

Q: You started your writing career as a novelist, but your films *Braveheart*, *The Man In the Iron Mask*, *Pearl Harbor*, and *We Were Soldiers* reached a global audience and really put you on the map as a writer. Why did you decide to return to writing novels with *Love and Honor*?

RW: *Love and Honor* will be a film in the not-so-distant future; but I first envisioned it as a novel. In fact, I started writing it in 1984 before I even had a career in film. Writing is my first love. Movies are visceral, powerful things; but a novel lives in the mind. There is no other art form, at least for me that can connect the reader with the characters in that way.

Q: What was the stimulus for *Love and Honor*?

RW: I'd written two novels before I started *Love and Honor*; they were contemporary stories and were well received by critics, but they were published with small marketing and small sales. I realized that what I needed to do was to write what stirred my blood, to write the kind of book I'd love to read. I spent four years writing *Love and Honor*, and the original manuscript was 1600 pages long. That was too long for any publisher to touch, and I had to feed my family, so I set it on the shelf and got a job writing for television. That led me into writing films, and my first film was *Braveheart*.

Q: How did *Braveheart* transform your career?

RW: The success of *Braveheart* gave me a lot of freedom professionally. After it won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1995, people in the movie industry were interested to see what else I had to offer. So *Braveheart* gave me the opportunity to tell other epic stories, and it gave me the opportunity to direct my first film.

Q: Would you say that your original work on *Love and Honor* prepared you to write a film like *Braveheart*?

RW: Definitely. *Love and Honor* and *Braveheart* are similar stories, stories that echo the question, "What does a man profit if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?" That question is constant in my own life, and it keeps coming back in my work.

Q: As you mentioned, after *Braveheart* you added another job to your resume, becoming a director for the first time with *The Man In The Iron Mask*. How does directing compare to writing?

RW: Directing is both exhilarating and agonizing. It's a collaborative process and you get to

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A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

RANDALL WALLACE'S
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work with brilliant people who are experts in what they do. I love that. It's also an incredible amount of stress to go through a production schedule. Obviously writing is very different. It's you and the page.

Q: One of your best-known films is *Pearl Harbor*, which you also wrote as a novel. Which came first, the book or the movie?

RW: After the screenplay for *Pearl Harbor* was finished, I couldn't let the story go, so I wrote it as a novel too. No one was more surprised than I was when *Pearl Harbor* cracked the top ten on the New York Times Bestseller List. With *Love and Honor*, the novel existed before I wrote the screenplay. But in writing both novel and screenplay, I feel that one shapes the other. I go back and forth. I learn from each draft. The novel becomes more cinematic and visual, while the screenplay benefits from having rich, novelistic characters. It's a treat to tell the same story in two different mediums.

Q: *We Were Soldiers* is your most recent film, a movie that tells the true story of American soldiers fighting in one of the first major combat actions of the Vietnam War. Why, after directing this film, did you decide to refocus your energies on *Love and Honor*?

RW: While making *We Were Soldiers*, I was blessed to spend time with many of the real people that story is about. *We Were Soldiers* affirmed for me that real heroes exist; when it was finished I felt inspired to return to writing *Love and Honor*. And I had the experience to make it what I had always intended it to be: an epic historical novel.

Q: After 20 years, *Love and Honor* is finally being published. How would you characterize this novel and your journey writing it?

RW: *Love and Honor* is a love story, but like *Braveheart*, it takes place amid huge battles and betrayal and puts the fate of an entire nation on the shoulders of a single man. This man, a young American named Kieran Selkirk, embodies the best of the other characters I've written. He fights for his country, he sacrifices for the people he loves, and he believes in his heart that all men deserve to live free. I believe America was created by people like that, who had their steel forged between the idealism in their hearts and the battles they fought in the real world. I know that writing *Love and Honor* has forged me as a writer. It's taken over twenty years to bring *Love and Honor* to the public, but for me it's been worth every step of the journey.

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Q: How much of *Love and Honor* is based on historical fact?

RW: I've sought to give readers a vivid experience of Catherine the Great's Russia; and though this is a novel, I've done my best to keep the historical details accurate. The British did seek Catherine's help to stamp out the American Revolution. Catherine's court was notoriously erotic, as well as political. The Cossacks were raiding Russian villages in those times.

Q: Most of the things you write are set in historical times. Why did you decide to write about the period before the American Revolution? What do you find most intriguing about this period in history?

RW: I stand in awe of what our forbearers – not just the famous Founding Fathers, but ordinary Americans too – went through so that we could so easily believe that all of us are created equal; though the Declaration of Independence says we hold that to be self-evident, for the rest of the world in their day, it was a radical and dangerous ideal.

Q: Who inspires you creatively? What are your favorite books and movies, and have any of these works inspired you as a novelist and screenwriter?

RW: I love Charles Dickens; and the Russians: Tolstoy, Chekhov, Pushkin. I love Robert Louis Stevenson, Kipling, and the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson. But all in all, *The Bible* is the written word that has inspired me most – I've always read it in The King James version. In the spoken word, the greatest storytellers I know are in my family.

Q: Your books and movies are filled with strong and courageous male characters. What, in your opinion, makes a man a "real man" and have you known any real men in your life?

RW: A real man has the heart to face his enemies, and the wisdom to recognize the greatest battles are within himself. My father is my model of manhood.

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