

Interview for “Celts and Kings” by Mel Hathorn

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is happy to be joined by Mel Hathorn, who is here to talk about his new novel, “Celts and Kings.”

Melvin Hathorn, BA, MA, is a nationally recognized facilitator who has presented workshops around the country. He is a former educator, behavioral therapist, and college instructor and has over 20 years experience in the training field. He has recently published his second novel, “Celts and Kings.” Born and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, Mel has in his varied career taught literature and history, piloted planes, and traveled extensively across the United States, Europe, Greece, the former Soviet Union, and Central Asia. A former educator, behavioral therapist, and teacher, he has worked in the staff development field for over 20 years.

Tyler: Welcome, Mel. I’m glad you could join me today. I understand “Celts and Kings” is historical fiction with a mystery and love story intertwined, but what it mostly focuses around is the Flight of the Earls in 1607. Would you briefly explain to our readers about that event?

Mel: The Flight of the Earls happened in 1607 when 99 Irish Lords fled Ireland for reasons that are even today unknown. On Sept 4th or 14th, 1607 (depending on which calendar you use) the Earls mysteriously disappeared overnight. One day they were there; the next day they had totally disappeared. There have been many theories about this disappearance but none have actually been proven. Many claim that the reason for their departure was to seek Spain’s help in overthrowing the English. Although they did approach Philip, the Spanish king, there are many unanswered questions about that disappearance. Why did they leave family including pregnant wives behind? Why the rush and secrecy? Why did they abandon their lands to the English?

Tyler: Mel, how did you become interested in this historical event?

Mel: The mystery and unanswered questions of this event intrigued me. However, this disappearance is a catalyst for the story that takes place today.

Tyler: Would you tell us a little bit about the situation in Ireland that presumably caused their departure?

Mel: Hugh O’Neill, considered by many to be one of the last great Gallic chieftains of Ireland, had been defeated by England’s Lord Deputy Mountjoy on Christmas Eve in 1601. Two years later, he

surrendered to Mountjoy and was still allowed to keep his estates. However, England significantly reduced his powers. The Irish Earls were also being forced to attend Protestant-ruled services and to follow many of England's mandates. Presumably the Earls had had enough and decided to flee.

Tyler: What do you think happened to the Earls, and how did it influence your writing the novel?

Mel: We know that the Earls were shipwrecked in a storm off the coast of Normandy. They proceeded overland passing through France and Spain where Philip told them that due to recent peace with England he could not help them at the present time. They traveled through Europe and settled in Rome where most died of old age or illness.

However, there are still many unanswered questions: Why did they leave pregnant wives and families behind? If they were going to seek help from Philip, why the large number, 99 people? Surely a smaller number would have been an adequate delegation. Why the secrecy? I am afraid that if I told you my theory it would spoil the story for the reader. You'll have to read the book to find out.

Tyler: I understand the main character, John Michaels, is seeking to find out what became of the earls and in the process he meets Megan O'Rourke. Their encounter is described as mystical. Would you tell us a little bit more about their relationship and its importance to the story?

Mel: Megan is a graduate student at the college where Michaels teaches. Although he was a mentor to her, he was not her advisor. There is a mysterious and intuitive connection between them. It is so strong that neither can understand where or why it exists. Michaels is happily married to Janet and has a six year-old son. Actually, it turns out their attraction goes back 400 years to the Flight of the Earls although that is not discovered until later in the story. Theirs is a long lost 400 year-old love that is reflected in their relationship.

Tyler: Mel, I realize "Celts and Kings" is your second novel. Would you tell us a little bit about your first?

Mel: My first novel was "The Castlereagh Connection." It is a fast-paced adventure about globalization, murder, the Vatican, a mysterious operation known as Jericho, ancient manuscripts, and an ancient feud that continues into our times. A reviewer called it: A dramatic political thriller that traces the pervasive influence of a...global elite over the entire course of Western history and culture. (This) work with complex conspiracy theories...is truly unique. Credible characters, dramatic action, and a fine blend of both historical fact and futuristic fiction.

Tyler: Both novels, especially the second, sound a lot like "The Da Vinci Code" and other thriller mysteries. Is that a fair comparison? What sets your book apart from other adventure stories with a search for historical information?

Mel: "Castlereagh" is more similar to "The Da Vinci Code" than "Celts." "Celts and Kings" is the story of a 400 year-old romance, kidnapping, murder, and art theft. It also presents a believable theory of why the Earls fled Ireland.

Tyler: Of course, “The Da Vinci Code” focuses a lot on religion, and I understand “Celts and Kings” also focuses on Christianity in its ancient Celtic format. Would you tell us a little bit about Celtic Christianity?

Mel: The best way to do that is to read a section from my book:

Michaels glanced at his program. He read that Celtic Christianity was admired for its spiritual depth, its love of creation, its absence of sanctimony and its integration of religious and spiritual elements.

“It is a living faith,” the program noted, “that combines the past and present, bringing together an ancient pagan worship of nature with Christian belief. It is a practical faith—poetic, humorous, mystical and egalitarian—with a freedom to choose between good and evil. Its tools of worship were personal in nature: devotional poetry that contemplates even the simplest activities of daily life as acts of worship, serenely beautiful images and songs from traditional culture.”

Michaels glanced over at Megan. “It seems that Celtic Christianity is different from Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.”

“Yes, it was the third force that both Rome and London hated because they couldn’t control it. It blended ancient practices with Patrick’s Christianity. It was particularly suited for Ireland.”

Perhaps this helps answer your question.

Tyler: That’s a great description, Mel. Why is Celtic Christianity significant to the plot of “Celts and Kings”?

Mel: John Michaels has for years been disillusioned with his Calvinistic upbringing and has been estranged from his Father as a result. As he learns more about Irish history and Celtic culture, he sees that perhaps this might be an alternative. Whether he accepts this alternative will remain to be seen.

Tyler: I understand “Celts and Kings” isn’t solely about Irish history but also the problems facing modern Ireland. Would you tell us a bit about how those problems and issues are portrayed in the novel?

Mel: Without getting too theoretical, I believe the story explains the differences between how the English and the Irish (read Celtic) view the world. Their different ways of seeing the world would lead to centuries of fighting. Again, let me read a short section from the first chapter. Michaels is talking to Megan in his office.

“Well, how’s it going?” he asked.

“Good, except I am having trouble finding resources to support my hypothesis about the source of troubles between Irish Celtic and English Anglo culture. As you know, my theory is that one of the major differences between the English and the Celts was not merely

cultural, but also the way each viewed the world. There were fundamental differences between them that could never be reconciled and fueled animosities that led to centuries of war and plunder.”

“Talk it out; maybe your thoughts will get clearer.”

“The Celtic mindset is radically different from the Anglo-Saxon mindset. Anglos depend on logic, reasoning and sequential learning. They see differences between objects and people. Intellect is more important than feelings. We Celts, on the other hand, recognize the value of the unseen world. We are intuitive, often expressing feelings rather than ideas. These feelings are often expressed through music, stories, and myths. Which do you prefer, a breakthrough in, let’s say, fuel technology, or a new form of music?”

“I don’t know; I never thought of it in that way. Fuel, I suppose, because of my training.”

Megan smiled. “Exactly my point. The Celt would appreciate the music more. Each culture doesn’t understand and appreciate the other. Anglos thought Celts were barbarians. But look at it in another way. Have you ever felt like you didn’t fit in? Somewhat different? Maybe seeing an injustice really pushes your buttons. You feel that you need to do something about it when everybody else says, ‘What’s the big deal? Life is unfair.’ Maybe you feel more moved when you read a powerful story than most people do. That’s the Celtic side in you.”

Tyler: Wow, Mel. That really makes it clear. I guess the Celtic side of me is predominant. What would you say is the benefit to readers of reading your novels? As an accomplished teacher yourself, are you trying to teach your readers?

Mel: I really started getting interested in Irish history while working on getting my Irish citizenship. Reading the history of the Irish made me want to tell the story to others. I felt it was a story that had to be told so I used the vehicle of the novel to do that.

Tyler: Why did you want Irish citizenship? I understand many Americans, Tip O’Neill, most notably, have sought dual Irish and American citizenship.

Mel: My answer may put off some readers. After the election of 2004, I was disillusioned with what was going on in the U.S. and I began looking for alternative places to relocate. One of my students told me about her husband’s dual citizenship. I have roots in Ireland and I decided to check out Irish citizenship for myself.

Tyler: A moment ago, you said you felt the Flight of the Earls was a story that had to be told. Why do you feel it is important for modern-day readers to know this story?

Mel: I have a strong sense of justice and fairness. As I researched the history of Ireland, I was overwhelmed and outraged about their story. I saw parallels to what is going on today. An example would be Iraq. As England used a false pretext to invade Ireland so we used a false pretext to invade

a country that was not involved in the September 11th attack. Many believe it was to obtain oil. History repeats itself and as the saying goes: Those who do not learn from history will repeat it.

Tyler: Mel, do you have plans for any more novels?

Mel: Yes I have started to research my third as yet untitled. It will be about corporate corruption and a Supreme Court Case.

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Mel. Before we go, would you tell our readers where they can find out more information about “Celts and Kings” and where to purchase a copy?

Mel: The book can be obtained through bookstores, online at sites like Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com and through my website: www.authorsden.com/mel.

Tyler: Thank you, Mel. I wish you lots of luck with “Celts and Kings.” I’m sure it will bring history alive for our readers.