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The Oddest Places

The terrible secret of my writing is that I don't have a great imagination. I have to go to a place, soak in its atmosphere, its nuance, and let it speak to me. I'm sitting in a rear corner booth in a bar/café in downtown Indianapolis, a known haunt for prostitutes and strippers when they are "off shift." Under the crimson glare of the bar's lights, I stare out at a sea of empty lives. Women clinging to men to fill a void they might not even be aware that they have; men searching for the momentary distraction of bedroom companionship to numb themselves from the pain of their reality. The décor reeks of a pervasive hopelessness that has settled even into the formica tables; an air of desperation as thick as the fumes of spent Scotch from the nearby table.

And here I find inspiration.

I'm a horror author; not a genre often associated with spiritual musings. I have a novel to write—three, in fact, over the next eighteen months—and some might not think what I choose to write about honors God. It's like we have come to believe that the only thing that makes art redeemable is if it's a set up for our proselytizing sales pitches. But I believe that using your gifts to your fullest—and bringing yourself to Him in worship—is what pleases God.

My faith informs my writing, that secret alchemy of creation, that strange union of art and spirituality. What we believe, why we believe—from nihilistic to religious—are a part of us and thus a part of our writing. We all have stories, mine is no better than anyone else's, all of us leading broken lives to one degree or another. And I find inspiration writing about redemption, about wringing hope from hopelessness.

To think, as I sit here drumming my fingers along this table waiting for inspiration to hit, all I need is a pad and a pen and a place for something mystical and profound, yet simple and ordinary, to happen. I believe that we're called to creative purpose. I write

because I have to, in order to still the voices in my head. Because something in the core of my being crawls up and takes hold of me and makes me move pen to paper. The Creative Spirit's work, the good news of grace, drives me into mission, to use my gifts to be a blessing to others.

My notepad has been like my security blanket, since I never know when a good idea will strike. My notepad is also my act of worship. It contains my attempts to join in with the Holy Spirit by participating in creation. I carve out places to write in the same way that I carve out places to worship. We often think of church as the building we go to in order to worship God. Yet, it's just a structure. There is nothing "sacred" about it until a sacred space is carved out ... by the people. The church is people, a sanctuary set apart where heaven and earth meet and we can connect to God ... not a building. In the same way, I find my places of inspiration, to get into that mental place, where I can capture the ever-elusive ideas and words and wrestle them to this blank page which scares me with its sheer ... emptiness.

I love working on my stories at church, even (especially!) the darker ones. Surrounding myself with reminders of who the ultimate Author is, whose work I join in, I'm working out my spiritual journey as much through my art as through my faith. So it's okay if we pursue art for art's sake because creating beauty is its own pursuit of truth and all truth points to God. I was born with the gift to write and when you are doing what you were created to do, you are doing God's work.

Life is wondrous, even the dark sides of it, and there is a beauty not only to Creation but in the act of creation. So be it a seedy bar, a poorly lit street corner at 2 a.m., a neighborhood left forgotten and abandoned by folks who lock their car doors while speeding through them, or the other sides of a city hidden in shadows, I carve out places to find inspiration. It's no Walden Pond, but it works for me.