

BEHIND THE BOOK - RINPOCHE'S REMARKABLE TEN-WEEK WEIGHT LOSS CLINIC

I've never written a novella. There have been novels - about a dozen, I'd guess - that failed to make it past about page 50 (they're lying around here someplace), but I've never before sat down with the intention of writing something that was too long to be a short story and too short to be a novel.

For some reason, though, with *Rinpoche's Remarkable Ten-Week Weight Loss Clinic*, I knew from before the first word was on the screen that my idea was both too short and too long to fit into the kinds of things I'd written before.

As mentioned in the greeting this month, I've written about a lot of different aspects of life, beautiful and ugly, and in various ways - memoir, thriller, literary novels, travel books, humor, golf writing, a little food writing, political stuff, stories of love, sickness, war, abuse, gambling, prayer, revolution and resurrection. But the fact is that *Breakfast with Buddha*, *Lunch with Buddha*, and *Dinner with Buddha*, have sold about a quarter of a million copies so far, and that's much more than all the other books combined. I receive a lot of nice emails from readers of those books, and most of the speaking invitations I get (like recent ones in California and Virginia, and the upcoming one in Connecticut) are connected to the *Buddha* stories, so it's true that those characters and situations are often on my mind.

Couple that with the fact that I've been surrounded by addiction of various sorts from my earliest years until now. I've seen the lives of several very close friends ruined, and I've had some of my own - more minor - struggles, and so I'm fascinated by how our minds work, especially how the addicted mind works.

It doesn't take a sharp eye to see that American society has an enormous problem with obesity and weight issues - another type of addiction. My good friend, Arlo Kahn, is a doctor in Little Rock, and obesity has been one of his main interests for most of his career, and we've had a number of conversations about the subject.

So all these things went into a kind of stew in the part of my mind that produces writing, and out came what I now think of as 'the weight-loss book'. I was surprised at how easily the story came, from start to finish. But then, when I thought it was finished, I realized it needed something else, a little twist at the end, something that would broaden it out of the narrow territory of weight loss and into the territory of addiction, and then into the even wider arena of self-esteem or self-appreciation.

As always, once it was finished, I spent a lot of time re-reading it. A professional writer needs to have a real tolerance for monotony, for going over and over something, looking for small changes, errors, opportunities to enrich the story. I actually find that part of the work less difficult than the original creation.

My friend and publisher Peter Sarno then put in many hours trying to find a cover that we both liked. The one we settled on might be my favorite cover of all my books: simple, colorful, thought-provoking.

In all, I'm at peace with the novella, and it's garnered some really nice praise. I know for sure that there will be more of Rinpoche in future writings, most likely in novel form, but writing a novella has opened up a new room for me, and I plan to spend some time there, too, exploring subjects outside the concerns and characters of the *Buddha* trilogy.