

Tell us about your background and how it led to writing this book.

Having traveled to most parts of the United States, I have always been interested in the contrasting commonality and variations of people in different regions of the country. The unique conventions of the Appalachian people intrigued me more than most other areas, and I considered this to be a fascinating setting for a novel.

Which writers have influenced you the most?

John Grisham
David Baldacci
John Irving
William Faulkner
Ernest Hemingway

Share with us a bit of your journey through the writing process.

I always enjoyed writing short stories but did not get serious about writing until this novel. This book had its origin when I finished a rather banal novel in a hotel room one night and decided that I could do better. I wrote *Beyond the Higher Ground* in spare time over the period of a year and then set it aside. It was some years later, when I personally witnessed a heartbreaking result of illegal drugs, that I decided to complete it and get it published.

Where did the premise of *Beyond the Higher Ground* come from?

I was astounded by the devastating effects that opioids and other drugs were having on the Appalachian region and thought it would be good to bring attention to it in a sensitive manner. I did not want to make an accusatory statement of the region's condition, so I wrote of personal struggles affected by the drug problem. Using the construction of a prison as a metaphorical background seemed like a natural and unique way to tell a story, and my own direct experience helped give it credibility.

The opioid problem in America seems to be growing exponentially, are you hoping your book will bring some of these issues to light?

Everyone is aware of the opioid crisis, but I don't think there is enough awareness of the depth of the problem in *rural* America. I would hope that this book would help reveal that sad reality.

What is the main message you want your readers to take from this book?

Moving on from adversity is not an endgame. Life goes on and we must continue to face its realities.

What are you working on now and what can we expect from you next?

I am currently working on a novel about a miscarriage of justice evolving from a sophisticated illegal drug network in the rural Midwest. I hope to have it completed by mid-summer.