

Interview with Jerry Burgener, author of *Desert Journey*

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined for an interview by Dr. Jerry Burgener, who is here to talk about his new novel, "Desert Journey."

Dr. Jerry's life has been as interesting as it has been varied. He has a Ph.D. in Human Learning and has worked in schools, mental health organizations, and as a forensic psychologist for the Department of Corrections. Dr. Jerry says his life experiences are as equally important as his work and education. He has skydived more than 1400 times, has 3,000 hours of flying airplanes and helicopters, scuba dives, repels, and is an avid motorcycle rider. Dr. Jerry trains horses, riding them in the Midwest, as well as the desert Southwest. Throughout his life, a dominant theme has been his studying and exploring of relationships. Relationships are a key focus in "Desert Journey" as he will explain for us today.

Tyler: Welcome, Jerry. I'm very interested in learning more about "Desert Journey" and the spiritual elements in it. To begin, will you tell us about your main character and what life has been like for him prior to the novel's opening?



Jerry: Jerry is a middle-aged man whose life has been rocked by a recently failed relationship. He takes a several months trip to the American Southwest, where he hopes to spend the majority of his time riding horses and forgetting about another failure at love. Instead he "accidentally" runs into an age-less Indian man, who intrigues him.

At their first meeting, Jerry tells Tom, his teacher, that his goals in life are to be happy and learn the lessons life has chosen for him. Agreeing to be Jerry's teacher in this journey, Tom warns, "Be careful what you ask for. You just might get it."

Tyler: Jerry, the book is labeled as a novel, yet the main character has your name. Are you the main character, and was it difficult to write about yourself in the third person? Did you fictionalize yourself at all?

Jerry: "Desert Journey" is a fictionalized autobiography. It is about my life story in many ways, especially the early years with skydiving and the relationships. Writing about failed relationships is very difficult as I am laying myself out for all to see. But, I know others have had the same experiences and maybe they can learn from the lessons I have been given.

The person I am in this book was not fictionalized; the spiritual journey, the lessons and the failures are real. But I didn't write me as a psychologist, even though I do share some of the insights I have learned from my travels down that career path.

Tyler: Where did you get the idea for “Desert Journey”—did it begin with the idea of the journey, or is it based on an actual experience of yours?

Jerry: “Desert Journey” has been in the works for years. I have been pushed by my teachers to share what I have learned with others. It was the price of admission. So, yes “DJ” is about actual experiences. Tom is a fictionalized version of the “voice” inside my head that gives me insight and directs me down the path of life.

Tyler: What about the Southwest do you love, and what made you decide to use it as the setting for the novel?

Jerry: I lived in Tucson in the mid 70’s shortly after getting out of the Army the first time. I liked Arizona then, but thought it was too hot and dry. When I went back five years ago, it was like falling in love with an old acquaintance. I love the mountains, the colorful sky and the subtlety of the ever-changing desert. Every time I return, I feel as if I have come home.

Tyler: The main character travels to the Superstition Mountains? Are these real mountains or fictional and allegorical, and why did you choose for this to be the main character’s destination?

Jerry: The Superstition Mountains are a part of the Tonto National Forest, butted up against Apache Junction, which is about forty miles east of Phoenix. Superstition Mountain was the first thing I would see when I woke and the last thing before going to bed. The Mountain is spectacular and changes from day-to-day in color and mood.

I wrote about this area, because of the time I have spent there and the feelings that are evoked every time I return.

Tyler: Do you feel the Southwest has a special energy or spiritual pull to it that was appropriate for your book, or that the name of Superstition Mountain lent itself to your goals? Would you have been able to get the same message across had you set the book in Illinois, for example?

Jerry: The Superstition Mountains are a very special place and it has a unique feel to it. The top of the Mountain is jagged and to the Pima Indians of long ago, looked as if spirits were standing there, looking down on those who traveled below. They were afraid of going on top of the Mountain, hence the name Superstition Mountain.

The story would have been the same, even if told in the flat lands of Illinois, but the Superstition Mountains added to the mystical quality I wanted to portray. I only hope my writing reflects the strong feelings I have for that area.

Tyler: Will you tell us more about Tom, the Native American, whom the main character meets?

Jerry: Tom is someone I have traveled with in other lives. I don’t learn of our connection until later, even though I feel it when we first meet. He has brought forward more of the lessons from our past lives together than I have. Due to the strength of our past experiences he made an agreement with spirit to be my teacher in this lifetime and help me learn what it is I need to know.

Several people in this lifetime have been my “Tom.” One of them is Dick, the man who taught me to skydive and even though he was only alive for twenty-six short years, he taught me much about the meaning of our existence and to live every moment to the fullest.

Tyler: Jerry, I also noticed on your website that you have a section about past-life regressions and you discuss them in “Desert Journey.” Will you give our readers a definition of past-life regression and why it is important in regard to your novel and theme of relationships?

Jerry: I know I have lived many lives, even though the veil is pulled when we enter a new life. Pulling back the veil to see what happened in those lifetimes can be helpful when it is approached with the right attitude and for the right reasons.

Many would like to think they were someone important or famous, but we have to realize spirit often teaches us through failures and mistakes. “Be careful what you ask for. You just might get it,” really applies here.

In “DJ,” I look beyond the relationships formed in just this lifetime and consider how they effect the totality of “me.”

Tyler: Would you mind explaining to us what Jerry in the novel learns about his past lives and how that makes a difference to him? Why would learning about your past lives be useful to a person?

Jerry: The Jerry of this current lifetime has always had difficulty with organized religion and the control it seems to inflict upon its parishioners. By exploring past lives, he visited a time when he was a fire and brimstone preacher, who exerted strong control over his flock. He was so dogmatic; his wife of the time hated him and was happy when he departed the earth.

That life had such a negative impact upon him; he has a strong distaste for those around him now who are similar to what he was then. There are other, even stronger issues that came from that lifetime, but I don't want to ruin the experience for the reader.

Even accepting the possibility of past lives gives one a different perspective. Instead of looking at the tragedy of a failed relationship, one can see that it is only a chapter in the book of this lifetime and a page in your existence.

Life is like school. We have lessons spirit requires we learn before we can go on with our life and eventually teach others. Having an idea of what lessons you have learned and those you have failed can be helpful if you have the perspective to make sense of it all.

Tyler: Jerry, on your website you talk about how you have been in "relationship school" throughout your life. What role do relationships play in "Desert Journey"?

Jerry: Relationships are a central theme of this book, just like they have been in my life. Besides what I have experienced as a psychologist with others, I have struggled individually with the purpose of the "meetings" in becoming the person I need to be.

Tyler: Why do you find relationships so important as a learning tool?

Jerry: I think one of the purposes of this life for me is to teach others about how they can learn from the relationships they encounter. One of the most frequently asked questions is when am I going to meet that special someone. Once they meet someone important, people often don't understand the purpose of that meeting and how it will affect them for lifetimes.

Tyler: How do relationships differ from one lifetime to the next? For example, might someone be your mother in this life and your wife or sister in another? Do you feel you are always trying to work out issues or learn something based on the positioning of the people in the relationships?

Jerry: When we are in that place in between lives, I think we are given the opportunity to choose the experiences we need to work on. There are those people we have a special affinity with and who we want to share the journey with. In order to learn all that spirit has for us; we are sometimes the parent and sometimes the child; sometimes male and sometimes female. It is all about learning.

In these lives we can create karma and future lives together need to happen in order to balance the scales. Living a balanced life is the key to completing the life without incurring more karma that might tie you to someone else.

Tyler: Jerry, "Desert Journey" is a novel, but it reads somewhat like a spiritual guide or self-help book. What made you decide to impart your ideas in the form of a novel rather than a non-fiction work?

Jerry: I like the flavor and flow of fiction. I wanted to do more than teach. I wanted to share my joy, fear, failures, and successes of being a student of life as I painted the picture of my journey.

Tyler: That is interesting because I often used to think people who studied math or science were doing something more important than people who wrote fiction, but when it comes down to it, fiction is about human relationships, and I think those are what we most learn from. When you say you wanted to do more than teach and instead share so many things such as joy and fear, would you also say that such emotions are key factors in how we learn?

Jerry: Absolutely, we are not just thinking beings. We have feelings and they are just as important to the totality of our being as thinking is. You are right in that the use of fiction lets me share that part of myself as I talk about the intellectual and spiritual insights spirit has given me.

Tyler: What do you hope will be the feeling, impression, or difference that "Desert Journey" will make upon your readers?

Jerry: I put this book out so that those who read it could get what they need. That isn't for me to decide. It is between the reader and spirit.

Tyler: Jerry, do you have plans to write any other books, and if so, will you give us a preview of what they may be about?

Jerry: I am just about done with “Return to the Desert,” which is a continuation of Jerry’s journey of self-discovery. I lived “Return to the Desert” several years ago and am now living “Beyond the Desert,” which will be the final book of the trilogy.

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Jerry. Before we go, will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information they may find there about “Desert Journey”?

Jerry: My website www.creatingthebest.com is dedicated to the idea we can be all we want to be in all aspects of our lives if we are willing to face the lessons life has presented. But, it is our choice.

I have included pictures from riding in Arizona as well as more information about me and how I may be contacted. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about my first book, “Desert Journey.”

Tyler: Thank you, Jerry. I’ve enjoyed visiting with you and learning more about your insights. Best of luck with your future books.

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