

I stood between two ~~towering infernos~~giants. Author Jerry B. Jenkins to my right, and ~~to my left~~, Byron Williamson, CEO of Worthy Publishing, ~~to my left~~a touch taller. The two ~~giants~~ bent low to ~~hold~~offer the five-foot, \$20,000 check ~~to me~~ they'd given ~~me~~ for winning the 2011 Christian Writers Guild's Operation First Novel contest.

Standing tiptoe to see over the top of the check, I smiled. Little did anyone know my entire world was reeling. But ~~at the photographer.~~

~~Shock sent my entire world reeling. I can tell by the dazed look in my eyes, the dilated pupils, my out-of-body experience.~~

~~Perhaps~~ it wasn't solely the surprise of hearing my name announced as the winner, it was also that ~~all over the world. Maybe it was~~ I'd lived long enough to experience the moment.

Three months ~~before~~earlier, I thought I was ~~about~~going to die.

### ~~LIVING WITH DEATH~~On The Move

My modus operandi ~~MO~~ is to move fast—produce—go. ~~That~~e summer I'd before the Operation First Novel contest submissions were due, I ran fifteen miles and called it fun. Writing 10,000 words a day was a sweat, but possible, even working a full time job. I finished my manuscript and ~~surrendered~~entered it to the ~~Christian Writers Guild's contest~~, hoping to make the semi-finals. Maybe the finals. With the feedback from the Guild, I could perfect ~~it~~my novel—and then who knew? On to publication— ~~I wanted to be published!~~

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

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

### Life Stops

We waited several weeks for ~~the~~a diagnosis. I couldn't write, so blogging and noveling were out. ~~Even writing an email was difficult.~~ I couldn't think, so conversations were a challenge. Besides, I had little to say. ~~, even to my wife and children. And concentrating on a television show was impossible. My drivers license was taken away.~~

My memory is blurry, but I remember my son and daughter going off to soccer and ballet without me. ~~, leaving me alone in the house.~~ 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. ~~I prepared my will.~~

## WHO LOVES ME

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

~~That's when~~ I realized ~~something~~. I'd never needed Him before. ~~Everything had come so easy~~. From writing to academics to running—I, 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 changed

~~But e~~Even though I ~~felt~~ I was no good to anyone, ~~through the Bible and prayer~~ Jesus let me know He still loved me. ~~Through the Bible and prayer, He spoke to me~~. When I ~~grasped the truth of His love, that truth of His love sunk in,~~ I ~~no longer cared~~ ~~didn't care~~ whether I ~~was~~ published ~~or not~~. ~~That was His problem~~. I would grow closer to Him even if my manuscript never saw the light of day.

~~Then I received an e-mail from~~ ~~Then a man I'd never heard of emailed me~~. His name was ~~Michael Ehret~~. ~~"You may want to check out~~ the Christian Writers Guild: ~~website today~~. ~~Good news on it."~~

I was an Operation First Novel semifinalist.

My heart ~~sunk~~sank. How would I mentally, emotionally, and physically handle ~~being one of 10 people who might win?~~ ~~the fame and fortune—fame, anyway—of semifinal status?~~ I gave it to God. Nothing was mine anymore. ~~It was all His~~.

## A FINALIST

### Moving on up!

~~Eventually I received another e-mail: Because my memory didn't work well, it suddenly skipped to the next email. Five of them had been sent out—OFN Finalists Announced:—it said. 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 ~~today~~. ~~We learned what each other needed, and that~~ 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 my~~ body had stopped making the stuff men survive on—~~the~~, ~~the~~ hormone that creates and maintains muscles. ~~And b~~Because the heart is a muscle, it was atrophying in sync with my arms and legs. ~~The doctor put in an emergency call, and a bottle of testosterone gel was overnighted into Boise, Idaho, a medicine that would keep me alive.~~

## The healing

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

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 ~~. And I knew~~ the cameras ~~couldn't~~ wouldn't pick ~~Him~~ up.

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