

Where did you get the idea for your story?

We've all heard the advice that one should write what one knows. Some readers will believe that authors take this suggestion literally and, as a result, all stories are based on events in which the author participated or at least about which the author has direct knowledge. Some authors do exactly that. Their books are considered to be memoirs, and they recount events which happened to the author, his friends, or his family.

Others take real events and embellish them. The event, itself, actually occurred, but the details may be the product of the author's mind. I think of one prominent writer from the America South who does this. Unfortunately his writing style changes as he moves from fact to fiction, so an attentive reader can identify which parts of his stories are factual and which are not.

A character in a popular television police drama is an author, in addition to being a police officer. His characters are drawn directly from people he knows with their names changed, minimally in some cases. In one episode, a crazed fan lost the distinction between fact and fiction and began kill people – characters in his mind – who were causing difficulties for the hero.

When I completed my first novel, *The Reunion*, my wife thought at first that I had used a similar strategy. As she read the book, she tried to identify the person on whom each character was based. She and I, she decided, were the central characters, Allison and Michael. One of our daughters must be their child, she thought. The woman who was chasing Michael must be her high school nemesis. Since my wife was only halfway through the book I suggested that she take care in claiming to be Allison, since in a few pages, Allison would engage in some rather inappropriate behavior!

So where do I get my ideas?

Some of the specific events in my books really have happened. In *The Reunion*, Michael attends his high school reunion, and his friends discuss several events which occurred while they were in high school. Each of those events really did occur, at least in some form.

In my new novel, *The Handfasting*, I recount one character's attempt to avoid the America military draft in the early nineteen seventies by getting married. There was a point in time before which married men could not be conscripted into the Army. As the policy was about to change, some men proposed marriage in their efforts to avoid military service. My brother, jokingly perhaps, talked of doing just that.

I can often tell you where I found the conflict that drove my story. For *The Reunion*, I was listening to a sermon. The preacher talked about a man who had done something that was evil, but had immediately repented. He wanted a chance to live that time over, to have a replay, if you will. My story is about a man who wanted to relive his time in high school.

We sometimes read of two people, lovers perhaps, who have not seen each other in years, but are re-united. *The Handfasting* deals with Katherine and Stephen, two people who were engaged to be married, but who were separated for a decade.

The story, though, the plot, where do I find it? It has been suggested that there are, at most, thirty-six unique plot lines and that every story is simply a version of one of these. As a result, *Romeo and Juliet*, the Hatfields and the McCoys, and *Westside Story* are simply variations on the theme of young lovers whose families are implacable enemies. Cinderella and *The Great Gatsby* each recounts a story of an impoverished person who falls in love someone in a higher social class.

But the variation, where did I get the specific variation that is my story? The answer is I don't know. It is sort of like magic!

In the *Second Chance Café*, the author writes of a young woman who weaves beautiful scarves. They sell in upscale stores around the country and are often seen wrapped around the bodies of movie stars and celebrities. Each scarf is unique. How does she decide on the colors, the pattern, for a new scarf? She describes the process in this manner:

"I don't know how you do that," her father said, looking at the collection (of yarn) she held and shaking his head.

Honestly, neither did she. To this day, she could not explain how the colors came together in her mind. How one flowed into another as she sat at her loom. How the different strands of story became a whole. "I just see it. I don't know where it comes from. Any of it. It's just there."

It is a description with which almost any author is familiar.

Thank you for sharing with us some of the magic today David