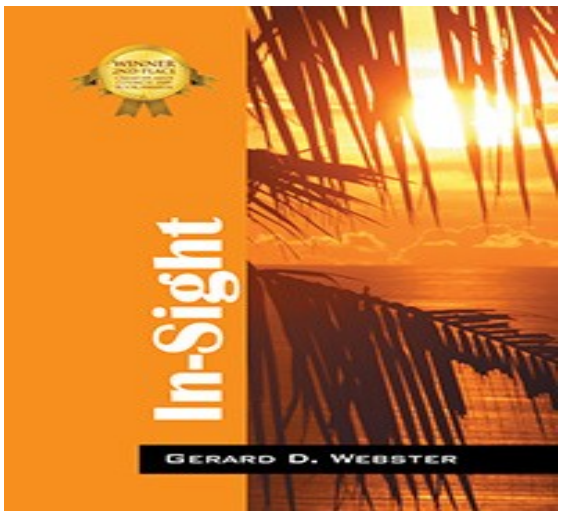
An Interview with Gerard Webster

February, 2010 Featured Author
at
Time with Tannia
(http://timewithtannia.tripod.com)

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés



1. Tell us about yourself, including how readers can contact you.

I'm a cradle Catholic and the oldest of 7 children. I spent 5 yrs in the seminary. Since then, I've been a Peace Corps Volunteer, a soldier, a businessman, and an addictions counselor. Most of all, though, I'm a husband to my wife, Anne, and a father to our 5 children. Our 3rd son, William, will be ordained a priest on Dec. 12, 2009. *In-Sight* is my first novel. I can be reached either through my website at http://outskirtspress.com/insight or by e-mail at websterjerry@hotmail.com.

2. You attended a seminary for five years before joining the Peace Corps to work 2 yrs in Bolivia. How did those years of personal quest and pruning mold your spiritual path?

The years in the seminary gave me an excellent education and a deep formation in the

faith. But, after I left, I felt lost…wasn't exactly sure of what to do with my life. So I joined the Peace Corps and worked in the small village of San Joaquin, Bolivia for 2 yrs. There my job was "disease vector control"—essentially helping the villagers get rid of the rats and mice that carried the deadly hemorrhagic fever.
The Bolivian people were very kind and accepting of me. When I arrived, I was the only American in town and spoke very little Spanish. Still, they took me into their homes and hearts and welcomed me warmly. Most of them were very poor…there was no running water, indoor toilets, or electricity in the village. But they shared what they had and were very happy. I saw first-hand that you don't have to have money or material possessions to be happy—that family and friends are far more important than "things." The years in the seminary and the two years in Bolivia helped shaped my values--what was important and what wasn't.

Why did you leave the seminary?

I was very young—twelve years old—when I entered the minor seminary. In our family, priests were always put on a pedestal. So part of my motivation for being there may have been for the wrong reasons…to be praised and admired. In my 3rd year I began to seriously question whether I had a vocation.

To help me decide, I was invited to do missionary work with the Navajos in Arizona. Meanwhile, I kept praying that God would let me know in no uncertain terms what I was supposed to do. One day, while driving on a desert road from one mission to another, I swerved to avoid hitting a jack-rabbit and the wheels locked in the soft sand. The car flipped over. All the bones in my left hand were crushed when the car landed on top of it. After surgery, I was told that I would probably never have full use of my hand. It's strange how God answers prayers. Right after this happened, I was informed I could not return to the seminary. The order was a missionary order and needed healthy men with "two good hands" to serve the Lord.

I spent the next year on painkillers and going through some intense physical therapy to regain the use of my hand. By the time it healed, I knew that leaving was the right decision. God had made it for me.

3. Upon your return to the USA, the Lord traced a new road for you to walk. You went to college, where you met your wife, and later on was drafted into the military. From where did you gather the strength to overcome these sudden changes in your life? Did you feel like Abraham on his way to the promised land?

When I returned from Bolivia, I enrolled in college at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. There I met and fell in love with my future wife, Anne Dolan. She was cute, pretty, smart, Catholic (which was important to me), and one of the most genuinely "good" persons I had ever met.

Then, after just one semester, I was suddenly drafted into the army. The next two years were the most depressing years of my life after being torn away from Anne in the springtime of our love. I felt totally alone. I wish I could say that I "found the strength" to get through it, but that wouldn't be true. I simply endured it. I was certainly no Abraham on his way to the promised land. I was more like the complaining Israelites who wandered in the desert for 40 years. Returning to home & Anne after the military *was* like finding a land flowing with milk and honey. Family was more important than ever…and making a family with Anne was the most important thing of all.

4. You have been working in the addictions field for 25 years. What do you consider the hardest and the most rewarding aspects of your job?

By far, the hardest part of my job is when an addict dies from the disease. It's toughest to see the effects on the family—especially of a suicide or a violent death. In the beginning, as a therapist, there was the temptation to blame myself…that perhaps there was something more that I could have done.

I was fortunate enough to have a good mentor, though. He suggested that I attend some Al-Anon meetings. There I learned that—while I was responsible for what *I* did as a therapist—I was not responsible for the outcome. I couldn't cross over into the area of the addict's responsibility and "do it for him"--no matter how much I might want to. Al-Anon taught me to "let go with love." It's made me a more effective counselor.

One day we were sitting on a couch in front of an old coffee table and discussing this very issue. *"Jerry," he said, "if you think you have the power to cause someone to use or drink or to cause someone to get clean and sober, you're on quite an ego trip." Then he asked: "If you had to pound a nail into this table right now, what would you use?"*

"A hammer," I answered.

"Well, I don't see any hammers around. So what else would you use, if you had to do it right now?"

I looked around the room.

"I guess I could use that stone ashtray," I pointed.

"What else?" he asked.

"There are some bricks out in the flower garden outside…I could use one of those."

"What else?"

"If nothing else worked, I could take off my shoe and pound it in with the heel," I said in exasperation.

"So," my mentor asked, "where's the power? Is it in the stone ashtray, the brick, or the shoe?"

"It's not in any of those things…that's just a tool I'd use."

"That's right," he explained. "And if you can use one of those to pound a nail into this table, God can use you to help someone get clean and sober. God has the power; you're just the instrument He uses. You might be an old shoe or a brick or an ashtray, but it doesn't matter. He can accomplish anything with the most unlikely tools. Your main job is to make yourself available. Your second job is to try to become a better instrument. Who knows…someday you might even become a hammer…"

Of course, the most rewarding part of the job is when someone makes a 180 degree turn around…is re-united with loved ones…and then helps other addicts recover. I've made

many life-long friends working in this field. And have experienced the joy of seeing them live full, happy, productive, and love-filled lives.

5. Do you attribute the priesthood of your third son, William, a reward and fulfillment of God's will for you? What events in his life pivoted that decision?

Billy and I were discussing vocations once. He'd asked me about my time in the seminary. "I guess," he concluded at the end of our discussion, "that just wasn't your vocation."

"It was my vocation at the time," I said. When Billy questioned my odd statement, I explained that I fully believed I was supposed to be exactly where I was at that time in my life. Between growing up in a good Catholic family and the years of formation in the seminary, God had provided me with a firm bedrock of faith…something He knew I'd need to face the slings and arrows of life later on…and a foundation to build our family on when we started having children. I see Billy's vocation as his answer to God's unique call.

The events that pointed him towards his vocation are many. All through high school he belonged to a youth group that would go on missions to Appalachia or Mexico in the summer. Even in college, he continued going on the summer missions with youth groups —but as an adult lay leader. The summer after his sophomore year, they went to Mexico to build homes for the poor.

When he got back, after seeing the extreme poverty of the people, their faith in spite of it, and the evil surrounding them due to the drug trade, he announced that he had decided to become a priest. But he wanted to join a missionary order. It wasn't long after that when he found exactly such an order by a series of amazing "God-incidences." He'd already announced to his now ex-girlfriend that he was going to be a priest, dropped out of UF, and turned his car over to his younger brother. He gave away everything that he owned before leaving for the seminary—and he's never looked back. That was nine years ago.

6. Who can benefit the most from the Diocesan Marriage Renewal weekends and the Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) retreats? Can you share some success stories with our readers?

Anyone can benefit from these retreats—unless they're already "perfect"—which no one is. Anne went to the CRHP retreat for women first. When she got home from the weekend, she had this "glow" about her. I went about six months later to the men's weekend retreat. It was such a wonderful experience for both of us and for the parish…we became very close to people we would never have gotten to know. As good as the CRHP retreats were though, they were for men and women separately. We actually commented to each other that we wished there was something like that for couples… "Chirp for two" we called it.

Shortly afterwards our parish announced a marriage renewal weekend. We signed up for it. Our first weekend was presented by World Wide Marriage Encounter. It opened up new lines of communication and made us realize what a beautiful gift we had in the sacrament and in each other. Later, Diocesan Marriage Renewal was started in our diocese and we were asked if we wanted to help present weekends. We've been doing that for about 8 years now, and it's been a true blessing for us as we continually renew our sacrament.

Two success stories: CRHP one first. A young man who had fallen away from the Church

because of his addictions to alcohol, drugs, and sex converted after hearing the testimony of two men with similar histories.

The other story is about a couple who had practiced birth control. They became open to life as a result of the weekend and now have several beautiful children and a joy-filled home. They are a wonderful example of a loving Catholic family and they give back to God and His Church generously.

To get in touch with CRHP (Christ Renews His Parish), you can ask your local parish or diocese if they have CRHP retreats or you can contact the National Office at CRHPFW@aol.com or by phone (216) 731-7903.

Diocesan Marriage Renewal (DMR) for the Diocese of St. Augustine, FL can be reached at www.diocesanmarriagerenewal.org.

World Wide Marriage Encounters are available internationally and they can be reached at www.wwme.org.

7. Now let's talk about your visionary debut novel, *In-Sight.* I enjoyed very much reading and reviewing it. What motivated you to write this kind of story? Who is your targeted audience?

About three years ago, I went on a silent retreat. One of the talks was about the gospel of the talents, and I was challenged us to meditate on what talents I have never used for the Lord.

My B.A. was in English Literature, but I'd never done much with it. By the time the retreat ended, I decided that I would try to put this talent to work for the Master.

While praying about this, I kept remembering a movie my kids had rented called Shallow Hal. It was about a very superficial young man who judged everyone based on their appearance and outward beauty…until he was hypnotized to see only their inner beauty. Every time I tried to come up with something to write about, the memory of Shallow Hal kept pounding at my mind's door. Finally I discussed it with a spiritual mentor, and he suggested that—instead of fighting off this intrusive thought—I should go with it and see where it led.

That night I got home, grabbed a pad of paper, and started writing down "what if" questions. What if a man really *could* see inside others—their character instead of just their looks? What if a worldly, selfish, sinful man could see the condition of his *own* soul… whether he was alive with divine grace, dead in mortal sin, or "wounded" by venial sins? What if he could see the condition of others' souls? How would that affect him? How would it affect his relationships?

The story took off after that. I merely had to come up with the main character, Ward McNulty, create an event in which he could suddenly "see" his soul, and then develop a story line "before" and "after" that event to show how it changed him.

My target audience is adult Catholics…or adults who enjoy a good thriller/mystery with a moral theme to it—whether Catholic or not. Basically, I wrote the type of novel I'd enjoy reading…with enough heart to appeal to women but enough guts and action to appeal to men…where the conflict occurs both in the "outer" sphere of men's actions and the "inner"

realm of conscience, thought, and moral decisions.

8. Ward McNulty's character seems to me as a clever combination of the prodigal son and Nabucodonsor stories whose lives' tragedies humbles them. Do you agree with this analogy? Does this character represent the road to recovery for an addict?

I never thought about it when I was writing it, but it's a good analogy. Like the prodigal son and Nabucodonosor, Ward McNulty represents those many materialistic souls who lose sight of the eternal in pursuit of the temporal. That's basically what sin is…choosing the creature over the Creator. Worldly accomplishments can blind us to own faults and lead to a false pride. With that kind of pride, it usually takes quite a cannonade of catastrophes to pound down the outer walls. Only then, if ever, can grace penetrate the defenses. "Recovery"—whether for an addict, an alcoholic, or a professional sinner—often begins in just such a manner. Being "humbled" is nothing more than seeing yourself for who and what you really are; honestly admitting your faults. And then seeing God for Who He is. That's the beginning of change.

9. How much of Dan McNulty is a reflection of your work?

Dan McNulty was actually fashioned after my father. He even looks like my father in the book…sort of thin and wiry but incredibly strong—both physically and morally. I just tried to put him in a work environment that I was familiar with and made him more successful at it than I could ever be. Dan McNulty, my own father, and I all have one other thing in common: we're all fathers who are deeply concerned with the ultimate salvation of our children's souls. Everything else is secondary. Dan McNulty, like my father, lends urgency to the spiritual warfare we're engaged in—not only for our own souls but for the souls of our children as well.

10. Where can readers purchase your book?

It can be bought online at either Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble.com. or you can go to my website http://outskirtspress.com/insight and link to Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Amazon Kindle. It can also be ordered by any bookstore through Ingraham. This often saves the reader shipping costs. I encourage readers to support their local Catholic bookstores whenever possible.

11. Which marketing method has proven more effective for you and why?

This being my 1st novel, marketing has been very much brain-surgery self-taught. Book reviews from professional reviewers, like yourself, have been a tremendous help. I've also done book signings at local bookstores—and have used local Catholic Radio to announce the book signings.

The best exposure, though, has come from word-of-mouth advertising…people who've read the book, like it, and then tell others about it. It's one thing for the author or the publisher to tout the novel on the jacket cover; but when a friend comes up to you and says: "You *gotta'* read this book!"…now *that's* powerful advertising.

12. Are you working on a sequel?

Yes. I hadn't planned on launching into another novel this soon, but my readers have been hounding me for a sequel. I'm constantly being asked *"What happens to Ward and Carrie? Do they ever get back together?*" or *"What does Ward do with his life afterwards?"*

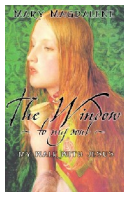
So it appears that the readers have gotten to know and love Ward, Carrie, and some of the other characters in the first novel and are hungry for more. I've just put the finishing touches on the "skeleton" of the sequel and started hanging some flesh on those bones. Hopefully, it won't take me as long to finish the second novel as it did the first. So look for the sequel to be out in a year or so. The working title is *Culebra*, which means "snake" in Spanish. The rationale for the title becomes evident in the novel…and a good portion of it takes place in Columbia, South America.

13. Can you give a word of advice to those dealing, living, and/or working with addicts.

Both Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (www.aa.org) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) (www.na.org) have meetings in just about every city. They are also knowledgeable about where alcoholics or addicts can receive treatment locally. Generally they can be found in the White Pages of your phone book or through the links attached.

I highly recommend Al-Anon (www.al-anon/alateen.org) for the families of alcoholics and Nar-Anon (www.nar-anon.org) for the families of addicts.

Invariably, the addict will not be able to overcome addiction on his own. That's why treatment and self-help groups are so important for both the addict and his family. But the *strongest* recommendation I can make is to *pray*. Recovery is a spiritual process as well as a physical one. And praying for the alcoholic or addict sets the stage—availing the addict of unseen graces—long before he actually begins the "action" process of recovery. Never underestimate the power of prayer. God hears the cry of the soul in pain—whether it's the addict himself or a grieving family member. But He's also given us free will. We have to *ask* for His help…He won't foist it upon us. Sometimes, I think, He's just waiting with an armful of graces to shower down on use…if only we'd ask.



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *The Window To My Soul; My Walk With Jesus* (2004 Tate Publishing;). *El Espejo de mi Alma* (2010 Pleasant Word) .

Author's websites: timewithtannia.tripod.com., www.shoutlife.com/tanniaortizlopes, and www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopes The author also has a blog at www.amazon.com

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READERS' COMMENTS:

Date Received: January 31, 2010

Name: Karina Fabian

Email Address: (optional) karina@fabianspace.com

Web site URL:(optional) www.fabianspace.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Jerry e-mailed me

Comments: So Paul gets thrown from a horse onto the path toward "priesthood." You get thrown from a car onto the path of laity. Who says God doesn't have a sense of irony?

Date Received: January 31, 2010

Name: Anne Webster

Where did you hear about this interview? I heard about it from Jerry

Comments: Jerry, This is a great interview. I am glad you didn't wait to marry me until after you wrote your first novel as you told me you had to do when we began getting to know eachother 40 years ago. I am your biggest fan and also can't wait for the sequel. Your bride, Anne

Date Received: January 31, 2010

Name: elena maria vidal

Email Address: (optional) emvidal@planetrussell.net

Web site URL: (optional) http://teaattrianon.blogspot.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Gerard Webster

Comments: Thank you for this interview, Tannia. Having enjoyed the novel In-sight so much, it is a pleasure to read more about the author and the characters which he created.

Date Received: February 1, 2010

Name: Jo Linsdell

Email Address: (optional) jo_bins@yahoo.com

Web site URL: (optional) http://writersandauthors.blogspot.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Just checking by Time with Tannia

Comments: WOW, one of 7, 5 children...if that doesn't give you insight I don't know what will! :) A nice interview. Great questions Tannia. I really feel like I know more about him now and what an interesting life he's had too! All the best with this and the sequel Jo

Date Received: February 1, 2010

Name: David Smith

Email Address: (optional) dsmith@meritconsult.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Through the author

Comments: The interview was a fun read, and really allows you to understand the uniqueness of Mr. Webster. I think the timing for a book like this is perfect, as people around the world are re-examining what truly is important in their lives. The following comment for the Webster Fmaily: I presume that at least one of the main characters in In-Sight are as bald as you and me, or at least has a significant receding hair line. This world needs a best selling book on morals and the meaning of life, which, in all its imperfections, includes the story of a good bald guy!

Date Received: February 1, 2010

Name: Kathy Johnson

Email Address: (optional) fkjohns6083@gmail.com

Where did you hear about this interview? e-mail

Comments: Thank you for the 'insightful' dialogue with the author! After reading the book, what struck me was the reminder that we can all actually 'see' the condition of other peoples' souls if we but look with the eyes of Jesus and are attentive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to really 'see' the people we encounter. We must work to clear away the clutter of everyday life, however, to see what Dan and Ward McNulty could see with no effort. Let's remember to take the time, listen to the Spirit, and obey His prompting to respond to the need. Great book; great reminder!

Date Received: February 1, 2010

Name: Janet LaPlante

Email Address: (optional) azauthor@q.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Catholic Writers Online

Comments: After my divorce, I dated an ex-priest and met several of his friends who, like you had entered the seminary at an early age and later left. I can understand the heartache with this change and the need to know it is God's will that you pursue a different life. He and I broke up because neither of us were in the right place and time to have a sacramental relationship. We both remarried later also to Catholic spouses. My husband and I were blessed to go on our first WWME weekend over twenty years ago, became a presenting team for awhile and still dialogue and belong to a local "Core" groups that meets every other Saturday. It is the mainstay of keeping our marriage good. I look forward to reading your book, and appreciate you sharing of your life.

Date Received: February 2, 2010

Name: Angel Dadabo

Email Address: (optional) angel874@comcast.net

Where did you hear about this interview? e-mail

Comments: What touched me most upon reading this interview was how truthful, without doubt, that knowing God is the only riches necessary to carry you through the grief of losing a child or loved one. Human beings may be the the hammer or stone ashtrays or bricks, but it is Jesus, only Jesus alone who picks you up and gives you strength to cope and make a difference in your life.

Date Received: February 2, 2010

Name: Luke

Email Address: (optional) luke@compasse.

Web site URL: (optional) comwww.sacratadei.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Email announcement

Comments: Mr. Webster-- I found your interview very interesting and wish you the best with your book -- and sequel(s?). I found your life experiences/background quite intriguing, which I am sure adds great depth to your writing. Many blessings to you and your family as you utilize this gift God has given you.

Date Received: February 2, 2010

Name: Lisseth West

Email Address: (optional) me@matthew-west.com

Where did you hear about this interview? Mr. Webster/Facebook

Comments: I had heard about the books for a while. His daughter told me he was writing it... so I expected the book to come out long before it was on the shelves. I enjoyed reading the book more than I expected to. I love recognizing some characters on the book as people I also know (the Priest, the daughter, the mom, etc). Like he says it has some romance and suspense to appeal to both men and women. What I enjoy the most is also being able to relate to the characters, love them or dislike them!. What also strike me was how his description of what sin does to our soul. How Ward and Dan gifts can really see what our souls may look like. You can go to confession and find healing but the scares of a past sins will still be there. Can't wait for the sequel to come out!!!

Date Received: February 9, 2010

Name: Brian Shields

Email Address: (optional)

Web site URL: (optional)

Where did you hear about this interview?

Comments: I loved IN-SIGHT. Its so real and gripping. Thanks for the interview.

Interview Contest:

Mr. Webster will be giving away copies of his book, In-Sight, to three lucky readers who leave a comment.

Rules: The winners will be selected based on the following three categories:

1. The comment with the best insight
2. The most creative comment
3. The most humorous comment.

Judges: The judging will be done by his immediate family (who are excluded from the contest because of this).

Contact Information: Be sure to include your e-mail address so he can contact you and send the novel through the mail.

List of the winners:

Most Creative	Karina Fabian
Most Humorous	David Smith
Most „Insightfull“	Kathy Johnson