

**Q&A with Sigmund Brouwer, author of *Flight of Shadows*
Interview done with BookReporter.com**

Q: Before we get into questions about your books, you live part-time in Nashville. How did the recent flood affect the area where you live? How can our readers help you and your neighbors in the aftermath of the flooding?

A: Our family lives far enough away from rivers that the worst of it for us was bailing water away from low spots near the house, but it has certainly affected a lot of people in the area, and we are doing our best to chip in to help. For anyone outside of Nashville, a reputable website to visit is: www2.grammy.com/MusiCares/NashvilleFloodRelief.

Q: FLIGHT OF SHADOWS is set in a futuristic world of seeming contrasts --- the legalistic theocracy of Appalachia and the secular city-state of DC. But both cultures are frighteningly similar with regard to the absence of freedom. Please talk about the value that you place on freedom and how that is reflected in FLIGHT OF SHADOWS, as well as the first book in the series, BROKEN ANGEL.

A: The need for freedom is woven into our genetic fabric. It was granted to us in the Garden of Eden when God allowed Adam and Eve the choice to eat or not eat from the forbidden fruit. It's something that individuals fight for and die for, something that Americans value as much as anything else in our society, and something that America can rightly pride itself on pursuing since inception. One of the things I love about the United States as I watch headlines unfold is the gloriousness of a brawling democracy, that with all its nastiness and name calling, it's unthinkable that any of these conflicts are resolved or imposed upon anyone -- except for criminals -- with armed force. It seems so long ago when Bush versus Gore came down to a handful of chads in Florida, but I remember marveling that there are precious few times in place and history where something as important as a presidency would still be decided by appealing to authority vested in law and order. But this freedom is precarious, and it's dangerous to take it for granted, something I hope a reader might think about after seeing one side in BROKEN ANGEL, and the other side in FLIGHT OF SHADOWS. One of the current and crucial flash points is the immigration issue that the United States faces. How we deal with it now is going to have huge repercussions for generations to follow.

Q: Caitlyn, the main character in both books, is a result of a genetic experiment gone wrong. You also explored the subject of genetic engineering in one of your earlier novels, DOUBLE HELIX. Describe how you see the relationship between genetic experimentation and the Judeo-Christian ethic, and what you hope your readers will discover about that relationship through your books.

A: For me, first, is a fascination for the potential of DNA to morph, either naturally or artificially. It's very easy to paint bad guys who have no qualms about abusing this power we've discovered, and you need bad guys for fiction, so that probably explains three

novels that deal with the subject! The ethics involved are very complicated, for and against genetic manipulation. FLIGHT OF SHADOWS does ask what is ethically right if we discover the power to double human lifespan -- how would we choose who gets the gift, and who would we put in control of it? I think, at a Bible study for example, you'd get a very robust discussion if you tried to decide how Jesus would address this issue.

Q: What is the primary message that you want to get across to readers in FLIGHT OF SHADOWS?

A: Cliched as it might sound, it's this: we are born to be free.

Q: Although FLIGHT OF SHADOWS wraps up a particular storyline, the world you created for the series seems rich with possibilities for additional stories. Any chance you're planning to use that setting for another novel?

A: No plans. Yet. But, yes, it occurred to me as I wrote the final chapter that it was liking stepping into a new world, and I couldn't help but wonder. . .

Q: Your efforts to promote literacy among school-age children are well-known; at one point, it was estimated that you talked to some 10,000 children each year. Now, with young children of your own, your prolific writing output, your wife's career as a recording artist, and your family's dual residency in Nashville and Red Deer, Alberta, how do you manage to continue your efforts to reach young people?

A: Well, it sure sounds noble, doesn't it, wanting to help kids read. I'd hate to appear to diminish the importance of the goal, but I'm compelled to point out that it's a lot of fun for me, and that's as much motivation as anything else. I visit around a 100 schools a year, armed with a great sound system to speak to all of the kids at once in the gym, audiences of up to 400. The presentation is called 'Rock and Roll Literacy', and I weave stories and music to make a simple point: good stories like good songs, will make you feel something. Nothing like playing 'Smoke on the Water' at full volume to get the kids pumped up!

As for managing it, I work out my schedule so that when I tour, I visit 3 schools per day. That essential demands around 30 days on the road, spread out over 9 months, whether we are in Nashville or Red Deer, and allows me the rest of time at home with family. So far, as a family, we all seem okay with that 30 or so days of the year devoted to 'Rock and Roll Literacy', and when I can, I take one of our two daughters with me. Btw, I'd love any invitations from teachers or parents who might see this. Best place for a sense of the presentation: http://authorsbooking.com/2043/authors/Sigmund_Brouwer.html.

Q: Tell us about some of the successes you've seen in your work with young people, particularly through the Young Writers Institute workshops you conduct.

A: Keeping in mind that I do these presentations because they are just as much fun for me as hopefully for the kids, I love hearing back from teachers and parents who are kind

enough to let me know when a reluctant reader discovers the joy of books. I shouldn't even get much credit for that. All it takes is for kids to find the right books, and they are hooked. The difficulty sometimes comes from trying to get kids to cut their teeth on 'important' books. I think too much attention is paid to vocabulary levels or reading levels, and more attention should be paid to emotional levels of books. Dav Pikey, author of the Captain Underpants series, for example, is probably one of the best things that have happened for literacy, and doesn't get enough credit for it. Kids are only ready for more serious literature after they been introduced to how much fun books are.

Q: As an author who writes for both adults and younger readers, how do you divide your writing time between those two age groups? Does writing for adults, for example, provide you with a break from writing for children, and vice versa?

A: I generally go back and forth. My next project however, is non-fiction, titled, yes, 'Rock and Roll Literacy', geared to give teachers and parents a different perspective on helping kids read and write. Not even going to ask forgiveness here for blatant self-promotion.

Q: Some writers need peace and quiet while others thrive on the energy of family life or loud music coming through their earbuds. What's your ideal writing environment?

A: Ideal: quiet in my office, with plenty of interruptions as my girls come in to ask me questions or show me stuff, like drawings or the tail of a lizard that snapped loose after catching it.

Q: As prolific as you are, what's your writing schedule --- or do you even have one? Do you maintain daily word-count or page-count goals, and if so, what are those goals?

A: I also like to set it for a chapter a day. But I've become a lot more relaxed if I miss that goal. The girls are at a time of life when I have no compunction about setting it aside for something fun like a spontaneous trip to the river.

Q: You've said that you'd like to write a humorous novel. Any plans for that in the near future?

A: It's a great dream to have!

Q: What's next for you?

A: REALM. About a centuries old witchcraft conspiracy hidden within the Vatican. Not so farfetched. Really.