

Smoky Talks Authors

by Smoky Trudeau Zeidel



Photo by Kim Hammack

Excerpt from: *A Talk with T.K. Thorne*

Where did you get the idea for this book?

A poem. I was looking for an idea with a broader scope than my previous works and thought that doing something like Sena Jeter Naslund did with *Ahab's Wife* would be interesting (i.e., focusing on a little-known person who had a key relationship with a very famous one). A friend told me that Noah's wife was barely mentioned in the Bible and not even given a name. That inspired her to write a poem called "Noah's Wife," and it inspired me. (Can't get much more famous than Noah!) I started researching to see if there was any credible evidence of a major flood in the Middle East and was excited to learn about the cataclysmic Black Sea flood of 5500 BCE. That gave me a date, which meant I had a time period for the culture. I started writing from Na'amah's point of view and she took control immediately. It was only after listening to her for a while that I realized she had a very unique voice and point of view, and that she had Asperger's.

Tell us what you love best about each of your characters.

Na'amah, of course, for her honesty of mind and heart. Noah, for his steadfastness and the selfless depth of his love. Yanner for his passion. Savta (Na'amah's grandmother) for her sharp tongue, capable hands, and the wisdom to give Na'amah the gift of being special. Inka for her loyalty and unclouded, sunny view of the world, and, of course, I can't leave out Bennu, the cranky parrot—who reminds me of Savta.

The Goddess plays such an important role in Noah's Wife. It is one of the main reasons I loved this book so much—in fact, Noah's Wife is my favorite book I read this year. You don't see mention of the Goddess too often in a book about biblical characters, yet you pull it off beautifully. How did you manage that? Have readers been supportive of this?

First, thank you for the lovely compliment!

I certainly did not start this journey as a Biblical scholar (nor would I claim that title now, though I can say I've done at least five years of independent study). What I learned about the beginnings of my own religion (I'm Jewish) surprised me, even stunned me. I never dreamed that there was, in truth, a kind of *Da Vinci Code* cover-up in the first millennium BCE. Actually, Biblical scholars know about it, but it remains obscured from mainstream religion and popular culture. The oldest known remains of probable religious artifacts are Stone Age fertility goddess figurines. The Goddess reigned for thousands of years prior to the advent of the Hebrews, and there is strong archeological evidence that she was even worshiped by them for a long time, probably as the consort of Yahweh. I explore this more in my next book, which is set in the time of Abraham.

As to how readers are reacting, I am still waiting for the religious "shoe" to drop, for *Noah's Wife* to be burned or declared heresy or something, but it hasn't happened, at least to my knowledge. On the contrary, I have spoken many places, including some churches, and not been stoned once!

You're writing a new book based on another biblical character, Lot's wife. Are you ready to talk about that a little? Give us a sneak preview?

Angels at the Gate: the Story of Lot's Wife has been a journey every bit as fascinating as *Noah's Wife*. In fact, I recently returned from a research trip to Israel, getting to walk where my characters tread.

Lucky you!

When I sat down to write a story about the (again, unnamed) woman who is given all of one line in the Bible and gets turned into salt for the unforgiveable sin of looking back on her city, I stared at the blank screen for a long time. Then I just gave up trying to figure out what I was doing and let my character speak. This is what she said:

If the path of obedience is the path of wisdom, it is one not well-worn by my feet. I am Yildeth, daughter of the caravan, daughter of the wind, and daughter of the famed merchant, Zakiti. That I am his daughter, not his son, is a secret between myself and my father. This is a fine arrangement, as I prefer the freedoms of being a boy.

A boy? Really? I had no idea! But I decided to honor her voice and she took me strongly through the entire book. Never underestimate the power of the subconscious.

Having had the privilege of being allowed to read the manuscript, I must agree with you. Angels at the Gate: The Story of Lot's Wife is every bit as compelling as Noah's Wife. Tell me: what do you think is the most important thing for your book to accomplish: to entertain, to educate, to instill moral values, or to enlighten? Why?

Any book worth its salt works on multiple levels. Primarily, I want readers to care about my characters the way I do. Perhaps, as a reader, the very act of entering another's world and "owning" a different perspective, if only temporarily, changes us in some profound or subtle way. It can certainly entertain us, educate, and enlighten us. It can do all kinds of things and that's the magic!

Let's talk about you instead of your books for a moment. What made you choose to become a writer?

What made me want to become a writer? Reading, of course! My Granny read to me (a lot of Mark Twain among other things) which instilled in me the desire for adventure. As a writer I have had plenty—I've traveled thousands of years into the past and as far into the future. I've experienced worlds that no one has ever imagined; I've lived as male and female; I've died; I've met aliens and seen the best and the worst of people; I've explored what it means to be human; where we've come from; and who we might be. And I'm having lots of fun.

Your book has such a spiritual theme. Are you a spiritual person?

An excellent question. I actually apologized to a few early readers of *Noah's Wife*, believing they had expected a "religious" book and gotten a surprise. "It's not a spiritual book," I said (albeit, a little late). To my surprise, they looked at me like I was nuts and claimed that it was. (See what I mean about a story working on many levels? Not even necessary that the author intended it!)

If, by the question, "Am I a spiritual person?" you mean, *-Do I seek beyond myself for understanding of the universe and my place in it*, then yes ... on my best days.

If you couldn't write, what would you be doing to express your creative self?

I just can't imagine not writing! Recently, I heard a radio interview with long-time fantasy writer, Terry Pratchett. I was saddened to hear that he had a relatively slow advancing form of Alzheimer's. He couldn't manage typing anymore, but he found he could still speak his thoughts, and so he is using a software program to translate his words into type and has just finished a new book! I've often thought about what I would do if I lost my vision or my fingers ... or even a part of my mind. I hope I would find a way.

What inspires you?

Apparently challenges. I keep saying the next book is going to take place in my backyard! Whoops, actually I did that already (a middle reader book yet to be published). Of course, my character finds a hidden cave that exists “between time” by the river that runs through our property and then finds his own adventure among the Creek Indians (Muskogee) who once lived in my backyard. Talk about difficult research! It was easier to make up a whole planet (another novel in waiting). I guess nothing worthwhile is easy.

Other than your own book, what is your favorite work of fiction, and why?

As a child, my favorite book was *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. I loved that book! My Granny read it to me so many times the pages were worn, and I think I learned to read faster so I could read it for myself. The timeless humor and truth captured my imagination.

As an older person, my favorite book was *Dune* by Frank Herbert. His characters are all real, intense and powerful; and he created, not just a world, but a complex, amazing, but believable future universe that has a lot to say about who we are here-and-now.

Where, and when, do you write? What are your writing rituals?

As a rookie police officer, I rode endless hours in a patrol car, staring out the window, supposedly looking for suspicious stuff. I’m afraid I was actually whiling away the hours (when there wasn’t real action at hand) thinking about plot and characters for my first novel (still in a drawer somewhere). In the same way that the association of touching a keyboard can release voices in my head, so does driving a car, and I do a lot of that as I have a long commute to work (my day job). Lucky to have a husband who cooks, I grab time after work to write down whatever I was thinking during the drive home (if I can manage to convince the dogs and cats that yes, I do love them, but no, they can’t sit on top of my laptop). And I’m a WWW (Weekend Writing Warrior).

What do you do when you aren’t writing?

I have a full time job as executive director of a business improvement district in downtown Birmingham, Alabama (having retired from a 20+ year career in law enforcement). I love to travel and to read good books (in between writing projects), spend girl-time with good friends, spoil my grandchildren, take care of all the dogs, cats and horses, and watch movies with my husband.

What’s the best compliment you’ve received as a writer?

“I can’t put it down!” Then I know the magic has happened.

Is there anything else you’d like to share with our readers that I haven’t asked you about?

It’s a commitment to purchase a book and to give it your precious time. I hope I have honored that.

Where can our readers find you on the Internet, and where can they buy your book?

Thank you for inviting me, Smoky. I’ve enjoyed the challenge of your questions! My Website is www.tkthorne.com. Signed copies are available there. All the main online sources carry it as soft cover and eBooks—Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc., and bookstores can order it if they don’t have it on their shelves (fuss at them!)