Wolves* is the natural extension from the initial novel.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

I love history, particularly American History. After *Lincoln's Bodyguard*, I was hooked on the story, and I hadn't let all the threads completely close. So the natural extension was to find the thread and complete the story. This brought me on a wild ride, as my initial idea of where it was all headed took off on an amazing tangent. My family took a long trip out west last summer, and it inspired me to weave in the tale of the opening of the west, and the conflicts with the native people there, in order to fill out the story. It fit perfectly. Joseph, one of my main characters, is half-Miami Indian. In this portion of his story he gets to come in direct contact with his native roots and really find peace through the process.

HOW DID YOU USE YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE OR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO ENRICH YOUR STORY?

As a scientist I love to do research, and peering back into history is no different than the work I do for my job. But as a federal agent, I get to deploy to lands of conflict, and really get to meet the people who live there and understand their life issues. This was huge for me in writing the portion of the novel that takes place in the Lakota territory. I used my experience in relating to people from very disparate cultures to guide all the scenes in the novel dealing with the Lakota people.

ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

Not really. This is a pure story of Joseph and Molly. Joseph is a little like me in some regards, but he's his own person, too!

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Well...a great friend of mine wanted to be in the novel, so one of the characters is very loosely based on him. He asked for it! And he loves it.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

In this work, I love Molly. She really comes into her own in the story, and sets me up to explore her background next. She's had a rough life, and despite it all, still fights for her own patch of happiness.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

General Dorsey! He's the epitome of corporate greed and political corruption.

WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

Blending in historical fact with the storyline. That's tough, but when it works, it's magic.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR BOOK?

I hope they turn the last page, or close their kindle at 4 a.m., because they just couldn't put it down. But after that, I hope they read the Author's Notes, and realize the history that goes in behind the scenes. There are so many stories that are lost to time, some more interesting than any fiction I could develop. So I hope they get to the end of my novel and are inspired to pick up some work of nonfiction to learn more about the time period.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Truthfully, there are too many to list, and I don't always have favorite authors as much as I have favorite works. For instance, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, is one of the most haunting pieces of literature I have ever read. When I finally get around to processing all of my Afghan experiences, I want to be able to write something as meaningful as O'Brien's novel. I also loved Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. It's more literary than the books I typically like to read, but the story and the central conflict kept me hooked. I also loved Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Even though it's a Civil War novel written shortly after the conflict, it still rings true in the themes and conflicts to today's modern warriors. Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* is another all-time favorite, especially for the story development and the twists he puts the readers through. *True Grit* by Charles Portis is another novel that I count on my top shelf, and have re-read several times in order to absorb his pacing and grasp of the time period. And finally, I love reading books that are so different than my own style. *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy comes to mind in this manner.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

I have no process. I write when I can—between bites of lunch, when the kids are in bed, and whenever the muse looks my way. And I don't worry about it. When I want to write I do, and that's the only time I know it will work for me.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

A few summers ago I was able to attend a great lecture by Andre DuBus III. He's a great teacher, and his main point was that you had to write what inspired you. If you don't, then you'll burn out and your story will become flat. Your readers will know it. Instead, if you write the story that makes you authentically curious, then your writing will reflect enthusiasm.

WHAT IS THE WORST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

That you have to write what you know.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY NEW BOOKS IN THE PIPELINE?

YES! I'm starting to outline Molly's story! She's an amazing character, and I can't wait to fill in her backstory about how she came into Pinkerton's employ.

ANY FINAL WORDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR NOVEL, OR LIFE IN GENERAL?

The writing life is hard, and I'm so grateful for everyone who's helped me along the path—from my wife who kicked me into writing my first novel (literally), to my agent Liz Kracht, to all the wonderful folks at Oceanview Publishing. THANK YOU!