

The 2nd Most Dreaded Question

For those of you who haven't read my essay titled, "A Question of Creativity," which dealt with the number one most dreaded question writers get asked (*Where do you get your ideas?*), go back and read it then hurry back here, because there's a second most dreaded question out there that I aim to answer for all of eternity in this essay.

Dreaded Question #2: *How long have you been writing?*

Yes, that's the question. I usually just give an offhanded, general answer of "Fifth grade," because that was when I first started to get serious about writing. But there are layers and shades attached to the whole subject for me and fortunately, I have the time and space to answer it in detail here.

From the beginning I always felt this natural affinity for the written word. I can recall clearly how, in the third grade, I preferred to have stayed at my desk in my homeroom classroom during recess to write little UFO stories and draw illustrations to go along with them (I was deeply entranced by the subject back then!), but, of course, teachers couldn't leave a child alone in a classroom to his own devices, he may burn the school down.

In fourth grade, I wrote this impressive short story about how I saved our neighborhood from the destruction of a tornado by shooting a bullet into its belly as it rampaged through my backyard, thereby dispersing it safely to the four winds. How a single bullet could accomplish such a task was still beyond my imaginative reasoning, but the point at that time was to write the story – nothing more. The illustration I drew for it was quite dramatic, I can still picture it in my mind.

But it was in fifth grade, when I was ten years old, when I came across this fantastically large, two-foot by one-and-a-half foot sized, full color comic book by Marvel Comics on a sales rack in the local A&P. The cover was indescribably over-the-top, full of action, laser blasts, exploding spaceships and the most awesome shiny, black robot bad guy I'd ever seen. He was holding a red laser sword over the entire scene – I was sucked in immediately. The giant comic cost me a whole dollar but it and the movie it was based on, *Star Wars*, have influenced my writing ever since, probably more than anything else in my life.

I read the comic in one night then went to see the movie a few weeks later...head blown, brains everywhere! As soon as I got home from the movie, I pulled out a yellow pad of notebook paper and began writing a completely "original" story based on Luke Skywalker's adventure, in long

hand. Of course, it was a deliberate act of pure plagiarism, but I didn't care, I wanted to write stories like that the rest of my life. I wanted to blow people's head apart, leave pieces of their brains on the floor, walls and ceiling!

I got about two and half note pads into this act of thievery when it finally dawned on me that, even though I had learned much on how to plot a story and develop characters, I would never damage people's heads by stealing other people's work. I had to write my own stories.

There was a short time in fifth grade where I experimented with a newspaper type format. I found a stack of 11"x17" blue construction paper and drew out an entire newspaper I named "The Blue News." I secured it together with pink yarn then laid out articles, all with a blue theme. I remember one of the stories was something about Neil Diamond's "Song Sung Blue," though I don't remember the details. I drew pictures for each article in black ink so, I couldn't make any errors. I always wonder what happened to it.

In high school, my best friend and I wrote original sci-fi stories using friends we knew in real life. We even protected ourselves by making our friends sign official, legally binding, permission slips – thereby allowing us to use their names and likenesses without threat of legal repercussion. We typed the stories out on an old typewriter with an ever-dying ink ribbon, had his mother edit the grammar, re-typed the changes, then sent the originals out in a two-pocket folder with his dad where he would make ten copies on the photocopier at his place of work. When we got them back, I colored the photo-copies of the cover I'd drawn with color marker then glued them to the outside of 8-1/5" x 11" folders that had three adjustable metal tabs inside. My best friend punched holes in the copied manuscripts then assembled them on to the three tabs and *viola!* a book was created. It was all great fun but the best part of the process was the look on our friend's faces when they received their free copy – I will never forget that!

Most of them still have their copies.

I took what I learned from that experience and wrote a completely original, true novel called "The Yuletide Spirit" on the pages of a small notebook that had a blue cover. It was about an angel that comes down on a group of kids one winter in Meddybemps, Maine (It's a real place, I found it on an atlas!). Again, I used friends and family members as characters in the book but this time I changed all their names except mine. It was the first time I drew up a map of an entire town; using this map I could plot out where a certain adventure or important scene took place, I could see where all the characters lived and amazingly, using this map created new adventures and scenes I hadn't thought of before. When I let my friends read "The Yuletide Spirit," it was the first time I realized I could make readers cry. Someday, when I decide to revisit it again, maybe I'll send it out for publication, but for right now it's a little too personal for me to let go into the hands of strangers and editors. There's an innocence and charm about the book that will

get lost should I let it be edited by someone who doesn't fully understand the story or its origin – I don't want that yet, even if it's not technically well-written.

As the years passed, I self-published a couple sci-fi short story collections and then finally, in 2001, my first officially published novel, "The Opening and Closing of the Moon," was published. I haven't looked back since.

Thanks for your time,
GC Rosenquist