

Steven Cleaver, author of the new novel, *SAVING ERASMUS*

A Self-Interview

1. What inspired you to write your first book?

I wrote *Saving Erasmus* while I was in Quaker seminary. I was wrestling with issues of how to keep faith in a world that contains senseless tragedy and trauma. I was taking classes in Church History and Old Testament as well as in writing.

While I had never written a book, I had written short stories. I was in a class where I had to meet with my professor once a week to give him new material. The first week I gave him 6 pages which had been written the night before. He asked if I could write more for the next week. I responded to the challenge by producing the book that semester.

I wrote *Saving Erasmus* so that I could process my unresolved questions about how to maintain faith in a world that constantly was causing me to question. It was only after I had written it that I realized the significance of each part.

I also wanted to make Church History more accessible to people. *Saving Erasmus* has story within a story about the Reformation, which indeed was also about people trying to find what they believed in the midst of challenges.

2. How did you come up with the title?

Originally, the title was to be *Way Will Open*, which is a Quaker phrase that advises that indeed there will be way through any problem or an answer to a question. As I was

working on this book, I was also developing another and the title seemed to work better for that one.

The town is named after Desiderius Erasmus, a theologian who helped to start the Reformation. Since the main character is called to save the town, *Saving Erasmus* seemed a good title. I have found since then that Erasmus shared some common traits—sarcasm, wit, and early death of his parents—with the main character.

3. Is there a message in your novel that you want readers to grasp?

The book is truly about grace. It is about finding our guidance or truth through various media—but, in essence, that we are guided towards loving reconciliation with God. I think that God is accessible and that there are many ways God's word is given to us.

4. Are the experiences in the novel based on someone you know, or events in your own life?

Well, oddly, like Andrew, I have felt I had to save several non-profits. I have worked in more than one place where the director died, got sick, or was fired soon after I arrived. I then felt it was my responsibility to “save” the organization. It took a long time for me to see who really needed the saving.

5. Is there anything you find particularly challenging in your writing? What was the hardest part of writing your book?

I didn't realize until the editing process began, just how vulnerable I had made myself by writing this book. There was a point in the editing process where I wanted to stop. It allowed me to see my perception of myself—which was not always good.

I learned some things about myself while writing Erasmus. When I was a kid, I learned to ride a bike by coasting down a hill, pedaling and working to get just a little further each time. Bit by bit I learned to ride. Like learning to ride a bike, writing a book, meant pedaling just a bit more.

6. Do you have any advice for other writers?

Write.

7. Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

I will be publishing a study/reading guide to the novel so that people can understand more of the underlying and background information. Sign in to the guestbook on the webpage at www.savingerasmus.com.

8. *Saving Erasmus* combines humor with some very serious topics, why did you do that?

I think humor allows us protection as we go to understand “dark places.” Having the Angel of Death travel through washing machines balances his fearsomeness with ways that we can “hear” such things.

9. You say you have included references to church history, pop culture and biblical stories. Can you give examples?

Well, John Luther Zwingli's family were bakers. In the original story, the Zwinglis and the Luthers fought over a bread recipe much like Luther and Zwingli fighting over the meaning of the Eucharist. The references to Jonah are more obvious, but you also have the plagues (well, I added the cats and dogs). I have more subtle references such as the Lady and Tiger bus lines which refers to Frank Stockton's famous short story, "The Lady or the Tiger."

10. Where will you be speaking about the novel?

I have done workshops on Humor as Ministry and I have used the book to talk about the Reformation. I will be teaching Spiritual Humor at Omega Institute this summer as well as workshops on Finding Your Voice. I will also be giving at Quaker meetings and bookstores. Please visit my website for details.

11. Any other projects on your horizon?

I am working on a book called *Ghosts*. It is about ghosts and also how unresolved issues form into anxiety and indeed became ghosts that haunt us. It is about a man who is working in a nursing home who discovers that the ghosts of past inhabitants are performing crimes. I am also working on a few short stories and poems.