PETERSON PETERSON

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Unutterable Joy of William Still

The Father of the Underground Railroad

The Disappearing Man & Vanishing Woman

New Covers for Two Underground Railroad Novels

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Issue

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* Cover Image: Henry "Box" Brown, Underground Railroad Hero

THE UNUTTERABLE JOY OF WILLIAM STILL

eter Friedman, a whitehaired freed slave, had traveled 1,600 long, grueling miles in 1850 to wind up in the Anti-Slavery office in Philadelphia, "looking for his people."

In Philadelphia, Friedman came face to face with William Still, the famed conductor on the Underground Railroad. Still kept meticulous records of slave escapes and the people who passed through the Anti-Slavery Society office. That's why some call him the "father of the Underground Railroad."

Friedman told Still he had a brother, who had died in slavery—whipped to death. Friedman, meanwhile, had been sold to a Jewish merchant, who agreed to let him earn enough money to buy his freedom. After Friedman did just that, he trekked north to hunt for his long-lost parents, bringing him to Philadelphia.

"What are your parents' names?" Still asked.

"Levin and Sidney," Friedman said, but he didn't know their last name.

This caught Still's attention. His mother, Charity, used to go by the name of Sidney, and his father's name was Levin. Still's mother told stories of how she escaped with her four children—two boys and two girls—only to be recaptured and dragged back to Maryland. However, his mother made a second, successful escape, this time with only the two girls. She couldn't take all four children, so tragically she left



without the two boys and was reunited with her husband, a free man in the North. Sidney changed her name to Charity and took on the name Still—to keep her identity a secret. But she always prayed for the two boys she left behind.

As Peter Friedman spoke of his family, William Still realized the startling truth. The man sitting on the other side of his desk was his long-lost brother—one of two brothers who didn't escape with their mother.

Still's feelings, he said, were "unutterable." He wrote that "I could see in the face of my newfound brother the likeness of my mother."

Still worked directly in many slave escapes and compiled the stories in 1872 in a book called *The Underground Railroad*. Actually, the original title was *The Underground Rail Road*: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others or Witnessed by the Author; Together with Sketches of Some of the Largest Stockholders and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road.

Let's just call it The Underground Railroad.

This book includes stories about the two escapes I wrote about in my novels—Henry "Box" Brown and William and Ellen Craft. These are two of the most unusual and compelling escapes that I had ever heard about. (See the story on page 11, "Go Ahead: Judge a Book by its Cover.")

Just before Christmas of 1848, Ellen Craft escaped by posing as a white man, while her husband William pretended to be her slave. Three months later, Henry Brown escaped by shipping himself in a box, from Richmond



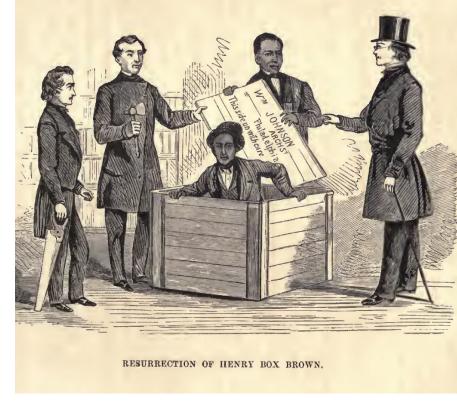
to Philadelphia—a grueling, 27-hour ordeal. At one point, he was stuck upside down in the box for several hours and could not make a sound because a white man was sitting on the box, completely unaware of what (or who) was inside!

William Still plays a significant role in my novel about Henry Brown, *The Disappearing Man*, because he and the white abolitionist, Miller McKim, were on the receiving end of the box in Philadelphia. As Still describes it in *The Underground Railroad*, McKim rapped on Brown's box and called out, "All right?" Then a voice from within responded: "All right, sir!"

Immediately, they cut the box's five hickory hoops and opened the lid, and "the marvelous resurrection of Brown ensued," Still wrote. Brown "was about as wet as if he had come out of the Delaware." And he had a Psalm ready for the occasion.

"I waited patiently for the Lord, and He heard my prayer," Brown exclaimed.

This prayer was just as true for Still as it was for Brown. Still had waited patiently for years before he finally met his long-lost brother, Peter. His joy was unutterable.



This illustration of Henry "Box" Brown appears in William Still's 1872 book, *The Underground Railroad*.

RENOVATE ME!

GHOSTS OF THE SOVIET UNION

y wife, Nancy, and I weaved our way through the quaint streets of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia—a city sitting on the Danube River and looking across into Austria.

We passed by one building, where people in the 19th century had carefully "installed" a cannonball in the façade. Back then, residents received money if their homes were damaged during an attack by Napoleon. And if your home hadn't been damaged? Then you simply installed a cannonball in the wall to make it look that way.

Next, we came upon a structure that bore no resemblance to the beautifully restored buildings we had passed. Take a look at the accompanying photo, and you'll see what I mean. This four-story building had windows boarded up, crumbling walls, and a smattering of graffiti. Someone had painted the plea: "RENOVATE ME!"

Downtown Bratislavia is charming, but this holdover building from the communist years stands out as a testament to red tape.

Note the "cannonball" that was carefully installed during the Napoleonic era to qualify for repair funds.

Our tour guide told us that this building was a holdover from the communist era, when so many of the buildings in Bratislava were crumbling. Evidently, red tape still rears its ugly head even today; she said bureaucracy had delayed the renovation of this building, and it remains a potent reminder of what came before.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Slovakia was part of the Soviet satellite country, Czechoslovakia. Today, it's two separate countries—The Czech Republic and Slovakia, both of which we visited on our Viking River Cruise from Budapest, Hungary, to Passau, Germany.

We visited three countries that were once part of the Soviet eastern bloc—Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic—and in each one of them, the guides had nothing good to say about life under the communists. Interestingly, two of the three guides said they were about ten years old when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the trigger that led to the Soviet Union's fall. Although the guides were young when the Wall came down, they still had vivid memories of the struggles their parents faced in a system built on suspicion, censorship, and bureaucratic night-mares.

When we were in Budapest, a couple of our guides talked about how the Soviets began as liberators, freeing their country from Hitler's grip at the end of World War II. But both guides used the line,



"The Soviets forgot to leave." One tyranny was replaced by another.

Under both regimes—communism and fascism—religious citizens suffered terribly. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 6 million Jews were killed under the Nazis. Meanwhile, in *The Wall Street Journal*, Marion Smith cites the scholar Todd M. Johnson, pointing out that he "estimates that Soviet authorities sent 15 million Christians to their deaths in prison camps between 1921 and 1950. A further five million Christians perished in the following 30 years."

But the Soviets aimed to exterminate all religions, not just Christianity. "The Soviet Union also targeted Muslim communities for mass deportation, killing, for example, as many as 46 percent of Crimean Tatars. Thousands of Buddhist monks also died at Soviet gunpoint," Smith writes.

The persecution continues today. In China, where communism still aims to exterminate religion, an estimated 3 million Muslim Uighurs—one fourth of their population—have been placed into "reeducation camps," where they are forcibly stripped of their religion. It's believed that when they are released from the reeducation camps, many are sent to forced labor camps.

Christian churches have also been forced to go underground in China, as pastors are regularly targeted with arrest.

John Lennon once wrote, "Imagine no religion." But we don't have to imagine it because the communists have been trying to achieve this goal for over 100 years now, and

the result has been anything but the idyllic world Lennon envisioned. Both the Nazis and communists tried to create utopias, but like most utopias, they became hell on earth.

Perhaps that crumbling building in Bratislava should never be renovated or taken down. Maybe it should remain, as a reminder of what can happen not just to buildings—but to the human spirit—when governments try to create "perfect" societies.

The Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest includes a memorial to the 400,000 Jewish Hungarians murdered in the Holocaust. (More on this synagogue in the next story.)





enő Reich was desperate to get word to his family. The Nazis had imprisoned him in an internment camp in Kistarcsa, and now he was being deported to the Auschwitz death camp on July 19, 1944.

So Reich wrote a letter to his family, telling them of his fate, and he tossed it from the freight car hauling him to a sure death. That letter wound up in a mud puddle at the train station in Karácsond, where it was found, miraculously winding up in the hands of his wife.

Even more miraculously, that same letter played an important role in the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the major organizers of the Holocaust. Margo Reich, Jenő's wife, testified at the trial, where she produced the letter. It was used as proof that Eichmann continued to deport Jews to the death camps even after the Hungarian regent, Miklós Horthy, had ordered it stopped.

Eichmann was found guilty of war crimes and executed in 1962.

I saw Jeno Reich's miracle letter when visiting Budapest,

Hungary, during the spring of 2019. The letter resides in a glass case in the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, located in the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Europe.

In 1944, the synagogue sheltered Jews facing the Nazi onslaught, and many of those who died during the winter of 1944-45 are now buried in the courtyard. In memory of them, there is a metallic weeping willow in the courtyard, with strings of silver metal leaves, each displaying the name of a victim. This Holocaust Tree of Life was funded by the famed Hollywood actor, Tony Curtis, whose father was Hungarian.

The courtyard also has a memorial to Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish businessman and humanitarian credited with saving tens of thousands of Jews in Hungary during World War II. Wallenberg purchased over 30 buildings in Budapest and declared them "extraterritorial" with diplomatic immunity. He used these buildings to protect Hungarian Jews.

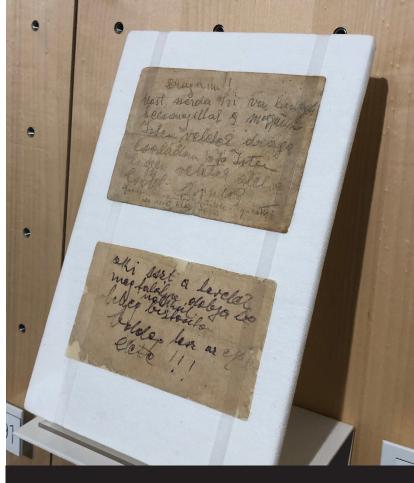
Wallenberg had the unfortunate fate of being persecuted by not just one totalitarian state, but two. After resisting the Nazis in World War II, he was arrested by the Soviets after the war and died under mysterious circumstances in 1947. In 1981, Raoul Wallenberg became only the second person to be declared an honorary citizen of the United States.

At the Dohány Street Synagogue, Wallenberg's memorial is surrounded by hundreds of stones, which represent the permanence of memory and legacy. Stones have a deep Biblical significance, because Joshua built a memorial of 12 stones to honor and praise God for leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. In 1 Samuel 7, the prophet Samuel set up a stone as a memorial because God protected them from the Philistines. He called this stone "Ebenezer," which means "stone of help."

Reich's letter, the Holocaust Tree of Life, and the stones at Wallenberg's memorial...all three serve the same function. They preserve memory. The letter preserved the memory of a man desperate to reach his family; the weeping willow tree preserves the memory of the Jews who died in Budapest. And the stones preserve the memory of a man who was every bit as heroic as Oscar Schindler of *Schindler's List* fame.

Israel declared Wallenberg to be one of the "Righteous Among the Nations." And as Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives."

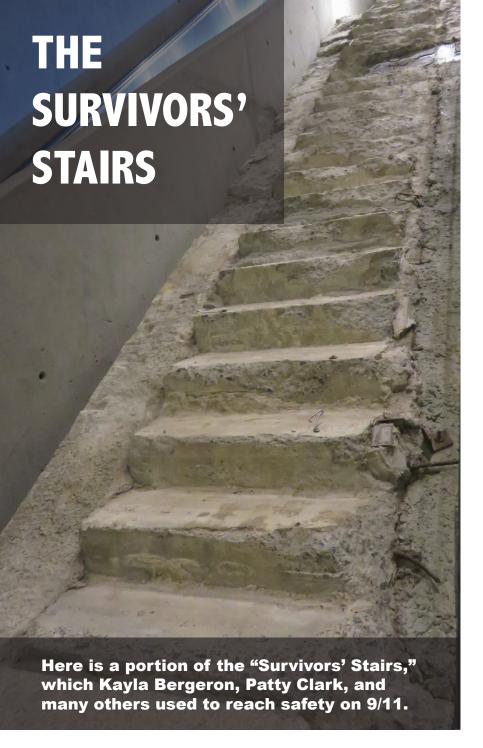
This tree of life has deep roots and bears good fruit. May we rest in its shade.



This letter was used to help convict Nazi Adolf Eichmann of war crimes.

< Title Image: The Emanuel Tree at the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest has the names of the Hungarian Jews killed during the Holocaust inscribed on its leaves.</p>
Below: The interior of the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Europe.





hirty-eight steps saved the life of Kayla Bergeron—and hundreds of others.

Bergeron was working on the 68th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center when two planes rammed the twin towers on September 11, 2001

"We made our way down, floor by floor, through darkness and smoke," Bergeron recalls in an audio tour at the 9/11 Museum in New York City. When her foot caught in a piece of twisted steel, a Good Samaritan stopped to help her out and even retrieved her shoe, for which Bergeron was eternally grateful. Without the shoe, her foot would have been sliced badly by glass and metal shards.

On the twenty-third floor, Bergeron encountered a colleague, Patty Clark, and together they kept moving. But just as Bergeron and Clark reached the landing of either the fourth or fifth floor, the South Tower collapsed.

"We felt the South Tower fall, and I was afraid our building would be next," Bergeron said.

According to the *New York Times*, "Ms. Clark looked up to see the stairwell itself twisting. Then the lights went out."

"You just closed your eyes and you prayed that it be over," Clark said.

But it wasn't over for Clark and Bergeron. Miraculously, the lights in the North Tower stairwell flickered back on, and they continued down the final four floors, where they had to wade through a foot or so of water, with electrical wires dangling down like vines. Finally, a firefighter opened a door, and they rushed outside into a surreal landscape of dense clouds of dust and smoke.

They found themselves on a raised plaza outside the North Tower, but they still needed to find a way down to the street—quickly. The Vesey Street staircase became their way to safety, leading them to the street below.

Five minutes later, the North Tower collapsed.

In all, nearly 3,000 people died on 9/11, but those 38 stairs were a pathway of safety for many. When my wife, Nancy, and I visited New York City, we had the honor of seeing a remnant of those stairs, which are preserved in the museum and are known as "the Survivors' Stairs." The craggy stairs are chipped and broken, resembling something you might see at the site of a Roman ruin.

9/11 was a day of unspeakable tragedy, but it was also a day for great heroism. One of our museum guides was a woman who was in the North Tower on the day of the attack; she told us of a window washer named Jan Demczur, who found himself trapped between floors on a stalled elevator. Using the handle of his window washer's squeegee, Demczur managed to pry open the elevator doors, freeing himself and a half dozen others.

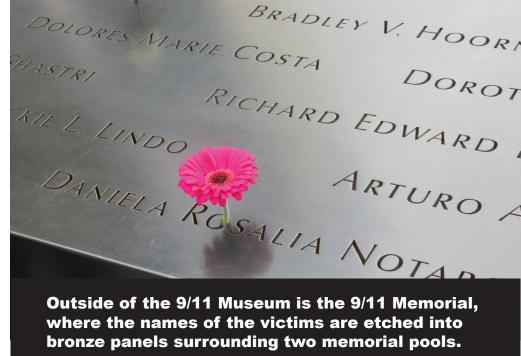
But they faced yet another problem. Because the elevator had stalled between floors, a wall blocked any escape. Once again, Demczur relied on the squeegee handle, only this time he used it to chip his way through the drywall, creating an escape hole. Everyone on the elevator lived, thanks to Demczur and that simple little tool.

The squeegee handle is on display in the 9/11 Museum, and so are the blue shoes, covered with dust, worn by Kayla Bergeron.

Sometimes, the most ordinary things—a staircase, a pair of pumps, and a window squeegee—can be used for remarkable things. The 9/11 Museum is filled with these kinds of artifacts, and behind each one is an incredible story.

These everyday items also stand as symbols of survival and redemption. The Survivors' Stairs, in particular, bring to mind one of the most striking visions from the Old Testament. Genesis, chapter 28, tells how Jacob went to sleep and had a dream of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending.

Throughout the centuries, many have viewed this stairway as a foreshadowing of Christ, who became a spiritual stairway connecting earth and heaven. You might even say that Jesus is the ultimate Survivors' Stairs. When the world is collapsing all around us, when death and destruction



are ever present, Jesus is the Way out. As you make your way through the darkness and smoke, He is the path to safety.



Inklings

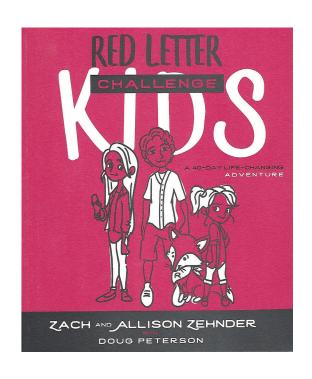
WHAT'S NEW IN MY WRITING WORLD

THE WINDS OF REDVALE

Aiden was the first to notice it. He spotted a massive brown cloud of swirling sand, off in the distance. But here's the strange thing...The sandstorm was indoors.

So begins my story, *The Winds of Redvale*, a seven-part adventure that appears in a new book that I co-wrote, *Red Letter Challenge Kids*. The book is a 40-day devotional that challenges kids to pray, worship, show mercy, read their Bibles, serve humbly, give freely, and share what God has done for them. Each of the 40 days includes a devotional, plus a couple of activities that kids can do to put their faith into action.

Interspersed among the 40 days is *The Winds of Redvale*. The story brings the principles of Jesus to life through an adventure featuring the three Perez children—Aiden, Emily, and Isabella. The children pass through different wildernesses in Redvale—desert, mountain,



forest, swamp, and sea. And in each of these wildernesses, they encounter forces trying to prevent them from learning the lessons found in *Red Letter Challenge Kids*.

I co-wrote the book with Zach and Allison Zehnder, who run a vibrant Lutheran church near Orlando, Florida. Zach also happens to hold the Guinness World Record for the longest speech ever. He did it to raise money for a recovery house. Zach delivered 50 sermons over 50 hours, going from 7 a.m. on a Friday to 9 a.m. on a Sunday.

Check out the new book at redletterchallenge.com.

THE LEGENDS OF LIGHTFALL

When I was a kid, my favorite comics were Spiderman, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* (see photo), and an obscure Army character called Sad Sack. So, last year I was thrilled to relive my childhood and add comic-book writer to my name.

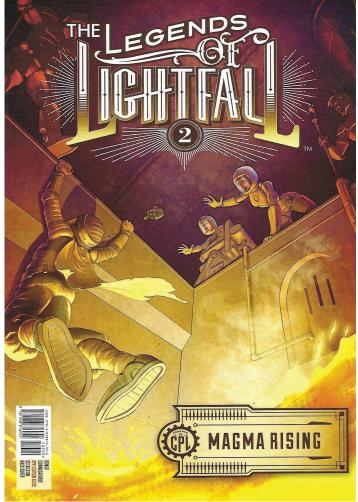
Six issues of *The Legends of Lightfall* came off the press in 2019. This was a unique project, which began when an evangelist in San Diego brought together artists, educators, and one writer (me), and put us in a hotel for five days. By the end of those five days, we had created and outlined the basic storyline for *The Legends of Lightfall*.

This six-part series traces the odyssey of Kort, an orphan who escapes from the Home for Castaway Children in the underground world of Lightfall. Kort and his droid, ABDA, are trying to find his caretaker, Tam, but his mission becomes much larger. With ABDA, Sofia, Treads, and Ekon, he ventures into the heart of Shadowcore and battles the true power behind the Council of Power and Light—the ruthless organization that controls Lightfall.

I may have aged 50 years between photos, but I still love to read (and write) comic books.







FRIENDS INDEED!

First, comic books. Then, plays.

In September of 2019, I had my first play produced by Life Together House and staged at the Sleepy Creek Vineyards in Fairmount, Illinois. The play, *Friends Indeed*, tells of the improbable friendship between Benjamin Franklin, a religious skeptic, and George Whitefield, the Billy Graham of the 1700s.

Franklin and Whitefield came from different worlds, and yet they forged a friendship that helped to shape a new country. Theirs is a story of two friends, 13 colonies, and one nation.

Joe Thomas, a professor of history at Urbana Theological Seminary, invited me to write the play, which he had envisioned for years. I think Joe expressed it best when he said, "Given the toxic political and social climate that has developed in the 21st century, I thought this friendship could also serve as an example in civility for us all."

Douglas Malcolm (left) played the evangelist George Whitefield, while Cameron Cornell was Benjamin Franklin in Friends Indeed!



I was the head writer for *Friends Indeed!* Joe Thomas was the producer and Jennifer Goran was director.





GO AHEAD: JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

My two Underground Railroad novels have a new look. Kirk DouPonce, the masterful illustrator who did the covers for my other historical novels—*The Puzzle People* and *The Lincoln League*—has completed new covers for my novels, *The Disappearing Man* and *The Vanishing Woman*.

The Disappearing Man tells the story of Henry "Box" Brown, a slave who escaped in 1849 by shipping himself in a box from Richmond to Philadelphia. The Vanishing Woman is about Ellen Craft, a slave who escaped in 1848 by pre-

tending to be a white man, while her husband posed as her slave.

Now that all of my novels have covers by the same designer, there is a unity of look to my four books. However, initially the new covers will only be available for the e-book versions, not the print versions.

Check out all of my novels on Amazon.

New Book Covers Pictured on the Back of this Issue >

PETERSON PILGRIM

www.bydougpeterson.com

- All stories written by Doug Peterson
- Photos by Doug and Nancy Peterson
- Design by Irenka Carney

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Let Freedom Ring!

My four historical novels take readers everywhere from Civil War Richmond and Cold War Berlin to the Underground Railroad's route to Philadelphia. But what all of the novels have in common is the theme of freedom.

With the release of new covers for *The Disappearing Man* and *The Vanishing Woman*, they also have something else in common. All of the covers are designed by Kirk DouPonce of DogEared Design. So check them out on Amazon.

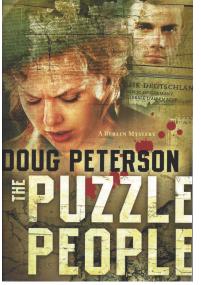
The Puzzle People tells the story of Annie O'Shea, who uncovers the incredible story of two couples split apart when the Berlin Wall went up in August of 1861. She also discovers a tangle of betrayal, espionage, mystery, and murder.

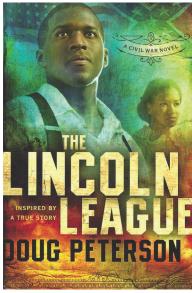
"Doug Peterson is a master at combining intriguing fiction with historical events. I highly recommend The Puzzle People." —Dave Trouten, Division Chair, Kingswood University

The Lincoln League is inspired by the true story of John Scobell, the first African-American spy in our nation's intelligence service.

Doug Peterson "has a way of making history fun and interesting to read. Somehow he manages to find very important people from the past that most people have never heard of and writes great and informative stories about them."

-Amazon Review

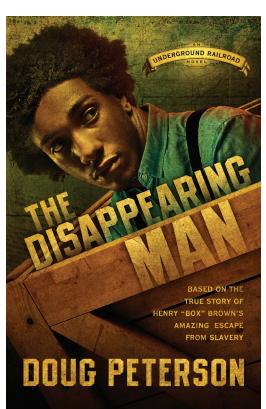


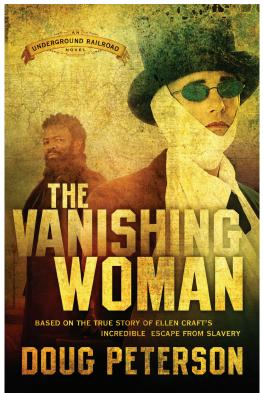


The Disappearing Man is based on the true story of Henry "Box" Brown, a slave who mailed himself to freedom in a box in 1849—a harrowing, 27-hour ordeal.

The Disappearing Man "is more than just fast-paced entertainment; it is an eye-opening and educational reminder of the importance of grace, acceptance, and equality."

—Eric Wilson, New York Times Best-Selling Author





The Vanishing Woman is based on the true story of Ellen Craft, a slave who escaped from Macon, Georgia, by posing as a white man, while her husband pretended to be her slave.

"Well-researched and wonderfully written...Doug Peterson captures the ingenuity and the danger of this bold escape in a novel that will appeal to both adult and young readers."

—Andy Ambrose, PhD, Executive Director, Tubman African American Museum, Macon, Georgia

What I'm Working on Now

- A Biblical history novel
- A new play about Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- A new Underground Railroad novel