

# Dangerous Places

Stories



## Author Interview with Perry Glasser

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*Every book has its own story about how it came to be conceived and written as it did. You've described your book as a collection of stories about people who "want to do more than survive." Did you have a collective theme in mind before you wrote the stories in Dangerous Places? How did this book evolve and what makes these stories work together?*

Dangerous Places was not undertaken as a project that encompassed a vision and then went forward. That may be closer to how a novel is engaged, but for this collection, at least, the stories were accumulated over a number of years and, if anything, when the time came to see what was in the drawer and whether there was a coherent collection, this group of tales presented itself. Others remain in the drawer.

I try to write stories about characters undergoing stress. Real stress. Terror and fear and dread without resource to the supernatural—not vague malaise based on dissatisfaction with a lover, parent or self that leads to a moment of epiphany. There is no drama without trouble, and the fashion that has so much contemporary fiction to be about faint irony or mental events seems to me to be inferior art.

*"Jody's Run" is written, convincingly, from the point of view of a young female protagonist. In "An Age of Marvels and Wonders," the protagonist is a retired college professor in his sixties. Other stories in the collection include characters from a wide range of life stages and backgrounds. For you, how is a story born?*

The process of creation for me, at any rate, is synergistic. One thing suggests another, and sometimes a moment will stay in mind for years, even decades, before it comes becomes connected to another event, which might bring to mind a third, which might require the invention of a fourth.

*Do you write with any particular audience in mind? Are there any particular audiences you hope will connect with these stories?*

The connection I hope for with an audience is an adult whose educated sense of aesthetic pleasure, a sense of rightness and wholeness in the work, that it is true in the sense of being more than factual. I am wary of suggestions that fiction writers who want to "connect" to an audience on a thematic level, as it either presupposes that writers are neurotics who choose to write philosophy in a code called "storytelling"

and the reader's wearying job is to decipher the code. This is how literature is taught in too many schools: "Hey, kids! Grab your pencils! Let's go on a symbol hunt!" Worse is the idea that a writer may only connect with an audience that already is predisposed to sharing an identical perspective on the nature of things. In the first instance, if a decent writer wanted to write philosophy, she could. Why create a puzzle that might be misread? The writer who sets out to send a message needs to read more—every message has already been sent—and in all cases that writer would do better to rent a billboard in I-40 in Missouri: in the course of 3 days, the message will be read by more people than any mere book. I reject the idea that an audience and author must share a common bond as a matter of principle as we do not live in impenetrable silos of human experience.

*You taught English for ten years at an inner-city school in Brooklyn, NY. Now you coordinate the professional writing program at Salem State College. How has your role as an educator shaped your writing?*

Like the kindergarten teacher who has forgotten how to conduct adult discourse, there is an element of didacticism in a lot of drafts I struggle to eliminate. It's also worth noting that the inner-city school at which I taught was a public all-girls school, often kids who were recent immigrants whose parents did not want them in "mixed" schools; more often minority kids who were fleeing their very violent neighborhood schools. They traveled by subway or bus to get to a school that was relatively safe. They kept sharpened afro-picks in their hair, mind you, and in my final years they entered the school building through a metal detector. The drugs of choice were downers, mostly "reds" which are barbiturates, and in that pre-birth control pill age when

abortion was illegal, it seemed that pregnancy was a contagion like flu or chicken pox, something one caught by breathing the wrong air. A lot of my fiction since then—less in this collection than in the others—has been about young women coming of age.

*You've published more than fifty stories in several literary journals and anthologies. You've also published two previous collections of stories. How has your writing evolved over the years?*

I write less; I write more slowly; I revise more; I write at greater length; I choose subjects with care.

*What is your next project?*

I've been at work on a novel for about two years. The damn thing does nothing right. It wants to be one thing; I want it to be another. We fight; I lose. When I do not think it is marvelous, I am certain it is unfit

to line a canary cage. I take month-long breaks from the novel to write memoirs. These have a way of finding their way into print, and there are enough of them for a book. They tell a story from my early teens to roughly when I turned 50, and they are less episodic than they have any right to be—which is a way of saying that I have chosen not to write an autobiography, but a sequence of related narratives where I am protagonist, though rarely hero.



**“There is no drama without trouble.”**  
— *Perry Glasser*