

***LIFE'S GOOD, BAD AND UGLY:
MAKING YOUR FICTION RING TRUE***

I. INTRODUCTION: SEE APPENDIX

II. SOURCES OF AUTHENTIC FICTION WRITING

A. Personal Experience: SEE APPENDIX

B. Interview: SEE APPENDIX

C. Research: SEE APPENDIX

D. Empathy: SEE APPENDIX

1. Combine the experience you do have with thorough research to create a reality you can't experience.

2. If you don't know, fake it . . . properly

III. WEAVING AUTHENTIC CHARACTERS:

A. LISTEN! Capture words, actions, emotions of others.

B. Don't get mad or even—just write 'em. DEA SAC interview.

IV. BREATHING AUTHENTICITY INTO YOUR SCENE:

A. Use all six senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and emotion. SEE APPENDIX

B. Use specifics, not generalities. SEE APPENDIX

C. Apply dramatic exaggeration—the 'what if' principle. SEE APPENDIX

D. Let genuine emotion add authenticity to a fiction scene. SEE APPENDIX

APPENDIX

I: INTRODUCTION (Excerpt *Freedom's Stand*, Tyndale 2009):

Farah had leaned over the balcony's wrought-iron railing for a better view when two men strolled into sight below. Though they were talking and laughing, weapons slung casually over a shoulder, their appearance was a stark reminder that if Farah was no prisoner in that fortress across the plain, neither was she free to come and go as she chose. Something in her startled withdrawal from the railing drew their attention upwards. Automatically, Farah snatched up her headscarf across her face.

But even as she did so, mutiny rose inside her. Why should she not be able to stand on her own balcony barefaced? To breathe in deeply the spicy sweet fragrances of cedar and pine instead of cotton cloth? To survey her surroundings unobstructed? Would Ameera hide her face for such as these?

I will not be invisible!

Dropping the scarf, Farah defiantly stared out over the landscape.

II-A: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: (Excerpt *Betrayed*, Tyndale 2008):

For all the somberness the guerrillas had brought to San Ignacio, there was still beauty here, Julie recognized with surprise. A beauty that came from the tranquility of the night and the heady perfume of the flowers that was released by the cooling dew of nightfall and the gentle evening chorus of bird life and frogs and even the scampering monkeys restlessly choosing a place to sleep. Almost, Julie could see the ghost of a small girl perched on those concrete steps across the way, knees drawn up to her chin as she waited for a call to supper, wondering eyes on the stars that were so much more glorious here above that tossing sea of jungle than at boarding school where the city lights competed with their splendor.

Across the plaza, a murmur of voices rose suddenly from beyond those closed shutters, and an indignant squawk from the macaw signaled that someone had thrown water—or worse—to silence it. For one agonizing moment Julie knew she had only to cross those paving stones and knock on that wooden portal for her father and mother to step out into the doorway and pull her laughingly inside.

The compulsion was so strong that Julie's fingers dug into the concrete rim of the planter to keep her where she was. She hadn't known what reaction to expect upon seeing her old home. Bitterness. Anger. Pain. She'd been prepared for all of those.

But love—?

That was the emotion that was ripping her apart.

I...I loved this place, she thought dazedly. *I loved these people. I...I was happy here!*
How could I have forgotten?

II-B: INTERVIEW (Excerpt *Freedom's Stand*, Tyndale House Publishers):

Beggars remained everywhere. Men missing limbs squatted on sidewalks or negotiated traffic on wheelchairs crafted from bicycle tires. Women in burqas exposed a cupped palm at intersections, small, ragged children at their skirts. Nor in the glut of automatic weapons and armed vehicles did Steve see any indication of a country at rest from war. It wasn't just the ISAF convoys with their armored Humvees and turret guns. A dozen different uniforms belonging to

the Afghan police, army, or hired security firms roamed sidewalks, stood guard at intersections and outside buildings, and crouched behind sandbags on the tops of walls.

And I thought we'd freed this place! Steve felt a sudden weariness that was not from jet lag. *Why did I come back here?*

“And if a bullet ricochets and hits the child? You do not shoot again unless you are being shot at.”

“But the minister—”

“I will deal with the minister.” Steve was so furious he waited a full five minutes before speaking to another human being. This was the side of Afghanistan he'd let himself forget, the side he'd come to hate. The casual cruelty despite all that surface hospitality that was almost a reflex as though a generation or perhaps even centuries of incessant aggression had hardened these people against anything but their own survival and perhaps that of their closest family.

Steve banished a lingering image of those tearful, frightened childish features. You didn't have to like your principal or even approve of his lifestyle. You simply did the job you were paid for. And Kabul promised to be an easier gig than Basra.

Meanwhile, you didn't get personally involved. It wasn't just that saving these people from themselves was a hopeless job. As far as Steve was concerned, Afghanistan just plain didn't deserve to be saved.

II-C: RESEARCH (Excerpt *Freedom's Stand*, Tyndale House Publishers):

Pul-e-Charki! Steve knew the high-security complex well enough. Originally built by the Soviets to hold political prisoners, the prison was laid out from an aerial view to look like a massive concrete wagon wheel. Spokes and connecting rim provided four stories of prisoner housing, the pie-shaped spaces between paved over as exercise yards for the inmates. The concrete wheel was itself set in a high-walled square that separated it from administrative offices and staff quarters. Another high exterior wall surrounded the whole layout, creating a no-man's corridor in between where during Soviet times killer dogs had roamed . . . The wing to which Jason steered Steve boasted fresh paint and roofing, a contrast even more marked because the spokes on either side were still a dilapidated ruin. Inside, the layout was identical to the corridor they'd just traversed. But here was more fresh paint, functioning lights, shiny-new steel bars on both windows and cells.

II-D: EMPATHY (Excerpt *The DMZ*, Kregel 2002):

Every day began the same. A pleasurable wakening to the freshness of the jungle dawn, the odor of wood smoke and brewing coffee, the morning chorus of birds and monkeys. Familiar scents and sounds, even loved. Then a glimpse of mottled green-and-brown and the metallic gray of an assault-rifle barrel, and the feeling of well-being would evaporate like the lingering coolness that burned off as soon as the sun arose . . .

Julie spent most of her day sitting cross-legged on the pallet in her shelter, fanning herself with a palm leaf against the humid heat. When her muscles protested that position, she stretched out on the thin mattress, pretending to be asleep. For a person who had always taken pride in filling her days with productive output, the idleness was a worse torture than the mosquitoes.

III-A: CAPTURE WORDS, ACTIONS, EMOTIONS OF OTHERS. (Excerpt *Betrayed*, Tyndale House Publishers)

“So that’s it?” Holly leaned on the door. “You’re turning me down without even talking about it? You’re telling me to just throw in the towel and let them get away with it?”

“I’m not *telling* you to do anything,” Vicki responded evenly. “You asked what I would do. Well, that’s easy. Exactly what I’m doing right now. Just walk away. Consider the occasional sidetracked animal the price for doing business in Guatemala and concentrate on all the other good you are doing. If you’re really concerned, contact your superiors back stateside and ask them to put some pressure—require accountability for future funding.”

The driver had started the engine. Giving him a nod, Vicki added, “Holly, I promise we’ll talk more tonight. No matter how late you finish up, give me a call. Meanwhile, don’t do anything foolish.”

“Oh, don’t wait up for me.” Holly stepped back. “If that’s the best you can do for advice, I’ll handle the rest of it myself.”

“The rest of it? Holly, what are you talking about?”

“Oh, believe me, the animals are the least of it. But, hey, you’ve got your priorities.”

“Holly—”

She had already swung around on her heel, and the taxi was moving away from the curb. Leaning back with a sigh, Vicki did not bother to watch her storm back through the glass doors.

In the year’s she’d been in this business, she’d seen countless volunteers like Holly come and go. Not just American. British. European. Australian. They were all the same. Young. Idealistic. Determined to save the world—or at least their Third World portion of it.

They arrived here with a backpack over their shoulder, a camera around their neck—and a cause. Each sure their own cause was the most vital to the future of their planet.

And equally sure they had only to throw enough of their Western technology and money to solve the planet’s problems. That the corruption and evils they encountered were never by any human choice but unavoidable circumstance.

It was better not to get involved. To let them come and go with their short-lived dreams and convictions and mission. To save the mental and emotional energy for battles Vicki could win.

A handful of garbage pickers.

A Mayan baby.

A mother.

Just walk away.

Except this time it wasn’t so easy.

Because this particular youthful and naive volunteer who had stomped with angry self-righteousness into the airport was Vicki’s younger and only sister.

III-B: UNPLEASANT PEOPLE? WRITE ‘EM (Excerpt *The DMZ*, Kregel Publications):

A man dressed in combat fatigues ducked his head to step inside. He wasn’t young, his crew cut iron-gray, the grooves around mouth and eyes cut deep. But his body under the battle uniform was as lean and fit as any recruit fresh out of boot camp. He surveyed his visitors before speaking, his gaze lingering unsmilingly on the cameras the CNN cameramen already had to their shoulders, his narrow mouth tightening as he took in the FARC representatives in the front row. “Welcome to San José. I’m Colonel Jeff Thornton, Joint Task Force commander for U.S. operations in this region.”

“Young lady,” Colonel Thornton said grimly, “the information you have just given me is classified. May I ask where you got it?”

He looked dead serious and not at all friendly, and Julie, who at first had felt an impulse to laugh, for the first time appreciated how a suspect must feel sitting on the opposite side of an interrogation table. Only her own clear conscience allowed her to meet that gimlet gaze squarely.

IV-A: USE THE WRITER’S SIX SENSES: SEE APPENDIX II-D.

IV-B: USE SPECIFICS/CONCRETE IMAGES: SEE APPENDIX II-A.

IV-C: DRAMATIC EXAGGERATION: The “What If . . .” Principle: (Excerpt *Freedom’s Stand*, Tyndale House Publishers):

The teen pack didn’t try to stop the two chapans, but kept pace around them, jeering and calling to each other. Then Amy felt a pinch on her rear. She spun around, furiously slapping the hand away. An angry squeal from Farah told her the other girl had suffered the same indignity. Rounding on their tormenters, Farah snapped out furiously, “Do you not fear Allah? Have you no sisters or mothers that you molest decent women? *Be tarbia asti!*”

At its politest, the latter phrase meant, “You are without proper upbringing!”

For just a moment, the pack fell back, shame on a few faces. Then one sneered contemptuously, “But you are no decent women. You are—”

The word was not one Amy knew. But Farah’s sharp intake of breath told her it wasn’t complimentary. The tormentor who’d spoken was in his late teens, already heavily bearded. A sneer twisting his mouth and hate in his eyes made it easy for Amy to picture him Al Qaeda or Taliban. “Only daughters of dogs walk the streets indecently exposed and alone.”

Encouraged by his derision, others surged forward. As the two girls continued to press forward, huddling together to ward off the groping and pinching, Amy was no longer only angry, but terrified. The iciness of Farah’s hand sliding into hers told Amy she wasn’t alone.

IV-D: LET GENUINE EMOTION ADD AUTHENTICITY TO FICTION SCENE (Excerpt *The DMZ*, Kregel Publications):

“Except for a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die . . .”

But, God, I never asked to be a grain of wheat. I never asked to be part of this.

“He who loses his life for my sake . . .”

I didn’t ask to give my life! I didn’t ask to give my parents! . . .

This was what it came down to. How could she love a place that also held so much hurt? How could the same God who had placed such beauty into her life place such pain as well?

Why did you give me such wonderful parents and then take them away? Not just when they died, but all those boarding school separations when I needed them so much. Maybe that’s just the way missionary life was back then. Maybe it was the way it had to be to bring Christianity to the world. Why does winning the world for God have to involve breaking apart families and saying goodbye?

Julie swallowed back the tears in her throat. “Oh, Rick, you’ve got me all wrong. I’m no hero. I’m the girl who can’t think of anything but her career and that Pulitzer prize. And right

now I'm so scared I want to throw up. It's just that—there's some things in this world worth dying for, that's all—and a few million people is one of them.”

...
Some things worth dying for. The words struck Julie with a force that took her breath away even as she said them. *Oh, Dad! Mom! I get it! It was never a question of how much you loved me, of choosing Colombia over me. It's just that some things reall are worth dying for. And living for too. And even if we'd like to keep the people we love safe and make things pretty and easy for them, sometimes we just have to follow the path God puts in front of our feet and believe that if He knows what He's doing with our lives, then He also knows what He's doing with the people we love. You knew that, if I didn't! You never abandoned me—you just gave me to God.”*

... There was so much beauty here, Julie reflected, as the bird gobbled its breakfast—and so much pain as well. Just as both beauty and pain had intertwined in her own life, even when she had chosen only to see the pain. What she hadn't recognized—had refused to recognize for so long—was that both could come into her life by the same hand of a loving God, both were part of everyone's life in some way or another.