



OUTBACK: BOTHERS & SINISTERS CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

1. What is your inspiration for writing about the *Bothers & Sinisters* sibling dynamic?

I believe we all come from multifaceted dysfunctional family. The drama within the smallest of families offers rich writing inspiration. “Sissy,” my cousin Gayla, reminded me of bothersome and sinister things we did as children that our parents never knew. Funny thing was my parents, aunts, and uncles had the same experiences.

What inspired me to use a family tree as my inspiration was the falling out of family members and the severed relationships due to traumatic words that wounded the entire tree. Words in a family can change the entire dynamic for future generations.

When I was hurting as a kid, I found comfort out back in trees. I carved my childhood feelings on tree branches that healed over time hiding my words and feelings. I believe family trees heal much like trees in nature—over time.

2. Why is the Australian theme important in the *Family Tree Novels*?

I’ve always felt life would be different on the other side of the world. Australia’s size and location in the hemisphere was nearly opposite of the United States in position. They spoke a derivative of English as does the United States. One was founded on religious persecution the other by persecution of outlaws. These two worlds are rich in native culture and national treasures. I could explore both my entire life and be surprised daily.

3. What research did you do and how did you go about discovering your inspiration?

Reading and sharing my interest in places and ideas inspires me. When I decided to use the outback as my theme, I received various comments and feedback—positive and negative. Naturally I chose the theme since every parent and child has played in the magical outback at some point in their lives.

I chose to read children’s books to adult fiction about Australia. This taught me what Gulia’s character might learn at her age and what her mother might experience as an adult. Discussions about Australia revealed information about living there that I had not experienced. Smells, sounds, events, and moments only residents can relay.

Lastly I wrote a list of commonalities of Australian and United States families. I chose native folklore, ancient trees, and immigrant family history.

4. As a Kentucky native and a Florida transplant, how autobiographical is this story in comparison to your own?

I did pull from my own experiences of visiting my Kentucky family as an adult and how my Floridian children must feel when visiting Dawson Springs for weeks at a time. Growing up in Kentucky, my family was average middle class to most people living there and poor to outsiders when compared to big city living.

My childhood is a far cry from my adult life in a manicured Florida suburb. I wanted to share how caring for even the worst home can change everyone's perspective. Like Gulia grew to love the Qweepie farm saying she "could live there forever."

5. Which character do you have the closest connection to?

I feel a connection with each of the characters, they are like family. To pick one character I would say Killiope. As the oldest sibling in my family, I feel a responsibility for each of my siblings. Leaving home was my only escape from responsibilities, which soon caught up with me. As the series continues, I hope to become more relatable with each sibling hierarchy as the series continues.

6. Did you enjoy the writing process, since you've illustrated over fifty picture books?

I always enjoyed books as a child—from illustrations to reading. Making a career writing or illustrating books never came to mind. As a child my ambition was to become an animator after watching Walt Disney's movie, *Fantasia*. Once I discovered there were more profitable art careers besides animation, I began illustrating books. Being around creative writers, inspired my love of writing. I'm a firm believer, you are who you associate with.

7. How do you approach the writing process?

My writing process is fairly structured. I outline the story using a historical timeline which guides the rhythm of each book. As ideas appear, I categorize them into their respective place within the story timeline. I also parallel historical facts and words I want included from the time periods. Some days I sit inside my screened pool and become a prisoner to the story. Every breath is a moment trapped within Driew Qweepie's story.

8. What part of the writing process do you love most?

My favorite thing about being a writer is hearing from readers! Connecting with book lovers reminds me what writing fiction is all about—escape for us all. I enjoy reading Goodreads and Amazon reviews and seeing posts about the story—both positive and negative. I can't improve without their honest feedback.

9. When do you decide to share the *OUTBACK* writing with others?

I waited until the *OUTBACK* book was half completed—about eight chapters. These chapters are rough and very general in creative language. My goal was to give a bland idea of the plot, character action, and historical content. If this was enough to inspire others to ask questions or want more, then the creative embellishments would be much easier.

For the first novel, I had my wife read it. She is very thorough and not a reader. Needless to say, she only read it once, and wasn't excited. My next version was much more polished and the reader had decent feedback.

By the Beta Reader stage, all sixteen chapters had been edited using *Fire Up Your Fiction*, an editing guide written by a colleague, Jodi Renner. Her book was a great resource for a newbie or established writer. I went chapter by chapter and was critical of what I'd written. Trimming excess really makes a difference when creating a fast reading fiction book.

10. Who were your favorite childhood writers and why?

At age 13, Stephen King's werewolves of the *Silver Bullet* stalked my warm Kentucky summer nights. King's photo spooked me, and his writings haunted me. Really cool feeling when an author chooses the proper sequence of words to spur an emotion. To this day I feel *Misery* hearing "I'm your biggest fan!"

11. What advice would you offer new writers?

Don't wait to write a great novel. Age is not a limitation to becoming an author. Write everyday moments until the novel reveals itself in your average day.

Write often in any format possible. Siri's dictation on my Apple devices lets me write while walking, driving, or when I'm too lazy to use my thumbs. I carry my *Best Sketchbook* with me most everywhere to write and draw my thoughts. Use an app like A Novel Idea or software like Scrivener to keep track of your notes. Import your journal entries, dictations, and loose notes once a week into one main document that shows the word count. That will show you how quickly the story grows.

Join a professional writing group to enhance your writing. Join a publishing group to learn the marketing behind writing. Lastly, support local independent book stores. They will be the first to stock your book.

12. In the Author Biography, you indicate *OUTBACK* was inspired by a brown doll you had during your childhood. Where did the doll come from and what other life experience was used in the novel?

In the years since my childhood, I've learned to appreciate the value of dolls and toys as companions in my life. As a Caucasian boy, owning a brown baby doll named Driew was open season for teasing. I protected our colorful relationship which made me a better man in many ways.

I have what I've come to call an "adopted family," characters who came into my life when my family is absent. In their own way, they provided me with an imaginative love that became the structure for my artistic talent. I thank Driew and many more like him.

In *OUTBACK*, I wanted to bring some of my out back magic to the book. I wanted the book to be about the bonds formed between people that become your adopted family. Hopefully readers are engaged by my writing.

13. *OUTBACK* is set in the small town of Dawson Springs, Kentucky. Why did you choose to set the novel here?

I've lived nearly my entire life in a small town. I'm fascinated by the customs of small towns. Relationships there are a social dance that you don't get in major cities. I think I'll always write about this lifestyle.

Dawson Springs is my hometown in Western Kentucky. The Qweepie farm combines my parent's family farms and a 1939 home where I lived briefly in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. I think using the town is a homage to the people who asked me, "Remember me when you're famous!"

14. In addition to being a novelist, you are also a children's book illustrator. How has being an illustrator impacted your novel writing?

It keeps me focused on the importance of words. I overwrite most scenes and deeply edit my writing to be more precise with my words. This has taught me to appreciate the usage of illustrations with words. Rather than writing numerous pages to explain a message that can be brief and poignant.

15. When you began the *Family Tree Novels*, did you have the adventure completely outlined? How have you been surprised along the way? Were the introductions of additional characters important in the influence of the story's direction?

At the start of the series, I had a thin thread of intention of the entire series, five books. I'm a supporter of timelines and outlines. I used several drafts that were stimulated from the main outline. The titles and Australian theme came as I introduced Gulia's character. The attraction to Australia and the region inspired the titles.

The character that surprised me the most was Ida Mae. She was a character who was a first draft villain. "The maid did it" theme was my original intent with Ida Mae. Through the revisions, I saw the potential of her adoption into the family. She forced me to choose a dark underlying problem in my childhood to face. I think she has become a fabulous addition to the story.

16. What was your most challenging limitation while writing *OUTBACK* and what has been the best pleasure?

The greatest challenge was eliminating my prior illustration projects and focusing in on my writing time. I had to eliminate my personal choices and focus on the characters' lives. I also didn't want readers to be mired in details of Driew's torturous life. Readers should experience the positives in his journey: small town life and personal relationships.

The greatest pleasure has been, participating in Driew's adventure whether living my family life, driving on book tours, walking, or trying to fall asleep. Writing has become a journey I commit to each day. Not the most talented side of my artistic profile, but a frustrating and exhilarating challenge at the same time.

17. What can you tell us about *DOWN UNDER* the next book in the series?

I don't want to share too much about the upcoming book. But I will say that *DOWN UNDER* is a faster progression of understanding Driew's family magic. A miraculous event happens between he and Pester, his big bother, that will reach far into the choices of Driew's manhood.