Robert Barclay

If Wishes Were Horses
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Q: Writing was a lifelong ambition for you. What finally propelled you to sit down and write *If Wishes Were Horses*?
Robert Barclay: After I sold my businesses in New York, I moved to FloridA: I had always wanted to write a novel of some kind, and my wife, Joyce, suggested that I do it. She said something like: "Okay, big shot. Now you've got the money and time, so go and write your book!" So it came in the form of a challenge that I couldn't refuse! She's my rock, that one. Many folks who know us call her "my better two-thirds"!

Q: Where did you get the title of the novel? How does the old saying relate to the story and the message you are conveying?
RB: It's actually an old proverb that dates back to an English book that was published in 1628. It is often interpreted to mean that it is useless to wish, and that better results can be achieved through action'such as when Gabby stops wishing that Trevor's attitude would change, and she finally takes action and enrolls him in Wyatt's equine therapy program. Not only was I drawn to the proverb's meaning, the references to horses also seemed a perfect fit.

Q: Your wife, Joyce, is a practicing psychologist, and she too suffered a tragedy similar to the plot of your novel. Did that make it easier to write'or more difficult?
RB: Both, I would say. Joyce lost her younger son to a drunk driver. Sadly, I witnessed the true pain and sorrow of someone who was actually going through it. That meant I could both write about it with a greater sense of reality, but it also forced me to watch Joyce endure the most difficult period of her life. From that terrible reality came the idea of Wyatt losing his family. I only hope that I conveyed it well.

Q: You revealed that much of the novel is drawn from your own past. Can you share with us one or two examples from the book in which a situation in your own life inspired a part of the story? How do you as an author balance your own experiences with your fictional narrative? Were there ever times that you thought you had to change something because it was too close?
RB: Because Wyatt lost his wife and son on his birthday, he finds it impossible to take the blessings during his weekly church service, which is a celebration of blessings, anniversaries, etc. Instead of participating, he always leaves the church just as the priest commences it. The inspiration for this came about while I was in church one Sunday. As the priest called for people to come and take the blessings, I saw a man of about my age rise from his pew and head for the aisle. Rather than heading for the sanctuary, however, with his head hung low he gave some cash to one of the ushers, and he quietly departed the church. Although I never saw him again, I knew that his tale had to be an interesting one. That became the inspiration for Wyatt's inability to remain in church during the blessings. Seeing that unknown man leave the church seemed so poignant, and it rang so true, that I knew I wanted to use the occasion in my book.

And yes'novelists must do their best to balance their fictions with their own, true-life experiences. The secret, I think, is letting your life experiences get close to the storyline'but not so close that you are actually recreating them onto the written page. If the writer falls into that trap, he or she will begin telling the story of their lives, rather than those of the characters. Plus, every new tale will smack too loudly of the preceding one. Personal experiences are highly useful. But no matter how enticing they might be, they should be used only as a guideline, and nothing more.

Q: Equine Therapy is a central part of the story. Why did you decide to focus on this type of therapy versus another? Based on your research, do you think this type of treatment is effective for troubled teens?
RB: I had heard of equine therapy, and what little I knew about it at the time seemed like a good premise around which to wind a love story. As I did the research and interviewed people who actually ran such programs, I realized that not only was it an effective form of therapy for troubled teens, but that it could also be incorporated into a ranch setting, which might make the novel more interesting. Plus, I set the book in Florida, which is not usually the first state that comes to mind when people think about horses, or horse ranches.

Q: Horses played a large role in your younger life. Do you still ride? Would you like to own horses again? What can we humans learn from animals, especially horses?
RB: No, I no longer ride. But I would very much like to do so again, given the right set of circumstances. Joyce enjoys riding as well, and we have often talked about how we'd like to retire someday and buy a ranch in Montana or Wyoming, where I'd again own a few horses and a couple of dogs. When it comes to learning from animals, I've always been impressed by how instinctual they are; how they're always so much more aware of their surroundings than are we. How, for example, how is it that the family dog knows that someone's coming up the walk, long before he or she rings the doorbell? And how is it that a horse senses when a predator is near, long before a human does? Wouldn't those kinds of abilities be great things to have?

Q: You have several very strong female protagonists in this story: Gabby, Aunt Lou, and Mercy. As a male writer, do you find it hard to capture the voice for your female protagonists? Explain.
RB: I very much enjoy writing female characters, but they're tricky to do well. Women can be so emotionally guarded one moment, and yet become so vulnerable only moments later. I think that's what writers of either gender need to better understand. For the most part, I think, men tend to think and act decisively, in straight lines. Things are far more black and white for them. Women, on the other hand, tend to think more before acting, and they seek deeper meaning in both the words they say, and the ones they hear. Which by the way is a good thing, I think. I truly do believe that if women ran the world, there would be fewer wars.

Q: How have your family and friends reacted to your success as a novelist? What has the experience been like for you?
RB: My family was amazingly supportive about my writing a book, especially when one considers how difficult it is to be published. Frankly, I was shocked to learn not only that the book had sold, but to also learn how much support it is being given by my publisher,

HarperCollins. Everyone'including myself'is eagerly awaiting February 15th, the day the book hits the shelves.

Q: What writers have influenced your work? Which writers do you admire and what are you currently reading?
RB: As a kid, I very much enjoyed Ian Fleming and Mickey Spillane. Tough-guy spy stuff, things like that. In fact, I spent a lot of time wondering who would win the fight if James Bond went up against Mike Hammer, but I never did figure that one out! Later on my tastes matured, and I read all kinds of things now. Lately, I've taken to gobbling up biographies. My all-time favorite is, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, which is Errol Flynn's autobiography. It's an oldie, but a goodie. Right now, I'm in the middle of a fascinating one called, *The Last of the Playboys*, which is a detailed account of the life of Porfirio RubirosA: It was Rubirosa's amazing life that inspired Harold Robbins to write *The Adventures*, and a film was made of Robbins's book. If you're looking for a highly interesting read, I suggest them both.