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1. Could you give me a brief biography of yourself and your writing career?

When I was eight, my family moved from Lancaster to Monroe Valley in Lebanon County. My parents bought an old farmhouse on 125 acres of shaly, unproductive ground (although they didn't know it at the time) at the foot of the Appalachian mountain. My father was a truckdriver but he wanted his children to grow up on a farm. The structure was 250 years old, a log and stone house with a live spring in the cellar and gun-slits in the 18-inch stone walls. There were legends about the house and about our valley but no one knew any facts. We had no idea that Bethel Township was the site of some of the most devastating frontier attacks in the French and Indian War.

I knew very early on that I was going to be a writer. I read little stories I'd written to my cousins when I was eight and they loved them! The stories resembled the sci-fi and most-excellent-adventure books I loved. I hated driving tractor and milking cows—I knew I was headed for college and a career as a writer but I'd never met a real writer. I'd also never read a book that described life in a religious sub-culture like mine. Our family was part of the Mennonite community.

I came to hate that community when I was a teenager. I was drafted right out of college and as a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War I went off to serve my nation by teaching English in Japan. I felt like an eagle that has flown her cage! But I had an epiphany in Japan, a God-Moment when I heard God tell me he loved me and had a bigger plan for me.

When I returned from Japan, I kind of fell in love with the Mennonites and beautiful 'Amish Country'. I still didn't know how to write a book so I worked as an editor for three years at the Mennonite Publishing House in Pittsburgh and edited other people's books. I can write at least this good, I thought. So when I was 28 I moved to Lancaster and started writing stories, mostly about my childhood. In one of those stories I wrote about Dave Yoder, my grandfather who grew up Amish and then left the community only to return ten years later and become a pastor. I used the composite character method—combining my grandfather's story with the story of an Amishman who flew planes in the Korean War and came home to drive a buggy with his six kids. True story. My story just kept growing until it was a book and I named it Mennonite Soldier and that really grabbed people because Mennonites are traditionally pacifists and here was a Mennonite who enlisted in World War I.

I wrote a much more experimental second novel and my editor blasted it, said it was anti-Mennonite, vulgar, etc. I got mad and moved with my California wife to San Francisco, where I've been ever since. I couldn't find journalism jobs on the West Coast so I worked a variety of jobs, including work for a temporary agency. When the owner of the employment agency decided to retire, she offered me the agency and I've been running my own recruiting firm ever since, which I do full time while writing on the side. I recruit engineers for Silicon Valley engineering firms.

2. Can you tell the readers a little bit about Both My Sons (plot, characters, themes, etc.- if possible)?

There is a gnawing question behind each of my novels. With Mennonite Soldier it was: Why did my grandfather return to a rather sober Mennonite farm life when he'd seen the world? With Both My Sons there were a couple questions: Why did our house in Monroe Valley have gun-slits in the walls? And secondly, my ggggggg grandfather Nicholas Stoltzfus—why did he leave Germany and everything he knew, cross the ocean on a teacup ship and build a home in the wilderness? What was that like? I also like the big timeless themes you find in the Bible. **Both My Sons** is loosely the story of Abraham and his two sons, one illegitimate and one legitimate, and his inability to have a happy home. I relate to dysfunctional families because I have one!

So in **Both My Sons**, Greenywalt is an immigrant father from Germany in 1710 who knows exactly what he wants: a peaceful life with his two sons, the older illegitimate one whom he loves and the younger legitimate one that he has never understood. He also knows neither son's mother will ever permit peace in his house for the other woman and her son. What can he do? And then the French and Indian War breaks out and complicates everything.

3. There will be a bus tour of the area in conjunction with the release of Both My Sons. What are some of the highlights of the tour, and how do they pertain to the novel?

My cousin Sanford always likes to ask me: "But is your story true?"

And I tell him. Look, this is a novel. The main character Greenywalt only exists in my mind and he is a composite of several Pennsylvania pioneers. I made up the scenes and conversations of his life.

However, all the main events and people in Greenywalt's world are real and the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society has chartered a bus on October 8 to see the sites mentioned in the book. We'll start with the Hans Herr House in the original 1710 Pequea Settlement around Strasburg. Then to the Lancaster Courthouse, where Benjamin Franklin threatened the Mennonite farmers in 1755 and said he'd seize their wagons and sons if they didn't voluntarily give them up for the war effort. Then to Harris' Landing (modern Harrisburg) where a John Harris, Jr. re-enactor will meet us and tell the story of Harris, who fortified his cabin on the Susquehanna so terrified settlers could shelter, then Paxtang Presbyterian Church, home of the infamous Paxtang Boys militia—Greenywalt's oldest son becomes a leader of the Paxtang Boys--and finally Light's Fort, at 11th and Maple Streets in Lebanon, where as many as sixty families sheltered in the dark days of 1755, when the French and their Delaware Nation allies were attacking settlers up and down the Susquehanna and along the Appalachians.

4. Could you give me some information about your other books?

In 2004 I reworked that experimental second novel into He Flew Too High, the story of a Korean War Era nuclear bombing strategist who becomes a conscientious objector to war, leaves his Army job and ends up in the Mennonite-Amish community. He becomes a charismatic pastor who leads a revival that splits the community, after which he leaves with

his followers to start his own colony in British Honduras. A tragedy and unfortunately, too true.

But you really wanted to ask about my next book, didn't you? I like stories about men and women who wrestle with God and wrestle with the people they love—just as I have done. So I'm thinking of Saint Junipero Serra, canonized by Pope Francis last year because he founded about eight of California's Spanish missions. Was he a great man because he introduced the Christian faith to California's Indians, as Pope Francis believes? Or was he a genocidal megalomaniac who destroyed the Indians' culture? Everyone in California has an opinion. I don't want to take sides. I would rather bring to life Serra and a couple of the Digueno Indians in his life. Writing ***Both My Sons*** taught me some techniques I can use to really make this happen.

5. How can I get a copy of *Both My Sons*?

Thank you for asking! The Publisher is putting together a number of events around the Release Date of October 6. You can come to the Launch Party that day at Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and I'll sign your book! You can come on the bus tour on October 8. We still have some open spots for the bus tour! (Call 717-393-9745 to make your reservation!) Or you can just call Masthof Press for a book copy, **(610) 286 0258.**