



# Novel Journey

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Friday, March 06, 2009

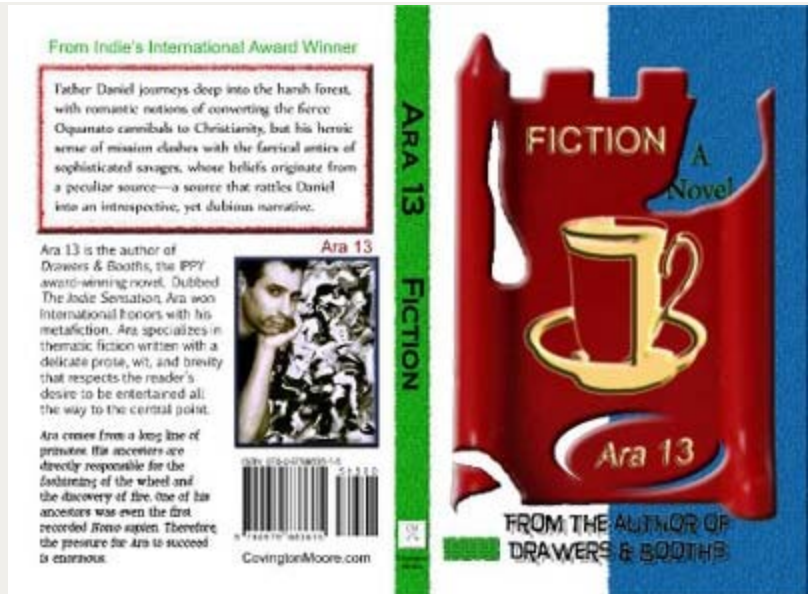
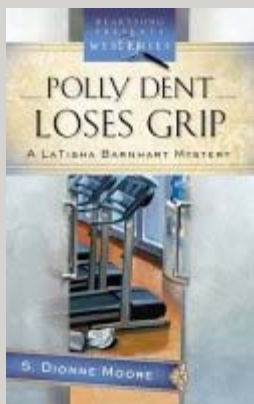
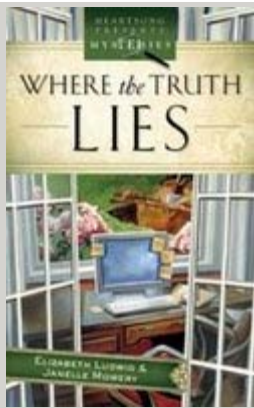
### Author Ara 13 ~ Interviewed

**Ara 13** was a United States Marine Corps journalist and Army special operations soldier. He is a national columnist, award-winning journalist, international-award-winning author, and CovingtonMoore's featured novelist.

**What is your current project? Tell us about it.**

Hm. Which project shall I claim? Fiction, by Ara 13, is soon to be released, so I am working on the marketing endeavor for that. Bloggers and various reviewers are discovering my first novel, *Drawers & Booths*, because it won an international book award, and they are requesting it for review as well as sending me Q&As, and the momentum affords me the opportunity to have great fun lecturing at universities about the metafiction genre (another project). My third novel is being edited. And number four (thinking ahead to 2011) is being outlined as I develop key themes. Keeping up with the profession thrusts me into a multitude of projects. And I couldn't be more thrilled.





Specifically, Fiction, a metafictional novel, will be released in late March. It chronicles the endeavors of Father Daniel as he journeys deep into the harsh forest, with romantic notions of converting the fierce Oquanato cannibals to Christianity, but his heroic sense of mission clashes with the farcical antics of sophisticated savages, whose beliefs originate from a peculiar source—a source that rattles Daniel into an introspective, yet dubious narrative ... At least, that's the elevator spiel.

Primarily, my projects highlight my metafictional proclivities. I enjoy the many considerations involved when an author determines to what degree he inserts himself into his novels, whether thru metaphor, direct address of the reader, or unintended personal insinuations into the text. Great fun!

**Tell us about your journey to publication. How long had you been writing before you got the call you had a contract, how you heard and what went through your head?**

My journey—deliberate; every step of the way. I am a firm believer that no matter if the call is received or if you do the dialing yourself, it is of no importance. What matters is the product; and quality is not an accident. My thrills come from holding that book in my hands, feeling its sturdy reality, and thinking, "this is competent. This is a good work." Certainly, I am willing to accept any assistance toward facilitating and promoting my product; and certainly I enjoy making a living with my personal endeavors, but the real journey is the one toward production of a product you feel great about putting your name on.

Don't get me wrong, I am pro-business, but the true adventure is the development of personal integrity, so that the business venture you develop is a byproduct of sound judgment and therefore on a strong foundation. I know ... I know ... you were just asking about the elation of learning I'm a published author. I just wish more people would ask me about my journey toward quality.

**Do you still experience self-doubts regarding your work, or struggle in a particular area such as writers block or angst driven head-banging against walls? Please share some helpful overcoming hints that you've discovered.**

A healthy humility about my work keeps me diligently researching my facts, and scouring my sentences for ways to improve the prose or even

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better the communication. Writers shouldn't experience so much self-doubt that they lose the belief that they can impart some wisdom, that they can produce a quality product. But on the other end of the spectrum, they shouldn't feel as if they are infallible. An accurate personal inventory is essential for writers to exploit their assets, yet keep them a student of the field so that their weaknesses become viewed by others, perhaps ironically, as their strong suits.

As per writer's block: If a writer begins with a theme, a point to the story, they have a skeleton on which to pin the meat of the plot. I truly believe writer's block occurs when authors have no intent with their story, and thus the plot goes willy-nilly, where it may. Eventually, personal experience is played out; and without a theme, an author doesn't know what to research, what direction to point the characters, before unleashing them to the serendipitous journey of the pen.

**What mistakes have you made while seeking publication? Or to narrow it down further what's something you wish you'd known earlier that might have saved you some time/frustration in the publishing business?**

Allow me to address this twofold—one from a writer's perspective and one from a publisher's. The best early advice for writing is to have your setting and style defined before starting your piece. You will encounter a painful edit if you don't first select, voice, inner-monologue style, time, location and such. You will be stumbling through unintended anachronisms that could shut down your plot, and you chance creating a style that is incongruent and therefore unintentionally artificial.

Regarding mistakes from a publisher's view: Ensure you have a word or comparable document of a finalized version of your text; so that the publisher isn't the only one with the later editing corrections. Also, when writing your back blurb, focus more on the description of the plot than the themes addressed. Browsers need tangible action when they consider purchasing your book.

**What's the best or worst advice (or both) you've heard on writing/publication?**

I consistently encounter what I believe to be bad advice about writing, which amounts to, "begin writing about anything. Create characters and let them dictate what you're trying to say. Find the discovered meaning of your artistic journey." I think this concept of writing first, and discovering meaning second is insincere and just plain rotten advice. I believe that writing is not divorced from communication; and for one to communicate an idea, it is best to have a specific intention, a predetermined point. I am amazed that this belief is contrary to the opinions of most coaches and writers. We can allow the plot to develop naturally and not be in conflict of addressing a pre-intended, discernable theme while focused on making a great point.

**What is your favorite source for finding story ideas?**

I think up funny headlines. Headlines cut to the chase. If you can come up with a headline that is utterly intriguing, contains a nice conflict, and has the potential for both humor and philosophy, then you nailed it!

**Have you ever had one of those awkward writer moments you'd like to share with us, the ones wherein you get "the look" from the normals? Example, you stand at a knife display at the sporting goods store and ask the clerk which would be the best**

**to use to disembowel a six foot man...please do tell.**

No awkward moments really, just the typical mockery I receive from people who marvel over my ever-presence at the coffee shops. They see me as having the life of Riley, without reflecting on the fact that I am at work all those hours.

**Is there a particularly difficult set back that you've gone through in your writing career you are willing to share? Or have you ever been at the point where considered quitting writing altogether?**

The road to publication is replete with difficult setbacks, as is any business venture. The trick is to chip away at the venture, everyday. Even if you lose ten paces and only gain two, you miraculously move forward, nonetheless. Certainly, if I remain undiscovered by the larger reading public, in lieu of the nice reviews, I will have to consider continuing my venture as a hobbyist—a serious hobbyist, hopefully producing work of quality professionals would envy, but the point is; I will continue writing and publishing. Knowing that quality of product is in my hands keeps me motivated. No setback should take away my ability to publish. No unconvinced authority will stop my production; though, I will try to honestly decide if those opinions have merit and the advice is that which I should heed, ultimately bettering my product. But to be honest with you, I feel pretty good about my products right now.

**With the clarity of experience what advice would you offer up to the wet-behind-the-ears you if beginning this writing journey today?**

Address a particular theme, establish setting, narrative voice, and style before beginning. Research, research, research—if you don't get your facts right, the readers will never believe your fiction. Editing is not the sole purview of the editor; learn your trade. Read. Argue. Chance being wrong in a crowd so that you can be right later on paper, having looked at the matter from many angles. Don't be afraid of being redundant. Constantly interview yourself so that you can find the holes in your presentation. Charlie Rose does not need to know he was in the shower with you asking you questions about your brilliant themes.

**What event/person has most changed you as a writer? How?**

My journalism background in the military was instrumental in fashioning my writer self. I had the good fortune of working under some terrific editors. Plus, I appreciated the structure of news writing. "Here's the AP Style guide. Memorize it," I was instructed. I already had the creativity, and the years of news writing gave me the tools necessary to write clear sentence.

**What piece of writing have you done that you're particularly proud of and why?**

Wow. If I weren't particularly proud of my novels, they would be on the shelf with the other sophomoric attempts of my youth. Why am I proud of them? Because I feel as if I met my criteria of a good novel: I addressed particular themes, I entertained so that the philosophizing wasn't a bitter pill, and I did it with some brevity, respecting the reader's ambitions to tackle other great works.

**Dean Koontz recently shared his take on the concept on "the**

**writer's sacred duty." What comes to your mind at the mention of "the writer's sacred duty?"**

Well, I certainly don't believe in a literal account of my work being any more "sacred" than any other occupation, to include manual labor. And to be honest with you, if Koontz thinks he has a sacred duty to write, I would have to question his output.

Entertaining, yes; but of worldly importance? Come on. Of course, I don't know the interview you are referencing, and I may be taking this comment out of context. If so, then I plead: stupid. That being said, do I think there is a nobility, an honor to writing? There certainly could be, if one has that integrity prior to taking pen to paper. I do not think, however, that the very act of writing makes a piece of high-value, just as Michael Moore's ability to make an entertaining film doesn't overcome his intentional disregard for the integrity of journalism. What you say does matter. The sanctity is not inherent by virtue of the speaker, but by the truth of the assertion.

**Do you have a pet peeve having to do with this biz?**

I have a multitude of pet peeves, but they are usually explained by others needs to draw bright lines for utility sake. Without harping on each business obstacle, I've learned to overcome them by polishing my stuff so that it shines bright enough to make ignoring my work terribly difficult. Some of these obstacles, I can't ignore, for they are genuine roadblocks, but I won't wallow in the unfairness of them. I realize this answer is somewhat a dodge, but I'm practicing nonwallowingness.

**Do you have a dream for the future of your writing, something you would love to accomplish?**

I will be happy to continue producing work that meets my standards. If in doing so, the byproduct of recognition for such quality befalls me, I will embrace it. But, it is the quality of product that motivates me; which is fortunate, for that makes my goals subject to being attained without having to coax others into taking up my banner. That being said, I would like to be praised by as many people as possible, to include being given shiny awards, standing ovations, and invitations to the hippest events. Do you have any pull?

**What is your favorite and least favorite part of being a writer?**

I love the exposure to a multitude of subjects, which I can delve into as deeply as I desire. I greatly enjoy the research necessary per each setting and event.

**How has your unique life journey prepared you to be an author? What is one of the more unique or strange life experiences that has really given you an extra oomph in your writing?**

That's just it; the oomph is not one strange experience, such as a trauma, for that would only give me fodder for one piece, or repetitive work. The journey is long, slow, and deliberate. It's composed of exposure to various authors, a multitude of world views, healthy skepticism, subject specific research, honest personal evaluation, and time—this is my thrust.

**Describe your special or favorite writing spot.**

Coffee shops. The less piped-in music the better. Libraries for difficult editing passages. Coffee shops have the nice balance of quietude with the feeling that I'm not a hermit, at home, antsy, wanting to see people existing, people recognizing my existence, but only briefly, for I have work to do.

**What aspect of writing was the most difficult for you to grasp/conquer? How did you overcome it?**

Grammar and spelling. I scrutinize everything, and often feel as if a particular sentence could be polished ten different ways, which can stall editing. Perhaps, because I feel it is my weakness, I am getting quite good at it, just as I did with acquiring familiarization with odd words, working to overcome my predisposition for phonetics with NY Times crosswords and scrabble. Now, my friends ask me how to spell certain posers, not knowing I carefully tread when beyond Q without U words. Currently, my particular shortcoming is my knowledge of Geography (at least per my standard), and as I explain the migration of Vikings to a friend, they marvel over my geographical knowledge, not knowing I painstakingly poured over Atlas and history books until I plugged up that particular hole in my education. More and more, what I consider to be my shortcomings are considered by others to be my strong suits. But find me on a blog, and you will see how much work I put into editing.

**Writing rituals. Do you have to sit somewhere specific, complete a certain number of words, leave something undone to trigger creativity for the next session? Some other quirk you'd like to share?**

My ritual is to go about working nearly every day. I've found that once I've worked a theme, I try not to think about the story until I am able to take notes. My problems tend to be the opposite of others, in that I often, unintentionally think about my story, late at night, come up with great ideas, funny dialogue, and then I have to get up and write it all down. I force myself not to think about my story at these times, so I can get some sleep. Because my foundation for the story is so strong, because I've prepared the essentials, knowing my theme and major conflict, the meat just pours out.

**Plot, seat of pants or combination?**

I guess you would call it a combination, though it leans heavily toward the prepared side. Again, I begin with a particular theme, a point, and then I work the plot letting it unfold naturally so that the events aren't forced and risk coming across as artificial. But because I am aware of the story's point, the plot unfolds in the direction I intend, even if it meanders around peaks and valleys I wasn't originally privy to.

**What is the most difficult part of pulling together a book? Ex. Do you have saggy middles, soggy characters, soupy plots during your first drafts...if so, how do you shape it up?**

For me, because I spend so much time on the main edit, inserting symbolism, clarifying that which the sentence doesn't directly state, I have a minor difficulty of not being overly influenced by the author I am currently reading and enamored with. Within the time from the first write to this elaborate edit, I've changed somewhat as a writer. I've heard Henry James went back and reworked all his earlier books. I don't want

to do that; yet I don't want one book to look as if it is a genealogy of my growth. I like the stages, the honesty of separate styles, but in separate pieces. I don't want to stagnate, and I think it's possible to do so from an end stage as well, working backwards. One of my favorite authors is Ishiguro, for *The Remains of the Day*, and *An Artist of the Floating World*; but I think his style—withholding a piece of psychologically pertinent information, to be revealed in a climax—is played out for him, and his later works paled greatly, just the same as if he stumbled upon this formula later and inserted then into his stories. An authorial progression can be pleasant. No doubt, I'm amazed that *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood* were written by the same man. What a feat! I can also understand the motivation behind Joyce's progression, even though I don't wish to march that direction.

**Have you received a particularly memorable reader response? Please share.**

I live for each reader's response. My writer's ego is sometimes that precarious. I could never run for office; a mere majority consensus would still crush me. Specifically, I love to hear that a reader returned to one of my books to find a particular passage, in order to get an argument straight in his head, or to reference it in a conversation. To be cited is a particular coup.

**Have you had a particularly memorable peer honor? Please share.**

Do the people who hand out awards count as peers? *Drawers & Booths* won an IPPY as an "Outstanding Book of the Year," one of 32 from 3,175 entrants from 16 countries. As far as contact with other authors; I tend to have an open-mind policy. If I think I have a particular formula for success, or components thereof, I eagerly share. So, I am constantly honored by the honest career-particular discussions of my fellow writers, and readers.

**How much marketing/publicity do you do? Any advice in this area?**

Tons. Indies are soon going to have the leg up when it comes to grassroots marketing. Not that I think the future will be removed from big business, but those businesses will be scurrying to catch up to those of us who've set some terrific foundations online. Advice: it's easiest to promote work of high quality. Believe it or not, the best marketing advice is to learn your trade and polish your work. Next, plug into the grassroots internet network. For those of us who write fiction, marketing is particularly difficult as we cannot attach our work to too many current events, and it is hard to locate a niche audience. But still, we must try to define our niche. Develop a boxer name: Jean-Paul "The Existentialist" Sartre. Think of yourself as the name brand, not your book.

**Parting words? Anything you wish we would've asked because you've got the perfect answer?**

Where can we buy your books? *Drawers & Booths* is available at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and can be ordered in most bookstores; and readers can research me at [Ara13.com](http://Ara13.com). Where can we buy two or more of your books? Same places. Thanks. Ara

*posted by Kelly Klepfer @ 3:28 AM*



**2 COMMENTS:**



At 7:24 AM,  Kelly Klepfer said...

Thanks for dropping by, Ara. You've shared some great advice. I haven't started "Fiction" yet but I'm getting closer to and looking forward to it.



At 1:10 PM,  Sheila Deeth said...

Interesting. Thanks for the introduction.

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