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PRESS RELEASE

Golf, Honor, and the Meaning of Life

“Golf is a very serious metaphor for life. It is more than a game. How one thinks about the game – respecting its rules and traditions, and playing with honor – is often a reflection of how one thinks about his life and lives it,” says M. Ernest Marshall. Marshall is a retired medical oncologist who came to golf in mid-life. Perhaps it is this delayed introduction to the game – at a more mature time in his life – that is responsible for his Zen-like regard for it.

Marshall is also the author of a novel called *Wintering Into Wisdom* in which the Rules of Golf play a major role. According to Marshall, “The Rules of Golf are very clearly defined and immutable. By contrast, the rules of life are less well-defined except for the larger issues regarding how humans should behave with each other – that is, morality. If people play golf and do not observe its rules and traditions, they render the game meaningless except that they have dishonored themselves by their conduct. How people play golf can be an indication of how they live their lives off the course.”

From Marshall’s perspective, golf is a very difficult sport to play. “It is unlike any other sport in that the golfer alone is responsible for the outcome of his game,” says Marshall. In baseball, a great hitter can be deprived by a better pitcher and, in football, a great quarterback can make a great pass to a great wide receiver only to have it blocked by a great defensive player. None of those factors enter into golf. The rules of golf bar players from

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Interfering in any way with the play of others – every player on every shot is given the perfect opportunity to make a great shot. It is perhaps because of this that golfers enjoy and applaud great play by their opponents. Every golfer pulls for every other player on the course to play well because they are all struggling against the same opponent – the difficult, challenging, and enticing game itself.

There is no *perfect score* in golf, Marshall reminds us. “People pursue golf as a never-ending journey to play better – no matter the level at which they are playing. Like the journey of life, golfers’ games can be affected by the attitude they take onto the course. As in life, golfers must discover what it is they are seeking in order to understand their level of success.”

At a less philosophic level, golf can be a catalyst for forming strong bonds of friendship. The travails and triumphs of the golf course – like the “ups” and “downs” of daily life – are shared by golfers. “The golfer feels the pain of his friend during a poor round of golf and shares his joy when things go well,” Marshall points out.

In Marshall’s novel, each member of Th’ Foursome derives something different from the game. Shared golf results in a stronger bond of friendship while each member of the group seeks and finds something distinctive from the game. Doc and Doug – the protagonists – believe that being a “good” golfer is more than shooting a low score. Being a good golfer is respecting the rules and traditions of the game. Eighteen holes of golf is also a quiet venue for them to have four hours away from hospital duties to discuss intellectual issues that have nothing to do with medicine. For George – a kind and successful businessman – golf is four hours of joy with friends and escape from a miserable home life. Harry has little respect for the game and is often inconsiderate of his playing partners on the course. He uses golf to enhance his law practice and to climb within the social structure of the small town country club. This fictional story follows the members of Th’ Foursome and their families through lighthearted times on the golf course, divorce, scandal and death. In different ways, they are always there for each other.

Marshall says that, while the superficial reader will dub this a *golf novel*, it is really so much more than that. It is existentialist. While each of the characters is trying to find his or her own way in life in this small Southern town, Doc and Doug are actively seeking some intellectual meaning to life. They discover that meaning can be found only if one seeks it. They realize that meaning can be learned, but it cannot be taught.

Wintering Into Wisdom

By M. Ernest Marshall

Pathbinder Publishing

ISBN: 978-0-9842496-6-4

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Author Bio

Ernest Marshall is a retired medical oncologist and former Full Professor of Medicine. Following successful careers in both academic medicine and private practice, he retired from the active practice of medicine to pursue a career in creative writing. In pursuit of this, he returned to his hometown of Lynchburg, Virginia where he lives with his wife.

He has authored and co-authored numerous articles and book chapters within the medical and scientific literature. *Wintering Into Wisdom* is his first novel.

His second book is an historic work entitled *Life of a U.S. Navy Lieutenant During World War II* and is based upon a diary maintained daily for three years by a Navy Reserve lieutenant who served on three different battleships in the greatest battles of the Pacific.

Two other historic works are in design and research phase and he is beginning the sequel to *Wintering Into Wisdom*.

Suggested Interview Questions

1. What is the connection between golf and real life?
2. How long have you been playing golf, and how good a golfer are you?
3. What do you mean when you say that golf is a game for “gentlemen” and “gentlewomen?”
4. Why are so many physicians drawn to the game?
5. If you are a terrible golfer and do not seem to be able to master the mechanics of the game, is it still worth playing?
6. Why are so many “intellectuals” drawn to the game, and why does golf seem to engender serious discussions on and off the course?
7. If golf were *easy* to play, would it still be interesting?
8. Your story is set in a small town country club. Is that the best place to play golf, or was there another reason for selecting that backdrop?
9. You talk about honor, and yet some notable golf players recently have been in tabloids for actions that are anything but honorable. Would you say they’ve discredited the game?
10. You paint one of the primary relationships in your novel as the perfect marriage. Is there such a thing in real life? What is golf’s role in such a partnership?
11. For those who “don’t get it,” so much of golf seems to be about standing around and waiting, or walking from one hole to the next. What’s really going on?