

An Interview of the Author David Mead

13/06/2012

1. Please give a short description/biography of yourself.

My career as an Infantry Officer in the Australian Army commenced with two tours of Vietnam, in 1969 and again in '71/72. On the 4th July '69 my platoon was decimated by two mines at night, three were killed and a number of us were wounded. I carry the memory of that night and the carnage and ongoing trauma caused by mines with me, to this day.

My last appointment in the Army was as the Australian Defence Attaché, Phnom Penh (94-97). In Cambodia, the mine horrors and the continued suffering of innocent civilians and untrained soldiers during a period of political instability and conflict, formed a large part of my experience there.

In August 97, after a dramatic exit from a 'post-coup' Phnom Penh, I resigned from the Army and returned to Cambodia to work in the field of forest and wildlife conservation.

I was fortunate to be instrumental in convincing the Cambodian Government to make the Central Cardamom Forest of southern Cambodia a protected area and to put in place the people and infrastructure to protect the forest and its wildlife.

In total I spent almost ten years in Cambodia. Some of my most enjoyable moments derived from the wonderful local people I met while working in conservation and in philanthropic activities like supporting orphanages and helping to raise the Association of the Blind.

2. Please describe your book.

The book was first released in 2000, though only distributed locally in Cambodia. I would however like to quote from a review of the time by Dr. Geoff Coyne PhD, a long time resident of Cambodia. I feel he more than adequately describes my work.

"The Churning is a collection of verse and photographs by Colonel Mead (Retired) who first came to Cambodia in 1994 as Australian Defence Attaché and throughout his three year period saw at first hand the results of the ongoing civil war – the poverty-stricken draftees, the maimed, the helpless civilians, the corruption, the poverty. Following his retirement he remained in Cambodia working with disadvantaged groups and as a consultant in forestry and conservation. The verse and photographs reflect his experiences.

There are 18 poems, accompanied by photographs taken by the author of people and places in Cambodia. They focus on how ordinary individuals think and feel, as they experience life as a soldier at war, maimed, dying, and the effects on their families. They admire the stoicism of the people, their struggles to survive, their personal tragedies, their love of life, their strengths and their beauty. There is an underlying pattern: an appreciation, through the suffering and pain of the people, of their remarkable fortitude, their innate charm and dignity, and their culture which offers a way forward to peace.

The poems cover the range of emotions from anger, rage, humility, compassion, wonder, admiration, and hope. The author is not concerned with the generals or senior people in politics or the civil service, but with ordinary people. He delights in their wonderful smiles and laughter. He has a special place in his heart for the young, as shown in "Smiling Child" (How could you paint that smile?...How can you paint that laughter?), and "The Game" ('chortling children...barefoot...racing home to the smell of steaming new rice'). He has an eye for the ironic, as in "Tinted Glass". The poem reflects on how the Khmer Kings travelled in pomp and ceremony to meet the throng, as the King still does today. However, today's children who make up much of the flag-waving bystanders do not see the King, they see only tinted glass.

A strength of poetry over prose is its ability to condense and focus on passion and meaning. David uses this strength very effectively, and it is particularly evident in "No Tears for Mao". The poem tells the story of Mao's progress as an orphan, through the Pol Pot years, through sacrifice and study, only to be blinded in an acid attack by a thief who stole his motor bike.

*The thief struck by night,
Wanting the moto, not Mao's sight, but the acid took it all,
Left writhing, burning, only pain, what in this did he have to gain;
A moto for a life of struggle, he melts away, little trouble;
The thief, a good night's work, at least two hundred dollars,
Mao, sight, light, everything; lost.*

Yet even here the author sees hope: Mao's adopted family and friends stood by him; with help from them and from doctors he has made a new life for himself. He is the first blind student to attempt a degree at the Phnom Penh University and he now works as the Executive Director of the newly formed Association of the

Blind in Cambodia (ABC).

The book concludes with the poem "Lotus Flower", a metaphorical journey through time of the Cambodian people, according to their own traditions. Kings and empires come and go, but the living patterns of the people are timeless. War and death and conflict may be a constant pattern in life, but there is hope because love, trust and beauty will always prevail.

The collection of poems and photographs is an intensely personal and revealing portrait of the author and his experiences. We are privileged to have these impressions and photographs of a former soldier who experienced so much of the recent war and its effects on the Cambodian people, who kept his mind and his heart open to them, and who continues to share in their struggles and hope."

3. What made you decide to become an author?

I have always been interested in poetry and dabbled in it over the years, even while in the military.. While in Cambodia my camera was also always with me but it was only after leaving the Army that I had the time to gather a number of poems and photographs together to produce this book.

I believe the use of accompanying photos adds to the descriptive nature of the work and as you will see, I was also interested in how the visual shape of certain poems can add to the effect of the work.

4. Do you have plans to publish further books?

Yes, I have a further collection of poems and a book either on paper or working their way out of crevices and recesses.

5. If so, do you plan to keep with your chosen subject or expand to other fields?

Conflict and conservation will feature in my poetry and as for the prose I am trying to produce a book to make the reader laugh rather than cry.

6. Which authors have you enjoyed or have inspired you in the past?

I am particularly in awe of poets of the great war and see their poetry as being far more powerful than any prose when it comes to describing the horror of life and death in the trenches.

7. Do you have a particular process for writing?

No, but I envy those who wrote poetry without the 'aid' of a computer when you find that the twelfth version you produce, is no different than the first!

8. Aside from writing, what are your main hobbies?

As an Australian, exploring Europe and when we are not on the move, DIY and gardening.

9. What would you say would be the one thing that readers should keep in mind after reading your book?

Please , before you die, see Cambodia and Angkor Wat and meet some wonderful Khmers.

An Interview of the Author Zak Seridarian

20/03/2012

1. Please give a short description/biography of yourself.

I was born in London in 1977 and lived there until I was 31, when I moved to Parma. I have a son who lives in London.

I am engaged again and my fiancé is German and I will soon move to Berlin.

I absolutely love books and always have, since I was 5 or 6 I think. It is impossible for me to go a day without having a book on the go.

I started writing about 15 years ago but life always managed to get in the way of writing. I don't want writing to get in the way of life, but it would be nice to be able to live by my writing.

2. Please describe your book in your own words.

It's a whodunit? in a little known Italian town. A mysterious power suddenly emerges to challenge the authorities and begins a spree of crimes and attacks the likes of which Parma has never known. The once quiet and cheerful town is thrust into a world of murder and theft of unprecedented magnitude. In the midst of all this is Hammond, a recently retired Chief Inspector, who is unwitting drawn into the mire when he himself wanted nothing more than to find rest and romance.

The book also tries to bring together 2 very different cultures and approaches to life through the main two characters. It challenges traditional British and Italian ways of thinking in an attempt to see the best of both worlds rather provide a critique of the same. It is however chiefly about crime and how Hammond and Sergio go about solving it by uncovering elements of society in Parma which even some locals refuse to believe exist.

3. What first got you interested in your book's subject matter?

Agatha Christie and then Colin Dexter. I like crime novels but not necessarily modern crime novels. I think that sometimes it is too easy to get lost in all the blood and entrails or gruesome detail. It is possible to write about crime without too much splatter.

4. What made you decide to become an author?

It helped me at times to walk in another person's shoes without ever escaping the odour of my own, so to speak. It brought me a welcome respite from the mundane. Then it became a simple necessity to complete what I started. That was the first book. The second book was all about pleasure. I really enjoyed writing it.

5. Do you have plans to publish further books?

Oh yes! If the first one does well enough to justify the effort. Maybe I will just write instead of publishing though. Who knows!

6. If so, do you plan to keep with your chosen subject or expand to other fields?

We'll have to wait and see.

7. Which authors have you enjoyed or have inspired you in the past?

Agatha Christie and Colin Dexter for crime, Malkhas and Raffi for Armenian literature, Andy McNab for that slightly different type of story-teller. Then there is Wilbur Smith who has always been a great read, James Clavell for his absolute attention to detail and depth of plot and of course Charles Dickens for writing David Copperfield. The best single book story I have ever read. Robert Jordan however must be my all time

favourite. The man was an absolute genius and will be sorely missed.

8. Do you have a particular process for writing?

I let the moment take me and change plot sometimes halfway through if I feel the need to strengthen things. I usually write big chunks in one go though because I feel it flows better that way.

9. What do you see as the advantages of having your book published in translation?

More people have the choice of reading it. Even if they don't, they at least have the choice.

10. Aside from writing, what are your main hobbies?

Football, reading, meeting friends and watching films.

11. What would you say would be the one thing that readers should keep in mind after reading your book?

That is for the reader to decide. I can only try to keep them entertained while they read.

An Interview of the Author Paolo Paron

06/02/2012

1. Readers often love to learn something about the lives of the author whose book they are reading. It would be interesting if you could tell us a bit about your artistic and professional life and the experiences that have informed who you are today.

“Over the past 20 years now, I’ve been visiting the elderly and getting them to tell me their stories, the tales they used to listen to as children, and the thing that always seems to shine through their words is a respect for the forest, paddocks, rivers, and animals, everything from which the natural world is formed. Gradually, they have passed this love and respect on to me, and I, together with Maria who has taken care of the pictures, have tried to pass it on to others. This is how the Charter of Fundamental Rights was born, but this work also fits into the various initiatives that we work on. In one such initiative, we go into primary schools with stories and tales, which are narrated whilst an illustrator draws on large sheets of paper and invites the children to illustrate characters, animals and trees, teaching them the basics of comic strip art. On these occasions, the children are also given copies of the comic strips, which we print in colour and which are written in two languages: Italian and the Friulian language. These comics tell the stories of witches, Benandanti (“Good Walkers”), sprites, gnomes and beasts of the forest. Also, for the last few years, we’ve been putting on evening events in barns and farmhouses, together with a young musician who also sings. On these evenings, we tell stories the way it used to be done on winter evenings, in the Friulian peasants’ homes.”

2. Please describe your book in your own words.

“It is a collection of 40 works which aims to make people to disconnect from the overwhelming list of jobs that modern life throws at us all, and to take a moment to breathe. We are to stop for a moment and observe the world around us, to savour the joys of life which can be found in the smallest things, like a watermill turning by a river, a cloud that has taken an unusual shape or the gentle song of a nightingale. The stories are arranged by topic and broach the greater themes of modern life, such as Dignity, Respect, Hospitality, Mutual Support and the Rights and Duties of the Community.”

3. What first got you interested in your book’s subject matter?

“The book was inspired by the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the European Union. I was flicking through it distractedly one day and as I was reading I began to think that while, quite rightly, charters of rights that safeguard the lives of men and women from around the world existed, there was still no charter of rights that took into consideration the existence of woodland creatures, trees, water and land, that considered these to be like living beings and that guaranteed them dignity and respect. From there, I asked myself who would be a good audience for a message of this sort and immediately answered: only the young can still change the world and change it for the better, and thus, after a couple of weeks, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Forest Peoples of the European Union was born.”

4. What made you decide to become an author?

“I believe that writing a story or a book is the direct consequence of finding pleasure in telling a story, or at least, this is the path I have taken. I must say that I learned to listen first. For many years, I interviewed the elderly, turning my attention primarily to gathering stories, legends and accounts based on rural life; to folk magic, enchantments, envy and witchcraft, but also to the sense of community, togetherness and conviviality. After this long period of listening, there was born in me a desire to tell everything that I had heard, listened to and learned, and from this came the pleasure in writing all this.”

5. Do you have plans to publish further books?

“I have recently sent a folkloric detective novel off to print, in which I tell a tale of the eternal conflict between good and evil. In this book I’ve brought to life a few of the characters that I have come to know through the tales of our elders. I have used the old framing technique: essentially, by using one story as a central thread, I have interwoven a whole series of tales and stories, gathered through many years of research. In the story there are witches, “Benandanti” (“Good Walkers”, who used to fight witches), black cats and strange events which are sometimes kind and sometimes cruel. All of this takes place in a rural world which is now disappearing. The book is called “The House of the Seven Cats”.”

6. If so, do you plan to keep with your chosen subject or expand to other fields?

"I think that the world of peasant tradition is the field that is most suited to my creativity and, in any case, I always try to keep my stories close to the ones that I have gathered, seeking to pass on their meanings and messages."

7. Which authors have you enjoyed or have inspired you in the past?

"I must say I have always been fascinated by German and Nordic mythology. Works such as Voluspa and the Kalevala are particularly appealing to me, not to mention those of the great creator of worlds, J. R. R. Tolkien."

8. Do you have a particular process for writing?

"I must say I do not follow a particular routine. I write in the evenings when I am not reading, generally when I feel it is time to work on a tale or sequence of stories. Then, it comes out on its own; it weaves itself like a tapestry, slowly gaining form and substance. I do not force myself to write, I do it when I feel like it, when I feel like the moment and the subject matter are right. I do not have a rational explanation for this; it is a good feeling doing something that is right and pleasant (at least for me of course). But I hope that it brings pleasure to others too."

9. What do you see as the advantages of having your book published in translation?

"Certainly the possibility of comparing different cultures and insights. I must also say that reading what you have written in a language other than your own really allows for reflection and self improvement, because some concepts that seem obvious in your own language are quite unfathomable to people from other cultures. It reveals a lot about our own limitations and certainties."

10. Aside from writing, what are your main hobbies?

"My objective has always been to save and pass on the oral tradition. The world of storytelling and narration is composite, variegated and vast and it is fertile ground for planting seeds of fantasy, examples to follow and constructive ideas. We are working on a website that will collect oral accounts from the older generation of Friuli through interviews, videos and photographs and that will then be open to all those, (including those speaking other languages), who want to contribute to this project and save this great tradition of folktales. The site will be Anticaquercia.eu (old oak tree), which in the Friuli language is vieri rôl. We have chosen this tree as a symbol, for as Tolkien said: deep roots are not touched by frost."

11. What would you say would be the one thing that readers should keep in mind after reading your book?

"The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Forest Peoples of the European Union was born from the need to communicate to the younger generations the importance of love and respect for the other, for those who are different to oneself, as well as for that of which we know little or nothing about, such as the rhythms and messages of nature, animals and the world which lies outside of our daily lives. The book is aimed at young children with engaging and meaningful pictures. However, the message is also intended to touch the hearts of those who were young once and who are now responsible for and have the capacity to ruin, change or destroy habitats, small wild areas, sections of woods and forests, and who maybe do this only for mere personal benefits, without lifting their gaze to take in the much broader and more enthralling picture that stretches beyond our tiny lives."

An Interview of the Author Alfredo Vismara

06/02/2012

1. Readers often love to learn something about the lives of the author whose book they are reading. It would be interesting if you could tell us a bit about your artistic and professional life and the experiences that have informed who you are today.

"In 1965, when I was 17, I started practicing Judo in one of the first gyms in Milan to offer it. The gym was called Spartacus and I believe it still exists. A basement that was muggy even in the summer, with only a couple of showers for the whole gym, which were almost always cold, a tatami with wood shavings and sawdust covered in a plastic tarpaulin, a corridor for a changing room that was marked off simply by a worn out tarpaulin and a strong, thick smell of sweat. This was my first Judo school and it was here that I met my Instructor, Cesare Barioli. From that time onwards, I never stopped practicing this discipline, at first as a competitive activity and later as a teacher."

2. Please describe your book in your own words.

"My book is about one of Pinocchio's many adventures and takes place in the Land of the Rising Sun, Japan. Pinocchio is a wooden puppet who is always getting himself into trouble but is in constant search of the secret that will allow him to transform from his puppet form into a child of flesh and blood."

3. What first got you interested in your book's subject matter?

"What inspired me to write about this theme was the desire to use a famous fairy tale in order to explain the foundations of Judo; Judo as a Discipline with the power to educate as opposed to Judo as a sport. (Judo as a sport is the practice which aims exclusively at victory and defeating others.)"

4. What made you decide to become an author?

"I got into writing about Judo by explaining technical principles related to my competitive experiences. In the beginning, I wrote about the techniques I used to adopt in fights and then I moved on to write books on Judo kata and its principles."

5. Do you have plans to publish further books?

"Yes, I'm working on a book aimed at parents and guardians which sets out my ideas about Education. This is also the central theme of my story about Pinocchio, but in this book it is broadened and aimed at those who have educative responsibilities to children and who are willing to try out, (without any dogma), a method of raising them based on installing positive values in them and eliminating any negative ones."

6. If so, do you plan to keep with your chosen subject or expand to other fields?

"The topic that I am interested in is Education - education in the sense of self-improvement and the interaction of Physical, Moral and Spiritual education."

7. Which authors have you enjoyed or have inspired you in the past?

"There aren't any authors that I particularly admire over others if you are referring to novelists. I'm not especially fond of reading for pleasure; I mainly read the work of authors that discuss the subjects that I love: Judo and Education."

8. Do you have a particular process for writing?

"I don't follow a precise method. I just try to explain in a clear way what I believe in and what I practice everyday when teaching Judo."

9. What do you see as the advantages of having your book published in translation?

"I think that the greatest advantage is being able to communicate your idea to a greater number of people and hope, as in my case, to contribute to improving human beings."

10. Aside from writing, what are your main hobbies?

“My main interest is Judo and its formative value. I need writing in order to communicate my experiences to more people.”

11. What would you say would be the one thing that readers should keep in mind after reading your book?

“I would be happy if the readers of this Pinocchio adventure understand that when they find themselves face to face with another human being, young or old, or when they look at themselves in the mirror, they see the product of millions of years of evolution and that they must learn to deal with this. This is an evolution that, from the depths of history, has brought us thousands of positive and negative emotions, stronger and weaker, which condition us and push us to make the strangest of choices - choices which are sometimes joyous and other times painful. I hope that the reader is left with the idea that they can decide what they want to be in the future or with an idea of how they could help others to understand this fascinating adventure of the Human Being; the transformation from Puppet into Child!”

Taiji e Judo

Quando hai iniziato a praticare il Tai Chi?

Ho cominciato con il maestro Chang Dsu Yao qualche giorno fa... no, qualche anno fa... no, qualche decennio fa! Non ricordo il mese ma era inverno e sicuramente di domenica mattina.

Il mio maestro, Cesare Barioli, aveva invitato il maestro Chang per uno stage al gruppo degli agonisti. Mi piacque molto e da allora seguii le sue lezioni quando potevo, spesso anche il mattino a casa sua.

La pratica, assomigliava per molti aspetti a un Kata di Judo, il Junokata, dove la ricerca si indirizza oltre che alla tecnica pura, anche allo sviluppo dell'energia interiore (Chi o Ki), era una cosa che ci affascinava. Ho continuato a praticare perchè ho sicuramente trovato dei benefici, fisici e mentali, che poi riscontravo nella pratica del Judo.

Ad esempio, una cosa banale, ma che notai dopo non molta pratica era la possibilità di agire con tecnica a destra o a sinistra quando combattevo senza sforzo o particolare attenzione al cambio di guardia.

Quasi contemporaneamente al Tai Chi Chuan, appresi da un altro maestro un'altra disciplina che mi diede molti risultati, simile al Tai Chi per quanto concerneva la ricerca interiore, ma più semplice tecnicamente e adatta ad integrarsi a qualsiasi disciplina, il Pi Quan Shu.

Come e' stato accettato il Tai Chi Chuan nel mondo del Judo?

Non penso sia stato mai accettato e mai sarà accettato, soprattutto con il Judo attuale non ci sono assolutamente punti in comune.

Molti judoka che mi hanno “preso in giro” in passato, adesso lo praticano rimpiangendo forse di non averlo fatto prima quando avevano qualche acciaccio in meno.

Quali sono le figure dei maestri che ti hanno influenzato?

Non ho visto moltissimi maestri di Tai Chi!

Ho cominciato con il maestro Chang Dsu Yao perchè era l'unico in Italia allora che lo insegnasse, poi ne ho conosciuti altri ma non mi davano mai la sensazione di saperne molto in termini di efficacia, e per me l'idea di “Chi”, dal punto di vista del Judoka, doveva essere una cosa molto chiara e dimostrabile. Spesso vedevo maestri che si muovevano, anche bene tecnicamente, ma completamente vuoti nella sostanza.

Una dozzina di anni fa invece conobbi il maestro Yang Lin Sheng durante uno stage tenuto presso il Musokan di Milano e percepì subito nei suoi movimenti quello che mi interessava.

Lo invitai a rimanere in Italia e lui accettò rimanendoci per dieci anni.

Ho imparato parecchio dal maestro Yang, non tanto lo stile Chen di Tai Chi, quanto i meccanismi che interagiscono e che sono necessari per un concreto sviluppo dell'energia interiore e della sua applicazione in ogni azione, Tai Chi Chuan compreso.