

Hal Schweig, Author  
*The Strange Odyssey of Peter Sampson*

**Suggested Talking Points for an Author interview**

**Q.** What is the most important thing you'd like readers to get out of your novel?

**A.** First and foremost, a good read! I want readers to be emotionally involved, to be touched, to have tears in certain places, to be exhilarated, to enjoy the company of fascinating, larger-than-life characters who experience truly remarkable adventures. After that, if they also find ideas in the book that continue to make them think about things in a different way, long after they've finished it, I'll be pleased.

**Q.** Your book deals with issues of immortality and God's influence on our lives. But if readers aren't primarily interested in these issues, are there other compelling reasons to read the book?

**A.** Absolutely. The characters are most compelling. The title character is Peter Sampson, and a Chicago-area librarian who read the book said of him: "I really liked Peter Sampson. I could fall in love with him." All the main characters are "larger-than-life" and their exploits are such that the reader is constantly surprised. The book contains doses of lusty sex, loneliness and longing, a resurrection of sorts, spiritual metamorphosis and romance. The story is romantic in every sense of the word. It's a very readable epic, comprising an intimate love story.

**Q.** Your press materials state that you were inspired to write this book by a dream. Could you be more specific?

**A.** As far back as I can remember, I've been exasperated by what I consider a strange confusion in people's minds about God's influence on our lives. For example, someone will be involved in a terrible accident, where everyone is killed but them. And they'll invariably say, "God was with me, that's why I survived." But if God was with them, why did He let that accident occur in the first place? What these people are inferring is that God has the power to save that individual, but not the power to prevent the accident. That doesn't make sense.

Prior to beginning work on *The Strange Odyssey of Peter Sampson*, I had a dream in which “angels”—that’s what they said they were—appeared to me and told me the answer to this vexing problem, which is, that God has no influence on what happens to us here on earth, but grants immortality to every living thing. In the dream, as in the book, they impress upon me that it is my mission to reveal this to the world. It was such a powerful and convincing dream, that I half-thought I actually had had a visit from angels. Whether I did or only dreamed that I did, I knew that I had to fulfill that mission. And the only way I could do it was by writing a book that contained a lively and exciting story—something that would appeal to a wide audience—not a dry lecture on the subject. But it didn’t happen overnight. The writing and rewriting, the shaping of the story, the developing of the characters, took me 10 years.

**Q.** What makes you think that the messengers in your dream are good, that they are from God? Isn’t it possible they are evil, cloaked as “angels,” with ulterior motives (plans) for humanity? Might you not be an instrument they use?

**A.** The “angels” cannot be good or evil. It was only a dream, after all. What is important is my interpretation of the dream, and I interpreted it to be positive because it was so real and convincing; like no dream I have ever had. It seemed to me then, as now, to be the answer I had long sought. If it also makes sense to others, and helps make life more understandable and meaningful to them, then that’s all that counts.

**Q.** Do you think your book will change people’s minds about this subject?

**A.** I don’t know. It depends on the person, of course. Truly religious people may be shocked by these ideas, even angry. But at least I hope it will get people thinking for themselves about these things, instead of simply going along with the same old dogmas.

**Q.** Is it important to change people’s minds? Are you inferring that the “same old dogmas” are bad...don’t work?

**A.** If someone is comfortable with these age-old dogmas, that’s fine with me. But for a lot of people, including myself, they don’t make sense, as I’ve stated. For those people, I hope that the answer I have presented in this book helps.

**Q.** In the book your character, Peter Sampson, tells the world that immortality is guaranteed to everyone, regardless of the kind of life they have lived. Won't this

promote recklessness, not to say lawlessness in some people? After all, what do they have to lose?

**A.** I don't think so. I think the vast majority of people want to lead moral, useful lives. If punishment does not exist in the afterlife, it certainly does in this one. So, if it means years or life in prison while here on this earth, I don't think most people would just go berserk and commit crimes. But I'm sure that the religious hierarchy will be upset if they can no longer control their congregations with threats of dire consequences, not to mention Hell, in the afterlife.

**Q.** Do you see religion as controlling? Do you believe that's the function (the purpose) of religion?

**A.** I'm not qualified to explain the "purpose" of religion. For many people, it obviously is very important in their lives, and I don't seek to change that in any way. I only address those who seek different answers to these age-old religious dogmas, and I hope that for them, my answers provide comfort and make sense.

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