

the bad times honorably and methodically, instead of stumbling blindly into the future. I can change destiny. Someone, somewhere, may be warned not to make the mistakes I made, through my manipulation. I can go back in time. I can rearrange things.

“I longed for magic when I was a child—other writers’ books brought tantalizing, fleeting glimpses of glitter and glamour that might be mine. Through reading I could become enchanted, and the magic seemed real. Now, as a writer in my own right, it *is* real. I can *make* the worlds I wanted so much to be part of. I wished myself Aladdin, with a magician at my beck; instead I have become the magician.

“A fiction writer is by definition a liar. That’s the paradox of my life: through fiction I can come at the truth.”

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ONLINE

Elizabeth Wein website, <http://www.elizabethwein.com> (October 11, 2016).*

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WESSELHOEFT, Conrad 1953-

Personal

Born 1953, in Seattle, WA; married; wife’s name Lyn (deceased, 2006); children: Claire, Kit and Jen (twins). *Education*: Lewis & Clark College, B.A. (English), 1976; Ohio State University, M.A. (journalism), 1988. *Hobbies and other interests*: Playing guitar, hiking.

Addresses

Home—Seattle, WA. *Agent*—Erin Murphy Literary Agency, 824 Roosevelt Trail, Ste. 290, Wyndham, ME 04062. *E-mail*—cwesselhoeft@comcast.net.

Career

Journalist, technical editor, marketing writer, and novelist. Worked variously as a tugboat hand in Singapore and a Peace Corps volunteer teaching English in



Conrad Wesselhoeft (Reproduced by permission.)

Western Samoa (Polynesia); member of editorial staff of five newspapers, including *New York Times*; Cisco Systems, former senior editor; World Vision, former senior writer; Community News Group, executive editor, 1996-97; freelance writer and editor, beginning 2008.

Awards, Honors

Best Fiction for Young Adults Book of Merit selection, American Library Association, 2011, for *Adios, Nirvana*; Jugendliteraturpreis nomination, 2013, for German translation of *Adios, Nirvana*; Best Aviation and Space Themed Books for Young Readers selection, *Smithsonian* magazine, and Reading the West Award, Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Association, both 2014, both for *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly*.

Writings

Adios, Nirvana, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Boston, MA), 2010.

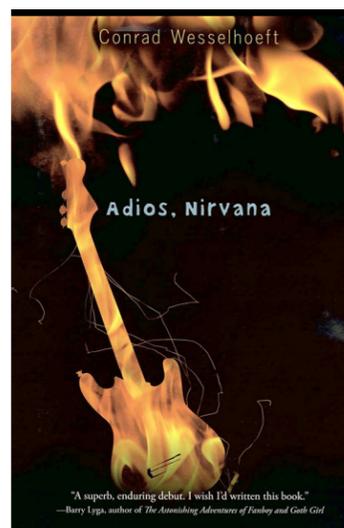
Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Boston, MA), 2014.

Author's work has been translated into German.

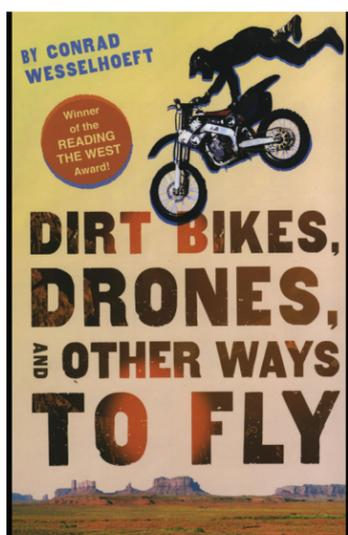
Sidelights

Conrad Wesselhoeft cites American writers John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, Larry McMurtry, and Scott O'Dell among his literary mentors, and his resumé as a young man reflected the quest for life experience that might be credited to such reading. After a year of college, Wesselhoeft left school to work on the crew of a tugboat sailing from Singapore to other Asian ports and, after earning his bachelor's degree, he joined the Peace Corps to teach English in Western Samoa. His skill as a writer ultimately combined with his curiosity and led him into journalism, where he worked for newspapers such as the *New York Times* before returning to his native Seattle. Wesselhoeft's first novel, *Adios, Nirvana*, is set in that city, incorporating Seattle landmarks and focusing on its vibrant urban culture. He continues his focus on teens on the brink of an uncertain future in *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly*.

While Wesselhoeft's complex story in *Adios, Nirvana* was born of several intersecting experiences, his teenage protagonist was inspired by his son Kit, whose adolescent world had been shaped by close friends and a passion for music. Narrator Jonathan is a talented teen guitarist and high-school junior who also has a gift for lyrical poetry. Since the death of his twin brother Telly in a tragic accident, Jonathan has been unable to sleep, and he functions by consuming large doses of caffeinated drinks and NoDoz. Without Telly to confide in, Jonathan turns to alcohol as well as to his literary idols, and he becomes consumed by the need to put his thoughts down on paper. After his grade-point average at Taft High School plummets from stellar to no-show, Jonathan's friends and an understanding school principal refuse to let him go under. A perceptive English teacher also helps refocus the teen's pain, allowing Jonathan to bolster his grade point by helping a dying



Cover of Wesselhoeft's award-winning debut novel *Adios, Nirvana*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. All rights reserved.)



Cover of Wesselhoeft's young-adult novel *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. All rights reserved.)

World-War II veteran complete his memoir. The older man's "story of loss resonates with and amplifies Jonathan's own survivor's guilt," observed Suzanne Gordon in *School Library Journal*, and the teen's ultimate turnaround is the high point in Wesselhoeft's "brash, hip story."

In *Adios, Nirvana* the author "offers a psychologically complex debut that will intrigue heavy-metal aficionados and drama junkies alike," predicted *Booklist* contributor Frances Bradburn, the critic adding that Wesselhoeft's intended rock-band readership is infrequently the target of young-adult fiction. While a *Publishers Weekly* critic praised the novelist's "ability to deliver genuine emotion" in his "moving" teen drama, *Voice of Youth Advocates* contributor Sharon Blumberg made special note of the book's literary sophistication. In *Adios, Nirvana* Wesselhoeft serves up "a wonderful blend of contemporary, historical, and literary fiction," Blumberg asserted, and "his . . . figurative language makes each page dance with images of raw realism."

In *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly* Wesselhoeft focuses on another teen whose life has been suddenly torn apart. Seventeen-year-old Arlo Santiago has no argument with the adage that bad luck comes in threes: his mother has been murdered, his father has lost his job, and his sister has been diagnosed with Huntington's disease. Arlo finds a temporary escape from his problems while performing daredevil stunts on his dirt bike and he spends hours playing *Drone Pilot*, a challenging video game. His skill on his bike attracts the attention of a reality television show that offers to pay him for risking his life. Meanwhile, the teen's gaming skill comes to the notice of the U.S. Air Force, which recruits him to pilot drones in a top-secret military operation based in Pakistan. While both opportunities will bring financial help to Arlo's family, the teen must look at his situation objectively, setting aside emotions and deciding what course he should take.

"A moving story about loss, love, and learning to let go," according to Kimberly Castle-Alberts in *School Library Journal*, *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly* will appeal to fans of Carl Deuker and Chris Lynch. "Nuanced supporting characters and a vivid New Mexico landscape ground Arlo's dilemma, creating a superbly well-balanced narrative," wrote a *Kirkus Reviews* critic. Also praising Wesselhoeft's novel, *Booklist* reviewer John Peters noted that the "larger-than-life characters" in *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly* include a teen hero who "makes right choices in the clutch."

During Wesselhoeft's career as a journalist, he met many memorable men and women, but one of the most influential was novelist Scott O'Dell, the author of some of his favorite young-adult novels. "That day changed my life," he once recalled, in sharing the details of the meeting with *SATA*.

As Wesselhoeft tells it, "I was a young staffer at *The New York Times*, harboring a secret ambition: to write novels. But how? Writing a novel seemed far out of my depth. However, writing a feature story about a novelist might be a stroke in the right direction. So I set up an interview, hopped a train at Grand Central, and headed north to Westchester County, New York.

"Who was Scott O'Dell? Probably the most acclaimed young-adult author of his generation. He had written



Wesselhoeft and his standard poodle Django, during a jaunt at a Seattle park. (Photograph by Bronwyn Edwards. Reproduced by permission.)



Wesselhoft, meeting fans at Klindt's, the oldest bookstore in Oregon. (Photograph by Bronwyn Edwards. Reproduced by permission.)

nearly two dozen books, including the classic *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and garnered a barrel of prizes: the Newbery Medal; three Newbery Honor awards; and the Hans Christian Andersen Award for a body of work.

“Scott greeted me at the station. Now 85, he looked time-chiseled and fit, with a shock of white hair, barrel chest, and deep tan. We climbed into his big car, and he peeled for his home on Long Pond. He seemed to enjoy speed.

“The interview was supposed to last about two hours, but it filled the morning and lapped into the afternoon. We broke for a late lunch.

“‘Enough about me,’ he said, over seafood chowder. ‘What about you? What do you want to do with your life?’

“I stammered out the true contents of my gut: ‘I want to write novels.’

“‘Well, then, write them.’

“‘But I don’t have time. I don’t know how.’

“He planted a hand on the table and leaned close. His blue eyes sparked. ‘Now listen—listen!’

“I did listen. Here’s what Scott O’Dell taught me:

“Writing is about starting. Start simply, even if it amounts to no more than fifteen minutes a day. Open an empty notebook and on page one write: ‘I want to write a book about. . . .’ Then write: ‘I want the main character to be. . . .’ It’s okay to write in fragments. It’s okay to use weak verbs. Just write. Spill all of your ideas into that notebook. On about day five, or seventeen, or fifty-five, something will happen. A light will turn on. You will see the way.

“Writing is about finishing. He liked to quote Anthony Trollope, the [nineteenth-century] English novelist: ‘The most important thing a writer should have is a piece of sticking plaster with which to fasten his pants to a chair.’

“Writing is about reading. Soak up all the great books you can. He loved Willa Cather’s spare, lyrical prose style, singling out her novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

“Writing is humble. Let your forebears guide you. He followed Hemingway’s advice: Stop your day’s work at a point where you know what is going to happen next. That way, you’ll never get stuck.

“Writing for young readers has a special reward. Scott told me that before he discovered young audiences, he had only a tentative commitment to the craft of writing. Now it was strong. ‘The only reason I write,’ he said, ‘is to say something. I’ve forsaken adults because they’re not going to change, though they may try awfully hard. But children can and do change.’

“Before driving me back to the train station, Scott took me out on his deck and pointed to a grove of trees across Long Pond. During the Revolutionary War, a teenage girl had sought refuge from the Redcoats in a cave hidden by the grove. For years, she had drawn on her wits and fortitude to survive. After learning this bit of local history, Scott had crafted one of his best novels, *Sarah Bishop*.

“His message was simple. Good stories are everywhere. You don’t have to look far. Open your eyes.

“We corresponded for a few years, and he kindly critiqued my awkward early efforts at Y.A. fiction. Years later, I read that he had been working on his last novel, *My Name is Not Angelica*, in his hospital bed, just days before his death at age ninety-one.

“Scott taught me many things about writing, but one stands out. Writing is about perseverance. Never give up.”

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Wordstock website, <http://wordstockfestival.com/> (December 13, 2010), interview with Wesselhoeft.

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WILLARD, Elizabeth Kimmel See KIMMEL, Elizabeth Cody

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WILLIAMS, Katie 1978-

Personal

Born 1978, in Okemos, MI; married Ulysses Loken (a pianist). *Education*: University of Michigan, B.A. (English); University of Texas at Austin, M.F.A.

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Home—Eugene, OR. *Agent*—Judy Heiblum, Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc., 115 Broadway, New York, NY 10006. *E-mail*—katiwilliamsbooks@gmail.com.

Career

Writer and educator. Academy of Art University, San Francisco, CA, instructor in writing. Presenter at schools.

Awards, Honors

Named San Francisco Library laureate, 2010; Best Books selection, Bank Street College of Education, and International Literacy Award Honor Book selection in Young-Adult Fiction category, both 2014, both for *Absent*.

Writings

The Space between Trees, Chronicle Books (San Francisco, CA), 2010.

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