

Behind the Creation of Michael J. White's *Weeping Underwater Looks a Lot Like Laughter*

I first began writing what is now called *Weeping Underwater Looks A Lot Like Laughter* when I was twenty-five years old and just beginning to indulge my newfound fascination with literature. Without having crossed off even a dozen books on my list of “novels I thought about reading but didn’t,” I started writing a novel of my own, beginning with a chapter involving the psych ward incarceration of a redheaded teenager in Iowa who kept insisting he was Jim Morrison. The deal with this George Flynn character was that he’d been doing a lot of drugs and suffering major delusions, not to mention that he was infatuated with an actress at his college named Pamela whom he swore would become his wife, Pamela Morrison. The ideas at play here were largely based on the real life experiences of my best friend Nate, who besides being a hopeless romantic and loving advocate of all things human, happens to have a case of bipolar disorder that has helped land him in more than his share of unpleasant circumstances.

The novel no longer involves the character George Flynn as a mental patient with bipolar disorder, though I have continued to test him on how to make the transition from precarious adolescence to precarious adulthood, how to reconcile with romances that prove wrong or somehow ill-fated, how to suffer hammering setbacks to his dreams without becoming bitter to the point of forcing shut the valves of his magnanimous heart. A few years ago while talking to Nate about the protagonist George Flynn I explained that while I originally began writing about a guy who thought he was Jim Morrison, eventually I recognized that the most powerful sections of the book had nothing to do with any shocking revelations related to his delusions of grandeur. The most powerful sections were clearly inspired by Nate’s dedication to a girl he loved for many years but never really won over, despite all his poetic and often hilarious love professions that he recited everywhere from the Merle Hay bowling alley to the Kum & Go snack aisle to the most alcoholic movie theater even known to man, the now defunct Billy Joe’s Picture Show in West Des Moines. The George Flynn who exists in the final draft of *Weeping Underwater* looks like my friend Nate, but he *thinks* like me, and his way of thinking probably reflects my personal history more than Nate’s.

It’s been seven years since I first began haunting the aisles of used bookstores, talking about fiction characters like they were real people, and buying armfuls of novels when I’ve already got at least a hundred unread others waiting idly on my bookshelf at home. In that time I’ve traveled to about 30 foreign countries, been employed as a high school teacher in three of those countries, read more books and seen more movies than I could possibly remember, fallen in love, fallen out of love, fallen in love again, completed an MFA, and finally written maybe two or three thousand pages of fiction, of which I’ve scrap-heaped at least half. While some parts of *Weeping Underwater* contain material written as long as five years ago, most of what remains was written in the last two. While almost none of the events of *Weeping Underwater* happened in real life, at least not to me or my friend Nate, it doesn’t change that my whole objective in writing the book was to speak the truth. Please enjoy *Weeping Underwater Looks a Lot Like Laughter*, the truth of George Flynn.