

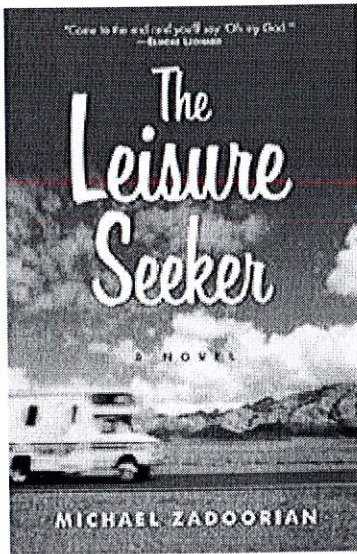
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Book review: "The Leisure Seeker" January 22, 2009

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He has Alzheimer's disease. She has a serious case of cancer and has stopped taking the treatments. He's driving the family's late-1970s RV. She's riding shotgun and popping pain pills. He's subject to outbursts of anger and confusion. She's cynical and wistful. The elderly couple is going down Route 66 for a final vacation together.



This may sound like a road trip from hell. But Michael Zadoorian's new novel, "The Leisure Seeker" (\$24.95, HarperCollins, 288 pages, in stores Tuesday), turns out to be a brisk, entertaining read with an abundance of humor and poignant moments. "The Leisure Seeker" also has been optioned by Sharp Independent films.

The story starts with John and Ella Robina already on the road, departing their native Detroit. Against their adult children's protests, they point their Leisure Seeker RV toward Chicago and take the Mother Road to Disneyland. Ella, who's calling the shots, knows that she and John don't have much time left, and wants to take a vacation together.

It's quite an adventure. They get held up by robbers at the Texas-New Mexico ghost town of Glenrio, suffer a harrowing fall in New Mexico, eat pie at the Midpoint Cafe in Adrian, Texas, buy grapes from one of the roadside stands in Missouri, tour Meramec Caverns ... between the misadventures, they do many of the things that tourists do — if time and health allow.

At their stops for the night, the couple watches slides from previous long-ago vacations. During a slide show at the Lincoln Motel in Chandler, Okla., John and Ella have a pleasant encounter with fellow Route 66 tourists. Those slides allow the couple to reminisce — if John has the capacity to do so.

Zadoorian's portrayal of John and his creeping dementia comes across as heartbreakingly accurate. Occasionally, John wakes in the morning and is remarkably lucid for a few minutes, "as if his mind has forgotten to be forgetful." Then he

returns to his mental fog. Most of the time, he doesn't cause problems. But he periodically goes into a rage amid his confusion, including one ugly incident with a prank-pulling clerk at the Snow Cap Drive-In in Seligman, Ariz. Ella has to keep an eye on John, making sure he doesn't wander off without her. More concerning, Ella thinks that John is entertaining thoughts of suicide.

Zadoorian's wisest decision with "The Leisure Seeker" was to tell the story entirely from Ella's point of view. She comes across as curmudgeonly but lovable — typical for a woman who's lived long and no longer cares much about decorum. Here's an excerpt of Ella's thoughts, when the couple is driving past the Gemini Giant in Wilmington, Ill., and she's fiddling with her wig:

As we pass the Launching Pad Drive-In, again I want to crank down the window all the way. Then I realized that if I want to feel the wind and sun on my face, there is no reason why I can't. I rip off my Babushka, then unclasp my helmet of synthetic lifelike fiber (the Eva Gabor Milady II Evening Shade — 75% white/25% black) at the back where it is tentatively tethered to my last remaining hair of any thickness. I reach underneath, then pull back and up to unsheath my head.

I roll down the window and throw that goddamned thing out where it tumbles and flops along the side of the road like a just-hit animal. Such blessed relief. I can't remember the last time my scalp saw direct sunlight. What little hair I have on top is thin and delicate like the first frail wisp of an infant. In the delicious wind, the long strands twist and dance around my scalp, a sad swirled turban, but I don't care today. It had bothered me so much when my hair thinned out after menopause. I was ashamed like I had done something wrong, afraid of what everybody would say. You spend your life so worried about what others think, when in reality, people mostly don't think. On the few occasions when they do, it is often something bad, but one had to at least admire the fact that they're thinking at all.


I look back at my Styrofoam wig stand. The head is still taped to the counter, no longer my companion, but now staring at me, judging, wondering "What the hell did you just do?" I don't look at myself in the mirror. I know I look like death warmed over. It doesn't matter. I feel lighter already.

The novel's conclusion won't be a surprise to many, although it may happen in a way you won't expect (Zadoorian inserts a few MacGuffins to keep readers guessing). The ending may prove troubling to some readers and will inspire a lot of discussion. But Ella's final words on the page will haunt long after you close the book.

Highly recommended.

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Michael Zadoorian

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About the Author

Biography



Photo by John Roe of Roe Photo

Michael Zadoorian was born in Detroit, Michigan, and has lived in the area for his entire life. His father, Norman, was a photographer for The Detroit Edison Company for 35 years, photographing nuclear power plants, parades, "All Electric Kitchens," corporate bigwigs, and victims of electrocution. His mother, Rose Mary, was a homemaker. Both encouraged creativity in Michael and his sister, Susan. He attended the public schools in Detroit, then went on to graduate from Wayne State University with a Liberal Arts degree.

In the mid-eighties, Zadoorian discovered the work of Raymond Carver, which inspired him to start writing fiction. After a few years of working on his own, he decided to return to Wayne State to study Creative Writing. While working toward his MA in English, he was the recipient of the Loughhead Eldridge Creative Writing Scholarship and three Tompkins Awards for his fiction and essays.

During this time, Zadoorian continued to work at his day job, writing advertising copy for used car dealers, processed meats, banks, and pizza chains, but kept working on his stories. Though it took a while to shake off the influence of Carver, he soon started to develop his own voice and a style that reflected his own sensibilities. More and more, he found himself writing about his hometown of Detroit and the people he knew there. Before long, his work started to appear in various literary magazines and journals, including *The North American Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *The Literary Review*, *American Short Fiction*, *Detroit Noir*, and the European journals *Panurge* and *Paris Transcontinental*.

Zadoorian's first novel, *Second Hand* (W.W. Norton), about a Detroit junk-store owner was released in 2000. *The New York Times Book Review* wrote that *Second Hand* "may be a gift from the (Tiki) gods" and called it "a romantic adventure that explores what Yeats called 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.'" *Second Hand* was selected for Barnes and Noble's Discover Great New Writers Program and as an American Booksellers Association Book Sense pick; it also received the Great Lakes Colleges Association's prestigious New Writers Award. Recently translated into Italian, it continues to be a cult favorite, still popping up on blogs and "favorite book" lists nine years after publication. Zadoorian's short story collection, *The Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit* (WSU Press), features published and new work.

Zadoorian still works as a copywriter in the Detroit area. He has also worked as a journalist, a magazine feature writer, a voice-over talent, a shipping-room clerk, and a plant guard for Chrysler. He lives with his wife, Rita Simmons, a librarian, in an old house filled with things that used to be in the houses of other people. He still loves Detroit, no matter what anyone says.



Official Websites

Michael Zadoorian

[Michael Zadoorian's Facebook Page](#)

[Michael Zadoorian's LinkedIn Page](#)

[Michael Zadoorian's MySpace Page](#)

[The Leisure Seeker's Facebook Fan Page](#)

Education

Wayne State University

What's Next

Author Q&A on Goodreads until June 30, 2009.

http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/19661.Q_A_with_Michael_Zadoorian
Reading/Signing Thursday, July 16, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. Baldwin Public Library,...



Press & Articles

[Los Angeles Times: The Leisure Seeker: A Novel by Michael Zadoorian](#)

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Praise for *The Leisure Seeker*

Books

by Michael Zadoorian

Leisure Seeker, The

by Michael Zadoorian



John and Ella Robina have shared a wonderful life for more than fifty...

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'The Leisure Seeker' blazes a trail to discovery

By Bob Minzesheimer, USA TODAY

Even before *The Leisure Seeker* was published as a novel, the movie rights were sold.

Michael Zadoorian's bittersweet story about two runaways who are in their 80s and in failing health could be a lovely film. It hasn't been cast yet, but I could see Clint Eastwood and Shirley MacLaine in the lead roles.

As a novel, it lags in the middle. But it avoids getting too sentimental while raising questions about memory and old age with bracing doses of humor.

The runaway couple are John and Ella Robina. They defy their doctors and children for a final vacation in their RV, driving from Detroit to Disneyland.

He's a retired auto engineer whose memory comes and goes (mostly goes). She's the wry narrator, a housewife who has led a "completely unremarkable life" — not that she's complaining. That she saves for her cancer and other ailments.

They follow "the Mother Road," fabled Route 66, or what crumbling stretches of it they can find. Call it Kerouac-lite. It's *On the Road* with shorter sentences and less drugs and sex.

Zadoorian, 51, whose father had Alzheimer's and died five years ago, has done his homework along Route 66, which he discusses in a video on YouTube.

Doctors, nursing home administrators and officials at Disneyland won't like parts of *The Leisure Seeker*. Nor will everyone like the ending. But as Ella defiantly puts it, "It is not your place to say."

Find this article at:

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1. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships **were believable or realistic**? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
2. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? **How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?**
3. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
4. Talk about the plot. **What was more important, the characters or the plot?** Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
5. **What were some of the major themes of the book?** Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? **Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?**
6. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
7. What else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

8. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?

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St. Petersburg
Times

Book review: In Michael Zadoorian's 'Leisure Seeker,' what a trip

By Dan DeWitt, Times Staff Writer
 In Print: Tuesday, March 24, 2009

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Aging: Lifetimes

About one-third of the way into Michael Zadoorian's *The Leisure Seeker* — and at about the same point in an elderly couple's cross-country trip the book describes — the two of them look at slides from a similar, long-ago trip.

They see a picture of their best friends, a couple their own age who traveled in the same brand of camper (the title's *Leisure Seeker*) and had parked it close enough that the "extended canopies (were) almost touching."

In a lot of novels, this would be a signal that the real story was about to begin. You prepare to read about who cheated on whom, the compromises that kept them together, the fallout from their destroyed friendships.

But in Zadoorian's book what happens is this: Ella once again breaks the news to her Alzheimer's-afflicted husband, Jim, that their friends died years ago.

"Aw, Christ," he says, clutching his hand over his mouth."

This is when you realize that this book actually is about what a lot of books claim to be about but aren't: ordinary people and, more than that, ordinary, decent people.

Depending on your age, Jim and Ella Robina may remind you of your- self, especially if you are from the Midwest, ate a lot of bologna sandwiches and hamburgers, said "conked out" to describe exhausted, overly medicated sleep. (It happens a lot.)

Or, if you're lucky, they'll remind you of your parents. Because Jim and Ella are good spouses and parents, true to one another and just about everything else.

"We are the people who stay," Ella, the narrator, says at one point. "We stay in

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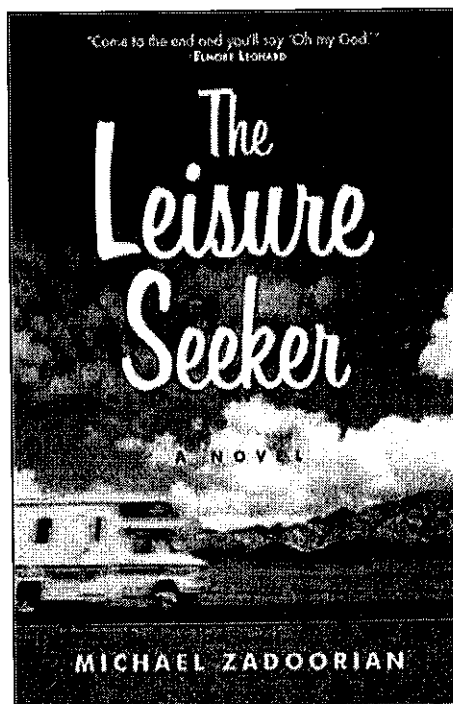
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our homes and pay them off. We stay at our jobs. We do our thirty and come home to stay even more."

The action comes out of their decision (or, Ella's really, because she calls the shots) to just this once not stay where they are supposed to. Defying the wishes of their doctors and adult children, they take off from their home in Detroit for Disneyland on Route 66.

It's a bland, middle-American vacation plan. It becomes an adventure because the two of them are also facing the most ordinary problem in the world: growing old and dying.

Ella acts as navigator though racked by cancer pain or doped up on painkillers; Jim drives the entire way (the only slightly incredible element of an otherwise right-on portrayal of Alzheimer's) though he sometimes forgets his wife's name and can't wash without her help.

Jim's occasional wanderings are scary at home, terrifying in a desolate patch of Texas; Ella's fall at a campground in New Mexico turns into a desperate struggle to survive and, just as important to her, keep the trip going.

None of this would hold our interest if Ella really was a bland person and really had led, as she says, "a completely unremarkable life."

She is alive enough to appreciate treats such as the hot dogs in Oklahoma that come loaded down with chili and a "yellowish vinegar coleslaw . . . I have to say, the Okie Coney Island looks absolutely delicious."

Route 66, which, like them, is fading from the prime it reached in the middle of the last century, is the perfect trigger for such moving reminiscences. "Nature is slowly reclaiming it. Vegetation creeps in from the edges, narrowing it like an artery."

Wanting more passages like this and more details of Jim's and Ella's rewarding lives, you reach through this book. Because, despite all the descriptions of bodies and landscape, the book's message is uplifting: *Ordinary, dutiful lives are not necessarily boring ones.*

Dan DeWitt is a columnist in the Herndon bureau of the Times. He can be reached at (352) 754-6116.

review

The Leisure Seeker

By Michael Zadoorian

William Morrow, 288 pages, \$24.99

[Last modified: Mar 23, 2009 10:18 AM]

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Mar 23rd, 2009 12:12 PM

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The truth about writing fiction

Q&A with Michael Zadoorian

BY ELLEN PILIGIAN | JANUARY 15, 2009

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JOHN ROE

Michael Zadoorian, a part-time copy editor at Campbell-Ewald, will release his second novel, *The Leisure Seeker*, in February. His first, *Second Hand*, received significant praise. [View larger photo](#)

If **Michael Zadoorian** could change one thing about his career, he would have started writing fiction sooner.

"I've always been a late bloomer," says the author of two novels, the latest, *The Leisure Seeker* (out in February), about an ailing elderly couple from Detroit who escape their adult children to take one last road trip along Route 66. Zadoorian, 51, a part-time senior copywriter at Campbell-Ewald in Warren, says he didn't get serious about his craft until well into his 20s.

"I still feel like I'm playing catch up," he says.

You could argue that he's right on track. After all, his debut novel, *Second Hand*, a story about junk and those who care for it, captured the attention of

The New York Times Book Review, which said the book "may feel like a gift from the (Tiki) gods."

That was a huge surprise to Zadoorian.

"Quirky, small first novels by unknowns don't generally get reviewed in the *Sunday Book Review*. [It was] pretty thrilling."

He's garnered numerous awards and honors over the years.

Second Hand was an American Booksellers Association pick and named one of the best books of 2000 by the *Detroit Free Press*. He also has a stash of 30-something Caddy awards, handed out from 1989 to 2006 for the best advertising work in metro Detroit, an Obie award for outdoor advertising and an Addy award from the American Advertising Federation.

Zadoorian, who grew up in northwest Detroit, earned his bachelor's degree in communications and master's degree in English, creative writing from Wayne State University.

Today, living with his wife, Rita Simmons, a librarian, and two cats, Pickles and Bongo, in Ferndale, he says *The Leisure Seeker* was inspired by his own life growing up with his older sister, Susan, and parents, to whom he dedicates the book: Norman, who died in 2004 after suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and Rose Mary, who died in January 2008.

"We camped all through my childhood, and they continued to travel in a small RV after I left home," Zadoorian says. "When my father became ill with Alzheimer's, it affected my whole family. After he died, I just started writing the book. It didn't take me long to realize that I was writing about what we all had been through."

As for being from Detroit, good or bad, he says, "It's a huge part of who I am as a person and a writer." As a kid he couldn't believe how lucky he was to live where they made all the cars. At the same time, "It is kind of a low self-esteem place," he says. "That's probably another reason why I feel comfortable here. Either way, I like writing with a strong sense of place."

His "need to write about Detroit," as he calls it, comes through in his upcoming story collection, *The Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit*.

We caught up with him as he finished up work for the day, dressed in jeans and his favorite Cass Corridor T-shirt from Pure Detroit.

Where did you get the idea for *Second Hand*?

I helped a friend clean out his childhood home when his mother went into a nursing home. I was thrifting pretty heavily at the time and I started to wonder what it would be like for a junk-store owner to have to clean out the house he grew up in.

Second Hand is about junk. What favorite relic do you possess?

I have a bowling ball liqueur dispenser that I love. I bought it at an estate sale not far from where I

have a bowling ball liqueur dispenser that I love. I bought it at an estate sale not far from where I grew up in northwest Detroit. I love my tiki mug collection, as well. That stuff just speaks to me, I don't know why.

***Leisure Seeker* is about old people. Do you think young people appreciate old people?**

That's a great question. I certainly got the feeling that they didn't when I was sending the manuscript around trying to interest an agent. I got the distinct feeling that the younger ones looked at my query letter and said: "Two oldsters in a RV travel to Disneyland? Pass!" It didn't matter that the book was really funny or interesting or weird or poignant. That said, my editor at Morrow is just in her early 30s, so it's obviously not always true.

Where and how do you do your best work?

Since I work afternoons at Campbell-Ewald, I write in the mornings — Monday through Friday, on my iBook at my slightly scraped-up Paul McCobb desk, between 7:30 and 8 until 11:30 or so. We have a small study filled with all our books and music. I usually keep the curtains drawn so I'm not distracted.

Both books feature or refer to Detroit and Michigan. How has that been received?

Great. When I went on my book tour for *Second Hand*, I always read the section about Hamtramck. People were fascinated by it. People felt that Detroit was an active character in the book. It's a lot like the stuff in the book: old, beat-up, but loveable and full of something special.

Will family, friends or co-workers see themselves in your books?

I have stolen things from my life and my family's life, but not in a malicious way. My sister is very cool, unlike the sister in *Second Hand*.

What did you want to be when you were a kid?

I wanted to be a disc jockey.

What was your first job?

I worked in the shipping department at a place in northwest Detroit called Home Planners, collating and packing books and blueprints.

Who is your favorite author?

I was heavily influenced by Raymond Carver's short stories. His work allowed me to understand the inner workings of fiction in ways that I never had before. He allowed me

to think that maybe I could write fiction ... I wound up writing my share of Carver stories. Still, it was a way to learn. And whatever helps you to find your personal style or voice or whatever you want to call it, is a good thing.

What feeds your creative juices?

I try to keep reading, following no particular path. Sometimes I read serious stuff, sometimes biographies, pulp/noir stuff, books about music and comedy. I seem to be learning that if I'm reading a lot of things about a particular subject, say, Greenwich Village in the '60s or comedians of the '70s, it probably means something. Maybe I'm going to write about it, maybe not, but I try not to beat myself up too much worrying about whether it's what I "should" be reading and just go where it takes me.

How has success gone to your head?

Pathetic self-Googleing. It's like ego porn. That is, until you run into someone saying something mean about you or your work. Then, not so much.

Do people think life is easy now that you're "published?"

I make a point of mentioning this when I speak to writing students. I don't know how the hell they get this idea that getting a novel published means you're suddenly on Easy Street. ... I tell them that the advance for *Second Hand* would have bought me a six-year-old used car. For every Steven King and John Grisham, there's 10,000 writers who don't make back their paltry advance.

What makes you most proud to be from Detroit?

The creativity. Sometimes I get together with a large group of friends, and I'll look down the table and see: musician, writer, artist, designer, screenwriter, poet — all from Detroit. There's a great story from my friend Jim Ward (sculptor) about someone he knew who was living in Prague. A native asked the man where he was from. When he answered "Detroit," the Prager replied, "That's where artists are from." There's something about being from a place like this — f'ed up as it sometimes is — that inspires creativity. That part of it makes me very proud.

First place you'd take an out-of-towner in Detroit?

The Rivera murals at the DIA, the Heidelberg Project, Hamtramck Disneyland, Henry Ford Museum, Eastern Market, the amazing Tom's Tavern, Baker's Keyboard Lounge, Dakota Inn, Motown Historical Museum, Ford Rouge Plant, Cranbrook and Elmwood Cemetery.

What do you spend too much money on?

Books, music and movies.

How would your mother describe you in one word?

Smartass. **What would your wife say is your most annoying habit?**

Saying I'm going to do something, then completely forgetting about it.

What was your first car?

A '73 Plymouth Duster.

Favorite Detroit eatery?

Union Street.

What do you always carry in your pocket?

A little spiral-bound notebook with a tiny pen that I use for writing down strange details for stories — things that amuse me, graffiti, whatever. My friends always mock me for taking notes, but when I write down some interesting or funny comment, they always say: "I got in the notebook!"

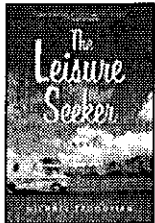
Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I'd love to write fiction full time, but who knows? I'll settle for being alive and healthy.

Comments:




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Reading Guide





By Michael Zadoorian

Questions for Discussion

- 
1. Do you think that John and Ella's children should have tried to stop their parents, or perhaps to have tracked them through their credit card transactions?
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2. Did it bother you that John was driving? Or do you agree with Ella (page 21) that, "If they let sixteen-year-olds on the road" then John "who has an excellent driving record, should be allowed to do the same?"
3. How have you coped in your life with outliving friends and loved ones? Or how do you imagine that you will? How do you think it feels for Ella to have to watch John experience the loss of his best friend each time he remembers him, and asks how he's doing?
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Reading Guides:

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behind of this last journey for their family? Why or why not?

5. Upon seeing Cadillac Ranch (page 138-140) Ella says: "This so-called art feels to me like a slap in my generation's face, everything we thought we needed after the war." What do you think it was about seeing the antique cars buried in dirt that upset Ella most?
6. Discuss Ella's promise to John—that neither spouse would let the other be placed in a nursing home. Was Ella right to honor their vow? Do you think John would have been to do the same for Ella?
7. Why do you think that Zadoorian chose to narrate the novel entirely in Ella's first person voice? How would the novel change if he had decided to tell the book in several voices, such as including Kevin and Cindy's stories? Or including the voice of a grandchild?
8. Discuss the idea of a vacation where "the journey is the destination" and what that might mean for the modern family. Also, what wisdom does Ella wish she could go back and share with her younger self about family vacations?
9. Should someone who is mentally as sharp as a tack in a body that is failing them be able to make their own decisions about how they might pass from this world?
10. Why do you think it took a grandchild to voice that John might be developing Alzheimer's?
11. If you had to plan one last road trip where would you go? What people or places might you stop and say goodbye to along the way? Who would be your co-pilot?

About Michael Zadoorian

Books

Leisure Seeker, The
John and Ella Robina have

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METRO TIMES | 2/18/2009

No heroics, please

An author with a major new novel, likely to become a movie, rises quietly from the workaday Motor City

BY CHRIS HANDYSIDE

'I'm lucky to have a job (which seems to be the new Detroit mantra).'



It's a damn-near-balmy Thursday night (for February, in Detroit), and 50 or so folks have gathered at Oak Park's Book Beat. They're seated on folding chairs before a lanky, bespectacled, clean-headed, soft-spoken dude in an Army surplus jacket and jeans who's suddenly been transformed into an elderly woman whipping her wig out the window from a moving RV. An accordion accompanies his words, keying in on the word "tumbleweed" and complementing it with its aural equivalent. The man is Detroit writer Michael Zadoorian, a mild-mannered advertising copywriter by day. The accordion accompaniment is provided by his pal, Grammy Award-winning songwriter and keyboardist Luis Resto. Zadoorian's reading from his recently released second novel, *The Leisure Seeker*. It has been nine years since his first critically acclaimed novel, *Second Hand* — a tale of Richard, a garage- and estate-sale hound finding complicated love and loss with animal rescue worker Theresa — earned praise from no less than *The New York Times* and even piqued screenplay interest. This gathering has been a long time coming, and the assembled couldn't be more rapt as Zadoorian reads in the voice of his narrator, Ella Robinas, and her husband John. At turns laugh-out-loud funny and able to induce a meditative hush, this feels as intimate as a reading should; that's to say homegrown and familial, like a hometown coming-out party. Later, the book-signing line will stretch from the back of the store to nearly its front door.

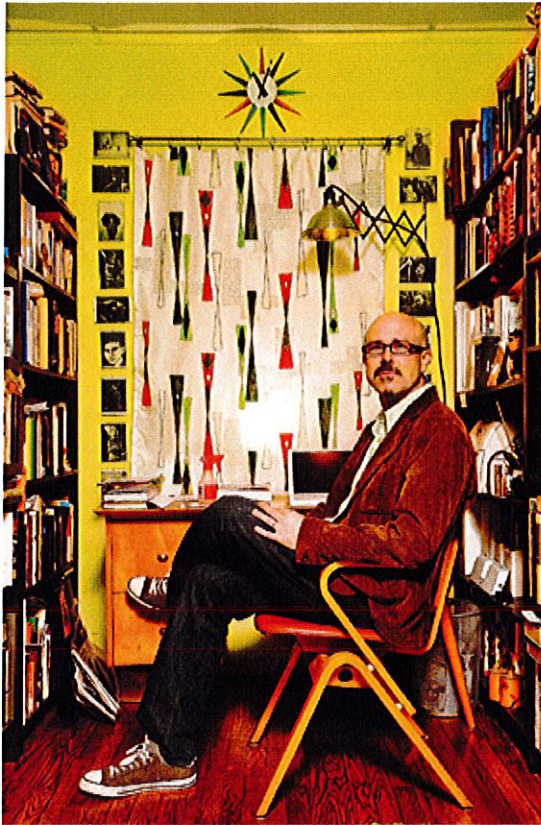
As it turns out, it's not just hometowners queuing up to read this story, either. Zadoorian's gotten solid critical marks including a *USA Today* notice that tipped Hollywood that this might make a moving film too. In fact, *Hollywood Reporter* just reported that Swedish filmmaker Jens Jonsson's in the mix to helm a film adaptation with the same production company that shepherded *Boys Don't Cry*. (The news is so new that, at press time, Zadoorian didn't know much about it.) The confluence of story and commerce couldn't be more perfect, in fact, as the novel's Detroit setting dovetails perfectly into the state's sapling but successful efforts to lure filmmaking communities to the Motor City. It'd be a coup for Zadoorian, a writer who has a true love of his hometown (as you'll read) and the kind of 24-7, "why not?" work ethic that has defined Detroit artists from Berry Gordy to Elmore Leonard, Glenn Barr to Eminem.

METRO TIMES: How did you get started down the road to writing? Has it been something you always knew you'd do to try to make art for a living?

MICHAEL ZADOORIAN: I came at it in kind of a half-assed way, actually. I've always envied those writers who knew they wanted to write from the time they were 5 years old. I was most definitely not one of them. It really wasn't until I was into my 20s that I realized that I wanted to write. Raymond Carver's stories really inspired me, like they did a lot of young writers in the '80s. I think he made it look simple. Then, after you dug deeper into his stories, you realized they weren't simple at all, but by that time, you're hooked. I spent a couple of years writing Carver stories instead of Zadoorian stories. Once I shook off Carver's influence, I think I did retain his notion that everyone is worthy of a story. Your characters don't have to live some glamorous life in order to be interesting.

As it turned out, by the time I was writing stories that felt like my stories, I had a career as a copywriter. It's a great way to make a living, but you're still writing what other people want you to write. So for me, fiction was a way to write exactly what I wanted to write.

MT: *Second Hand* seems like a story that could translate quite well to film. Was there any interest in optioning it? If so, any interesting developments that came of it?



ZADOORIAN: Yes, some other people thought it might make a good film as well. And I actually wrote a script for it. Nothing's happened so far, but you never know. Either way, it was fun to do and a good exercise that helped me to understand that craft a little better.

One strange thing that happened as a result of *Second Hand* was that I was contacted by a very well-known video director who had read and loved the book. He wanted me to write a script for a feature film project of his that was completely unrelated to *Second Hand*. I did one draft of the script, then another. Eventually, it came out that he essentially wanted me to take the character of Theresa, the tortured animal shelter worker from *Second Hand*, and transplant it into the script I was working on for him. Needless to say, I wasn't so crazy about that idea. He never called back after that. But I got paid for all my work, so that was cool.

MT: How did the process of writing *Second Hand* — and the experience of having it published, reviewed, received well — impact your approach to your writing?

ZADOORIAN: I thought that getting another novel published would be easier after *Second Hand*, but it turned out to be just the opposite. The book that I was working on after it never really came to fruition. After a couple of years, people started asking me, "So when's the next book coming out?" What could I say? I didn't have a next book coming out. I had the choice to lie, which is sad and generally a bad idea, or to tell them the truth, which was complicated and depressing for me. I ended up telling them the truth. People kept asking and I kept telling the truth. After a while, I was officially depressed and they just stopped asking. That's how nine years went by between my first and second books. So the difference between a first novel and a second one is this: With the first one, if nobody wants it, you at least fail privately. With a second novel, you get to fail publicly.

MT: Why such a long gap between novels?

ZADOORIAN: A variety of things contributed to the long gap: an abandoned manuscript, agent problems, and a certain amount of time dealing with family stuff, including my father's illness with Alzheimer's.

MT: You've had two well-received novels published by a major house. From the outside, that's success. To some, that's "making it" — and yet you do still keep a day job and you still live in your hometown. What defines success for you? Can you envision a life of writing fulltime? In other words, what's your vision of the life of a successful novelist?

ZADOORIAN: I wish I knew. Maybe then I would know how to act. Even though the advance for *The Leisure Seeker* was considerably more than for *Second Hand*, it's still not enough to live out my days in some deluded fantasy of an artistic lifestyle. I'm lucky to have a job (which seems to be the new Detroit mantra). In a lot of ways, it's a really good job. Aside from the pay, it also gives structure to my days. A good friend of mine had the opportunity to quit his job and write full-time. He really missed the social aspect of working, seeing people, eating lunch with others. Writing can often be lonely, so those things start to mean a lot.

In many ways, I'm living like a lot of folks do in the Detroit area. We have day jobs and then we fit in our art, music, writing, etc., whenever we can. It's one of the things that I love about this area. Even the artists have that goddamned Midwestern work ethic. But it doesn't stop them from creating. I think Detroit is bursting with creativity. Glenn Barr told me that he's constantly being asked by people in L.A.: "Why would you live in Detroit?" like it's some sort of leper colony. He always says, "Why the fuck not Detroit?" He likes it here. To paraphrase him, he says the advantage of being from a place where no one expects anything to happen is that you can do what you want and everyone leaves you the hell alone. (Hope I got that right, Glenn.)

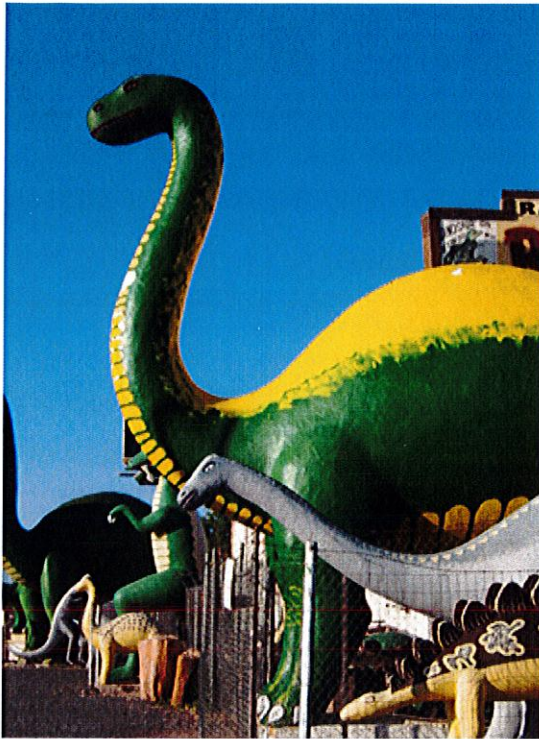
It would be great writing fiction full time. I'm just not entirely sure I could do it. At this point, success for me just means seeing if I can do it again and write another book.

MT: You talked about how the genesis for the story that became *Leisure Seeker* was in a short story. And you have a short story compilation coming out soon [April, actually, called *The Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit*, Wayne State University Press —Ed.] too. Is there a theme uniting the stories you've chosen for your collection?

ZADOORIAN: Well, looking over all my work, it would appear that I write a lot about love and death, things forgotten and found again, memory and the eidetic power of photography. And the story collection has a fair number of stories that deal with those very subjects. And with a name like *The Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit*, Detroit is certainly one of the themes as well. Almost all the stories take place in this area, except the one called "Mystery Spot" which was the story that was the basis for *The Leisure Seeker*.



Photos from Zadoorian's trip on Route 66.



MT: How does your short story work differ from the longer works? And what do each of the forms offer in terms of constraints, opportunities and approach?

ZADOORIAN: Obviously, stories are nowhere near the time commitment of a novel. That's a distinct advantage. The way I work my way into a novel is not a particularly efficient method. I'm not much of an outliner. I really have to write and write to figure out if I'm onto something. If it turns out that I'm not, I've wasted a lot of time, which is pretty awful. With stories, you can finish something in a week or a month and feel good about it. But then you're starting from scratch again and looking for the next idea. For me, that's its own kind of agony. But once you're into a novel and you really feel like it's happening, it's a wonderful feeling. You know you have something to work on for the next day and the next and the next. It's strangely secure for me.

MT: How did the writing of this novel differ from *Second Hand*? I don't want to assume too much, and correct me if I'm wrong, but was Junk, the protagonist in *Second Hand* closer to your life stage, closer to you? Whereas Ella, the narrator here, is an elderly woman.

ZADOORIAN: Absolutely. Richard (Junk) was a man in his 30s and I was at least in my 30s when I started the book. Writing *The Leisure Seeker* with Ella, a woman in her 80s, as the narrator wasn't some big intentional plan or statement. It just felt right.

MT: Who did you talk to, interview or otherwise involve in getting inside the minds and hearts of two elderly blue-collar Detroiters?

ZADOORIAN: I'm at a time of my life where a lot of my friends are in the middle of parental issues, so I certainly did talk to people about their mothers and fathers. And that definitely helped. But for the most part, let's just say that through my whole life, as a child and as an adult, I always listened to my mother. She really inspired a lot of Ella's character. Of course, as you get farther into a book, the characters take on their own histories and personalities, so everything evolves. That certainly happened with these two characters.

MT: Ella's voice is a really spry mix of language. Like she's trying on new phrases while sticking to her old standbys. How did you approach crafting her vocabulary?

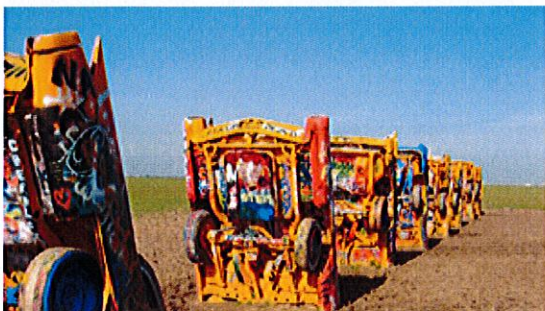
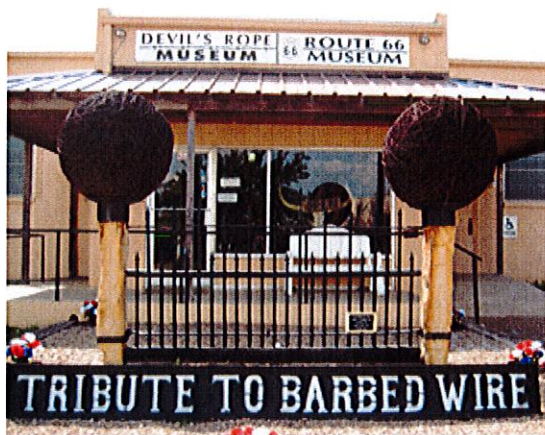
ZADOORIAN: I love strange and arcane language. *Second Hand* is filled with it, but much of it is used in an ironic manner. *The Leisure Seeker* has a lot of it as well, but used in a completely unironic way. It's simply the way these characters talk, strange little expressions left over from the '30s and '40s and '50s. A friend of mine used to keep a list of her mother's favorite expressions. She and I would compare notes. She did have a few that I hadn't heard of (which I promptly lifted for the book), but, for the most part, it turned out that our mothers used a lot of similar slang. To me, the challenge is always to make it sound natural and work within the rhythms of the writing.

MT: I've read quotes from some authors — one from Jim Harrison stands out in my mind — about the difficulty in shaking characters once they've become such a big part of your imagination and mental landscape. Did you have that experience? It would seem that once you got into the head of two people who are so different from you in age, gender, life stage, you'd want to hold on as long as you can. What was your experience with these characters, and letting them go?

ZADOORIAN: Once you do get deeply into your characters, they do become hard to shake, I suppose. Still, I love that feeling of emerging from a good morning of writing, of shaking off the characters. It's a very satisfied feeling, kind of euphoric. Maybe it's because the characters of John and Ella were influenced by my parents, but writing those two felt very natural to me. I do know that sometimes writers miss their characters after a book is finished, but my rewriting process tends to take care of that. After a while, I rewrite so much that I can't stand the sight or sound of them anymore. Actually, I can't stand my writing either. I start to hate everything. And that's how I know I'm done.

MT: *The Leisure Seeker* uses Route 66 as a backdrop to the couple's travels. What kind of travel did you do to get into the mode for this novel? And what surprised you about the road that you maybe weren't expecting?

ZADOORIAN: I actually wrote a couple of drafts of the book before taking the trip. There's so much written about Route 66 — guidebooks, turn-by-turn directions, history, folklore — not to mention endless photo books and websites of other peoples' journeys, it was not that difficult to piece together a credible journey. But at a certain point, I knew that I would have to take the trip. It worked out well, since my wife and I had meant to travel Route 66 for many years. Here was the perfect excuse. It was a fantastic trip too. Certainly full of the ruins of an America which no longer exists, but there was also so much that hadn't changed. Landscapes, skies, the air, the look and feel of the earth. And of course, much of the crazy tourist stuff. Afterward, I felt like we had a true American adventure.



MT: Which, if any, of your own travel experiences particularly inform the narrative?

ZADOORIAN: Landmarks, odd little exchanges with strangers, the food, but, more than anything, I decided that all the giant roadside icons that we encountered along the way were something that needed to be turned up thematically in the book. Everywhere you go on Route 66 you run into something big — a giant spaceman, a huge dinosaur, a jumbo chicken or cow, the Cadillac Ranch, the Big Texan Steak Ranch. These are things that will not be ignored, which is why they are there along the road. It occurred to me that there were some issues that the characters were dealing with, their illnesses, certainly, and their ultimate fates, that were in some way like those colossi. They were there and would not be ignored, as hard as Ella might try.

MT: Did the characters come to you first or the notion of a road trip? Or did they emerge fully formed as a dynamic duo?

ZADOORIAN: I started writing the book shortly after my father died in 2004 and needed to write something. I turned to a short story I had written a few years back, called "Mystery Spot," about an older couple on a road trip, who get a glimpse of their not-so-distant future at a cheesy roadside attraction. I just started there. It wasn't long before I realized that, in many ways, I was writing about what my family had just been through with my father and his Alzheimer's. The idea of Route 66 came after. It was later that I realized that it was the perfect road for these two to travel — fading, falling apart, but still full of history and memories.

MT: How on earth do you balance a gig copywriting with the sort of dedication that a novel demands? What kind of a writing ritual do you keep?

ZADOORIAN: I am very lucky to have a part-time job at Campbell-Ewald Advertising in Warren. I've been doing it for a long time now. I come to work in the afternoons, so I have my mornings to write fiction. It works pretty well for me. I'm usually at my desk by 7:30 or 8 a.m., then I write until I have to go to work.

MT: There are many reveries in the book about Detroit "back in the day," as it were, and Route 66 is portrayed as a metaphor for what was in the same way. What connection did you see that made pairing these two make sense?

ZADOORIAN: I certainly wanted Detroit to be part of the book because it is so large in the histories of John and Ella, but I guess I didn't look so much for Route 66-Detroit connections. It just worked out that way. But Route 66 is interesting and evocative for many of the same reasons why Detroit is. You can see both what was once there and what it has become. While Detroit and Route 66 are both often amazing and vital, there are a lot of ruins. Still, you can discern and feel the history amid the ruins. There's always something interesting about faded glory.

MT: Your two novels both trace themes of the forgotten, overlooked or neglected parts of, not just pop culture, but people, technologies (the slide projector here, in particular) and (in *Second Hand*) animals. Why, if I'm characterizing it correctly, is this an important theme for you?

ZADOORIAN: I think it does have something to do with living in the Detroit area all my life. None of us are happy about it, but as people who live here, we are somewhat overlooked and neglected in the eyes of the rest of the country. So as an artist, living in the Detroit area, you gain an appreciation for the imperfect, the forgotten, the broken, the abandoned, and it imbues your work. Though it's probably the obvious choice, the Heidelberg Project is the perfect example of this. Sorry to quote myself here, but I did say it in *Second Hand* that it's good to love that which seems to have no worth. We create our own value, our own beauty. We find it wherever we find it. And that's OK.


See Also


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message 1: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/15/2009 05:04AM



Hey all-

Thanks so much for participating. Though I'm still figuring out how to do this, I'll do the best I can to answer everyone's questions in a timely manner. A reminder: this is an open group, so if you think of anyone that may be interested, please feel free to invite them to join.

Some people have already asked questions, so I'll start there. Doris Mahony asked if I caught any flack about the ending. Frankly, before the book came out, I was prepared for some people to hate it. Though a few critics subtly made note of it and stated the same thing, I haven't really heard much of anything negative. Response has been overwhelmingly positive about the ending. Older people even seemed to like it the best. It's been interesting.

She also asked if the characters of John and Ella were based on people I've known. While it's true that my late mother and father most certainly influenced the characters, as I was writing the book, John and Ella definitely took on their own personalities and histories and characteristics. That said, a co-worker and I used to compare our mothers' slang expressions from when we were growing up. It turned out to be a kind of unconscious research. Those phrases started popping up in the book.

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message 2: by [Michael](#) (last edited 06/15/2009 05:25AM) (new)
06/15/2009 05:24AM



Another question is from Patti Abbott. Hey Patti! (We know each other. Patti's daughter is the fantastic noir writer Megan Abbott.) Here's her question: This is a novel told from the voice of an elderly woman. Did you find it difficult to find her voice, and articulate her concerns.

Hmm. Actually, the voice of Ella came sort of naturally to me. I'm not entirely sure why that is, but it really just felt comfortable. I'm sure that it has something to do with my mother and the long talks we used to have about all kinds of things: her childhood, my childhood, our family before I was born, old music, objects, Detroit back in the day, etc. As a little boy and as an adult, I always listened to my mother.

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message 3: by [Jacqueline](#) (new)
06/15/2009 05:48AM



I see others are also impressed with your ability to get inside the head of an elderly person. Thanks for explaining...I figured you must be a good listener.

So...what's the wisest thing you learned from those listenings..and the least useful?

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message 4: by [Vicki](#) (new)
06/15/2009 07:05AM



Hi Michael...I enjoyed The Leisure Seeker immensely, and, like others who have already asked questions, was very taken with the characters of Ella and John.

How do you develop such realistic characters? Do you outline some sort of "character study" of your characters before you begin a book, or do they evolve as you write? You mention that the voice of Ella came naturally to you, but I'm wondering how much you know about your characters before you begin writing.

Thanks so much!

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message 5: by [Patti](#) (new)
06/15/2009 07:57AM



Michael-I thought the ending worked well; the ground was well laid for it--just like in THELMA AND LOUISE.

I was also most impressed with how well you captured a woman's voice and an elderly woman at that. Most men don't try it. Obviously it could not be John's voice unless you reversed the maladies. That could have made an interesting book too. Did you consider it?

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message 6: by Patty (last edited 06/15/2009 08:09AM) (new)
06/15/2009 08:05AM



Ella and John's children and Doctor forbid them to take a vacation at this time. When do you cross the line between listening to your mom and telling her what to do? I like that as the trip progressed the children began to be more understanding.

Suicide seems so unfair to those who love you but in some cases it feels ok. Why do you think so many readers understand Ella's decision and would they feel the same way if this was their parent?

Do you think Ella's children will think that their parents' death was accidental?

Some readers don't like the ending. Would they have been happier if the Leisure Seeker had a head on fatal accident? I'm really glad that you didn't wimp out but had you considered that ending?

In the very beginning you mention Ambrose Bierce. "He decided when he got to his seventies that he would simply shove off to Mexico." The Devil's Dictionary is full of wonderful quotes. What came first the quote or the idea for the book?

Have you read other works by him?

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message 7: by Michael (new)
06/15/2009 08:48AM



Jacqueline wrote: "I see others are also impressed with your ability to get inside the head of an elderly person. Thanks for explaining...I figured you must be a good listener."

So...what's the wisest thing you learned from those listenings..and the least useful?

Well, that's an interesting question. I'm not so sure I have a great answer for either part. Rest assured that although I may have always "listened" to my mother, I certainly didn't do everything she told me to do. But I have noticed that now that both my parents have passed away, I have a stronger sense of just how much wisdom and creativity they gave me. (Of course, there's a few other things that they left me with that I could do without.)

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message 8: by Michael (new)
06/15/2009 08:55AM



Vicki wrote: "Hi Michael...I enjoyed The Leisure Seeker immensely, and, like others who have already asked questions, was very taken with the characters of Ella and John."

How do you develop such realistic chara..."

Hey Vicki-

I'm afraid that it all needs to happen in a pretty organic manner with me. I usually just start writing and see where it leads me. Unfortunately, sometimes it doesn't lead me anywhere. But with both SECOND HAND and THE LEISURE SEEKER, I just started writing in the voices of the characters. With SH, it

took me a long time and many pages to see that there was something there that I wanted to explore. With LS, it didn't take as long because I had a pretty good idea of where I was going with it. (I had written a short story about ten years before about an older couple who steal off to Disneyland so I knew that was going to be the basic plot.) I suppose experience helped as well. I think I know what I'm doing now more than then. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it though.

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message 9: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/15/2009 09:00AM



Patti wrote: "Michael-I thought the ending worked well; the ground was well laid for it--just like in THELMA AND LOUISE.

I was also most impressed with how well you captured a woman's voice and an elderly woman at that. Most men don't try it. Obviously it could not be John's voice unless you reversed the maladies. That could have made an interesting book too. Did you consider it?

Patti-

Actually, no. I really didn't even consider it. But I have been very surprised at how many people have told me that writing in an older woman's voice was a chancey proposition for a man. I'm glad no one told me this while I was writing the book! I don't think I would have chickened out, but you never know. The idea of the woman telling the story just seemed right to me. I try to listen to myself when I write and just go with my instincts and that's what they told me.

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message 10: by [Melissa](#) (last edited 06/15/2009 10:16AM) (new)
06/15/2009 10:15AM



Michael,

First I have to say I loved the Leisure Seeker. My son won a copy and I read it outloud to the family.

Now, I am a single mom who is disabled and I think I felt the book more because of the connection to Ella. I do not have the same things wrong but pretty close in the symptoms. I know how docs can be. I also know how kids can be with parents who are not as gifted healthwise as we should be.

That being said, I was surprised at first when I read the ending. Not that I was upset by it, but just that I did not expect that ending. As I let it sink in, I think I understood it more and it hit me so profoundly. While I would not take that avenue myself, I understood her longing to be with John and not be fighting everything so hard. It flows and does not just say "she killed them both". It leads in and gently says, "she did what was best for them and where they were". Kudos!!!!

My question is, My kids and I were talking about how this would be a great movie. Is that in the works? I would definately have to get it if it went out on dvd. That would of course be after a few viewings at the theater.

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message 11: by [Cody](#) (last edited 06/15/2009 10:40AM) (new)
06/15/2009 10:39AM



I would love to see a movie made out of *Leisure Seeker*.

Do you have any ideas if they are making a movie and if they are when do you expect to have the movie finished?

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message 12: by [Alicia](#) (last edited 06/15/2009 10:42AM) (new)
06/15/2009 10:41AM



Melissa wrote: "Michael,

First I have to say I loved the Leisure Seeker. My son won a copy and I read it outloud to the family.

Now, I am a single mom who is disabled and I think I felt the book more becaus..."

I would definetly watch the movie if there was one made. I think that it is frustrating when parents expect you to listen when it is the best for you but when you try to help them they argue. I totally see what their kids are thinking. But I can also see that they just want a vacation. I loved this book!

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message 13: by [Michael](#) (last edited 06/15/2009 11:22AM) (new)
06/15/2009 11:15AM



Melissa wrote: "Michael,

First I have to say I loved the Leisure Seeker. My son won a copy and I read it outloud to the family. My question is, My kids and I were talking about how this would be a great movie. Is that in the works? I would definately have to get it if it went out on dvd. That would of course be after a few viewings at the theater.

Melissa- So glad you enjoyed the book and that the ending made sense to you. (BTW: I guess there's going to be some major spoilers in this Q&A by all of us, so if anyone hasn't read the book yet, you may want to tread warily through these questions.

Since both Alicia and Cody's asked film-related questions along with yours, Melissa, I'm going to answer them all at the same time. Hope no one minds.

So here goes: Right now there are indeed plans for the book to be made into a film. A Swedish director named Jens Jonsson is working on a script for it right now. Jens won Best Foreign Film last year at the Sundance Film Festival for a lovely film called THE KING OF PING PONG.

I haven't gotten a report lately, but I know they're hoping to start shooting this year. It's really hard for

any of them to know what's absolutely going to happen since so much depends on financing and other matters that are very hard to control. We're all keeping our fingers crossed and hoping that it happens. It would certainly be a boost for the book, as well for my home state of Michigan, which is where they plan to film some of it.

For a little more information on it, including a nice video of Jens Jonsson talking about THE LEISURE SEEKER, go to Sharp Independent's website. (They're the producers who also made BOYS DON'T CRY and YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.)
<http://www.harpercollins.com/sharpindepe...>

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message 14: by [John](#) (new)
06/15/2009 09:21PM



But how accurate is the description of the current state of Route 66?

PS--loved the hot rod hipsters cameo

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message 15: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/16/2009 10:46AM



John wrote: "But how accurate is the description of the current state of Route 66?

PS--loved the hot rod hipsters cameo "

hey John-

When I traveled Route 66 to research the book, things were actually starting to look up. I think some the people and merchants who still live along the various alignments of 66 (it was often re-routed and realigned over the years) are now starting to truly realize that the road may once again be a viable tourist attraction and thus a potential source of income.

So some of them are attempting to restore historic buildings or to at least clean up some of the surrounding areas. There are also many Route 66 societies and museums and clubs that love and respect this historic piece of America. If you want to find out more I suggest you check out Ron Warnick's Route 66 News. It's kind of a clearing house of news and information about The Mother Road.
<http://rwarn17588.wordpress.com/>

mz

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message 16: by [Jacqueline](#) (last edited 06/17/2009 09:05AM) (new)
06/17/2009 09:04AM

Non-"Leisure Seeker" question. After keeping a friend company on a jaunt to a panel discussion on



"getting yourself in print", I was wondering what was YOUR trajectory to your first book? Published stories/articles/ built up writing credits? Self-publishing/POD?

Personally have ZERO aspirations to Be An Author, since I edit books and truly enjoy that. But I was fascinated with the complex choices available to today's authors. Previously, it was self-publish or find an agent!

Memory Lane, please? Thanks!

PS Drove some of Rte 66 a couple years ago..It has a unique road hazard. You have to be watch out for people standing on the white line /lane divider,getting their pix taken with Rte 66 sign in background.

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 17: by [Patty](#) (new)

06/18/2009 07:47AM



I was exploring this site and went to the Q & A home page and was excited to add your newest book to the groups book shelf. But I'm not sure how many people will find it to read. This venue is definately a learning experience.....which proves you are never too old to learn new things!

Anyhow, I posed in my review of the "Lost Tike Palaces of Detroit" that a side trip made by Ella and John is told here that was left out of "The Leisure Seeker".

I went back and find that you say you actually wrote this story about 10 years ago.

This short story, "Mystery Spot", seems to explain Ella's reasoning best to me although many similiar incidents happen in "LS". What do you think? It would be interesting to see how others feel about it.

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 18: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/18/2009 11:06AM



Jacqueline wrote: Non-"Leisure Seeker" question. After keeping a friend company on a jaunt to a panel discussion on "getting yourself in print", I was wondering what was YOUR trajectory to your first book? Published stories/articles/ built up writing credits? Self-publishing/POD?

Personally have ZERO aspirations to Be An Author, since I edit books and truly enjoy that. But I was fascinated with the complex choices available to today's authors. Previously, it was self-publish or find an agent!

Memory Lane, please? Thanks!"

Hey Jacqueline-

Thanks for your question. My particular journey started with locking myself up and quietly writing stories, not telling anyone what I was doing. After a couple of years of that, I decided to finally get out there and show some other folks my work. I took a workshop at Wayne State University, then another... After some encouragement from instructors while I worked on my Masters, I started sending stories out to small literary journals and quarterlies. I kept doing that and over the next few years, I started to get some stories accepted.

*I started to think about an agent then, but unless you get stories published in The New Yorker or somewhere like that, agents don't pay much attention to you. Finally, I decided to write a novel, which took me about two years. After I finished it, I was at a Writers Conference in New Orleans, where I had a meeting with an agent. I pitched my novel to her. I do think she took me more seriously because I had published in all those journals. As it turned out, she wasn't interested in the book that I had written, but she told me that if I wrote another one, she'd like to see it. Four years later, I sent her *SECOND HAND* and they took me on. After about six months of shopping it around, W.W. Norton accepted it.*

It's strange to compress the events of about twelve years into two paragraphs, but there it is. Hope this answers your question.

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 19: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/18/2009 11:26AM



Patty wrote: "Anyhow, I posed in my review of the "Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit" that a side trip made by Ella and John is told here that was left out of "The Leisure Seeker". I went back and find that you say you actually wrote this story about 10 years ago. This short story, "Mystery Spot", seems to explain Ella's reasoning best to me although many similiar incidents happen in "LS". What do you think? It would be interesting to see how others feel about it."

*Hey Patty- Yes, I did write that story "Mystery Spot" at least ten years ago. And it was indeed my starting point for *THE LEISURE SEEKER*. I suppose in some ways it does explain things in a different manner than in the novel. But I would also say that once I started writing the book, I did need to let go of most of what I did in the story and take an approach that would lend itself better to a longer form. Still, I love that story and felt that it totally stood on its own. I also thought it would interesting to include it in the collection for people who may have also read the novel. Like you.*

Actually, it's kind of exciting that you would ask this question. Even though I've mentioned here and there that "Mystery Spot" was the seed for the novel, no one has ever asked me any questions about the relationship between the two.

*Here's another one: the character of Theresa in my first novel *SECOND HAND* is rather closely based on the animal shelter worker character in "To Sleep," the first full story of *LOST TIKI PALACES*. Some of the action in the story parallels the book as well. Obviously, I tend to borrow from my stories for my novels. I think it's my way of working out an idea to see if it will lend itself to a longer work.*

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message 20: by [Patty](#) (new)

06/18/2009 01:29PM



*For some reason, at least a year ago, I picked up *Second Hand* at the Library (good librarian!) and loved it. It was something about the way your characters seem so familiar. Not just their manner and language but their values and priorities. I'm sure I meet them all the time.*

I love to go antiquing and after reading the novel I wanted to find Richard's second hand store. I don't think our tastes are the same but I would love to see his store and how he displayed the prizes he found at estate sales.

Why is his store on the west side?!

I can't wait to read "To Sleep" and savor the rest of Lost Tiki Palaces of Detroit. You seem to be able to say what I feel or else I can really understand what you write. I laugh out loud, I get choked up and at the end I feel good. What more could you ask for from a novel?

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 21: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/18/2009 01:58PM



Patty wrote: "For some reason, at least a year ago, I picked up Second Hand at the Library (good librarian!) and loved it. It was something about the way your characters seem so familiar. Not just their manner and language but their values and priorities..."

Hey Patty-

Well, I'm hoping that the characters feel "familiar" because we both come from the same state and much the same region of the same state. (SE Michigan) I think I'm a Midwestern guy who tends to write about Midwesterners. All my favorite fiction has a strong sense of place and I hope mine does as well. I think those manners and language and values that you write of are fairly representative of our part of the world. Hopefully, my fiction reflects that.

As for Richard's store from SECOND HAND, I had more than a few folks ask me where "Satori Junk" was located. I always say it was in the Ferndale of about 12 years ago, with a touch of the same era of Royal Oak. (For anyone who's not from the area who may read this, those are two older small cities on the outer edge of Detroit.) So it's not really West Side. (Metro Detroiters are often adamantly East Side or West Side. It's one of our little quirks.) To this day, I'm not exactly sure if Ferndale is East or West side. It's kind of in the middle. Maybe that's why I like it still.

Thanks for your kind words about my work. For the record, I'm pro-librarian myself. Aside from the fact that librarians have been incredibly behind THE LEISURE SEEKER, I'm also married to one.

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message 22: by [Jacqueline](#) (new)
06/18/2009 07:52PM



Michael wrote: "Jacqueline wrote: Non-"Leisure Seeker" question. After keeping a friend company on a jaunt to a panel discussion on "getting yourself in print", I was wondering what was YOUR trajectory to your fir..."

Yep, question answered, thx!

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 23: by [Melissa](#) (new)
06/19/2009 10:36AM



Michael,

I went looking for your other books. The kids and I figured since we loved The Leisure Seeker, we have to try getting the other ones. I can not find the Lost Tiki Palaces. (Any tips on finding it?) I did find

and have a copy of Second Hand. We are starting it soon and I was wondering if you have anything someone should keep in mind when they are reading it for the first time?

Also what was your favorite one to write? What is your favorite of them now that they are written and published? What is the one favorite part of each book?

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 24: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/20/2009 09:23AM



Hey Melissa-

Yes, the story collection will probably be more difficult to get ahold of since it's been published by a university press. I'm sure you could order it through your nearest independent bookstore (find your nearest with this link: <http://www.indiebound.org/indie-store-fi...> And of course, it's available directly through the university press: <http://wsupress.wayne.edu/books/1019/Los...> Or at Amazon.com or Powells.com.

I can't think of anything you should keep in mind while reading SECOND HAND. It's a fairly different book from THE LEISURE SEEKER. If you have a fondness for old objects, language, music, culture, that will certainly help. Also, It's definitely an adult read in much the same way that LS is. (Just not sure how old your kids are, Melissa.)

Can't say that I have a favorite book. For quite some time, I really thought that SH was going to be my only book, then suddenly I got LS and LTPOD accepted within 24 hours of each other. It's nice to actually have three books out. As for a favorite part of each book, this is also difficult for me to say. But the fact that both novels required me to travel for research makes both special to me. I traveled Route 66 for LS which was wonderful. SH also took me somewhere, but I'm hesitant to say because you haven't read the book yet. You'll find out...

Hope this at least kind of answers your questions. Thanks for the interest and effort to find Tiki Palaces.
Best, Michael

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message 25: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/22/2009 11:50AM



Does anyone have any other questions about the writing process, or publishing or anything like that?

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 26: by [Vicki](#) (new)
06/22/2009 12:34PM



I do! (says the aspiring writer)

Do you have someone who reads and critiques your work before you submit it to your agent, editor,

and/or lit mags? If so, at what stage do you share it with your "first reader(s)" for feedback? Do you show them the finished short story? Or a few pages at a time? Chapters of the novel or the finished work?

Also, now that you have two novels and a short story collection under your belt, how has this changed your feelings about your writing (if at all)? Are you more confident than you were when first starting out?

Thank you, Michael!

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message 27: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/22/2009 01:06PM



Hey Vicki-

Thanks for having some questions (and good ones at that). I was wondering if this Q&A was going to die on the vine.

Yes, I do have a few "first readers," who are basically people whom I trust to have good comments, who will mention possible problems or confusions or inaccuracies or just plain bad writing to me without crushing my delicate little ego.

Generally, I don't show anyone anything until I feel that it is completed (or very, very near done). I think it's a little dangerous to show people stuff before it's finished, but maybe that's just me. I don't want to be influenced until I have done what I feel needs to be done with the work. Keep in mind that you're talking to someone who had nine years pass between his first and second books (and three months between his second and third), so it's entirely possible that I don't know what the hell I'm talking about. Anyway, that's what works for me.

Yes, I'm considerably more confident in my abilities as a writer than I was when I first started writing fiction twenty years ago. It was years before I showed anybody any of my work. As for how I feel about my writing now at this moment, I'd love to say that I'm bursting with confidence and absolutely sure that my editor will love my next book. I'd love to say that, but I would be lying. I certainly do feel slightly more confident after the publication of my second and third books, but I do feel as though I have to be prepared for anything. (See comment about nine years between books.) Again, maybe that's just me.

Thanks so much for your questions, Vicki. Hope that answers them.

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message 28: by [Vicki](#) (new)

06/24/2009 08:14AM



Thanks, Michael. That does answer my questions. I appreciate the response! And not to hijack this thread, but I do have one more question. Well, actually, two:

1) I've already mentioned that I think your characters in *The Leisure Seeker* are superb. Now I'm wondering about plot, too. Seemingly simple things happen to Ella and John on the road, yet each thing is significant in its own way and pushes the story forward to its conclusion. What is more important to you in your writing: the characters or the plot? Any tips on how to write interesting characters, while also making sure, in regard to plot, that there is some "there" there?

And 2) Will you be doing any sort of book tour for *The Leisure Seeker*? Namely, showing up on the East Coast anywhere? (I'm in a book club and some of the gang asked me to ask! :-)

Thanks!

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 29: by [Cindy](#) (new)
06/25/2009 05:51AM



Hey....don't worry about hijacking the thread, Vicki, you're asking questions I am interested in but don't ask! This book so reminded me of my family - my mom has MS and dad has Parkinson's but they really haven't let it get them down too much. And as a family of five kids, we took many cross-country trips (Dad was in the Air Force) back and forth from our new base to Michigan (the St. Johns area - north of Lansing). Delightful tales of family traveling - the good and the bad! I passed the book on to my mom and sisters.

[reply](#) | [flag](#) *

message 30: by [Dawn](#) (new)
06/26/2009 05:04AM



Definitely not hijacking! LS reminded me, too, of all our trips as kids in the camper across the country. Good idea about sharing it (the book!) with siblings, but mine aren't readers. I think I might try, though...because they'd really like this book. As a kid I used to read aloud to them long books...if I could just get them all in one spot (they live scattered all over the country) I could read LS to them!

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message 31: by [Michael](#) (new)
06/29/2009 11:33AM



Vicki wrote: Thanks, Michael. That does answer my questions. I appreciate the response! And not to hijack this thread, but I do have one more question. Well, actually, two:

*1) I've already mentioned that I think your characters in *The Leisure Seeker* are superb. Now I'm wondering about plot, too. Seemingly simple things happen to Ella and John on the road, yet each thing is significant in its own way and pushes the story forward to its conclusion. What is more important to you in your writing: the characters or the plot? Any tips on how to write interesting characters, while also making sure, in regard to plot, that there is some "there" there?*

*And 2) Will you be doing any sort of book tour for *The Leisure Seeker*? Namely, showing up on the East Coast anywhere? (I'm in a book club and some of the gang asked me to ask! :-)*

Hey Vicki-

First off, sorry to everyone for the lag time between your questions and my answers. I was out of town and things were getting kind of quiet with this Q&A, so I wasn't as attentive as I should have been.

As for your questions, here goes.

1) I suppose that I often do start with a character or characters and then see where they take me. Although one or two critics have found the action in TLS a bit on the "slow" side (USA Today, I'm talking to you), I agree with you that it's just a simple story. What happens to John and Ella is ordinary (for the most part). I don't think that everything that happens in a book or film or story needs to be spectacular. Most of our lives are spent doing rather unspectacular things, and in the case of John and Ella, all they want is to do those things one last time. When I realized that was the idea, the "plot" and narrative and the writing itself tended to work around that. So it was in the rewriting that I think the plot came into its own. For the record though, I do tend to like something to happen plot-wise, it just doesn't have to be gigantic. For a (surprisingly) simple and (not surprisingly) brilliant take on the whole idea of plot, check out Aristotle's Poetics. Charlie Baxter's BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE is well worth reading as well.

2) No sign that I'll be doing any appearances on the east coast at the moment. Publishers are not so big on the book tour these days. They'd rather have me do things like, well, Q&A's on Goodreads. (Speaking of which, I'm also on Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter. Stop by if you feel like it.) But it's possible that I might travel a bit when the paperback of TLS comes out next spring. And I'm doing a book tour for the Italian translation in September. My wife is very excited about that, as am I. As for your book club, I'd be happy to do a call in. Just drop me a line through my website or Goodreads.

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message 32: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/29/2009 11:36AM



Cindy wrote: "This book so reminded me of my family - my mom has MS and dad has Parkinson's but they really haven't let it get them down too much. And as a family of five kids, we took many cross-country trips (Dad was in the Air Force) back and forth from our new base to Michigan (the St. Johns area - north of Lansing). Delightful tales of family traveling - the good and the bad! I passed the book on to my mom and sisters.

Hey Cindy-

So glad you enjoyed the book. Sounds like you grew up in a family that traveled as much as mine. It's only as an adult that I realize how much that traveling affected me in a positive way. Hope your mom and sisters enjoy the book too. Thanks for spreading the word.

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message 33: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/29/2009 11:47AM



Dawn wrote: "Definitely not hijacking! LS reminded me, too, of all our trips as kids in the camper across the country. Good idea about sharing it (the book!) with siblings, but mine aren't readers. I think I might try, though...because they'd really like this book. As a kid I used to read aloud to them long books...if I could just get them all in one spot (they live scattered all over the country) I could read LS to them!

Hey Dawn-

If I had only known, I could have had you and your siblings tune into NPR's Radio Reader with Dick Estell. He just read THE LEISURE SEEKER over about a three week period a month ago. As far as I know they won't be re-running it, but it's a cool show, easily accessible over the internet and worth

checking out.

<http://radioreader.net/>

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message 34: by [Michael](#) (new)

06/30/2009 05:42AM



Hey All-

Since I was out of commission for a couple of days, I'd be happy to extend this Q&A a few days if anyone has any additional questions or comments. If so, please send them in. If not, this has really been fun and interesting and I'd like to thank you all for joining in the discussion.

Cheers,

Michael

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message 35: by [Vicki](#) (new)

07/03/2009 07:41AM



Just wanted to say thanks, Michael, for taking the time to chat and answer our questions!

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message 36: by [Michael](#) (new)

07/03/2009 08:40AM



You're more than welcome, Vicki. It was my pleasure.

Michael

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message 37: by [Cindy](#) (new)

07/03/2009 12:19PM



Yup.....thanx from me, too...it was really interesting! Sorry I missed it on NPR - I love the way Dick Estell reads stories....take care.

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message 38: by [Jacqueline](#) (new)

07/07/2009 08:11AM



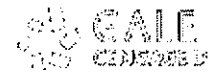
Thanks..it was fun to read the thoughts of someone who can REALLY write!

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message 39: by [Michael](#) (new)

07/12/2009 06:28AM

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Michael Craig Zadoorian

1957-

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Also known as: Michael Craig Zadoorian,
Michael Zadoorian

Birth: February 26, 1957 in Detroit, Michigan

Ethnicity: "Armenian/Czech"

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Entry updated: 10/01/2007

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"Sidelights"

"When I die, I will leave nothing but junk." So begins *Second Hand*, Michael Zadoorian's first novel, the story of a thirtyish Detroit-area second-hand store owner ("Satori Junk") who spends his days rummaging through the cast-off debris of other people's lives, and who eventually acquires some junk wisdom about love and loss.

After garnering very favorable reviews in *Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Marie Claire* and a number of other publications, the book was selected for Barnes & Noble's Spring 2000 "Discover Great New Writers" Program, and was also one of the American Booksellers Association "Book Sense 76" titles for March/April. Marta Salij, writing for the *Detroit Free Press* called the book, "a wry, wise novel." The *New York Times Book Review* referred to *Second Hand* as "a gift from the (Tiki) gods" and "a romantic adventure that explores what Yeats called 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.'"

Critics particularly praised the compelling first-person voice of the narrator, Richard Stalling: a "quirky, commonsense protagonist" (*Library Journal*); "Zadoorian strikes just the right tone throughout somewhere between cynicism and self-mockery" (*Kirkus Reviews*); "A modern, edgy tone, yet filled with Midwestern charm" (*Tampa Tribune*). Madison Smartt Bell, writing for the *Chicago Tribune* noted the "core of emotional authenticity" present in Richard's voice. But, according to John Marr of the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, "what really make(s) *Second Hand* astonishingly mandatory and compelling are Richard's frequent fascinating and insightful meditations on the nature of stuff."

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born February 26, 1957, in Detroit, MI; son of Norman (a photographer) and Rosemary (a homemaker) Zadoorian; married Rita M. Simmons, February 5, 1983. **Education:** Wayne State University, B.A., 1979, M.A., 1994. **Memberships:** AGBU, Wayne State University Alumni Association. **Addresses:** Home: Ferndale, MI. Agent: Lori Pope, Faith Childs Literary Agency, 915 Broadway, Suite 1009, New York, NY 10010.

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AWARDS

Wayne State University, Tompkins Awards, 1991, for fiction and an essay; Loughhead-Eldredge creative writing scholarship, 1991-92; *Second Hand* official selection of Barnes & Noble "Discover" program, 2000, "Book Sense 76" selection, American Booksellers Association, 2000, *Detroit Free Press* Book Club, 2003, and *One Book, One Community* Annual Reading Project, 2004; Great Lakes Colleges Association First Fiction Award, 2001.

CAREER

Copywriter in Detroit, MI.

WRITINGS:

- *Second Hand* (novel), Norton (New York City), 2000.

Work represented in anthologies, including *Pre-Press Awards 2: Michigan Voices*, 1995. Contributor of stories to periodicals, including *American Short Fiction*, *Literary Review*, *North American Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Wisconsin Review*, *ARARAT*, and *Paris Transcontinental*.

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BOOKS

- *Second Hand* (novel), Norton (New York City), 2000.

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, March 1, 2000, review of *Second Hand*, p. 1197.
- *Chicago Tribune*, February 20, 2000, review of *Second Hand*.
- *Detroit Free Press*, March 5, 2000, Marta Salij, "After Years of Writing, Ferndale Author's First Novel Is Ready for Release."
- *Kirkus Reviews*, February 15, 2000, review of *Second Hand*.
- *Library Journal*, February 15, 2000, Kimberly G. Allen, review of *Second Hand*, p. 200.
- *New York Times Book Review*, March 26, 2000, Sally Eckhoff, "Castoffs."
- *Publishers Weekly*, January 10, 2000, review of *Second Hand*, p. 42.

- *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, May 31, 2000, John Marr, review of *Second Hand*.
- *Tampa Tribune*, May 21, 2000, review of *Second Hand*.

OTHER

- *Michael Zadoorian Home Page*, <http://www.michaelzadoorian.com> (August 24, 2007).

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Leisure Seeker, The: A Novel

by Michael Zadoorian

Edition: Hardcover

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7 of 8 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Michael Zadoorian is a wise old woman.**, March 5, 2009

What a weird and wonderful book.

First of all, Zadoorian, although his name is Michael, must be a very wise, old woman. As you can see from the book description, this is the story of an old couple who escape all of the preconceptions of how they should live their short, remaining time on this earth. It is written in the voice of Ella, who you just have to describe as spunky.

She has cancer and in spite of it (or actually because of it), she decides that she and her husband John, who has alzheimer's, will, against the recommendations/advice/admonishments/threats and pleas of their children and doctors, take their beloved Leisure Seeker RV on the road one last time to retrace a previous journey over what is left of Route 66.

So it's a road trip for octogenarians.

Which means all of the associated dramas and circumstances of aging (humorous and sad) come along for the ride.

And that's why I say that Michael Zadoorian must be a wise old lady. Writing in the voice of Ella, he gives us all of the wisdom, the humorous and bittersweet insights of people who have lived a full life and now, facing death, take the time to contemplate that life and savor it as it is coming to an end.

But be aware, this is not some depressing book filled with nothing but complaints about aging and sadness about the good old days being gone. It is funny, bittersweet, tense and hysterical. Things happen! This is a story that moves along and, like any good book, you keep wanting to get back to it to see what will happen next. Very importantly, there are no false dramas used to move things along. There are no trumped up dark family secrets so often used to create fake tension. The beauty of this story is the normal-ness. These are plain people who are interesting just because we can identify so much with their insights and lives. Their choice is actually to continue to be as normal as they can be: to not be crammed into all of these last minute definitions of "patient", "cancer sufferer", "old person" and the rest of it, and try to do something that for them is quite normal: get in the RV and take a vacation from all of that!

Best of all, at the end of the day, you love these people. You come to wish that you could have the chance to be one of the people they meet along the way. Zadoorian gives you that wonderful chance.

[Comment](#) | [Permalink](#)**The Leisure Seeker LP: A Novel**

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Is it possible to outrun death and take one last road trip? A couple of terminally ill senior citizens in their eighties decide to give it a try. They drive away from their adult children and the medical establishment and go on vacation in their well preserved 1978 Leisure Seeker Camper

Van. They travel along the old roads of Route 66 from their home in suburban Detroit to Disneyland, California, and try to rediscover their past.

This is a beautiful, bittersweet story written with humor, affection, sadness and adventure by Michael Zadoorian, who was recently chosen as one of Amazon's best new writers. Ella and John Rubino's poignant love story will haunt you, scare you, and make you cry. You will not forget these two.

Ella and John Rubino, have shared the good life together for over 50 years. They have always lived in the Detroit suburbs where John has been retired from General Motors after putting in his "30". Now in their 80's, Ella has cancer and has decided to stop treatment. John has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Ella, spunky, bright and practically bald from chemo, plans one last adventure. Although she hasn't driven in 30 years, she does not worry about husband John driving. It seems to be the one skill he still has. She is the narrator and navigator of their story. Well prepared with maps, food, bourbon, beer, linens, clothing, a Visa Card, pain pills and John's gun, she is ready to go.

Even with Alzheimer's disease steadily stealing away his few lucid moments, John Rubino, who sometimes can't remember Ella's name, can still drive. It's the everyday conversations and activities that confuse him. As Ella says, "I am the keeper of memories, he is the driver. Between the two of us we are one whole person."

The story begins with Ella and John already on the road. Against their doctors' advice and their adult children's wishes, they point their RV camper van toward old Route 66 and Disneyland, and begin a trip taken many times before, when both they and their children were young.

And the adventures they have. They get held up by robbers in Texas. Ella suffers a bad fall in New Mexico and can't wake up John to help her. John drives off and forgets Ella. They re-explore old tourist's "traps" now with their canes and walker. They pop Pepto Bismol, before lunch at old road stops and diners, although John much prefers eating at MacDonald's.

At their Route 66 motel stops at night, the couple hang a sheet on their camper van, sit outside in the dark, and watch slides from their long ago vacations. Often fellow tourists join them as they reminisce about their grown children as kids, and lifelong friends, now dead. They rest for the night and try to get an early start each morning for their destination....Disneyland.

Author Zadoorian is heartbreakingly accurate in his descriptions of these eighty somethings. John's increasing dementia, his old man's smell, his sleeping at the wrong times, his incontinence; and Ella's own frustrations, keeping the trip on schedule, dealing with all of John's problems, her own miserable wig and hair-loss, and her increasing dependence on "discomfort pills" just to keep going. .

Don't peek ahead at the ending. Doctors, Disneyland officials, and you as well, probably won't like the way the story ends. But, as Ella says, "It is not your place to say."

This unforgettable story of a marriage and a couple, grown too old, will hook you from page one. You won't soon forget these two easy riders on their final road trip. Maybe you might better understand the elderly... who they were, who they are, and how they must face end of life issues.

Also, already there is a movie in the works starring Shirley MacLaine as Ella, and Clint Eastwood as John But hey, first read the book.

Sources:

The Leisure Seeker by Michael Zadoorian

Book Review...Los Angeles Times

Interview by K.H. (AKA "Bingo")

KH: What have you just finished reading?

MZ: I just finished HAM ON RYE by Charles Bukowski. I enjoyed it very much, a different kind of book for Bukowski, a chronicle of his childhood years, growing up in California.

KH: What books would you say have made the biggest impression on you, especially starting out?

MZ: Like a lot of writers who started in the Eighties, I was heavily influenced by the work of Raymond Carver, his short fiction and his poetry. His work touched me in so many ways, but also allowed me to understand the inner-workings of fiction in a way that I never had before. I don't know why, but he allowed me to think that maybe I could write fiction. His work is deceptive in that manner of extraordinarily talented people: he made it look easy. Once I started though, I found out differently. I certainly wound up writing my share of Carver stories. Still, it was a way to learn. And whatever helps you to find your personal style or voice or whatever you want to call it, is a good thing.

KH: What gets you started on a new book? A character or story idea or?

MZ: Often it is a particular character. Sometimes I'll just start writing in the person of a character and just see where it takes me. It's a chance to explore that character, get into his or her skin. If I continue to be interested, I just keep writing and see where it takes me. Sometimes it takes me no where, sometimes it's a story or a book.

KH: What is something about you that you would want people to know about you that we probably don't know?

MZ: I'm a big fan of my hometown of Detroit. I grew up on the Northwest side of the city. I now live just outside the Detroit city limits in a town not terribly

unlike the one featured in my first novel, **SECOND HAND**. Where I grew up, where I live now, the fact that I still live in the Detroit area, truly informs my writing. It depresses some people to stay in the place where they grew up, but I find it very useful as a writer. You need to *be* from somewhere, get that sense of place. It's just something you absorb from being in a place for a long time. People are always cutting down Detroit, but the city has a feeling, an attitude, an intensity that exists nowhere else. It's this sprawling urban center with all types of races and nationalities, yet still very midwestern in many ways. We're currently going through a rough period, but I think we're going to be okay. We're a hardy, rust-belt people, with a good sense of humor and a surprisingly hopeful attitude. We're also very creative: Lots of incredible music, art and writing comes from people from Detroit. You never know what you're going to see next.

KH: What is your best advice to anyone, including young people, who want to be writers?

MZ: Write. That's the best advice I can give. Sit down and start writing. Study the writers you love, try to understand what makes their writing work, what makes it move you. Don't think too much at first, just get it down. Don't worry about it being perfect. You can do that later. Be strong, be tenacious, believe in yourself, because it probably isn't going to be easy. There will be rejection, but don't let it crush your spirit.

Thanks to Michael Zadoorian for consenting to the above interview. See him talk about his latest book, **THE LEISURE SEEKER**, and more, on this clip from YouTube recently.

Michael Zadoorian was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He is the author of two novels, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** (William Morrow, 2009) and **SECOND HAND** (W.W. Norton, 2000), which was an ABA Booksense 76 selection, a Barnes & Noble Discover Award Finalist, and the winner of the Great Lakes

Colleges Association New Writers Award. His story collection **THE LOST TIKI PALACES OF DETROIT** (Wayne State University Press, May, 2009) features new work as well as short fiction that originally appeared in *The Literary Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Ararat*, *American Short Fiction*, *The North American Review* and *Detroit Noir*. He lives with his wife in Ferndale, Michigan. Website: Michaelzadoorian.com. You can also find MZ on

orlandosentinel.com/topic/la-et-book17-2009feb17,0,3470903.story

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BOOK REVIEW

'The Leisure Seeker: A Novel' by Michael Zadoorian

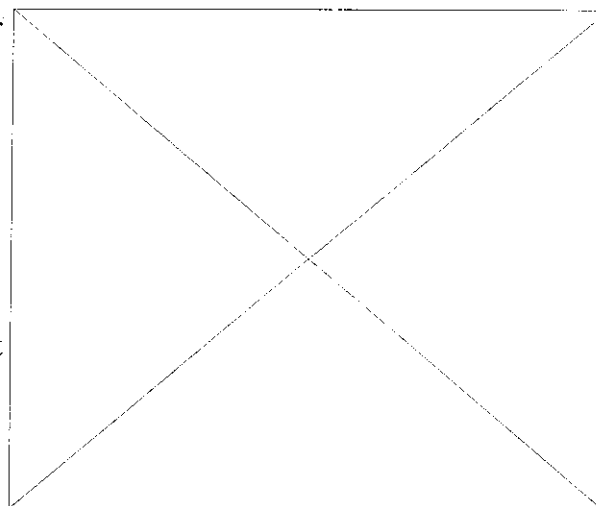
A couple in their 80s, both ill and acutely aware of the inevitable, take a final road trip along Route 66 to Disneyland.

By Amy Wallen

February 17, 2009

Life is a vast open highway. Along the way, we pull over for tourist sights, rest stops and flat tires. Near the end of our journey, if we try to travel the same road again, we find, like Route 66, our memory is paved-over in parts, completely gone in others, replaced with newer faster-moving interstates in some sections, but ultimately we come to a dead end.

Ella Robina, our narrator in Michael Zadoorian's novel "The Leisure Seeker," is dying of cancer. She's seen what happens to friends who meet the same fate, and she's got other plans. Zadoorian's first book, "Second Hand," gave us the heartfelt story of the grown children dealing with "stuff," both physical and emotional, left over after the death of their parents.



"The Leisure Seeker" faces head-on what the parents have to deal with when faced with painful death. It's not a pretty sight, and Ella describes it best with Destiny's salesman-like spin on fate: "[W]ith his loud plaid polyester suit, his halitosis, his cubic zirconium pinkie ring . . . with a meaty dampish paw, [he] smile[s] at us with nicotine teeth and promise[s] us. . . 'That's the best one on the lot.' "

So, Ella puts together a different itinerary, against doctors' and her children's wishes. She and her husband, John, take their "last vacation" along Route 66 headed for Disneyland. They set off from Detroit in the Leisure Seeker, the same RV they've had for most of their marriage and most of their vacations. She's taken John, an Alzheimer's patient, on this vacation with her not just because he's her husband, but because he's the only one of the two of them who can drive. "Is this home?" he asks repeatedly along their journey. She answers: "No, honey. We're not going home. We're on vacation."

With guidebook in hand, they follow the remaining parts of Route 66. They stop in Texas at the now-defunct Reptile Ranch in the Jericho Gap, the Devil's Rope Barbed Wire Museum in McLean and even the Cadillac Ranch outside of Amarillo. A kitschy diner, the Mid-Point Cafe, serves "Ugly Crust" pie. They travel to what are now the crumbling, run-down and even impassable locales they visited throughout their life together. We never forget their ages, both in their 80s: They use canes, fumble with their memories and, when they fall, can't get up.

We don't know what Ella has up her sleeve (besides Kleenex) after Disneyland, but nothing, not even her children begging via cellphone, or any of the encounters along the way, will convince her to turn back. When a "hopped-up Japanese car" zips past them driven by a young girl and Ella notices the sticker on the back window that reads "No Fear," Ella thinks "good girl" and carries on fearlessly as they travel from campground to KOA to RV park heading southwest. She's dead set on Disneyland.

Though episodic (like most road-trip books), a story like this one wouldn't work without flashbacks, and Zadoorian tidily fills in the couple's history with their vacation slides projected onto a white bedsheet on most nights at RV parks. Shots of their grown children as kids and of lifelong friends now dead blast across the darkness, all confirming Ella's conviction. As we head backward with her through the slide carousel of memories, she and John head on down Route 66 to their destiny.

Zadoorian is true to these geezers. He draws them in their most honest light, with hair loss, old people smell from bodies gone awry, and that constant conflict of tiredness and sleeplessness at the wrong times. Zadoorian treats 60-plus years of marriage realistically with the gentle touches or sideways teeth-gnashing that say everything. At times John can't remember Ella's name or he calls her by the wrong name. Once, John forgets that they are in the middle of an argument and reaches over, pats her knee and smiles at Ella. Ella starts the argument over again because she wants to finish what they started together -- that argument and life.

I hoped for a book that would make me laugh during these tight times, and I was rewarded. But would the ending depress me? As Ella says, "nothing lasts, but even when you know that things are just about over, sometimes you can run back and take a little bit more and no one will notice." We can't avoid the inevitable, but we can make it our own.

Wallen is the author of the bestselling novel "MoonPies and Movie Stars" and will host the forthcoming public radio series "DimeStories."

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