

## Old soul inside a good dog in "Racing in the Rain"

By Florangela Davila  
Special to The Seattle Times

"The Art of Racing in the Rain"

by Garth Stein

Harper, 321 pp., \$23.95

Anyone who has ever owned a dog knows one universal truth: Dogs are good people. Smart, compassionate, intuitive, seemingly knowing when it's best to wag tail or simply nudge nose. Oh yes, I'm anthropomorphizing here, and if you've got a problem with this Go! Out! Now!

The rest of you ought to curl up with "The Art of Racing in the Rain," the latest novel by Seattle author Garth Stein. Joyful in its language, creative in its narration and affecting in its story, this is a terrific book that speaks to our fundamental desire to commune and communicate with animals.

On the eve of his death, Enzo, a dog certain that he's part terrier (because terriers are problem-solvers), recounts his life's story, from a pup plucked by Denny Swift, aspiring race-car driver stuck selling auto parts, through Denny's marriage to Eve; the birth of their daughter, Zoe; Eve's battle with terminal brain cancer; a brutal custody fight with a pair of in-laws dubbed The Evil Twins; and finally the deterioration of his own body due to hip dysplasia and old age.

"I'm old. And while I'm very capable of getting older that's not the way I want to go out," Enzo says on page 2. "Shot full of pain medication and steroids to reduce the swelling of my joints. Vision fogged with cataracts. Puffy, plasticky packages of Doggie Depends stocked in the pantry. I'm sure Denny would get me one of those little wagons I've seen on the streets, the ones that cradle the hindquarters so a dog can drag his ass behind him when things start to fail. ... I'm not sure if it's worse than dressing up a dog for Halloween, but it's close."



FRANK HUSTER

### Author appearance Garth Stein

The author of "The Art of Racing in the Rain" will appear at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Starbucks' Madison

Park location, 4000 East Madison (206-329-3736; "Art" is the new Starbucks book selection). He will appear at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Barnes & Noble's University Village location in Seattle (206-517-4107).

Stein's Enzo is the perfect narrator, wickedly observant of the world around him, even if limited in his ability to interact with humans. Oh, how he yearns for a proper tongue and vocal chords so he can string a sentence together. And opposable thumbs!

But Enzo has gestures, plenty of them, and he finds a way to get his feelings across — anxiety, humiliation, jealousy, rage, concern, loyalty. Stein fleshes out the character Enzo so incredibly well, it's impossible not to regard this dog as anything but marvelous companion.

A good portion of Enzo's intellect comes from watching (responsibly) TV. One particular documentary speaks about a belief in Mongolia that dogs reincarnate into humans. Enzo adopts this as truth. It explains why he's already felt so human, and why he doesn't entirely fear death. And thus his life's journey is a struggle to hone his humanness, to make sense of the good, the bad and the unthinkable.

Stein, a husband, father of three, dog owner and former documentary filmmaker, consulted on the U.S. distribution of a Mongolian film, "State of Dogs" some 10 years ago, according to the book's publicity materials. And that's where the idea for "The Art of Racing in the Rain" first took root.

Stein also credits a 2004 Seattle Arts & Lectures reading by poet Billy Collins, in which he read the poem "The Revenant." A euthanized dog addresses his former master from heaven. Stein knew then he had his narrator.

The plot arrived in part from the travails of a close friend, a semiprofessional race-car driver. Enzo, steeped in race-car driving from countless watchings of race-car videos as well as driving-technique musings imparted by Denny, is a four-footed philosopher. The racetrack — even and bumpy, full of risk and reward — is life. "We are creators of our own destiny," Enzo says, absorbing the thinking of driver Ayrton Senna and his strategy for navigating a track in the rain. Thus, the novel's title (and Enzo's naming after car builder Enzo Ferrari).

Stein, who lives in Mount Baker, sets his story in Seattle and its environs. A tiny Craftsman house in the Central District where Enzo worries about the bees in a bush that could sting Zoe. Mercer Island with its Lake Washington views. The Bauhaus cafe on Capitol Hill. The fertile Cascades during a summer hike.

Other marvelous Enzo moments: The respect he learns to have for a pregnant Eve. "It must be amazing to have a body that can carry an entire creature inside. (I mean, other than a tapeworm, which I've had ...)"

Enzo wishing the baby would look like him.

"Sometimes I think you actually understand me," Denny says to Enzo, one especially significant evening in a relationship that will endure tragedy and yet also endure in happiness. "It's like there's a person inside there. Like you know everything."

I do, Enzo says.

Stein's book makes it so easy to believe.

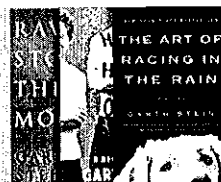
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Garth Stein is the author of the New York Times best selling novel, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Harper, 2008). Now published in 30 languages, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* was the #1 BookSense selection for June, 2008, the Starbucks spring/summer 2008 book selection, and has been on the IndieBound bestseller list since its publication. Stein's previous novel, *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets* (Soho Press, 2005) won a Pacific Northwest

Booksellers Association Award, and was a BookSense Pick in both hardcover and paperback. *Raven Stole the Moon* (Harper, 2010) was Stein's first novel. He has also written a full-length play, *Brother Jones*, and produced a number of award-winning documentaries.

Garth is the co-founder of Seattle7Writers, a non-profit organization comprised of 42 prominent Northwest authors dedicated to creating connections between readers, writers, booksellers, and librarians to foster and support a passion for the written word.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Seattle, Garth's ancestry is diverse: his mother, a native of Alaska, is of Tlingit Indian and Irish descent; his father, a Brooklyn native, is the child of Jewish emigrants from Austria. After spending his childhood in Seattle and then living in New York City for 18 years, Garth returned to Seattle, where he currently lives with his wife, three sons, and their dog, Comet.



Photo: Frank Huster

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## The Art of Racing in the Rain



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### New York Times best-selling novel

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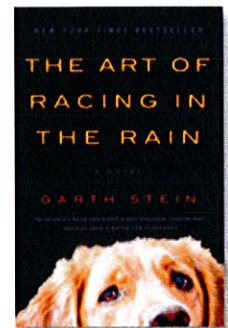
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*"In Mongolia, when a dog dies, he is buried high in the hills so people cannot walk on his grave. The dog's master whispers into the dog's ear his wishes that the dog will return as a man in his next life. Then his tail is cut off and put beneath his head, and a piece of meat or fat is placed in his mouth to sustain his soul on its journey; before he is reincarnated, the dog's soul is freed to travel the land, to run across the high desert plains for as long as it would like."*

*"I learned that from a program on the National Geographic channel, so I believe it is true. Not all dogs return as men, they say; only those who are ready."*

*"I am ready."*



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Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television extensively, and by listening very closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver. Through Denny, Enzo has gained tremendous insight into the human condition, and he sees that life, like racing, isn't simply about going fast. Using the techniques needed on the race track, one can successfully navigate all of life's ordeals.

On the eve of his death, Enzo takes stock of his life, recalling all that he and his family have been through: the sacrifices Denny has made to succeed professionally; the unexpected loss of Eve, Denny's wife; the three-year battle over their daughter, Zoë, whose maternal grandparents pulled every string to gain custody. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations, Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family, holding in his heart the dream that Denny will become a racing champion with Zoë at his side.

A heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty, and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life...as only a dog could tell it.

### The Art of Racing in the Rain Video Book



[Watch on YouTube, where you can share or embed the video](#)

[Download the trailer here](#)

### Praise for *The Art of Racing in the Rain*

*"The Art of Racing in The Rain has everything: love, tragedy, redemption, danger, and--best of all--the canine narrator Enzo. This old soul of a dog has much to teach to us about being human. I loved this book."* -- Sara Gruen, Author of *Water for Elephants*

*"I savored Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain* for many reasons: a dog who speaks, the thrill of competitive racing, a heart-tugging storyline, and--best of all--the fact that it is a meditation on humility and hope in the face of despair. Since finishing this engagingly unique novel, I've found myself staring at my own dog, thinking, *Hmm, I wonder ...*"* – Wally Lamb, Author of *She's Come Undone* and *I Know This Much Is True*

*"The Art of Racing in the Rain takes you on an unforgettable journey through another kind of mind, through the eyes -- and nose -- of a dog. I found it fascinating."* – Temple Grandin, Author of *Animals in Translation*

[Read the reviews.](#)



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**When last we talked to you, you were deep into your next novel. How's it coming along?**

It was due last year, but I did not get it done, obviously. And it's changed a lot. You know, it's easy when I teach writing workshops to talk about how writing is a process of discovery. You don't know what you're doing until you're taking it apart, until you're "in the cave," as it were. You can think you know what your book is about, and pretend to know what your book is about, but you really don't know until you start peeling back the layers. And that's really what's happened with this book. I had a real strong concept. I knew exactly what I wanted to do. And it surprises me that the characters change. The story's changed considerably. The point of view has changed. The narrative voice has changed. You've got your choice: Either you crowbar it in and you shove it until the peg fits in the hole, or you adapt your peg. And I believe (the latter) is the proper way to do it. It takes longer, but it's a better end result.

**Does the success of your last book make it easier to take more time? Can you tell your publisher "Hey, we need a more time with this one"?**

Yes and no. In a sense, I have a certain grace period that's kind of a de facto grace period. Because the longer Enzo is out there doing well, the more patient they can be in terms of my next book. At the same time, there is an expectation that I have a next book, and they want to get it out there. And I totally understand that. We have a good communication line. I'm working with my editor. She knows. I keep her up to date. She's read the first draft of it. It's not an in-the-dark process for them. Jonathan Karp (of Simon & Schuster) is now my new publisher and he's a very smart guy. He says "Look, we're not going to put out a book that isn't the best book you can write. We're not just going to try to rush you out for expediency's sake." I feel the same way, so we're all on the same page.

**When do you expect it to be out?**

I used to guess. [laughter] I've just given up on it. I mean, if it goes really, really well and I get it done this fall, next summer or fall it will be out. We'll have to see. I'm making quantum leaps in it these past couple weeks, which is great. And I know that it's going well because suddenly all these things are happening and it's starting to make me busy doing other things. What I hate is the down periods where I don't get anything – when I'm depressed about what I'm writing *and* nothing's happening. So, as soon as I start getting really busy with things and opportunities start coming I know that it means that I'm on an upward swing. I'm not concerned.

**Any details you want to share? Themes? Plot details? Title?**

I had a title, and I'm not sure I'm going to stay with it, so no title yet. But it's a Northwest story. I read a few brief passages of it last night (at a pre-Bedtime Stories event on Aug. 17). Which was very exciting for me because I'd never read any of it to anybody before. Right away a couple of people came up to me and said, "Ohhh! We grew up in that neighborhood and we know what you're talking about, with the trains and the whole Northwest feel." My Northwest readers are really going to vibe on that, which is what I like. I like writing about the Northwest, about Seattle, specifically, obviously.

**I've heard the Stimson-Green Mansion – which happens to be Humanities Washington's headquarters – makes a cameo in the new book. Any truth to that rumor?**

Yes it does. It's not directly Stimson-Green. The main patriarch of this book is a guy named Elijah Riddell. He made his fortune in lumber in the mid- to late-1800s. And he initially built a house very similar to a fictionalized version of the Stimson mansion. And then goes off to build a greater mansion in a fictionalized version of the Highlands, which I call the North Estate. Which is what Stimson did, as well. So I cribbed that. There are cameos by some of the great forefathers of Seattle, which is kind of fun. And there's talk about the Denny Regrade, which was going on at the time, and how on Earth they were going to build a sewer system to carry waste into the Puget Sound. [laughter] It was fun to locate that kind of stuff.

## The Art of Racing in the Rain

### Questions

1. Some early readers of the novel have observed that viewing the world through a dog's eyes makes for a greater appreciation of being human. Why do you think this is?
2. Enzo's observations throughout the novel provide insight into his world view. For example: *"The visible becomes inevitable."* *"Understanding the truth is simple. Allowing oneself to experience it, is often terrifically difficult."* *"No race has ever been won in the first corner; many races have been lost there."* How does his philosophy apply to real life?
3. In one of the book's darkest moments, one of Zoe's stuffed animals—the zebra—comes to life and torments him. What does the zebra symbolize?
4. Can you imagine the novel being told from Denny's point of view? How would it make the story different?
5. In the first chapter, Enzo says: *"It's what's inside that's important. The soul. And my soul is very human."* How does Enzo's situation—a human soul trapped in a dog's body—influence his opinions about what he sees around him? How do you feel about the ideas of reincarnation and karma as Enzo defines them?
6. Do you find yourself looking at your own dog differently after reading this novel?
7. In the book, we get glimpses into the mindset and mentality of a race car driver. What parallels can you think of between the art of racing and the art of living?
8. The character of Ayrton Senna, as he is presented in the book, is heroic, almost a mythic figure. Why do you think this character resonates so strongly for Denny?

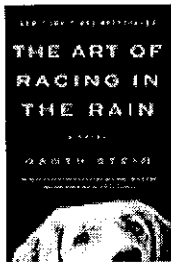


## Bedtime Stories emcee Garth Stein discusses continued success, next novel



*Garth Stein is in the hot seat this year. Instead of unveiling a new work of fiction at Bedtime Stories – as he did last year – the bestselling author of *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is stepping into the emcee's shoes. He says he's taking the role seriously, too: researching literary humor and sharpening his argument about the important role the arts and humanities play in today's world. There's little doubt he'll do just fine. Garth recently sat down with Humanities Washington for a lunch-hour interview near his writing studio in Seattle's Columbia City neighborhood. (For more with Garth, make sure to visit [GarthStein.com](http://GarthStein.com).)*

**It's been more than three years since the release of *The Art of Racing in the Rain*. How has its continued success changed your life?**



I'm still working on it. I'm still travelling. I'm going to Florida, and Shreveport, Louisiana, and Salt Lake City – never been – and Detroit, and I'm going Minneapolis – all this fall. So I'm still doing a lot of travel for it. Now it's moved into a lot of community reading programs as opposed to bookstore readings. It's a different format. Basically everybody there has read the book and is a fan, so the conversation kind of shifts. When you first start marketing a book you have to sell people on it, and now it's more of an entertainment thing. So, I really enjoy it. It does create an issue of balance. I have a new book I have to finish, and I do feel the tension. It's late. [nervous laughter] A lot. But, you know, it's coming along. I'm making progress. I'd be really upset if I weren't able to write the new book because I was too busy doing the old book, but it's working out.

**This year saw the release of *Racing in the Rain: My Life as a Dog*, a repurposing of *The Art of Racing in the Rain* for younger readers (ages 8-12). What are the main differences between the two books, and what challenges were presented in recrafting this story for a younger audience?**

## The Art of Racing in the Rain Reading Guide

### Introduction

A heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life . . . as only a dog could tell it.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Some early readers of the novel have observed that viewing the world through a dog's eyes makes for a greater appreciation of being human. Why do you think this is?

2. Enzo's observations throughout the novel provide insight into his world view. For example:

*"The visible becomes inevitable."*

*"Understanding the truth is simple. Allowing oneself to experience it, is often terrifically difficult."*

*"No race has ever been won in the first corner; many races have been lost there."*

How does his philosophy apply to real life?

3. In the book's darkest moments, one of Zoe's stuffed animals—the zebra—comes to life and threatens him. What does the zebra symbolize?

4. Can you imagine the novel being told from Denny's point of view? How would it make the story different?

5. In the first chapter, Enzo says: *"It's what's inside that's important. The soul. And my soul is very human."* How does Enzo's situation—a human soul trapped in a dog's body—influence his opinions about what he sees around him? How do you feel about the ideas of reincarnation and karma as Enzo defines them?

6. Do you find yourself looking at your own dog differently after reading this novel?

7. In the book, we get glimpses into the mindset and mentality of a race car driver. What parallels can you think of between the art of racing and the art of living?

8. The character of Ayrton Senna, as he is presented in the book, is heroic, almost a mythic figure. Why do you think this character resonates so strongly for Denny?

### About the Author

The author of two novels, *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets* and *Raven Stole the Moon*, and a play, *Brother Jones*, Garth Stein has also worked as a documentary filmmaker. He lives in Seattle with his family.

Source:

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/microsite/readingguide.aspx?authorID=33703&isbn13=9780061537936&displayType=readingGuide>

Accessed: 9/20/2012



It was really easy. Basically, it was at a point where I was getting emails from middle school teachers saying, “We think kids would love this book but we can’t put it in the library because certain communities have certain restrictions in terms of language and suggestive adult situations.” And I thought, “That’s really too bad.” I was talking with (author and autism advocate) Temple Grandin about why youth like this book – and why teenagers like it, specifically. And, you know what it is: It’s because they identify with the dog, Enzo. Because, what is Enzo’s problem? Well, he doesn’t have a tongue, so he can’t form words, he can’t join a conversation. He doesn’t have thumbs, so he can’t open doors, right? He can’t go anywhere unless someone takes him there. He’s dependent on his master for food and water and shelter. And Enzo’s convinced he’s just as smart as anyone else. A teenager – they’re very smart, in some cases much smarter and better educated than we are after our brain cells have all dried up. But they can’t vote, so their voice is not fully legitimized, as Enzo’s isn’t. They have to ask permission to do things. They have to be driven around. Their parents provide food, water. So, really, teenagers are like dogs, right? They have the same restrictions.

So I took this idea, and realized it was for younger kids, too. Little kids have to be driven to soccer practice and stuff, so they would really bond Enzo’s plight. But there are these restrictions to them reading the book because of bad language and because there’s an adult suggestion of sexual molestation. So I started talking to my editor and she asked, “Could you pull that stuff out?” I said, “It would be pretty easy, if I pull that stuff out of the book, not much else in the book needs to change.” And so we did it.

I get a lot response from young readers, now. They really like it. So that’s fun. Because I think Enzo has a lot of really good messages to give to kids about looking forward, about personal responsibility. So I think it’s good they get to read the book. And it’s been very successful.

**IMDb has the movie version of *The Art of Racing in the Rain* – starring Patrick Dempsey – scheduled to hit theaters in 2012. What’s the latest?**

There is no latest. There’s a script. Universal is happy with it. Patrick Dempsey is still waiting. We’ll see. Don’t rent your tuxedo for the opening yet.

**How involved have you been with the movie?**

Not at all. I read the first draft of the script and I have not yet read the second draft. But they don’t really want me involved. When it’s time, when there’s a director all set up and they’re ready to go, then we’ll have a conversation. I’ll read the script, we’ll go over it and see. I trust Patrick Dempsey to be true to the book. But I’d like to double check everything, just in terms of some of the messages that are in the book – I don’t want them to get turned into an after-school-special sort of thing.

## SUMMARY

Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television and by listening very closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver.

Through Denny, Enzo has gained tremendous insight into the human condition, and he sees that life, like racing, isn't simply about going fast. Using the techniques needed on the race track, one can successfully navigate all of life's ordeals.

On the eve of his death, Enzo takes stock of his life, recalling all that he and his family have been through: the sacrifices Denny has made to succeed professionally; the unexpected loss of Eve, Denny's wife; the three-year battle over their daughter, Zoë, whose maternal grandparents pulled every string to gain custody. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations, Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family, holding in his heart the dream that Denny will become a racing champion with Zoë at his side. Having learned what it takes to be a compassionate and successful person, the wise canine can barely wait until his next lifetime, when he is sure he will return as a man.

A heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty, and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life . . . as only a dog could tell it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of two novels, *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets* and *Raven Stole the Moon*, and a play, *Brother Jones*, **Garth Stein** has also worked as a documentary filmmaker. He lives in Seattle with his family.



Fifty-four years ago today — March 21, 1960 — Ayrton Senna was born in São Paulo, Brazil. He took to karting at the tender age of four, and later, as a professional race car driver, would become the pride of Brazil. In 2009, an unprecedented magazine poll of 217 Formula One drivers [voted Senna the greatest of all time](#), topping both Michael Schumacher and Juan Manuel Fangio.

Sadly, that honor arrived posthumously. Senna won three Formula One world championships for McLaren-Honda before his untimely death in 1994, when his Williams-Renault race car, stripped of ABS, active suspension, power brakes, and traction control due to shortsighted F1 rules changes, crashed during the San Marino Grand Prix. Following that fateful accident, the FIA again altered its rules to allow the electronic safety systems that are now standard equipment in most modern automobiles. Ayrton Senna remains the last driver to die piloting a F1 race car.

## Ayrton Senna Grand Prix Career

Senna has often been voted as one of the greatest Formula One drivers of all time in various motorsport polls. He was recognized for his qualifying speed over one lap and from 1989 until 2006 held the record for most pole positions.

He was also acclaimed for his wet weather performances, such as the 1984 Monaco Grand Prix, the 1985 Portuguese Grand Prix, and the 1993 European Grand Prix.

He holds a record six victories at the prestigious Monaco Grand Prix, and is the third most successful driver of all time in terms of race wins.

Senna courted controversy throughout his career, particularly during his turbulent rivalry with Alain Prost. Both the 1989 Championship won by Prost and the 1990 Championship won by Senna were decided by collisions between the pair at those years Japanese Grand Prix Race.





Garth Stein on *The Art of Racing in the Rain*

**Q: Where did the idea for the book come from?**

A: The first seed for this book was planted in my mind about ten years ago. I was no longer working in documentary films, but a friend asked me to consult on the U.S. distribution of a film he knew about from Mongolia, called "State of Dogs." I took a look at the film and the press material they had on it. I didn't end up getting involved with the film, but the idea really stuck with me. In Mongolia, there is a belief that the next incarnation for a dog is as a man. I thought this was a cool concept and I tucked it away thinking I might some day do something with it.

Photo by Abigail Seymour

Then, in 2004, I saw Billy Collins speak at Seattle Arts and Lectures. He's a great poet and a terrific reader. He read a poem, *The Revenant*, which is told from the point of view of a recently euthanized dog as he addresses his former master from heaven. The poem begins, "I am the dog you put to sleep...come back to tell you one simple thing: I never liked you—not one bit." I loved this poem. When Billy Collins finished reading, I knew I had to write a story from the point of view of a dog. And my dog would know the truth: that in his next incarnation, he would return to earth as a man.

So I had the character and the goal, but I still needed the framework of a story. A close friend of mine, who is a semi-professional race car driver but who supplements his racing by working behind the counter at an upscale automotive repair shop, was going through some personal difficulties. His plight wasn't Denny's, but it gave me some ideas about what happens to families when one member suddenly passes away. I developed a story that would really put my main character, Denny, through his paces, and then it was all there for me.

**Q: What inspired you to tell the story from a dog's point of view?**

A: Using a dog as a narrator has limitations and it has advantages. The limitations are that a dog cannot speak. A dog has no thumbs. A dog can't communicate his thoughts except with gestures. Dogs are not allowed certain places. The advantages are that a dog has special access: people will say things in front of dogs because it is assumed that a dog doesn't understand. Dogs are allowed to witness certain things because they aren't people and have no judgment.

I was able to work with this idea a lot in terms of giving the reader a unique viewpoint into the action of the book. Enzo goes off with Zoë, and while Denny, her father, doesn't know what happens, we see through Enzo's eyes and so we do know. In that sense, it was a lot of fun playing with this "fly on the wall" point of view. Especially since the "fly" in our case, is Enzo, who has very keen powers of observation.

**Q: Is there any significance to the name Enzo?**

A: Yes! Denny's dog, Enzo, is named after Enzo Ferrari, who built one of the greatest car trademarks in the world. Ferrari automobiles are famous everywhere. And Ferrari is a dominant player in the world of Formula One racing.

But I have a funny story about how I arrived at Enzo's name....



When I first started writing this novel, Enzo was not named Enzo. He was named Juan Pablo, after Juan Pablo Montoya, the race car driver. When my wife read the first few pages, she said that she loved what I was writing, but the name of the dog wasn't quite right.

**Q: "How about Enzo?" she asked.**

A: We had two sons already, and were expecting our third. I had always wanted to name one of my boys Enzo. I thought it was the ultimate cool name: Enzo Stein. But my wife very much disagreed. "We have a lot of different nationalities in our combined backgrounds," she reasoned. "Russian, German, Austrian, Tlingit Indian, Irish, English...but we have no Italian."

"But then we won't be able to name the baby Enzo," I said.

"I thought of that," she said, nodding slowly.

"I really wanted to name him Enzo," I said. "Enzo, the dog, is your new baby," she replied. "And when *our* new baby comes, we'll find the right name for him."

(For those of you who are interested: We named our son Dashiell.)

**Q: Are you a dog owner yourself?**

A: Yes. Our dog, Comet, is a Lab/poodle mix. She's goofy and silly and sweet.

**Q: Do you think people will look at their own dogs differently after reading this book?**

A: I hope so. Anyone who has a dog knows that they have some very deep thoughts, that they have moods and emotions, they get their feelings hurt. It's not a far reach to give them opinions and values and long-term desires.

The racing scenes deliver a real adrenaline rush and a feel for the intricacies of the sport. Is this seemingly expert knowledge based on personal experience or extensive research?

When I moved back to Seattle in 2001, I got involved in "high performance driver education," which is a fancy way of saying I learned to drive a car really fast on a race track. That soon led to my getting my racing license with the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA). While I did fairly well as a driver (I won the points championship in the NW region Spec Miata class in 2003), I didn't really have the skill as a mechanic or the time and money needed to really excel. When I crashed my car pretty badly—ironically, while racing in the rain—I decided to semi-retire from racing, and now I only race enough to keep my license current.

The funny thing is that while I love cars, I never really thought of myself as a "car guy." When I finished the draft of this book, my wife said, "So *that's* why you were racing. You were doing research!" I guess, on a subconscious level, that's what I was doing.

**Q: The custody battle between the widower Denny and the parents of his late wife is ugly and horrible, with the latter trying to manipulate the outcome by any means necessary. Is this over the top portrayal meant to be colored by Enzo's strong feelings of loyalty?**

A: Any narrative point of view is biased—the narrator has his opinions—and Enzo is extremely biased toward all things Denny and family. So what Enzo relates to us is filtered

through a couple of things: first, being a dog, he's limited in what he is allowed to see; second, being so devoted to his master, his opinions are all highly skewed.

That being said, I have spoken with attorneys who have assured me that in custody and visitation battles, especially ones involving grandparents, things can get extremely ruthless, and it is not inconceivable that, for instance, one side might try to drag things out in order to put the other party into extreme economic distress.

**Q: What lessons can we all learn from Enzo?**

A: I'm not sure that's for me to judge. But I would say the important things for me are twofold.

First, Enzo's mantra: "That which you manifest is before you." I think it's very important to take charge of your life, not to feel like you're a victim of circumstance or fate, but that you are an active participant in your future. It's not a new idea: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." (Lennon/McCartney) Where I focus my energy always matches what comes back to me in my life.

Secondly, Enzo's epiphany—the thing he learns at the end of his life—is that his assumption that race car drivers have to be selfish to be successful, is incorrect. In fact, he determines, in order to be successful, a race car driver has to be completely selfless. He must cease looking at himself as the brightest star in the solar system, and begin to see himself as simply a unique aspect of the universe around him—and, most importantly, as an extension of the universe around him. In this way, a race car driver sheds his ego; his actions become pure and as powerful as the entire universe, which in turn leads to success.

All athletes speak about the mental element of athletics, and it usually boils down to the same thing: if you can remove your ego from the game, you can function with much more clarity and you are more likely to succeed. Wouldn't it be interesting if we all began speaking about the mental element of our lives in this way? How would our lives change if we did?

Source:

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=33703&isbn13=9780061537936&displayType=bookinterview>

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**Q+A:** Garth Stein, *author of The Art of Racing in the Rain*

Using a wise and endearing dog as his narrator, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* author Garth Stein has put motorsports on national best-seller lists.

**Come on. A talking dog? Named Enzo?**

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### **Come on. A talking dog? Named Enzo?**

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### **Enzo even gets a thrill ride around Thunderhill Raceway Park in a BMW.**

I thought that scene pushed the boundaries of credibility. But I got a call from Bob Bondurant, and he said, "Oh, I loved it when you had Enzo in the car! I take my dog Rusty out all the time."

### **Dogs and race cars . . .**

People say, "Well, it's so obvious. You're so manipulative." But when I wrote this book, I had to fire an agent over it. My agent said, "Nobody reads racing books. You can't narrate from a dog's point of view." Now it's in twenty-five languages, and we're up to almost a million copies in print.



### **Are you a racer yourself?**

I raced a Spec Miata with SCCA for about four years. I stopped racing when I put my car into a wall-in the rain, of course-in Seattle. Then I wrote this book and my wife said, "You know, I wondered why you were doing that racing thing. Clearly, it was just research."

### **The book really captures the allure of competition driving.**

I think racers appreciate the book on an entirely different level from the general fiction-reading audience or the dog crowd. I had a guy who wrote me a long e-mail, and he said, "My wife and my family and my friends have no idea why I've been racing for twenty years. They don't get it. They don't understand why I

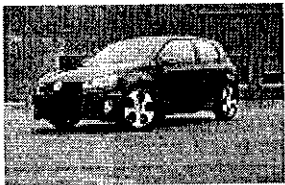
bother doing it. It doesn't make any sense to them at all. Now I have this book, and I gave it to them and I said, 'Just read this. This will explain it to you.' "

### **Is racing a metaphor for life?**

When you go to your first racing school, they tell you, "If something happens to your car, it's your problem." It's about personal responsibility and taking charge of your life. You don't like your job? Change it. Don't say, "It's somebody else's fault that I have this job."

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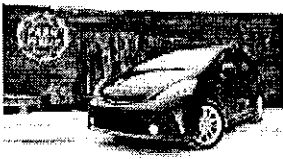
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