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A Magazine for Literature of the American South



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BOOK REVIEWS

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AUTHOR PROFILES & INTERVIEWS

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS

MISCELLANEOUS

NEWS & EVENTS

You are here: [Home](#) / [Author Profiles & Interviews](#) / Allen Mendenhall Interviews Russell Scott, Author of The Hard Times

ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS RUSSELL SCOTT, AUTHOR OF THE HARD TIMES

 NOVEMBER 27, 2015 BY [EDITORS](#)  [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



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AM: Thank you for the interview and congratulations on the publication of *The Hard Times*. This novel opens in Mississippi with an alarming scene involving a doctor—or doctors—and then brings us to Africa. You're a doctor in Mississippi who's traveled to Africa. What's going on here?

RS: I guess you write what you know; it makes it more real. Truth for the most part is stranger than fiction, so you have to adjust real life to make it more believable.

AM: How much research into places and world events did this book require?

RS: Well, quite a bit, the details of the mining restrictions, the Kimberly Process, U.N. diamond regulations, and the details of the period of the transition of the government of Namibia all took a lot of reading. The details of what is happening in Zimbabwe also took some time.

AM: I take it you never shot Cecil the Lion.

RS: No, I'm not so much of a hunter. I like to walk around and watch the animals. I understand the nature of consuming meat, so I tend to shoot things I plan to eat. That didn't work out so well with the zebra. I couldn't get over the whole horse aspect of things, and eating it was not that great an experience for me, but the locals love it and all of the meat was consumed.

AM: How do you find time to write and practice medicine, or are the two practices mutually illuminating?

RS: I think everything you do affects your writing. Being a physician is a part of who I am. You can't divorce any aspect of who you are from your writing and remain true to yourself as an author.

AM: China Grove Press is relatively new, correct?

RS: Yes, it is a new entity formed from two other entities, Magnolia Gazette Publishing – which has been in continuous operation since 1872, it's the oldest business in Pike County Mississippi – and IsoLibris, a company designed to produce ebooks, which was only a couple of years old.

AM: What's the significance of the poem at the beginning of the book?

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[Book Reviews](#) (266)

[Conferences and Festivals](#) (36)

[Contributors' Bios](#) (70)

[Essays](#) (9)

RS: It is a poem I wrote sitting on my back porch watching an approaching storm, it seemed to set the stage for the book, and the storms coming for everyone in it.

AM: Who is Ray Moffett? Is he a good person?

RS: He's my "everyman," trying to find a way back into grace from the transgressions of his life. So he's both good and bad, but mostly he's like the weeds in the poem, buffeted by the winds, or the particles of dust...moved by collisions he can neither avoid nor anticipate.

AM: You've got a lot of military experience. Did you write while you served?

RS: No, and I don't intend to write about my service directly. In the military there is a saying, "there is nothing more boring than an old hero."

AM: This may seem like a problematic question if not taken to refer to chronology, but were you a doctor or a soldier first?

RS: A physician must always be a physician first; anything else is unacceptable.

AM: You're the father of seven. How have you maintained your sanity?

RS: You would be surprised – it was hard at times – but it all flew by so fast. Now I only have one child left at home and it's quite sad.

AM: Do you consider yourself a Southern author? How about a Southerner?

RS: I am a Southerner, I wrote a whole essay on the perils and pressures of being a Mississippi (Southern) author. I still have some growing to do to fit into those pants, so I can only say, I hope to be.

AM: Thanks for the interview, Scott. Best of luck fitting into those pants.

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[Residencies](#) (5)

[Southern States](#) (1)

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