

The Shack

by Wm. Paul Young

About the Book

Mackenzie Allen Philips' youngest daughter, Missy, has been abducted during a family vacation and evidence that she may have been brutally murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later in the midst of his *Great Sadness*, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for a weekend. Against his better judgment he arrives at the shack on a wintry afternoon and walks back into his darkest nightmare. What he finds there will change Mack's world forever.

Praise for the Book

When the imagination of a writer and the passion of a theologian cross-fertilize the result is a novel on the order of The Shack. This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress did for his. It's that good!

--Eugene Peterson, Professor Emeritus Of Spiritual Theology,
Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

Finally! A guy-meets-god novel that has literary integrity and spiritual daring. The Shack cuts through the clichés of both religion and bad writing to reveal something compelling and beautiful about life's integral dance with the divine. This story reads like a prayer—like the best kinds of prayer, filled with sweat and wonder and transparency and surprise. When I read it, I felt like I was fellowshiping with God. If you read one work of fiction this year, let this be it.

--Mike Morrell, Zoecarnate.com

The Shack is a one of a kind invitation to journey to the very heart of God. Through my tears and cheers, I have been indeed transformed by the tender mercy with which William Paul Young opened the veil that too often separated me from God and from myself. With every page, the complicated do's and don't that distort a relationship into a religion were washed away as I understood Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for the first time in my life.

--Patrick M. Roddy, Emmy Award Winning Producer of ABC News

Courtesy Author's Website- Retrieved 12-2-08 <http://www.theshackbook.com/endorsements.html>

About the Author

Willie's Personal Journey by Wm. Paul Young

We live in a world where 'normal' does not truly exist except as an idea or concept. For each of us, where and how *we* grew up plays a foundational role in our sense of 'normal', and only when we begin to experience the 'bigness and diversity' of the world are we tempted to evaluate our roots. I thought the way I grew up was 'normal' but I think most would probably agree that my history and journey have been a bit unusual.

I was the eldest of four, born May 11th, 1955, in Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada, but the majority of my first decade was lived with my missionary parents in the highlands of Netherlands New Guinea (West Papua), among the Dani, a technologically stone age tribal people. These became my family and as the first white child and outsider who ever spoke their language, I was granted unusual access into their culture and community. Although at times a fierce warring people, steeped in the worship of spirits and even occasionally practicing ritualistic cannibalism, they also provided a deep sense of identity that remains an indelible element of my character and person. By the time I was flown away to boarding school at age 6, I was in most respects a white Dani.

In the middle of a school year, my family unexpectedly returned to the West. My father worked as a Pastor for a number of small churches in Western Canada and by the time I graduated, I had already attended thirteen different schools. I paid my way through Bible College working as a radio disc jockey, lifeguard and even a stint in the oil fields of northern Alberta. I spent one summer in the Philippines and another touring with a drama troupe before working in Washington D.C. at Fellowship House, an international guest house. Completing my undergraduate degree in Religion, I graduated *summa cum laude* from Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon. The following year, I met and married Kim Warren and for a time worked on staff at a large suburban church while attending seminary.

I have owned businesses and worked for others in diverse industries, from insurance to construction, venture capital companies to telecom, contract work to food processing; whatever was needed to help feed and house my growing family. I have always been a writer, whether songs, poetry, short stories or newsletters; never for public consumption but for friends and family. While I have extensively written for business, creating web content, business plans, white papers etc., *The Shack* was a story written for my six children, with no thought or intention to publish. It is as much a surprise to me as to anyone else that I am now an 'author'.

Overall, I am a very simple guy; I have one wife, six kids, two daughter-in-laws and two grandkids on the way. I work as a general manager, janitor and inside sales guy for a friend who owns a small manufacturers rep company in Milwaukie, Oregon, and I live in a small rented house in Gresham, Oregon, that Kim has made into a marvelous home. My time is spent loving the people that are a part of my life. I am not connected, or a part, or a member of, or involved inside any sort of organization or movement anywhere.

The truth is that I doubt anyone would want me. From my perspective that is a very positive thing... for both of us. I have lots of incredible friends, and now you are one of those. Oh yeah... and I wrote this book.

These are some of the facts of my life, but they don't begin to tell the real story. That would take much more room than is available here. The journey has been both incredible and unbearable, a desperate grasping after grace and wholeness. These facts don't tell you about the pain of trying to adjust to different cultures, of life losses that were almost too staggering to bear, of walking down railroad tracks at night in the middle of winter screaming into the windstorm, of living with an underlying volume of shame so deep and loud that it constantly threatened any sense of sanity, of dreams not only destroyed but obliterated by personal failure, of hope so tenuous that only the trigger seemed to offer a solution. These few facts also do not speak to the potency of love and forgiveness, the arduous road of reconciliation, the surprises of grace and community, of transformational healing and the unexpected emergence of joy. Facts alone might help you understand where a person has been, but often hide who they actually are.

The Shack will tell you much more about me than a few facts ever could. In some ways my life is partly revealed in both characters—Willie and Mack. But an author is always more. I hope that someday we can share a cup of coffee, or for me, an extra hot chai tea with soy. If that happens, and if you want, I will tell you a little more about the bigger story and you can tell me some of yours.

That about sums up my life. For me, everything is about Jesus and Father and the Holy Spirit, and relationships, and life is an adventure of faith lived one day at a time. Any aspirations, visions and dreams died a long time ago and I have absolutely no interest in resurrecting them (they would stink by now anyway). I have finally figured out that I have nothing to lose by living a life of faith. I know more joy every minute of every day than seems appropriate, but I love the wastefulness of my Papa's grace and presence. For me, everything in my life that matters, is perfect!

Courtesy Author's Website- Retrieved 12-2-08, <http://www.theshackbook.com/willie.html>

Author Interview

William P. Young Interview

by C.J. Darlington, Miriam Parker, Deena Peterson
Melissa J. Carswell, et al.

"I make a distinction between true and real. I think that the story is true, it's just not real. That's what a parable is. It takes things that we all know are real, and it takes life events that actually happens, and it weaves them into a fiction that allows truth to actually be embedded." --William P. Young

William P. Young (Paul) was born a Canadian and along with three younger siblings was raised among a stone-age tribe by his missionary parents in the highlands of what was New Guinea (West Papua). The family returned to Canada where his father pastured a number of churches for various denominations. By the time he entered Canadian Bible College, Paul had attended a dozen schools. He completed his undergraduate degree in religion at Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon.

While in Oregon, Paul attended seminary and met and married Kim. Together they celebrate "the wastefulness of grace" with their six children, two daughters-in-law, and now two grandchildren.

C.J Darlington: You've called yourself an "accidental author" yet you've enjoyed writing for much of your life. What was it that originally inspired you to start writing stories?

William Paul: Children mostly (chuckles). I have six of them. I've always been a writer in the sense that wrote gifts for my friends and family, but never tried even to publish anything. In that sense I'm not an actual author but an accidental one.

C.J.: So your kids were the ones who inspired you to write *The Shack*?

And my wife. Kim was the one really who was the instigator of *The Shack*. She had been asking me for years to put in one place, as she put it, "how you think, because it's outside the box". A couple months ago she told me that she was thinking maybe 4-6 pages. I'm glad she didn't tell me that in the beginning.

C.J.: Much has been made of your portrayal of God as a female character in *The Shack*, and I want to ask you, why did you decide to portray God as a woman in this story?

Well, you have to keep in mind that my youngest child is 15, the oldest is 28. I wanted to play with the paradigms we have theologically. A lot of our paradigms I think are so male oriented and skewed gender-wise. You would almost think God was actually a male. Or at least 51% a male, and we know that He's not. All maleness and femaleness are derived from His character. Imagery is going to be inadequate at some point, whether it's male or female. Plus it fit the storyline. Mac has a real issue with his father, and I see God a lot . . . reaching to us. God is then expecting that we can find Him.

C.J.: What was the hardest part about writing the novel and why?

I was holding down three jobs. Probably just finding time to do it. As far as the actual writing itself . . . the emotions were pretty intense at times, but other than that it was an incredibly wonderful experience.

Stacy from Nevada: Which of the God characters would you most like to spend a day with, and why? Where would you go?

Oh, boy. That's a great question! Maybe I'd start with Jesus because of the identification with Him as a human being, and living a life of faith as human beings. Plus I think he'd be a lot of fun! (Chuckles.) They all would be, but where would we go? If it were possible, I'd kinda like to tool around the outer edges of the galaxy. . .

Deena Peterson: What is your response to the criticism concerning some of the doctrinal statements being discussed in your novel

For one, I think it's all a good thing. I don't feel very responsible for stirring it all up. I wrote a story for my kids. It's fiction. It's not systematic theology. It's not a new book of the Bible. It's flawed, I wrote it. All of that goes into the mix, but I love the controversy. It elevates the conversation. I think it would be helpful if some of the people would actually read the book. But everybody brings to the table what they have. I believe the book is quite orthodox theologically. Just because it tampers with people's paradigms doesn't mean that's a bad thing. Because it pushes us to re-think how we view God, how we view our relationship with God. I'm very positive about the controversy. Even people who's doctrinal prejudices and paradigms are really limiting on themselves . . . but their job security is involved, their position within their religious community is involved. It's challenging those things, but you know what? I believe God wants us to be healed of those things even that we consider sacred but are really binding.

Melissa J. Carswell: What did you have to go through to reach the truth of the book? Truths such as you write do not come easily. I'd like to hear how God personally showed you these things so you could in turn write about them and touch people's lives?

You're right. I don't think you can write this type of stuff out of a vacuum, as an intellectual exercise. The weekend that Mackenzie spends in the Shack is eleven years of my life. I grew up with a lot of issues in my life as a Missionary Kid as a Preacher's Kid. There was sexual abuse both within the tribal contacts and also at boarding school. There was a disconnect from my parents. I grew up tribal—a disconnect from my own culture when I was dropped into the Canadian culture. I was born in Canada, but I was ten months old when we moved into the highlands of New Guinea. I became a religious performer. I'm the oldest. I took the brunt of some of the negative dynamics in our family at the time. A lot of those things fed into becoming a perfectionist performer. I held it together until I was thirty-eight years old, and then it all blew apart thanks to the grace of God, and I started an eleven year process of dismantling everything and putting it all back together. You're right in your perception. It's a long conversation about the details of that. Suffice it to say, Mackenzie's weekend was my eleven years.

Actually, my wife Kim asked me to write a memoir! She said, "What I'd really like you to do next is the accidental author's journey to *The Shack*."

Anna in New York: I'd like to know more about the original version of *The Shack*. Were you surprised that so many people wanted to read something you wrote for your family?

Totally surprised. The first run of *The Shack* was 15 copies at Office Depot. It was the only intended run of *The Shack* (laughs). To have this happen is so much a God thing and outside the box. By the time we were done working through the re-write I'd probably dropped 40% of the conversation and augmented the storyline about 20%. What Wayne Jacobson and Brad Cummings really helped me do was focus on the storyline. Just to follow the character through the process of healing. The characters were all there from the beginning. The scenes were all there, the dialogue was already basically there. We removed some thing that could have been impediments. As you know, Lucifer as a person does not appear in the book. But he was in the first manuscript, but he was really more of a distraction than anything. There are enough books written about him anyway. In the first draft there was more religious language. God was actually quoting Scripture, which kinda didn't work. In the re-write I was actually able to embed Scripture in the conversation almost in a way that people don't pick it up. That became a really beautiful part of what happened.

Miriam Parker: Could you talk a bit more about all the different jobs you've had and how they led you to *The Shack*?

I've done so many strange things. Basically I couldn't keep a job. Well, actually, that's not true. I never got fired, but my interests and the availability of work were so different. I was a radio disc jockey for four years, it's how I supported my way through college. I worked up in the oil fields in northern Alberta. I've done everything from working with venture capital companies, web content, writing, sales consulting, owning an insurance

agency for a while. I worked in a hotel as a night clerk, worked in a food processing company. The list goes on and on. Insulation underneath buildings in 95 degree weather where there was like a foot and half crawl space. That was awful (chuckles). Some construction, that didn't work really well. I've been involved in web conferencing. Worked in a manufacturing rep's office, and actually that's where I was working up until last February. I actually still had three jobs up until then. Shipping and Receiving. Cleaning the toilets, whatever. I was a lifeguard.

There's little pieces of these that fit into the storyline. I was on staff at a church. I did a lot of teaching through a period of time. But everything blew up when I was thirty-eight. I never thought I would speak in front of anybody again. I had basically thirteen years of silence. My experience with some television, radio, and speaking . . . all those have come into play. My growing up as a missionary kid. My love for travel. I look back with quite a great deal of amazement and see so many pieces of my history that seem to have been resurrected around what's happened with The Shack.

I'm 53, born in 1955. While you're living it you don't really see how unusual certain pieces of your life are. I've had an amazing life, and I've been greatly blessed, especially when it comes to my family and friends.

Miriam Parker: You say you grew up as a missionary. Seems like there were some bad experiences there, but what is your opinion of missionary work?

You know, I am grateful on so many levels for what's been done. Missions has taken a huge amount of compassion into the world. I'm not always as excited about how it was done or the blind spots in the midst of it. Missions has changed a lot. It used to be quite colonialist in the sense that we were importing our culture and thinking we were that much better than everybody else. There was that mentality sometimes to it. To me there's only one calling. And that's to follow Jesus. If following Jesus means you end up in another culture, then that's great. There's purpose in that. I'm all for that. I have a very warm place in my heart for missions. At the same time I think I'm very realistic about institutions in general and some of the damage that's been caused even by missions. At the same time I look at the movement of medical compassion and education, as well as the gospel. It's a mixed bag. Like most things are.

Miriam Parker: Could you share with us more about the different women who've influenced your life? It seems like from reading the book that you have a very special relationship with women.

That's very true. My exploration of the Trinity came through my exploration of gender issues. And I spent 25 years specifically working on gender issues. It drove me nuts. I come from overseas, another culture. As a missionary kid you tend to ask questions you don't realize you're not supposed to ask. A lot of them, actually, were gender related.

When I worked on gender issues, I wanted to find out, Why? Why do we do what we do with respect to maleness and femaleness. That really drove me into the heart of the Trinity.

There have been a number of very significant men and women in my life. On the women side it would've included when I was in Bible college the President's wife who had an influence on me. There have been people that I've worked with. There's actually an African-American woman named Rene who I was on staff with. I built the persona of Papa in part around her. Never doubted the fact that she cared and loved me, but she had no qualms about being in my face either. It was a great relationship and still continues to be one.

Some of the writers and poets. Whether it be Elizabeth Barrett Browning . . . I went through a stage when people who were pretty edgy like Virginia Mollencott and folks who were doing a lot of work on gender issues were very helpful. Overall, bottom line, I think women are fundamentally healthier than men. That's easy to prove. Just look at the statistics. I think when women turn to a relationship with God they turn to another relationship, and men don't even do that. Men turn to the ground, into the works of their hands. I think there's something fundamentally healthier in women than there is in men. All of those pieces came together when I was writing the story.

Miriam: Does Rene know that your character was based on her?

Yes, and she would be so embarrassed that I said anything! She's just a beautiful person. She's in a care facility right now, so I see her as often as I can. See, I didn't know I was white until I was in boarding school. She asked me recently, "Paul, how come you and I were always friends?" because we were on staff at a church together. I was in charge of the college kids she was in charge of worship. And I said, "Well, that's easy, we were the only two black people at that church." We have this special, humorous relationship.

Miriam: Why do you think your book is resonating with so many people?

I think for a lot of different reasons. One of them is religion has promised us a relationship with God and has not been able to deliver it. A lot of the paradigms that are built up around that, around religious thinking, has inhibited us from enjoying that relationship. There's a longing built into our hearts for authenticity and a relationship. The Shack is an indication. The timing was just perfect, and there's no way a human being could've figured this out. God's fingerprints are all over it. There's a resonance in terms of the invitation to an authentic relationship with God there's a resonance in terms of great sadness. There's a lot of hurt and pain, and the questions that are raised by Mackenzie have been revealing the questions that have been in the hearts of so many people both inside religious systems and outside. I can have ten different people come and tell me their favorite part of the book, and they'll tell me ten totally different things.

This particular story, however it happened, seems to have opened up a place where people can bring their own stories into it. It speaks to them. When people write me e-mails, for example, they're not telling me what a great writer I am. They're telling me how this story has changed their relationship in a transformational way with God, with the Trinity. Suddenly things have made sense. Suddenly the deep longings of their heart have found a voice. For a lot of people the story is an affirmation of what the Holy Spirit has already been working in their hearts.

Miriam: A lot of people seem to have to remind themselves that this is a novel. Have you come across a lot of people who have wanted the book to be true?

Oh, yes. In fact, I've had two forensic detectives contact me looking for the case file. People shouldn't feel bad about the fact that they thought it was real. I make a distinction between true and real. I think that the story is true, it's just not real. That's what a parable is. It takes things that we all know are real, and it takes life events that actually happens, and it weaves them into a fiction that allows truth to actually be embedded. So when people say, "Is this story true?" I say, yes. It's just not real. It's fiction.

Miriam: Fiction is sometimes so much truer than nonfiction.

I agree. And that would be true for anything artistic. If you look at nature, or you listen to a piece of music, or you watch a movie in which certain lines are spoken and all of the sudden you have a penetration into the depths of your heart . . . you're watching something that's totally fabricated, but it doesn't inhibit the Holy Spirit and the creativity of God from breaking through and speak to the things of heart. That's one of the reasons I love the creative arts in general.

C.J.: Who are some authors that have impacted you in your life and writing?

That's a great question. I don't know if you're familiar with Jacques Ellul. He's a 20th century sociologist and theologian. He's written probably 20 books on sociology and 20 on theology. He's a very difficult read. He's along the lines of Soren Kierkegaard. It's wading through wet concrete but you find diamonds everywhere. You've got your gamut. People like Tozer, the Inklings, you know with C.S. Lewis and Tolkien and all those guys. There are a lot of writers. Even speakers like Malcome Smith or Ravi Zacharias who's from my own denominational traditional history have been a great influence. You know, you have your Brother Lawrence's and modern guys like Brennan Manning who have really pursued the heart of the Father.

Then we add in musicians and what impact they've had, especially on the lyrical side.

C.J.: Do you read a lot of fiction yourself?

If I have the opportunity, yes. I'm actually a science-fiction fan. It's out of the box. Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card and that whole group of writings. His stuff is wonderful, as well as your Arthur C. Clarkes, your Asimovs. They pushed the boundaries of imagination in ways that I really enjoy.

Miriam: I think about 2001 A Space Odyssey almost every day.

You know what's funny about that? I went out on my first date with my now wife to see the movie. It was great.

Miriam: Do you have advice for others who want to write?

(Laughs.) You know, it's funny. I really don't know what I'm doing, but I have two pieces of advice. One is: disconnect your identity from what you produce, and that's a hard thing for us because we think of our significance, worth and value based on what we do instead of who we are. I'm finding with people who write that a lot of times to say anything about what they write is to say something about them. Because their own sense of worth and value is locked into words. For me to have written a story for my kids, I'm so glad that I disconnected like that. Second, when you get a chance, send your writing to people who don't know you and see what their response is. We had a collaborative process in working through The Shack that really made it so much more beautiful. I appreciated that. Right there is all the depth of my knowledge about writing. (Chuckles.) And maybe the purpose of your writing is just for you. That's a legitimate purpose.

Miriam: Any more books in the works?

Yes, I've got a couple of fiction, and they'll be a little bit slower. But I am working on that accidental-author-journey-to-the-shack story/memoir. It's always a process how that all unfolds.

Source:

C.J. Darlington, M. Parker, D. Peterson M. J. Carswell, et al. TitleTrakk.com, William P. Young Interview, Retrieved 12-2-08, from <http://www.titletrakk.com/author-interviews/william-paul-young-interview.htm>

Discussion Questions

1. Were you drawn in by the plot of *The Shack*?
2. Why do you think Mack's encounter with God took place at *the shack*? If God were to invite you somewhere, where would it be? (In other words, where is the center of your doubt and pain)?
3. Do you think suffering makes people closer to God or causes them to distance themselves from Him? What has been the pattern in your life?
4. Were you satisfied with God's answers to Mack about suffering? Do you struggle with believing God is good in light of all the tragedy in the world?
5. How is Young's description of God different from your concept of God? What parts of his description did you like and what parts didn't you like?
6. Did *The Shack* change any of your opinions about God or Christianity?
7. What were some of the things *The Shack* teaches about God, faith and life that you disagreed with?
8. Would you recommend *The Shack* to a friend?
9. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
10. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?

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