Eileen Beha

AN INTERVIEW WITH PETE HAUTMAN

Pete Hautman is the winner of the 2004 National Book Award for Young People's Literature for his novel, Godless, *a compelling story about a teenage boy who creates his own religion, one that worships his town's water tower. It is a story about how teenagers deal with questions of faith, how the expression of one's own beliefs can have a powerful impact on the beliefs of others, and how we discover personal power. The May/June 2005 issue of* The Horn Book *gave Hautman's newest novel for young adults,* Invisible, *a starred review, saying, "Reading this psychological thriller is much like putting together one of Doug's railroad bridges: connections are being made, but the realities being built may be imitations of life rather than the real thing."*

Pete Hautman has published seven works of fiction for adults, six novels for teens, and more than one hundred nonfiction science and nature books for children under the pen name Peter Murray. Hautman's poker-themed crime novels, Drawing Dead *and* The Mortal Nuts, *were selected as the* New York Times Book Review *Notable Books. Hautman's work has been nominated for the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award; it has won Best YA Book of the Year from the Michigan Library Association, the Minnesota Book Award for* Mrs. Million *in 2000, the Minnesota Book Award for Best Young Adult Novel for* Sweetblood *in 2004 and* Godless *in 2005, and the Wisconsin Library Association Award in both the adult and young adult categories.*

This interview took place in Hautman's home in Golden Valley, Minnesota, which he shares with mystery writer and poet Mary Logue. Hautman also owns a home near

Lake Pepin in Stockholm, Wisconsin, the small town that inspired the setting for Mr. Was, *his first work of fiction for young adults.*

> *Those of us who write for young people do a lot of memory work, searching inside ourselves for voices and feelings, trying to remember what mattered to us then, and why it mattered, and by what strange logic we thought and said and did the peculiar things we did.*
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> Pete Hautman, National Book Award Acceptance Speech, November 18, 2004

Beha: Go back to the very beginning, to the time when you first knew that you wanted to be a writer. What motivates you to tell stories?

Hautman: I enjoy reading stories. I've always enjoyed that. Reading was a big part of my life, when I was a kid especially, and continues to be. Also, I wanted to do something that I could be proud of. I respected writers, authors, and I wanted to do something that I would be good at, as opposed to law. I would have been a lousy lawyer. I was involved in graphic design and the visual arts for a long time, but I never thought they were something I could excel at.

Beha: Had you had early indications of that, for example, in high school? Did a teacher ever point out that you were a good writer?

Hautman: No.

Beha: Just a feeling that you could excel?

Hautman: Not a feeling. I mean, I knew I had some skill in manipulating language. I could read critically. I could see what authors were doing. And I said, "Yes, I can be good at this. I can probably do it as well as I can do anything else." It's a lot like carpentry. A carpenter doesn't go into carpentry because he believes he might be

good at it. He goes into it because he enjoys the process. He sees the quality of work that he, or she, is capable of doing. You know, we're all in life for these strokes, and we all get them in different ways. You can get them from having children; you can get them from being involved in the arts; you can get them from being a crafts person; you can get them from just doing a good job. We all look for where we get the best strokes. I thought that writing was a way that I could get that kind of affirmation from other human beings, from myself. I never was interested in writing as a solitary activity. I know many writers focus a lot of energy on journaling, because the process of bringing thoughts and feelings out on paper is rewarding to them. I never found that rewarding. What I find rewarding is being able to put something down on paper that will have a specific impact on someone who reads it.

Beha: On your website you advise, "Never, ever forget that writing is a form of communication." Will you talk a little more about that?

Hautman: Yes. I think that younger writers in particular – maybe I should say beginning writers – focus on what they have written and how it reflects what they have inside themselves. As you become more skilled in the art, you are more concerned about how those words are going to get from the work to the other person, to the reader. I traveled for the National Book Award – it's what they call the Gold Medal Tour – with other National Book Award writers. We did readings, questions and answers, and so forth. The winner of the National Book Award for Poetry, Jean Valentine, a lovely woman, said this: "In my earlier poems, when I was younger, I was writing for sound. The older I get, the more I write for sense. I worry less about how the words sound and more about what they mean." I think that's a normal process.

In my very early writing I tried to write a story and I'd write a sentence. I would craft that first sentence. I would work it and work it until I came up with what I considered a beautiful sentence. It was like attaching a ball and chain to my ankle, because I couldn't get away from it. I couldn't get to the part where I was actually telling the story and involving the reader in a mental journey of some sort, because I was hooked on my own words. There's a quote from Arthur Quiller-Couch: *Murder your darlings.*[1]

Beha: Kill your darlings?

Hautman: Yes, but the quote is more elegant than that – it's a whole paragraph. It was Arthur Quiller-Couch in his book, *On Style*. And that's what he's talking about. You can't get too attached to your own perceptions, your own words, the beautiful prose you've created. Otherwise, you forget that what you're there for is to engage and communicate with another human being (or dog, if you have a dog who can read).

Beha: Where do you get your story ideas? How do you know when a book is book-worthy – when it's time to commit to *that* story?

Hautman: Usually I don't know that something is going to turn into a novel until I've written twenty or thirty pages. I've got a lot of twenty or thirty pages that just stopped. Is the question more – where do the ideas come from?

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[1] Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On Style*, 1916: " . . . and if you here require a practical rule of me, I will present you with this: Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it whole-heartedly and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings."*

Beha: Yes, where the ideas come from. You have twenty or thirty pages and you think: this idea is book-worthy – I'm going to take it somewhere. Is it a sixth sense?

Hautman: Yes, well, I've certainly gone down a lot of blind alleys on that. To use *Invisible* as an example, the idea that lead me to that book was about best friends. I was thinking of how most kids under the age of twelve have a best friend. If you ask a kid who his best friend is, he'll probably be able to tell you. But that changes when we become adolescents. Not too many kids have a best friend when they are ten or eleven years old who's still their best friend in high school, even fewer by the time they graduate from college or get into their twenties. I remember that process. When you go to bigger schools, your world expands. You get a new best friend, or you get a couple of best friends, and it's a traumatic thing, because it means that bonds are broken and reformed, broken and reformed. That's part of the process of entering into adulthood, a little bit more painful part of the process. I wanted to write about a kid who just couldn't deal with it.

Beha: Deal with the loss of his friends?

Hautman: Right. And I wanted to present it in very dramatic terms. So, I just started writing, and the voice that quickly emerged was Dougie's. By the time I got ten pages into it, I pretty much knew I was going to keep writing until I was done. I knew where it was going to go. I knew it was a novel. But I didn't know that until I developed the character, until I asked, "Is this a voice I can stay in? Am I comfortable being in his world?"

Beha: You wrote *Invisible* in five weeks. What was that like?

Hautman: It was amazing. It's never happened to me before, and it might never happen again. I'd never written a book in under a year before. But it was a short book, only about 150 pages. Most of my books, particularly my adult books, have many points of view and many different characters, and it's pretty intricate trying to weave them all together. It takes a lot of time. My new adult book, *The Prop*, which Simon & Schuster is bringing out in about a year, is about a poker player who's employed by a casino to play poker. The book has a lot of characters in it, and it's complicated. It took a long time to write. I've been working on the revisions for over a month now, and I'm only about halfway through. And that's just going in and changing things and working them around. It's an intricate process. I'd like to just write books like *Invisible*. If I ever came up with another one, it would be great – work five weeks a year.

Beha: The 2005 May/June issue of *The Horn Book* gave *Invisible* a starred review. The point of view character is quite disturbed. As a writer, what did it feel like to enter Doug's private hell?

Hautman: I just wrote a little thing about that on my website. The reviews on *Invisible* are starting to come in. I think I've got the first four or five reviews, two starred, on my website. And they're all rave reviews; they're very, very nice. So I'm very happy about that. But the reviewers talk about the book as a dark and disturbing book, a portrait of a kid who's mentally ill. I won't say that those things are untrue; I think it *is* kind of disturbing. But as I was writing it, I was thinking of it as a very funny book. I don't think there's a chapter in there that isn't funny. (Maybe there are a few later on.) Here's what I was thinking of, aside from writing some funny scenes: I was thinking that it's a novel about a teenage boy who's an exaggerated version of teenage boys everywhere.

It's taking a normal teenage boy, taking some of those rough edges, and exaggerating them: his difficulty being with people, his difficulty taking responsibility, his attitude towards girls. And I think I gave him a few Asperger-ish quirks, too. You know, with all the numbers and obsessions and things like that. But I wasn't thinking of *Invisible* being about a crazy kid. I was pushing the worst part about being a teenage boy – pushing it as hard as I could.

Beha: It might be good for me to read the book again, to look more deeply for the humor. I read *Invisible* in about three hours. I absolutely had to know what happened. I could not put it down.

Hautman: If it wasn't funny, it would have been completely intolerable to read, given how the book resolves itself.

Beha: You have written nonfiction books for children, comic crime novels for adults, young adult fiction, and short stories. What are the unique challenges of writing in so many different styles?

Hautman: It's never been a problem for me. First, the books for younger children, the nonfiction books, are more like journalism than they are like novel writing. As far as the fiction is concerned, I write like most novelists, I think, from a particular character's point of view. In the case of *Invisible*, it was all from Doug Hansen's point of view. *Drawing Dead* was from a variety of different points of view, in third person. In doing that, I'm performing an exercise that actors do when they get into a role. I'm trying to put my head into the kind of world view that the character has, to see the imaginary world the way that character would see it. So, some of it is from Joe Crow's point of view, some from Laura Debrowski's, some from Joey Cadillac's. As characters,

they see things differently. They use a different kind of language to describe what they see. If Joe Crow observes a poker game and he sees someone's hand, he says they've got a full house. If the character is not a poker player, s/he just sees a bunch of cards. It's an acquired skill. Some people do it easily. Some people have a hard time with it. I think most authors have to learn it to some degree.

Beha: Compared to your novels for adults, the prose in your young adult novels is spare – little summary, lots of action and dialogue. Do you intentionally make your young adult prose spare, or do your characters *think* sparely?

Hautman: I don't try to simplify – I just see it from the adolescent point of view. It's all part of staying in character, as I perceive it.

Beha: Your novels are real page turners, filled with a sense of tension and surprise. How did you learn to create tension in your work?

Hautman: What I know about it I've learned mostly from reading. I read a lot of crime fiction, mysteries, thrillers, and things like that – especially when I was trying to learn how to structure a book, how to create a plot. Plots in crime fiction are very elegant and accessible. I think you can learn more about plot from reading a few mysteries than you can by reading all the books that are written about how to plot a story. There are a lot of writers who are way, way better at it than I am, crime writers who practically keep you at the edge of your seat. Phenomenal. In the process of writing, what I do is question myself, on almost a page-by-page basis: "What is the most interesting thing that could happen next? " I'm always thinking about giving readers their ride.

Beha: You're not driven at all by what the market wants right now?

Hautman: No.

Beha: It has been said that in fiction, only trouble is interesting. The characters in your comic crime novels have plenty of trouble. How do you come up with a cast of such eccentric characters who do such absurd things in such unpredictable situations? Can you speak a bit more about your imagination?

Hautman: Most of my characters are based on people I know. Seriously. I don't think that my friends or acquaintances are all that strange, but I've gotten to know some pretty interesting people. I don't create anything out of whole cloth. For example, in *Short Money* there's a character named Amanda Murphy. She's the matriarch in this criminal rural family. Amanda has almost no redeeming features. She's just this nasty old lady. I based her on my grandma, who was a sweet and wonderful woman. For Amanda's character, I wanted to have an old woman who had enough personality to have control over her sons and who would be interesting. I said to myself, "Suppose my grandmother was an angry, greedy, somewhat psychotic old lady whose sons were all criminals. What would she be like?" So I was able to take my memory of my grandmother, put certain personality constructs in, and then see what she could do. Her speech patterns are kind of like my grandmother's, and her appearance is not all that different.

Almost all my characters are either based directly on someone I met, or on a combination of many people I've met. When I was developing the cast of characters for *Godless,* I had Jason Bock, Shin, Dan, and Henry. Well, I wanted a girl character in there, and I was searching in my head for a model. I didn't have a name. I remembered this woman I used to play poker with in Tucson. She was a rather large woman in her thirties, very vivacious, who always had to be part of what was going on. Sometimes you look at

someone and you imagine what she would have been like when she was younger . . . and you think, “This was a woman who was once absolutely drop-dead gorgeous.” I thought Magda’s personality would be right for this girl. So, I imagined Magda when she was a skinny fifteen-year-old, and I put it in the book. Although I was not thinking of Mary Magdalene at all, everyone who reads the book sees this “Jesus and his disciples kind of thing.” And it is, it’s there, but it wasn’t intentional.

Some of my characters come out of dreams. The character Nick Fashon in *Doohickey* – I dreamed I was that character. I woke up so blown away. He wasn’t like any character I could imagine. I couldn’t put a face on him; I couldn’t attach him to anyone I met. He didn’t seem to have a whole lot in common with me. So I thought I’d write some scenes about this character and see what happened.

Beha: It seems as if the reader can love and hate your characters at the same time. Is that conscious? At some point do you decide that your character is becoming unsympathetic, that you need to give him some redeeming qualities?

Hautman: I don’t think of it in those terms. I don’t like writing characters I don’t like on some level. If you think of the people you knew in your life that you really disliked – especially people you disliked thirty years ago when you were a kid – and think of them now, it’s not that hard to find good qualities in them. At least for me it isn’t. I certainly did that in *Godless* with some kids I didn’t get along with in high school and junior high school. I re-explore and find they have these positive qualities. With enough distance from these characters, it’s a little easier to see the positive.

Beha: Let’s talk about the structure of *Godless*. In the book, Jason Bock’s best friend Shin writes the biblical text for the Chutengodian religion; he rewrites the Book of

Genesis. How did you make the decision to begin each chapter with a section of Shin's version of Genesis?

` **Hautman:** Well, first I wrote it, the whole Genesis thing.

Beha: From Shin's point of view?

Hautman: I didn't know it was from Shin's point of view at the time. That was very early in the process, because I was thinking, "Would this religion have a holy text?" Then I just started writing it. I picked up the Bible, and I got into the swing of the language. It was kind of fun to write all those *Lo's* and *Thou's*. It was fun to write about water because water lends itself to imagery. It was also fun for me, because it was different from the kind of writing I usually do: stylistic and flowery. I didn't know if I could use it in the book. It wasn't until I was halfway through that I thought it might work as chapter headings, so I revised and changed it, broke it up.

Beha: Parts of *Godless* are somewhat irreverent. On your website, you have a feature: *Why I Wrote Godless*. Is that in response to reader's questions or reader's criticisms? Have you had any backlash from the Christian Right, or from other religious groups?

Hautman: No, to my surprise. The reason why I wrote that on my website was because a couple of people, including my sister, told me, "I was scared to read it." Upon reading it (they told me this after they had gotten over their fears and read it),they really liked it. I asked, "Why were you scared?" They said the title *Godless* makes it sound really evil. So I wanted to say something about that – what the book was about and why I wrote it, to respond to people who were concerned about the book, not having read it. Now, as far as feedback from people who have read the book, I've gotten virtually no

negative feedback. One woman posted something on a website where she just trashed the book. I'm not sure what her agenda was. I did get a letter from an atheist who objected, saying I was giving atheists a bad name. I couldn't figure out where that was coming from, either. I don't think anyone who reads the book would have any concerns about it.

There are a few lines in the book that might make a few devout Christians cringe. But as for the resolution of the book, it's not an anti-religion book. It's not an anti-god book. It doesn't promote a particular agenda. In fact, I don't think anyone reading the book can really know what my beliefs are. It is being used in some church groups as a book discussion. All the questions about religion that are raised in the book are questions that get raised in every teen's mind at some point. As we all know, if a teenager asks you a difficult question about God, without a straightforward and honest answer, that teen is going to go out and find his own answer.

Beha: When you've taken the book into schools, have you had any objections from parents?

Hautman: No, I haven't. I did have one rural school that I visited. The librarian was a little embarrassed to tell me that she only ordered one copy of *Godless.* Then the principal heard about it and took the book home to read it. He had it for about six or seven weeks, and she hadn't gotten it back. That's a soft form of censorship, keeping the book out of school. The librarian said that the principal was not a reader, and he might never get to it.

Beha: You published on your website the *Booklist* starred review of *Godless.* In the review, the critic asserts: "Not everything works here. Shin's meltdown doesn 't seem real, even though it has been thoroughly foreshadowed." I don't agree; I found

Shin's character to be very consistent. I was totally convinced that the way he ended up was realistic. How do you take that kind of criticism? Do you take it seriously?

Hautman: I do. If I get a criticism that I think is off-base, I still look at what I did and say, "Okay, somewhere in here, this reader missed what I was saying. This reader didn't understand this point. What could I have done to have made that more clear?" Every now and again I'll say, "This reader is an idiot. I don't need this reader; this isn't an audience that I'm writing for." But most times I look at my work and ask, "Is there something I could have done that would have satisfied that reader?" That's not to say that if there's a horrible review, I don't have a reaction to it.

Beha: Let's talk about something another reviewer said. Deborah Stevenson in *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* wrote: "He has a particular knack for depicting that blossoming independence of adolescence that often displays as defiance; his protagonists are generally mavericks, occasionally bouncing off the consequences of this autonomy but never really regretting or forfeiting it." At sixteen years of age, were you a maverick? Does this describe Pete Hautman as an adolescent?

Hautman: Well, I wasn't the most maverick-ish of my classmates. Yeah, I was angry and frustrated and getting in trouble, but not to an extraordinary degree. I managed to stay out of jail. When I create these characters, they're presented with life situations that challenge them and cause them to behave in interesting ways. I think of the characters in my books as real people. The books artificially amplify that kind of behavior.

Beha: But, in some ways, aren't you the person a character is based on?

Hautman: There's a big part of me in all the characters. Lucy in *Sweetblood* was a sixteen-year-old girl, but she's not different from the sixteen-year-old boy that I was. Jason and Shin in *Godless* are as autobiographical as anything I've ever written. Jason and Shin are the two parts I see in myself. That was a conscious effort to say, "Okay, here's this creature, this Pete Hautman, who can be divided up in any number of ways. I looked until I found an interesting scene, cracked it apart, and I ended up with Shin in the one hand and Jason in the other."

Beha: Another critic wrote: "Pete Hautman pushes the boundaries of YA fiction." Do you feel that way about yourself?

Hautman: No, I don't. I don't. I mean, it would be nice if I did. There are YA writers out there who are pushing the envelope way harder than I ever have. I do think that my YA fiction is different from any other YA fiction being published – the ideas in it. The work is very different.

Beha: In what ways?

Hautman: I should first say that there are many YA writers who can legitimately make the same claim. We have our unique ways of seeing the world. I guess I was referring both to the range of ideas I bring to my YA work – my next book will be about prisons, football, and hysterical contagion in the year 2070. The one after that will be about a Cargo Cult in present-day Montana – and to the neutrality with which I frame my stories.

One of my all-time favorite novels is *Junky* by William Burroughs. The book is presented in a flat, matter-of-fact, almost amoral voice that makes the protagonist's life as a heroin addict both alluring and repellant – in roughly equal measures. I strive for this

sort of detachment in my writing. This can be seen most easily in *Godless* and *No Limit*, both of which chronicle a character's transition from one set of beliefs to another, without a moral checklist at the end. I leave the reader to do most of the heavy lifting.

Beha: You're not intentionally trying to put more "sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll" in your books?

Hautman: No, I could go way further with that than I do.

Beha: I've been astounded by how edgy some YA fiction is. As a YA writer, really, you have few boundaries.

Hautman: Well, think about what you read as a kid – books like *Huckleberry Finn, Lord of the Flies, Catcher in the Rye,* not to mention Grimm's fairy tales, which are really extreme. Look at what's going on in those stories. The language is a bit more graphic now, but not tremendously so. I guess there's more sex now than there used to be in YA fiction, which really broke open with Judy Blume's book *Forever* back in the 1970s. I don't read a lot of YA fiction that really sets me back on my heels anymore.

Beha: As an adolescent, would you have wanted to have the kind of YA literature available to you that is available to young people today?

Hautman: I think so. To some extent consciously, I'm writing for the reader that I was when I was fifteen to sixteen years old (or thirteen, fourteen). Would I have liked this story? Would this have grabbed me? When I was thirteen or fourteen, I was reading what was considered YA fiction back then. I was also still reading the Hardy Boys; I was reading comic books; I was reading James Bond novels; reading James Michener and a lot of best-selling stuff. So were my friends. By no means was I limited to children's literature. Now, if you go into one of our suburban middle school libraries, they have a

spinner rack of Stephen King and a rack of Daniel Steele in paperback. You know kids are reading that stuff, too. By reining in subject matter and language in YA fiction, it's not like you're protecting children from anything.

Beha: In a prior interview you said that you often imagine your books as being like comic book panels. Would you speak more about how you visualize your stories before you put them into words?

Hautman: When I'm writing a scene, and this varies a lot from scene to scene, I'll see it as a series of static images. It's not like I'm watching a movie reel out of my head, and it's not like I'm listening to an audio presentation. My writing is not real sound-oriented; it's more about presenting mental pictures of dialogue boxed. The first thing I ever wrote was a comic book in seventh grade. That's one of the reasons why there's been so much interest in my books by filmmakers (although none of them has been made into a film, I've sold a number of options), because when filmmakers read my books, they can see how this could become a script. The story is laid out in specific scenes, usually around some particular image. To create an image in a reader's mind is an incredibly magical thing to do.

Beha: Would it be fair to say that you want, or that you allow, the reader to fill in? Your reader becomes more active if he or she is not told everything?

Hautman: I think I do that. For instance, I tell you, "The gray-haired man named Barney Shoop entered the room." Now, you probably have got the rudiments of the man in a picture. And then Barney Shoop says, "How y'all doing?" That mental picture gets a little bit sharper. And then Barney Shoop maybe folds his long body into a chair, and you have a little bit more of an image. Well then, if the scene continues, I never tell you

anything else about what Barney Shoop looks like. I don't tell you his political affiliation, his religion, the color of his eyes, whether he wears glasses, what he's wearing, or anything else. Because you've got enough to go on. I'm saying 'you' as in 'most readers.' Then, as the dialogue continues, that mental image becomes sharper and sharper. One of the things I often see in writing is this: Someone will introduce a character, and the conversation will go on. Then the author will mention – for God knows what reason – that the character has an exceptionally long and pointed nose. All of a sudden, I have to stop. It pulls me out of the story. I need to readjust my mental image and go forward.

Beha: Is that something that beginning writers do – they don't give their readers enough credit?

Hautman: Yes. Exactly right. An excellent example of someone who gives his readers a lot of credit is Elmore Leonard (crime writer, novelist). He leaves a lot out of his books. You'll go through his entire book, and you won't find an adjective or an adverb for pages on end. His writing is very spare. He lets his readers do a lot of the work; it's not hard work to do at all. He just lays off. One of his best-known quotes is that he leaves out the part that the reader would skip over anyway. It's very effective.

Beha: At what point in your writing career did you most feel like a failure, most want to give up? Or, did you always have a core of confidence, faith in yourself?

Hautman: I never felt like giving up. But I was very frustrated for a long time. I was someone who wanted to write novels, but I wasn't able to discipline myself to sit down and stay in a character's voice for more than a page or two, or to stay with the same idea. I'd start writing, write a couple of pages, and then I'd pick up a book and read a

short story. All of a sudden, my sentences would be different shapes and sizes than they were before. I couldn't get that consistency. It was extremely frustrating, but I never thought of not doing it.

Beha: What's the best writing advice you ever got?

Hautman: Well, 'Shut up and listen' has got to be on the top of the list.

Beha: Listen to your critics? Your peers?

Hautman: Listen to how people perceive my work. Really listen, instead of being inside my head saying, that's not right, or, what do they expect? All the things that we tend to do – the defensive stuff. Learning to listen not just to a reader who thinks it's good, but to those who think the writing is bad. Now, that goes back to learning to perceive writing as an act of communication rather than an act of self-expression. The two don't have to be mutually exclusive, but they often are.

Beha: My favorite piece of prose was in your first novel for young adults, *Mr. Was*, published in 1996. If you will allow me, I'd like to read the quote:

> Back then I believed that my lost memory existed as a whole and complete entity inside my skull. I believe that the right thought, the right reminder would cause the unraveled plot to weave itself into a complete tapestry. But that is not the way it happens. Memories come back one at a time. I had a growing basket of multi-colored threads but no pattern. Places, people, and events from my early years floated about in my head, each one separate and distinct. Weaving it all together would be a tedious, prolonged process. I did not know what came first or how much was missing, and I only had the faintest shadow of an idea of the shape of my past.

For Pete Hautman, is this quote a metaphor for writing? Do you see yourself a weaver of words?

Hautman: Yes . . . I didn't know it when I wrote it.

Beha: You are a disciplined writer who goes to his desk and does his work every day?

Hautman: I work for at least an hour or two a day.

Beha: That amazes me. Because in a positive sense, overall you're a very prolific writer. You've published thirteen books since 1993. I thought you would tell me, if we got around to this, that you sit at your desk and write eight or ten hours a day.

Hautman: God, no.

Beha: What you're saying is that it's the doing it everyday.

Hautman: It's the doing it.