

This Writer's Journey:

Living With Death



By Peter Leavell

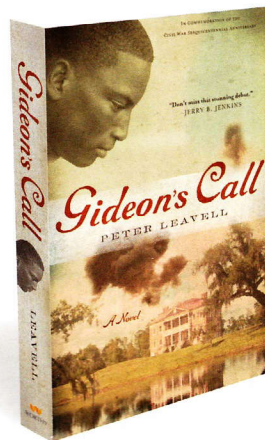
I stood between two giants. Author Jerry B. Jenkins to my right and Byro Williamson, CEO of Worthy Publishing, to my left. The two bent low to offer the five-foot, \$20,000 check to me for winning the 2011 Christian Write Guild's Operation First Novel contest

Standing on tiptoe to see over the top of the check, I smiled. Little did anyone know my entire world was reeling. But it wasn't solely the surprise of hearing my name announced as the winner, it was also that I'd lived long enough to experience the moment.

Three months earlier, I thought I was going to die.

ON THE MOVE

My *modus operandi* is to move fast—produce—go. That summer I'd finished my manuscript and entered, hoping to make the semi-finals. Maybe the finals. With feedback from the Guild, I could perfect my novel—and then who knew? On to publication!



Two weeks later my muscles died. My biceps disappeared and my legs shrunk to toothpicks. I couldn't think straight. Panic attacks struck on a whim.

My wife, with our two children, rushed me to the doctor. Diabetes was a possibility, as was cancer. I started my will—at age 35.

LIFE STOPS

We waited several weeks for a diagnosis. I couldn't write, so blogging and noveling were out. I couldn't think, so conversations were a challenge. Besides, I had little to say.

My memory is blurry, but I remember my son and daughter going off to soccer and ballet without me. Their lives had to go on, even if mine couldn't.

*Their lives had to go on,
even if mine couldn't.*

My local ACFW chapter settled on their knees, bowed their heads, and prayed with my friends and family.

Alone and helpless, I cried out to God—and received a surprise. He listened.

That's when I realized I'd never needed Him before. From writing to academics to running—I could always do it all myself. But now my self-sufficiency was gone. And no matter how much organic food my wife cooked for me, or how often my children cared for my needs, it was never enough to bring back my strength or my mind.

PRIORITIES CHANGE

Even though I felt I was no good to anyone, through the Bible and prayer Jesus let me know He still loved me. When I grasped the truth of His love, I no longer cared whether I published. I would grow closer to Him even if my manuscript never saw the light of day.

Then I received an email from the Christian Writers Guild: I was an Operation First Novel semifinalist.

My heart sank. How would I mentally, emotionally, and physically handle being one of 10 people who might win? I gave it to God. Nothing was mine anymore.

MOVING ON UP!

Eventually I received another e-mail: *OFN Finalists Announced: Hope you can make it to the conference to receive recognition of this accomplishment.* I read it over and over. From my bed.

The other finalists emailed each other and we started a prayer/support group that still exists. I wasn't the only one with health problems. Prayer would uphold us all.

The doctor called. He said I would live—if I received testosterone treatment *immediately*. It seems my body had stopped making the stuff men survive on—the hormone that creates and maintains muscles. Because the heart is a muscle, it was atrophying in sync with my arms and legs.

THE HEALING

In faith, I made reservations to attend the Writing for the Soul conference. Jesus would be there with me—because I needed Him. I knew that now. And He loved me—I knew that, too. In one week, my body returned to 70 percent of my former self. Soon, I was off to the conference of a lifetime.

In faith, I made reservations to attend the conference. Jesus would be there with me.

When the Operation First Novel winner was announced, onlookers saw a short fellow given a second chance at life. Standing between the two giants—and behind an equally massive check—I looked at the trio from my out-of-body experience. I saw a fourth Person standing behind me—one the cameras wouldn't pick up.

His arms were wrapped around me. Like they always were and will be.

PETER LEAVELL graduated from Boise State with a degree in history in 2007.



He is the winner of the Christian Writers Guild's 2011 Operation First Novel contest for *Gideon's Call*, which releases this month from

Worthy Publishing. He lives in Boise ID.

Novel shines light on unfamiliar history

In *Gideon's Call* (Worthy Publishing), Peter Leavell forges an unprecedented tale of tragedy and triumph across the backdrop of the Civil War through the story of Tad, a clever slave boy who comes of age as America's war reaches the sea islands of South Carolina.

Tad's desire to better himself is blocked by the color of his skin. But then, Northern soldiers force the island's white plantation owners to evacuate, setting 10,000 slaves free in a single day. These circumstances seem like a dream, except the newly freed men and women have no money, no education, and little hope for the future—unless someone rises to lead them.

Based on true events, *Gideon's Call* is the dramatic story of a young man who battles the shame of his past and faces the horrors of war and unimaginable prejudice to become the deliverer of thousands of freed slaves.

THE WIDOW'S JOURNEY
WHEN TWO BECOMES ONE

WWW.WIDOWSJOURNEY.COM WITH AUTHOR GAYLE ROPER