

*Q: When I first read “Stuck” I remember being lured into the story almost immediately from the opening paragraph. You do such a great job setting the mood early on. What was the inspiration behind this piece?*

I have been on hundreds of walks like the one Truman is taking in this story, walks taken in order to reflect on a situation or condition in my life. They are not for exercise. They are to my mental health what Advil is for my achy joints. Often begun in an unpleasant (or worse) frame of mind, there is hope that my mood will improve as I continue. A therapeutic aspect of these walks is, quite simply, to *notice* things. Thus the inspiration for the story, as I began an imaginary walk on the beach, aiming to settle an imaginary conflict in Truman’s personal life.

*Q. How long did it take to write? What was the process of getting it all down on paper?*

I wrote “Stuck” over a period of several months; it came out whole at the start, but I changed it quite a bit as I thought more and more about what kind of character Truman really was. I’m not sure, but it probably had six or seven drafts. You might be surprised to know that it was initially written in first person—which I used to get a better sense of the relationship with Sarah. I used one of the most emasculating experiences I had as a relatively inexperienced (sexually) young man, in which a woman I had cajoled (so I thought!) into bed turned out to be not only a control freak but physically strong and as scary as a speed addict. Obviously Sarah turned out to be a toned-down version of that, because my writing goal is to expose the anxieties and conflicts that creep into our lives unannounced, gradually, like silent cancers that—if untreated—will eventually kill us.

*Q: When did you decide to take up writing?*

I decided to take up writing seriously about ten years ago, although I had written some stories and poems in the previous two decades, and had actually written a “novel” as one of my two theses in college. But I had never written a true short story until 2006 or 2007. And once I had gotten the first one out of my system, it was surprisingly empowering; I wrote another, and then another, and found also that I enjoyed rewriting, crafting, changing, evolving my stories, as much as the initial burst of creativity. Every story has been through at least a half-dozen rewrites.

*Q: Are you working on any new projects now? Can we expect more stories like “Stuck” from Peter Hoppock in the future?*

I am pleased that readers have liked the opening of “Stuck,” but I do not consciously aim to “set the mood, or tone” of my stories in a like manner. Every story is different. Since “Stuck” I have been peddling a half-dozen other stories that have passed thru the rewrite wringer. My favorite is a lengthier story about a man who—having received a diagnosis of inoperable and terminal brain cancer—sets out consciously to tell lies for the remainder of his days, with the sole purpose of creating happiness for friends and strangers alike that he himself can never know again. He acts out what ethicists have argued about for ages: is it wrong to lie for the best of reasons?

*Q: Closing thoughts?*

I wish I knew the secret for writing “a good story.” I don’t. I write because I have an urge to share something I think is important, but at the outset I don’t always know what it is. I write because I know that important truths are discovered in the process of living, and my stories are meant to be slices of the natural world, a social world that is in all respects normal, except for this one little thing...