

A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL HALL

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I was working on a book for my brother and sister-in-law that used heart shapes to retell the story of their meeting and engagement in San Francisco. After I added a heart-shaped elephant seal, I kept seeing other animal possibilities. Eventually, I put the book aside and continued to make animals out of hearts.

How long did it take you to write *My Heart Is Like a Zoo*?

I worked on this book along with five others over the course of three or four years.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

It was a struggle to find a cover that satisfied me as well as the publisher. For a long time I worried that my first book would end up with a cover that I didn't like. Finally, when I enlarged the lion's face so that it spilled off the edges of the cover, we had a solution that worked for everyone.

What do you hope your readers take away from *My Heart Is Like a Zoo*?

That it's normal to have lots of different feelings, and it's okay to talk about them.

"It's normal to have lots of different feelings, and it's okay to talk about them."

What was your journey to becoming a published author.

I wanted to be a writer when I was very young. But I had dyslexia (which makes it hard to read) and struggled in English classes, so the notion faded. In college, I focused on the sciences, but found myself writing stories constantly. I was too embarrassed to admit that I loved to write, so all my stories were embedded in fanciful letters to friends. I would say something like: "Dear Jean, I was chased by a brontosaurus this morning — which seemed odd because I thought they were vegetarians." They went on and on. I rarely mailed them.

After a few unfulfilling years in biomedical research, I went back to school in graphic design and began a long and satisfying career expressing ideas with shape and color. My favorite projects were the ones that I wrote and illustrated as well as designed. This gave me a sense of how I might approach children's books. I worked on my own books for six years before contacting a publisher. *My Heart Is Like a Zoo* was published four years later.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

The long winters are helpful in that one can work comfortably for long hours without the nagging need to go outside and play.

I live in Marine on St. Croix, which is a very supportive community. Many of my neighbors are artists of one kind or another. We rarely discuss our creative work, but their presence seems important somehow.

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

Spending time with family and friends and taking long, long walks.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature



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MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Children's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Books For Africa

My Heart Is Like a

ZOO

Michael Hall

My Heart Is Like a Zoo

by Michael Hall

GREENWILLOW BOOKS/HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS

My Heart Is Like a Zoo



SUMMARY

This bright picture book features twenty animals created out of heart shapes. Michael Hall invites his young readers to encounter familiar and new animals in his colorful zoo land through playful rhymes and bright descriptions. The book encourages children to familiarize themselves with the animals, discuss emotions and feelings, and explore shapes and colors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which is your favorite animal, and why? What colors remind you of that animal?
2. What feelings or characteristics do you think of when you think of a bear, weasel, hornet, butterfly, snake, giraffe, horse, tiger, mouse, mosquito, rat, bird or fish?
3. Which animal do you think is the most lonely, happy, friendly, worried, quick, scary, funny, angry or silly?
4. Which animal reminds you of yourself the most? Is this the same animal as your favorite animal?
5. Why do you think the animals are all

made out of hearts?

6. What other animals could you make out of heart shapes?
7. What animals would you have put in this book? What shapes would you use to make your own animals?
8. What is your favorite page in the book, and why?
9. The author wrote the book in a style that's called poetry. What is poetry?
10. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?

ABOUT MICHAEL HALL

Michael Hall is an award-winning graphic designer whose work has been widely recognized for its simple and engaging approach. He studied biochemistry and psychology at the University of Michigan and worked in biomedical research for several years before becoming a designer. He is the co-owner and principal designer at Hall Kelley, Inc., and lives with his wife and two daughters in Minnesota. This is his first book for children.



Learn more about the author and his work at www.michaelhallbooks.com.



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Library Service Agency (MELSA); Milkweed Editions; Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Historical Society Press; Minnesota Library Foundation; MLBA Children's Fund; MS&R; The Red Balloon Bookshop; Saint Paul Almanac; University of Minnesota Press; and Voyageur Press/MVP Books. Media sponsors include Minnesota Public Radio; the Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); and TPT-Minnesota Channel. Generous support for the Book Awards has been provided by The Boss Foundation; City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; The Huss Foundation; and the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.

23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH LIGHTSEY DARST

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

In one sense, this book is deeply personal. *Find the Girl* springs from my middle school years (6th-8th grade). That was a rough time for me. Not that anything in particular happened; it was

How long did it take you to write the collection?

Find the Girl took two years of solid work. That's from when I knew I was writing it and it was a book to when I completed the nearly-final revision. In that time, I wrote and rewrote the book so many times I began to

What was your journey to becoming a published poet?

I remember thinking of myself as a writer from a very early age, before I actually even wrote anything. That's one answer. The other answer is that I never wanted to be a poet. I became a poet by discovering that I could not care enough to do other things. I wanted to be a historian—but I found I didn't care about facts; I wanted to be a professor of literature—but I found I didn't care about theories (they're interesting, but I'm not a believer); I wanted to be a fiction writer—but I found I didn't care about plots or characters. Thus, poetry!

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

Dancing! I take ballet class two or three times a week and I have since I was four and a half. I love that exploration and lift. I'm always learning something new in dance class.

"The experience will be different for every reader, but I hope it's unsettling yet beautiful. I hope readers find themselves driven through the book like Snow White running through the woods."

just the usual awfulness.

I remembered this time so clearly for years, but I just didn't think about those memories much (and I certainly never talked about them). Then they started coming out in my writing.

What research did you undertake in writing *Find the Girl*?

I read some CSI-tech type books, accounts of real cases and so on. I read some books about serial killers (not many—they're often disgusting). I read a little on archaeology. I read a lot of pulp detective novels. I also had a lot of conversations with women. I would tell them what I was working on and they would tell me stories. For me, that's research.

feel like an archaeologist, digging down through the layers of my own Troy. The layers went deep because the earliest poem in *Find the Girl* was written in 2002, and many poems that fed the book (even if they didn't end up in it) were written before 2005, before I knew what I was doing.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Find the Girl*?

An experience. The experience will be different for every reader, but I hope it's unsettling yet beautiful. I hope readers find themselves driven through the book like Snow White running through the woods. I hope they wonder whether they need to go back for a missing clue.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

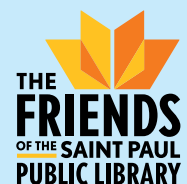
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23RD ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Poetry Winner

Category sponsored by
Wellington Management, Inc.

Find the Girl

POEMS

Lightsey Darst

Find the Girl
by Lightsey Darst

COFFEE HOUSE PRESS

Find the Girl



SUMMARY

From Snow White to the Yde Girl and Helen of Troy, to JonBenét Ramsey, this lurid and lyrical debut explores the transition from girlhood to womanhood and America's fascination with missing and exploited children. Topical and timely, Lightsey Darst's poems draw from both the oldest tales and the current vein of child/young woman endangerment horror. The poet recalls and responds to true crime exposés, pulp detective fiction, classic fables, modern novels like *The Lovely Bones*, and TV shows like "Law @ Order."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the collection's main themes?
2. What fairy or folk tale characters were important to you as you grew up, and why?
3. What have you witnessed? What is the role of a witness?
4. Which places and times in *Find the Girl* do you most connect with? Why?
5. Which poems reminded you of yourself or someone you know? Were the memories associated with your reading positive or negative, and why?
6. Do you like to watch CSI-type shows? If so, why?
7. Why is voice so important in this book? How does reading the poems out loud affect your experience?
8. Did you find the stream-of-consciousness sentences to be creatively freeing or distracting? Did the poet's style successfully enhance and emphasize her main themes?
9. Did you prefer to read the poems individually or in a sequence? Can the poet's themes and styles be better understood by taking one poem at a time randomly or reading the collection in the given order?
10. What does this collection of poems say about the coming-of-age experience of young women?

ABOUT LIGHTSEY DARST

Originally from Tallahassee, Florida, Lightsey Darst is a writing instructor, dance critic, and dancer who lives in Minneapolis where she curates a writers' salon. The recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, her poems have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *Diagram*, *Gulf Coast*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *New Letters*, and elsewhere. *Find the Girl* is her first collection of poems.



Learn more about the author and her work at www.lightseydarst.com.



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Library Service Agency (MELSA); Milkweed Editions; Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Historical Society Press; Minnesota Library Foundation; MLBA Children's Fund; MS&R; The Red Balloon Bookshop; *Saint Paul Almanac*; University of Minnesota Press; and Voyageur Press/MVP Books. Media sponsors include Minnesota Public Radio; the *Pioneer Press* and *TwinCities.com*; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); and TPT-Minnesota Channel. Generous support for the Book Awards has been provided by The Boss Foundation; City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; The Huss Foundation; and the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.

23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH WENDY WEBB

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

My spouse, Steve Burmeister, and I took a vacation to Mackinac Island, which struck me as one of the most beautiful — and eeriest — places I had ever visited. I think it was the combination of traveling everywhere in horse-and-carriage (no cars are allowed on the island), the 100-plus-year-old Victorian mansions (many now bed-and-breakfast inns) and the prominent, ancient cemetery that got me thinking about a ghost story.

How long did it take you to write the book?

Not long. Six months at most, including edits.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *The Tale of Halcyon Crane*?

First, with a full-time job (I'm a magazine editor) and a family, finding the time to write was a challenge. Secondly, since I don't outline my books, sometimes I'd write myself into a corner and have to puzzle my way out. It involved lots of walks with the dog, mulling over plot points!

What do you like most about the book?

My favorite thing about the book is something very sentimental. Madlyn's two Alaskan malamutes, Tundra and Tika, are my two dogs. Tika passed away before the book was published,

"I'm a Minnesotan through and through. My characters are conglomerations of people I've known in my life, or wish to know, and they're all Minnesotan."

and Tundra passed away while I was on the book tour. Now they are immortalized together in my first novel. That's pretty special.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

When I was about 13 years old, I read *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle. After I finished it, I knew I wanted to be an author and write books for a living. But the journey was not an easy one. I wrote, with a co-author, a young adult fantasy novel that

was quickly picked up by a major publisher, but we lost that deal. I wrote another novel, on my own this time, that didn't find a publisher. *Halcyon* was my third effort. I wasn't going to stop writing until I came up with a book that worked. Luckily for me, I have a fantastic agent who has believed in me from the very first day.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

There is a mysticism and a sense of magic about the Great Lakes—and Lake Superior in particular—that has a great pull for me. Also, I'm a Minnesotan through and through. My characters are conglomerations of people I've known in my life, or wish to know, and they're all Minnesotan.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

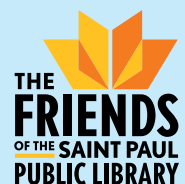
Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's

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Genre Fiction Winner

*Category sponsored by
Marvin Windows and Doors*

*"The Tale of Halcyon Crane is a wonderful gothic complete with ghosts and witches, graveyards and dreams. Captivating and haunting, this debut proves Wendy Webb is a very gifted storyteller."
—M. J. Ross, author of The Moorland*

THE TALE OF HALCYON CRANE



WENDY WEBB

The Tale of Halcyon Crane

by Wendy Webb

HENRY HOLT & COMPANY

The Tale of Halcyon Crane

SUMMARY

When a mysterious letter lands in Hallie James' mailbox, her life is upended. Hallie was raised by a loving father, having been told that her mother, Madlyn, died in a fire decades earlier. But it turns out that Madlyn was alive until just recently. Why would Hallie's father have lied and taken her away from Madlyn? What really happened to their family thirty years ago? In search of answers, Hallie travels to Madlyn's home on a remote island in the middle of the Great Lakes, where she encounters dark secrets and unexpected experiences.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Was Madlyn alive when she wrote the letter?
3. Was Hallie's father justified in taking her away from her mother?
4. What do you think of Madlyn as a mother?
5. Did Noah believe Hallie killed her friend?
6. When did you first sense there was something unusual about the elderly maid?
7. How would the story have been different if Hallie's destination had been a city such as Duluth or Minneapolis instead of a remote island?
8. Do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever seen a ghost? Do you know anyone who has?
9. Is Hallie's family history unusual, or do most of us have dark secrets in our family's history?
10. When you think about the elements that make a really good mystery, what are they, and to what extent are they used in *The Tale of Halcyon Crane*?



ABOUT WENDY WEBB

Wendy Webb grew up in St. Louis Park. She attended the University of Minnesota, graduating with a degree in political science. During the past 20 years, Wendy has written for most of the major publications in the Twin Cities. She now lives in the gorgeous port city of Duluth with her husband, son, and their dog. Wendy is editor-in-chief of Duluth-Superior Magazine, a lifestyle monthly.



Learn more about the author and her work at www.wendykwebb.com.



Minnesota Department of Education



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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL NORDSKOG AND AARON HAUTALA

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

Michael: I gained a strong interest in saunas as an ethnographic subject when I rehabilitated the lakeside bathhouse at our family cabin in northern Minnesota. Given the abundance of handsome and unique saunas in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario, a book of this scope seemed to be a worthwhile endeavor to preserve traditions for future generations.

Aaron: Growing up in the northwoods of Minnesota and taking a sauna every Saturday night from birth to the day I left for college.

What research did you undertake in writing *The Opposite of Cold*?

Michael: The core of my research involved reading pretty much every book written about saunas. I also spent a lot of time in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. But the best experience by far was visiting the sites of significant saunas and interviewing the folks who owned them, while Aaron took his stunning photographs.

Aaron: Michael did the heavy lifting for the story of

the book, while I researched architectural photography and also the new technology of HDR photography.

How long did it take you to write the book?

Michael: The project took about five years from inception to publication.

Aaron: 2+ years of photography, every other weekend, traveling from Finland to Canada, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in working on the book?

Michael: I was dead set against compiling a categorical depiction of Finnish saunas as a distinct architectural type, because that would have read like a glossary. Yet I wanted to include every possible detail—from which wood burns the hottest to why Finns settled where they did—throughout the narrative. So I spent a lot of time plotting the best place to include each idea.

Aaron: Photographic challenges were around every bend. How do you make a small outbuilding look interesting and unique when capturing around 100 of them?

What do you hope your readers take away from reading *The Opposite of Cold*?

Michael: I hope that readers who are familiar with saunas as a family tradition can look at this book and gain a renewed sense of pride in the practice, and those who see it as something a bit odd or exotic will be inspired to give it a try.

Aaron: The beauty, the passion, and the story behind sauna. It's not just a hot box; it's a family memory and a treasure. This book is the best gift I could ever give back to my parents as a thank you for the way I was raised.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer or photographer?

Michael: I have wanted to be a writer for as long as I remember, but I really began to realize that I could write well after I finished law school in my thirties—law school is like boot camp for writers. After some luck getting magazine features published and writing for “A Prairie Home Companion,” it seemed like I was on to something!

Aaron: I knew I wanted to be a published photographer when I was at Irma's Finland House in Virginia, Minnesota during college. I was home on Christmas break and I noticed a book from Finland that had a photographer with the last name of Hautala on the cover. At that moment I promised to myself, “Someday, that will be me.”

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

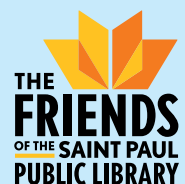
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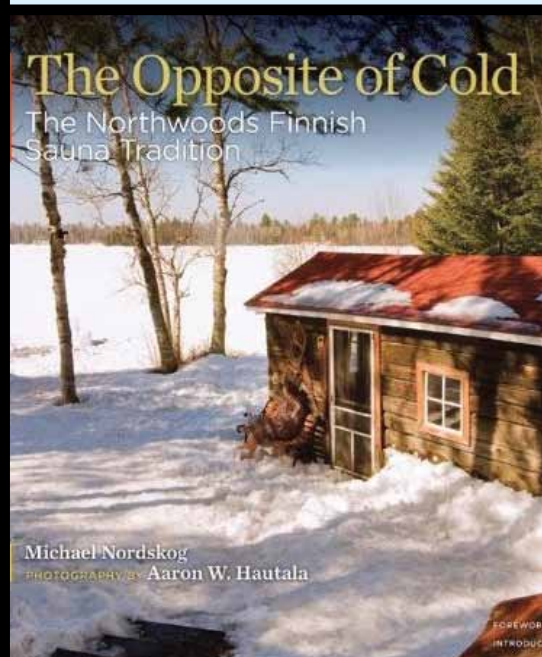
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MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

General Nonfiction Winner

Category sponsored by Minnesota AFL-CIO



The Opposite of Cold:
The Northwoods Finnish Sauna Tradition

by Michael Nordskog
photography by Aaron W. Hautala

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

The Opposite of Cold



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. How did the book expand your knowledge of the Northwoods beyond what you learned about the sauna tradition?
3. How did the relationship between text and photography contribute to your reading experience?
4. Which image in *The Opposite of Cold* drew you in the most?
5. How is sauna distinct from other bathing traditions like Native American sweat lodges or the Turkish bath?
6. What are some other ethnic practices that have survived the melting pot to make our culture more interesting?
7. Why do you think the issue of nudity in the sauna is so fascinating to Americans?
8. Does the sauna tradition remind you of any traditions, rituals, or hobbies in your life or that of your family?
9. Would you prefer a posh, modern version of a sauna or a traditional, rustic sauna?
10. If you wrote a nonfiction book on some aspect of Midwestern life, what topic would you chose?



ABOUT MICHAEL NORDSKOG AND AARON HAUTALA



(Aaron Hautala at left, Michael Nordskog at right)

Michael Nordskog grew up in the heart of North American sauna country. He works as an attorney, writer, and editor, and he lives with his wife and three children on a farm near Viroqua, Wisconsin.

Learn more about Nordskog and his work at www.michaelnordskog.wordpress.com.

Aaron W. Hautala is creative director and owner of RedHouseMedia in Brainerd, Minnesota. He has helped launch a variety of magazines and was the founding art director at Lake Country Journal.

Learn more about Hautala and his work at www.RedHouseMedia.com.

SUMMARY

Beginning with the origins of Finnish sauna and its arrival in North America, and continuing all the way to contemporary design, *The Opposite of Cold* is a commemoration of the history, culture, and practice of Finnish sauna in the Northwoods. With stunning photographs of unique and historic saunas of the region, Michael Nordskog and Aaron W. Hautala unveil the importance and beauty of sauna culture in modern Midwestern life.



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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH PETE HAUTMAN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

The novel *Shane* by Jack Schaefer. I've always been fond of the classic Western in which a stranger with a mysterious/dark past comes to town, befriends a vulnerable party, and defends him or her from the forces of evil using raw courage and remarkable fighting skills. But I didn't want to write a Western, so I set the book in a present day city, traded the horses for motorcycles, and used tasers instead of Colt .45s.

How long did it take you to write *Blank Confession*?

A couple of years, working on it on and off. I usually keep several projects going. As I was working on *Blank Confession*, I was also writing a love story called *The Big Crunch*, and a sci-fi trilogy.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Mostly technical stuff. The structure of the book is rather odd—it's half in first person, from Mikey's point-of-view, and half in a sort of third/second person hybrid, in which Shayne tells his half of the story to Detective Rawls. Although the book is inspired by *Shane*, it's structured more as a mystery and a

psychological study. It took some time to puzzle it together in a way that made sense and would be satisfying to read.

"I aspire to brevity. For me, the ideal novel is one that can be read in an evening. Not that I don't appreciate "big" books, but it's the short ones like *The Remains of the Day*, *Damage*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Leaving Cheyenne* that really knock me out."

What do you like most about *Blank Confession*?

Its length. I aspire to brevity. For me, the ideal novel is one that can be read in an evening. Not that I don't appreciate "big" books, but it's the short ones like *The Remains of the Day*, *Damage*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Leaving Cheyenne* that really knock me out. Having said that, I'm now working on a thousand-pager. I'll probably like that one for its length as well.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I could go on forever about that. The short version is I wanted to write ever since I was a teenager, but I got distracted by a bunch of other stuff for twenty years before I got serious. Once I made writing a priority, it took about five years for me to write something I thought was publishable. I found an agent who agreed with me, and I've been doing it ever since. It was hard back then, and it's still hard. But I love it.

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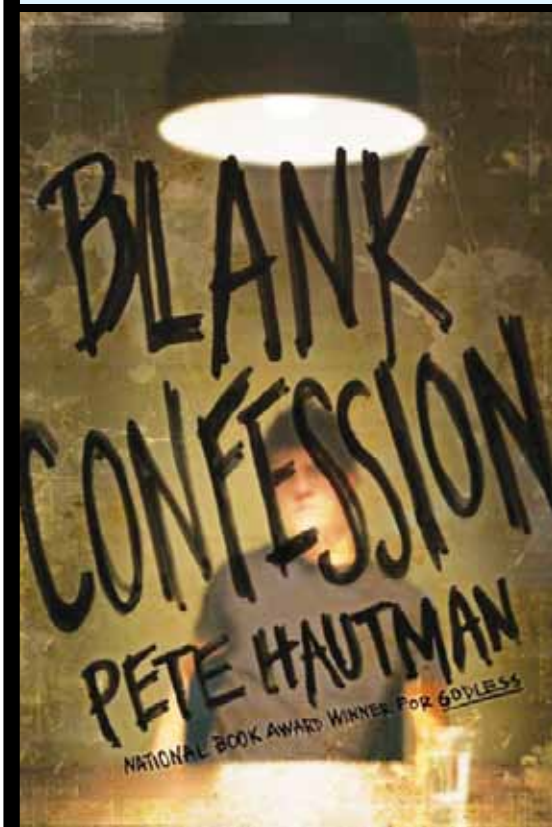
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Young People's Literature Winner

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Blank Confession
by Pete Hautman

SIMON & SCHUSTER

Blank Confession



SUMMARY

Shayne Blank walks into a police station and confesses to having killed someone. How could the quiet, unassuming new kid in town be a murderer? It's hard to believe, but as Shayne tells his story, Detective Rawls is forced to face the reality that Shayne may be a lot more than he seems. But who is he? Pete Hautman spins a story that has readers on the edge of their seats, unsure of who or what to believe, until the very last page.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. According to the author, *Blank Confession* was inspired by a Western novel and movie, *Shane*, from sixty years ago. In what ways, if any, does the book remind you of a Western?
3. The author says he used many metaphors in the book including the storm, the tree stump, and Mikey's suits. What do these represent? What are some of the book's other metaphors?
4. Why has the author chosen to write in both first and third person? How would the book read differently if it was written in just one voice?
5. Mikey's sister comes from a "good" family, but she's seriously messed up. Why do you think this is?
6. Most of the characters in *Blank Confession* have radically transformed themselves in some way—Mikey with his suits, Shayne with his avenging angel persona, Rawls shifting from being a teacher to a cop. Why do people do that? Or do they?
7. Which of the characters do you find most likeable, and why? In what ways do the teens in the book seem like typical teens, and in what ways do they strike you as atypical?
8. To what extent did the story unfold in a predictable

9. Several reviewers have said that *Blank Confession* is about bullying. The author asks, "Is it really? Or is bullying just the hot new talking point, replacing ADHD and anorexia as the number one thing for parents and teachers to fret over?"
10. If you wrote a book for a teen audience, what topic and title would you choose?

ABOUT PETE HAUTMAN

Pete Hautman is the author of Godless, winner of the National Book Award, and many other critically acclaimed books for teens and adults including All-In, Rash, No Limit, Invisible, and Mr. Was. He grew up in St. Louis Park and attended both the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and the University of Minnesota. Hautman and his partner, novelist and poet Mary Logue, split their time between Golden Valley, Minnesota and Stockholm, Wisconsin.



Learn more about the author and his work at www.petehautman.com or petehautman.blogspot.com.



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Library Service Agency (MELSA); Milkweed Editions; Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Historical Society Press; Minnesota Library Foundation; MLBA Children's Fund; MS&R; The Red Balloon Bookshop; *Saint Paul Almanac*; University of Minnesota Press; and Voyageur Press/MVP Books. Media sponsors include Minnesota Public Radio; the *Pioneer Press* and *TwinCities.com*; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); and TPT-Minnesota Channel. Generous support for the Book Awards has been provided by The Boss Foundation; City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; The Huss Foundation; and the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.

A CONVERSATION WITH LAURIE HERTZEL

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

Perhaps the biggest impetus was a discussion that took place a few years ago on the electronic bulletin board at the *Star Tribune*. A copy editor posted a message wondering why the word “employees” was misspelled on one of our doors. It was spelled “employes.” But I knew that back in the old days, newspapers often used simplified spelling, to save space, such as “cigaret” instead of “cigarette.” So a lively discussion sprang up about other newspaper traditions—no whistling in the newsroom, the early Sunday paper being called the bulldog, and others. And it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to somehow preserve this history, which was fast disappearing.

How long did it take you to write *News to Me*?

It took just about a year. Maybe a little longer. I wrote in the mornings, I wrote at night after work, and I wrote on Sunday afternoons. I also used almost all of my vacation time to work on the book. My husband and I rented a cabin up north for two weeks, and I wrote every morning and then hiked every afternoon. I came back with 6,000 words—that gave me a good start.

What challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Well, the biggest challenge was time. I got the book contract the same week I got a new job—as books editor at the *Star Tribune*, a job that requires an enormous amount of reading (on my own time). And so for a full

“I like that many, many people—primarily women—have identified with the whole ‘accidental’ part of the book, and I love hearing their stories of how they, too, fell into their lives and careers by chance.”

year, whenever I was reading I worried that I should be writing, and whenever I was writing I thought I should be reading. It was a stressful year.

What do you like most about *News to Me*?

I like that people have told me that it’s a fun read, and funny. I think it’s a real privilege to be able to make people laugh. I also like that many, many people—primarily women—have identified with the whole “accidental” part of the book,

and I love hearing their stories of how they, too, fell into their lives and careers by chance.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I have always written, all my life. I grew up in a family of writers and readers, and wrote my first “book” when I was still in grade school. (It was called “Balloon Magic,” and it was a total rip-off of Edward Eager’s *Half Magic*.) I started sending short stories out to magazines when I was 13, and my father was deeply impressed—far more than I was—when I got a personal letter from an editor at Harper’s, kindly rejecting my story and suggesting other markets. I have published short fiction in literary journals, and I have written two other books of nonfiction. And, of course, many, many, many newspaper and magazine pieces.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

- Children’s Literature
- General Nonfiction
- Genre Fiction
- Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
- Minnesota Novel & Short Story
- Poetry
- Young People’s Literature


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23RD ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Reader’s Choice Winner

Category sponsored by Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com



News to Me:
Adventures of an Accidental Journalist
by Laurie Hertzell

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

News to Me



SUMMARY

News to Me is the story of Laurie Hertzell's journey into the bustling world of print journalism in the mid-1970s, a time when copy was still banged out on typewriters by chain-smoking men in fedoras. The book chronicles Hertzell's 18-year career at the *Duluth News-Tribune* that began when journalism was a predominantly male profession. Major events took place during her time at the paper, including the Congdon murders, the establishment of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, and the rise of Indian treaty rights.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Describe the author's style of writing. How did her tone and use of language affect your experience of her story?
3. How might the author's career at the newspaper have been different if she was a man?
4. What did you learn about Duluth, and did your perception of the city

change by reading *News to Me*?

5. To what extent was the author's development as a journalist "accidental," and in what ways did the author shape her career at the paper?
6. In what ways did the book confirm what you thought about the newspaper business in the 1970s and 1980s, and what did you learn that surprised you?
7. In the 1980s, daily newspapers were big, newsrooms were bustling, and everybody read the paper. What are your views of how this industry has changed?
8. The author's father used to say, "Memory is a slippery thing." What are your expectations when you open a memoir? Do you expect it to be the literal truth?
9. The author has said, "It takes a lot of research to augment memories that are 20 and 30 years old." What kind of research might the author have done in writing her book, and what research would you undertake in writing your story?
10. What would an appropriate title be for your memoir?



ABOUT LAURIE HERTZEL

Laurie Hertzell grew up in Duluth where she spent nearly twenty years at the Duluth News-Tribune as a newsroom clerk, librarian, feature writer, news editor, and columnist. Her journalistic work has won numerous national awards, and her short fiction was honored with the Thomas Wolfe Fiction Prize. Hertzell is currently the books editor for the Star Tribune and is co-author of They Took My Father: Finnish Americans in Stalin's Russia.



Learn more about the author and her work at www.lauriehertzell.com or www.lifewiththreedogs.blogspot.com.



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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH MARY LETHERT WINGERD

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

The early history of the land that became Minnesota has too long been neglected. For two hundred years before Minnesota became a state, Native people (Dakotas and Ojibwes) and Europeans/Euro-Americans lived and worked together here; they inter-married and created a hybrid culture that was neither fully Indian nor European. I thought that the creation and later destruction of this world was an important missing piece of our history.

What research did you undertake in writing *North Country*?

Because *North Country* covers a period of more than two hundred years, I relied on existing scholarship as well as archival research. Specialists in Native American history and the history of the fur trade were particularly important in helping me weave all the strands of the story together.

What do you like most about the book?

What I most appreciate is the loving care that the University of Minnesota Press lavished on the book's production,

especially the wonderful color plates that help bring the period to life. What I like most about my narrative are the historical characters

"After becoming a historian and an academic, I was determined to write scholarly history in a way that was engaging and accessible to interested readers who were not academics."

that I came to know like old friends (or foes) during the writing process.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

From the time I learned to read, I loved to write stories and was fascinated by the past. I was particularly entranced by Maude Hart Lovelace's Betsy-Tacy series that was set in turn-of-the-century Mankato. After becoming a historian and an academic, I was determined to write scholarly history in a way that was engaging and accessible to interested readers who were not academics.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I believe that every place has fascinating stories to be uncovered if you ask the right questions. But American historians have largely ignored the old Northwest and Upper Great Lakes region, which I think are critical to understanding American history. Besides, I am a fifth-generation Saint Paulite and to my mind there is no place like Minnesota!

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I love to read, especially fiction. I think reading good fiction helps keep academics like me from falling into the dreaded (and dreadful) academ-ese that sadly made generations of students decide that history was boring and dull. So not true! History is exciting and full of intrigue and passion. Try it and see for yourself.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

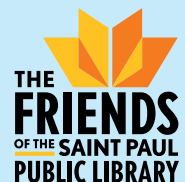
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

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Minnesota Winner

Category sponsored by Xcel Energy

NORTH COUNTRY

THE MAKING OF MINNESOTA



MARY LETHERT WINGERD

North Country: The Making of Minnesota

by Mary Lethert Wingerd

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

North Country



SUMMARY

This comprehensive text explains how the land the Dakota named *Mini Sota Makoce* became the State of Minnesota. Moving from the earliest years of contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the western Great Lakes region to the era of French and British influence during the fur trade and beyond, Mary Lethert Wingerd charts how for two centuries Native people and Europeans in the region maintained a hesitant, largely mutually beneficial relationship. This racially hybridized society was a meeting point for cultural and economic exchange until the western expansion of American capitalism and violation of treaties by the U.S. government during the 1850s wore sharply at this tremulous bond.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Minnesota history change when we situate Native people at the center rather than on the periphery of the story?
2. Definitions of race change quite markedly with the coming of settlement. What does this suggest about concepts of racial difference and hierarchies?
3. Do you think it would have been possible for Minnesota to have evolved differently? Could Indians and whites have crafted a society where they lived together as equals?
4. Which section of *North Country* did you find most compelling?
5. What can the history of Minnesota tell us about the larger American story?
6. The sesquicentennial of the 1862 Dakota Conflict is coming up in 2012. How should that event be commemorated?

7. How do the illustrations and graphics affect your reading experience?
8. How does this book fit into the modern relationship between Native Americans and European Americans in Minnesota?
9. How does *North Country* present a new angle on a long-standing issue?
10. If you wrote a book on an aspect of Minnesota history, what topic would you choose?

ABOUT MARY LETHERT WINGERD

Mary Lethert Wingerd is associate professor of history at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. She is the author of *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul*.



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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH BONNIE J. ROUGH

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

Carrier began in 2004 as a story about my mother and grandfather. At the time, I was newly married and childless, and the best true

the West on three separate research trips. I dug up legal documents, court papers, medical records, business transactions, family photos, and my mother's and grandparents' personal letters and notes. I interviewed my family,

"I made sure to walk on the old farmstead, visit my mother's childhood homes, smell the earth, feel the heat in the air. Where concrete evidence couldn't bring perfect clarity, I used my own impressions, experience, and common sense to connect the dots."

story I knew was the tale of my mother's childhood in the shadow of her father's troubled life. For three years, I researched and wrote their story, without realizing how it was eventually going to connect to my own life. I had a professor who kept asking why I needed to write this narrative about my forebears. I thought, "Well, because it's a great story—why not?" But finally he asked me point blank: "Isn't it true that your grandfather's story represents your own worst fears for your children?"

What research did you undertake in writing *Carrier*?

To uncover my family history, I traveled all over

my grandfather's old friends, even the families of my grandfather's deceased acquaintances. I interviewed detectives, doctors, even a coroner. I made sure to walk on the old farmstead, visit my mother's childhood homes, smell the earth, feel the heat in the air. Where concrete evidence couldn't bring perfect clarity, I used my own impressions, experience, and common sense to connect the dots.

What do you like most about the book?

I love hearing readers say *Carrier* is a page-turner. It took five years to write, so I think I was worried it would take five years to read! But so many readers have shared with me that they

were so gripped that it only took two or three days from cover to cover. I'm proud to have written a true story with such a strong pull.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

Even before I could spell, I knew I wanted to be a writer. When I was five, I filled a miniature notebook with a story about two kids and their kitten. I handed my mom the "book" I had written, and part of her encouragement was to tell me she loved my choice of "Fussy" for the kitten's name. "Fuzzy," I corrected her. "Z's, then," she corrected me, and I got busy with my eraser. I still love to be edited. Working with my agent and editor to take each chapter of *Carrier* to new heights was the absolute best part of my publishing experience.

How has living in Minnesota informed your writing?

Dozens of scenes in my book demonstrate how Minnesota interweaves with my life. The landscape supports my inner life while the neighborhoods and people enrich my social life. And beyond *Carrier*, with a Bush Artist Fellowship, a McKnight arts fellowship, a Minnesota State Arts Board grant, and now a Minnesota Book Award, the legacy of Minnesotans gave me the best imaginable start to my writing career. My awe and gratitude remain fresh.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

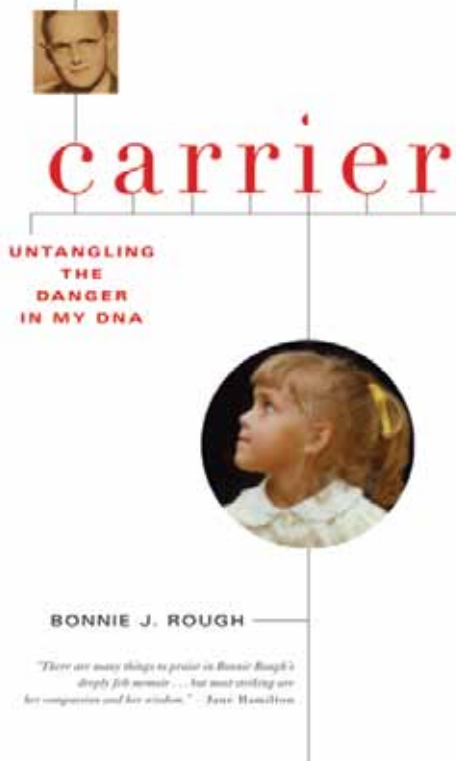
Children's Literature
General Nonfiction
Genre Fiction
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
Poetry
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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner



Carrier: Untangling the Danger in My DNA

by Bonnie J. Rough

COUNTERPOINT

Carrier



SUMMARY

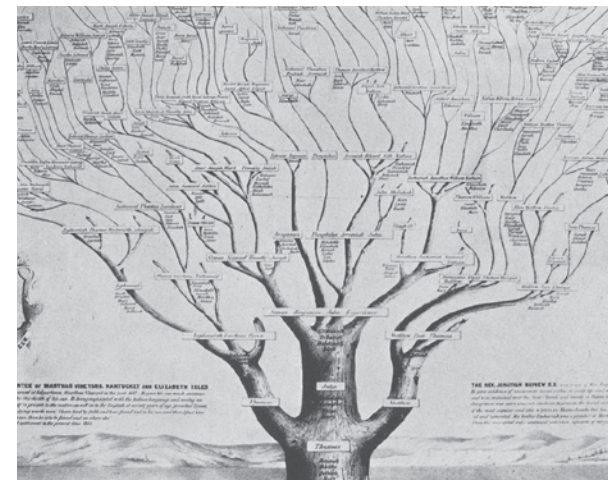
As Bonnie Rough and her husband consider becoming parents, their biological legacy haunts every decision. A carrier of the genetic condition hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia (HED), Bonnie begins a journey to uncover the complicated details of her family's past. At first glance, HED seems to be only a superficial condition. But a closer look reveals it as the source of a lifetime of infections, breathing problems, and drug dependency for Bonnie's grandfather who suffered from the disorder and died penniless and alone at the age of forty-nine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Do you agree with the author's decisions? Whether or not you agree, did you empathize with the author in her journey?
3. Simple blood tests can now show whether a person is a carrier of over 1,000 genetic disorders that could be passed to offspring. If you could be

tested, how much would you want to know, and how would you use that information?

4. Genetic testing is widely used but still controversial. What is the balance between harm and good with this new medical technology?
5. In *Carrier*, the author has tried to convey a loving respect for her family even as she reveals their story, which is not always flattering. To what extent is she successful?
6. What qualities in a memoir can make it a page turner? Did you experience *Carrier* as a page turner? Why or why not?
7. If you wrote a memoir about your own family history, what part of the story would take the most courage to write?
8. In addition to her own voice, the author writes in the first-person voices of her mother and grandfather. Was this technique used effectively, and can it be justified as nonfiction?
9. What part of the author's journey stayed with you most after you closed the book? What was the most meaningful part of *Carrier* for you?
10. If you were to have a conversation with the author about *Carrier*, what questions would you have for her?



ABOUT BONNIE J. ROUGH

Bonnie Rough has an MFA in Nonfiction Writing and has taught at The Loft Literary Center. Her writing has appeared in several anthologies, magazines, newspapers, and literary journals. She has traveled extensively and calls three cities home: Minneapolis, Seattle and Amsterdam.



Learn more about the author and her work at

www.bonniejrough.com and www.thebluesuitcase.com.



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23RD ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN REIMRINGER

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

Vestments started as an exploration of the conflict between a brawling, alcoholic father and a son who seeks refuge from his father's world by becoming a Catholic priest. The book gained momentum when I

so I saw them as people with lives and concerns alongside their religious callings, but getting that on the page took a lot of doing. I read a number of books by and about priests, and then I had a couple of Saint Paul priests review the manuscript for accuracy. When one priest who read

"The book became so much about Saint Paul. We moved here right after my father died, and I was missing him, and writing about his city became an act of remembrance. That sense of belonging somewhere—which I'd never had before I moved here—permeates the book."

moved in 2001 to Saint Paul. I'd never lived here before, but my father's family had lived in Saint Paul since 1857, and exploring my heritage led to the city of Saint Paul becoming a character in its own right. In addition to the priest's story, the book became somewhat of a love letter to the city.

What research did you undertake in writing *Vestments*?

I did a lot of research on priests. I'd grown up Catholic and knew priests and nuns as friends of my parents,

the manuscript asked if I was an ex-priest, I felt great relief that I'd managed to make that part of the book convincing.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Making the Catholic priesthood a legitimate choice for James Dressler. As a writer in the modern world, how do you make a convincing case that a man might choose celibacy and obedience over an intelligent, attractive, successful woman?

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

Around age 10 I started writing a lot of bad novels. But I had no idea how one became a writer. I was the first generation of my family to go to college. We didn't know any writers. And you believe you have to do something practical, so I got a degree in journalism and worked as a newspaper editor and then a library clerk before finally taking the plunge and going to grad school for creative writing in my 30s. So I was always circling books and writing, in every job.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

Well, hugely. The book became so much about Saint Paul. We moved here right after my father died, and I was missing him, and writing about his city became an act of remembrance. That sense of belonging somewhere—which I'd never had before I moved here—permeates the book. James Dressler belongs in Saint Paul. So much so that, though I go to Minneapolis all the time, I couldn't get my characters to cross the river even once.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature
General Nonfiction
Genre Fiction
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
Poetry
Young People's Literature


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MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Novel & Short Story Winner

Sponsored by Anchor Trust



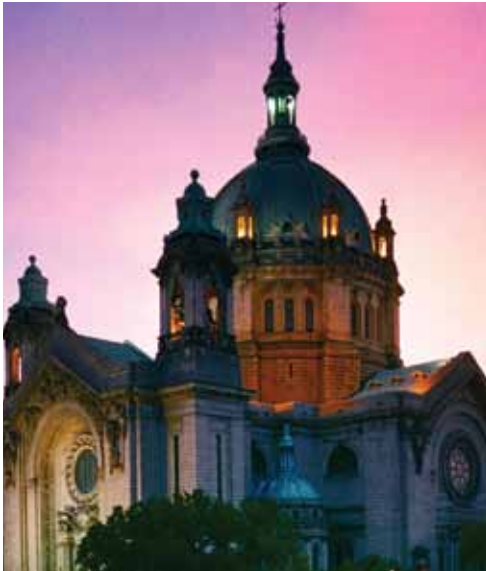
Vestments
by John Reimringer

MILKWEED EDITIONS

Vestments

SUMMARY

Originally drawn to the priesthood by the mystery, purity, and sensual fabric of the Catholic Church, as well as by its promise of a safe harbor from his violent father, James Dressler finds himself—just a few years after his ordination—drawn again to his first love, Betty Garcia. Torn between these competing loves, and haunted by his heritage, James finds himself at a crossroads.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What do you think of Joe Dressler? Is he a sympathetic character?
3. Why does Betty García make the choices she does? What role does her uncle, Hank Ramirez, play in her life?
4. Do any of Hank's actions surprise you? What are his motivations?
5. What is Otto Dressler's relationship with his son, Joe? How does it differ from his relationship with his grandson James?
6. What attracts James Dressler to the priesthood? Does he seem like a good priest?
7. How do the priests in the book differ from or meet your expectations?
8. Why do you think James makes the choices he does regarding his father and Betty in the end?
9. In what ways is the city of Saint Paul a character in this book? Could you also say that the Catholic Church is a character in the book?
10. What does the book say about men's relationships with one another?



ABOUT JOHN REIMRINGER

Born in Fargo, North Dakota, and raised in Topeka, Kansas, John Reimringer has a BS in journalism from the University of Kansas and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Arkansas. He has worked for the Santa Fe Railroad; as a newspaper editor in Kansas; as a youth hostel night porter in Edinburgh, Scotland; for the University of Iowa Law Library; and in the University of Kansas public relations office. He currently teaches English at Normandale Community College and lives in Saint Paul with his wife, the poet Katrina Vandenberg. Vestments is his first novel, and it was named by Publisher's Weekly as one of the "Best Books of 2010."



Photo by James Peters

Learn more about the author and his work at www.johnreimringer.com.



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