

WORDS OF LIFE

Celebrating 50 Years of the Hesburgh Library's Message, Mural, and Meaning

By Bill Schmitt

Interview Questions for Authors

How did you become involved with the subject or theme of your book?

I'd been writing stories about the Library for years. I was eager to tell people about the Library's many stories in the broader context of Notre Dame's traditions and mission. The Library's actually an excellent entry point for understanding what makes this University special.

Why did you choose to write in your particular field or genre? If you write more than one, how do you balance them?

I've been on the communications staff at the University for more than a decade. I had been a journalist for the first half of my career, but I wanted to use my writing more directly in service to the Church and education.

Where did your love of books/storytelling/reading/writing/etc. come from?

My dad was a great writer who transmitted his love for words to me by editing my schoolwork with loving care. For me, writing and books came to symbolize fun and family and a great way to reach out to people.

How long have you been writing?

I started a school newspaper when I was in sixth grade. Writing is central to my everyday life. As E.M. Forster said, I don't know what I'm thinking until I've written it down.

What kind(s) of writing do you do?

Now into my third decade as a writer, my life has been blessed with variety--many kinds of stories, about many subjects, published in many media and presented in many styles. I've written about countless people, organizations, and activities at this University, and it's been the most interesting writing of my whole career.

What cultural value do you see in writing/reading/storytelling/etc.?

As a journalism student at Fordham, I was inspired by the Watergate reporters

Woodward and Bernstein. I've always believed that reading and writing can bring people together in a virtuous journey toward truth, insight, justice, and continuous improvement.

How does your book relate to your spiritual practice or other life path?

This book reflects my own delight about a Catholic university's interest in everything. My faith helps me to celebrate the synergies, rather than the divisions, among people, ideas, and principles. Everything's connected to everything else, and I think that's a key message from the Hesburgh Library.

What were your goals and intentions in this book, and how well do you feel you achieved them?

Although the book is technically celebrating the 50th anniversary of a building, my primary goal was to show that this is a celebration of many people and many dimensions of life on the Notre Dame campus. The building's a starting point. I see the book as a success when I see it helping to bring people together and inspire them.

What do you think most characterizes your writing?

People say I "get" Catholic higher education...capturing the excitement of interdisciplinary activities and integrated lives. I want to honor the experience of wonder at the macro level and the sense of purpose at the micro level, where knowledge and wisdom are applied to help people make a better world.

Are there vocabulary words or concepts in your book that may be new to readers? Define some of those.

I liked the word "realia," which describes the "things" of real life that complement a library's collections of books. I enjoyed the fact that some books which have substantial value even though they're not necessarily "rare books" are called "medium rare."

What is the biggest thing that people THINK they know about your subject/genre, that isn't so?

Regarding one specific topic discussed in the book, a lot of people think "Touchdown Jesus" is the name of the mural on the Hesburgh Library. The actual name is "Word of Life." They also may think that the Library is just a library or that libraries are merely remnants of the past; hopefully, the book will convince them otherwise.

What inspires you?

I'm inspired by people who actually live out and embody the high standards and principles that are typically expressed in words. Remember the guidance attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: Preach always; when necessary, use words. I'm inspired by Fr. Ted Hesburgh's life, and I was privileged to get to know him better in writing this book.