

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: *Who are you and what do you do?*

Answer: There is nothing more interesting to me than observing and interpreting events, people and phenomena around me, and it has been this way since the conclusion first struck me that sticking my hand on a hot stove was not a good idea. That was quite some time ago, by the way. Since then my most accurate observations, and therefore my most reliable conclusions about life, have tended to occur when careful attention was paid. So, for me it is important to try and do that as much as possible.

Traveling, as well as tending my own garden both literally and figuratively, are passions of mine, especially if there is a small koi pond somewhere nearby. All the better if there is a nice vantage point for taking serious photographs that I can turn into wall paintings later. Certainly writing has also occupied much of my time in recent years.

When not engaged in such creative pursuits my efforts are devoted to science and engineering projects with a company in the Mid-Atlantic States that still employs me after nearly sixteen years. The team under my supervision there tends to focus on bringing degraded streams and rivers back to productive ecosystems for communities and creatures that depend on them.

Question: *What is your writing process? Do you follow a regular routine?*

Answer: My approach to writing combines organic as well as structural organization. As the idea for a story and associated thoughts and images emerge they are written down with minimal cooking time in my mind—in al dente form, so to speak. Once the sauce of ideas begins to reduce it's time to pull some structure together, something meaty that can be put under the broiler of analytical thought and provide support for the gravy of ideas still simmering away in the back of my mind.

This seems to make a more satisfying presentation for the eyes and palate for me than merely tossing a hot lump of thoughts into a reader's hands, as though it was just pulled out of a campfire. It is the difference between unseasoned steak on a stick and Châteaubriand. I like both, but eating with my hands rather than a nice place setting, seasonings and accompaniments gets tiresome as a steady diet. Thus, some story structure, metaphorical and other literary devices can greatly add to the reading experience, and I try and use them to advantage.

Question: *What are the most important elements of good writing? According to you, what tools are must-haves for writers?*

Answer: Key elements in my view include a workable concept, empathetic themes and the ability to convey an interesting story that has not been told before in quite the same way. As for tools, a writer needs precious few—a creative mind and a means to convey the story. By today's standards that includes a computer with a word processing program and access to the internet, and not much else.

My "writing office" consists of an easy chair with a swing-arm mounted to the floor next to it that holds a laptop, and within reach is a lamp table just big enough to hold a cell phone and a pad and pencil for jotting quick thoughts and notes. That's it; anything more is just a distraction from writing. Depending on the project, a few reference documents needed for the day might be on the floor next to the chair, but anything else is kept in a regular office downstairs, out of sight and mind until needed. I like to keep my space simple and uncluttered in order to free my mind for creative efforts.

Question: *What motivates you to write?*

Answer: The pleasure of the craft and learning how what was produced changed someone else's perceptions, behavior or feelings for the positive.

Question: *Do you ever suffer from writer's block? If so, what do you do about it?*

Answer: If you mean have I ever been unable to complete a writing project where high stakes were involved, such as failure to meet contractual obligations involving financial advancements, deadlines and the like, the answer is never. Sometimes an elective personal project might peter out after a while as more interesting ones arise that perk my interest in a new direction. But in my mind writing under contract is no different than any other profession where results are expected regardless of my personal feelings or sensibilities.

I prefer to have others take me seriously as a writer instead of some "temperamental artist" whose creative juice takes a sabbatical once in a while. Might I ignore the latter statement if I was a celebrity fawned upon by a large adoring fan base that will tolerate the shoddiest behavior imaginable? Unimaginable.

My approach to breaking through a bout of writers block is to shut out the noise and distractions, sit quietly somewhere and use the non-creative part of my brain—the thinking, rational part—and tighten up the story structure. I look for decision-points for my characters and think which way they and the story needs to go next. By letting my softer imaginative side take the break it needed in shutting down temporarily, then mentally bringing in the technical heavy equipment and story structure construction crew I am able to focus on other necessary parts of the project. In doing so, it's a good bet the imagination soon comes back refreshed and just itching to fill in the creative pieces.

The main point is, it is not useful for me to let an important project languish, passively waiting for my mojo to reappear like a lost lover that decided to return, or acting desperately to try and make it happen. Doing either would surely prolong an emotionally difficult and unrewarding state of affairs; better to just get on with things.

Question: *Do you have any advice for other writers?*

Answer: If someone loves to write, then they should take it seriously. Forget about cutting corners; do not dispense with quality control in order to rush a self-publishing effort. Have a manuscript professionally edited, and publish the highest quality work possible. Support high

standards and a written work will be respected, even if it does not become a best seller. Maintaining high standards signifies someone is a serious writer, a professional writer, one who is willing to learn from their mistakes and strive for improvement, so the next book can reach the best seller list.

Occasional free book promotions can make sense, but offering books for little or nothing most of the time does not. There is no company that I know about that stays in business very long or makes a profit when they give away their products—unless they are government supported or a charity. A book's worth, like every other commodity, includes what someone else is willing to pay for it, and if peanuts are what you are asking, then do not expect to pay your rent with what you get.

Question: *What is the message in your book?*

Answer: To be sure there are definite themes and messages in *Vagabond Boy*, but I prefer readers decide for themselves what they are. The work can be read on different levels— as a coming of age adventure story amid chaos, a commentary on past and current childcare practices, or a nostalgic retrospective on 1950s Americana.

In my mind, informing a reader on what I am trying to say in a book is like telling them what they should eat; it defeats a prime objective of writing as a creative art form—allowing the viewer to undertake their own journey of discovery as they navigate through my book.

Question: *What book(s)/author(s) have influenced your life and writing?*

Answer: Nonfiction: Mostly traditional and modern classics—Thoreau, Lewis Thomas, Stephen J. Gould, Paul Theroux, Stephen Ambrose, Jon Krakauer (*Into the Wild*).

Fiction: Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*), Robert Pirsig (*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*), H.G. Wells (*The Time Machine*), Arthur C. Clarke (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), Michael Crichton (anything), James Michener (*The Source*), Irving Stone (*Lust for Life*, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*), Robert Graves (*I, Claudius*), Erich Maria Remarque (*All Quiet on the Western Front*), Harlan Coben (anything), Michael Connelly (anything), Henri Charrière (*Papillon*), Sue Grafton (the alphabet series).

Question: *What is your next project?*

Answer: Two projects are currently in the works. One is a sequel memoir that involves a different theme and approach than *Vagabond Boy*. Untitled at present, it examines the author's quest for meaning from a lifetime of encounters with the natural—and at times unnatural—world. Experiences are included from his career as a field ecologist as well as his travels to unusual habitats and landscapes as an adult.

The other work uses the art and science of maintaining a backyard pond to explore the place of social values and personal behavior in America's changing cultural landscape. Needless to say, it is a serious, challenging effort.