

>> Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> Canady: This is Cheryl Canady at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the eleventh year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, DC to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival will be two days this year, Saturday, September 24, 10 am to 5:30 pm, and Sunday, September 25, 1 pm to 5:30 pm. Free and open to the public, the festival will take place between Ninth and Fourteenth Streets on the National Mall, rain or shine. For more details visit www.LOC.gov/bookfest. And now it is my pleasure to introduce Eric Jerome Dickey whose latest book is titled "Tempted by Trouble." Mr. Dickey is the author of 18 novels. Twelve of them have been New York Times best sellers. Mr. Dickey, thank you so much for joining us.

>> Dickey: Thank you for having me. Thank you very, very much.

>> Canady: I just finished reading your book, and it's a definite page-turner.

>> Dickey: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

>> Canady: Now it's about good people who are forced to do bad things.

>> Dickey: Yeah, it is. It is. The lead character, Dmytryk, is probably one of the characters I've written that has this very strong moral compass. You know, he's pretty much a throw back to the way that we think that people are supposed to behave, how they're supposed to work hard, things are supposed to work out. If you go to college and you're educated, you... everything is supposed to work out for you. I mean that's part of the American dream, but for him the American... and as it has for so many people, the American dream has folded, and he... and basically he's trying to survive, you know, and I put... it's one of those characters where it's like, you know, you're taken to your lowest point, to the point where you're, it's almost like you're susceptible to anything that will feed you for the moment and then coupled with the fact that he's married and his wife is in the same situation. They were both workers at General Motors and they're both laid off, so it's twice as hard, I mean for him as I'm imagining the story. You know, you're waking up and you're staring in the face with someone who is in the same situation that you are in, and you're both looking at each other, "How do we get out of this?" And there's just no apparent answer.

>> Canady: Now the backdrop of your book parallels today's economic problems. Why did you pick such a real and painful setting for your novel, and was there a underlying message about today's society?

>> Dickey: Well, it's... everything I write is contemporary. I mean it just happens to be where we were at the time, and it's really funny. The book came out about a year ago, so I probably started working on it two years ago, and sadly nothing has changed. [Laughter]

>> Canady: That's very true.

>> Dickey: I mean it's really I mean because the way I write, sometimes I'm writing characters who exist in a particular political climate that by the time the book comes out, that's past, you know, but unfortunately with this, you know I wrote it two years ago, and I can pick it up now and glance through it. It's still the same. It's still the same issues, so which for some may say it's a good thing for writing but for reality, it really isn't. Everything I write for the most part, except for a couple of the stories, have been just, you know, what we're living now. The backdrop has been, you know, the world as it is at that moment. Even when I wrote part of the Gideon series was in Argentina and for that novel it speaks of what was going on in Argentina at that moment. I've written stories that took place in London, Amsterdam, and it's the same thing because wherever I go, wherever I write about, that's a character as well, and I literally go to these places and I sit down and I break the bread... I break the bread with people, and I read the local newspapers every day, and I study that history so that as I'm writing a story it can feel authentic especially for the people of that region. Say for this story as I was working on "Tempted by Trouble" the big thing for me was I'm not from Detroit. I really don't know Detroit, but hopefully if I can pull it off, if I'm the type of writer that I want to be, people who live in Detroit will pick it up and Dmytryk will feel and sound and live as if he's from Detroit, and that's the best feedback I've gotten from readers. People who live in Detroit and they read it, they said... and they will say, "This feels and sounds like someone who lives right here where we are."

>> Canady: Well, you obviously have captured the authenticity of the area and the people who live there.

>> Dickey: Right, I was back there and again just casually chatting with people and then some stuff being pointed out to me, you know, that I just hadn't thought about, you know, which things like, you know, someone said, you know, the thing about it is like they don't watch the news anymore because every time they turn the news on, it's talking about Detroit. So now Detroit has become the epicenter of every problem in the United States and it's that we don't want to watch that every day, just wake up and turn the television on, and people are pointing the finger at you, and you're not the problem. It's something else that's the problem, but, you know, but now you've become... you've become the bad guy of the country, the bad city of the country, and also being there and watching the news and, you know, at the time the mayor was talking about because so many neighborhoods are basically ghost towns and talk about consolidating neighborhoods, trying to get people to move from certain areas over to other areas so they can bulldoze the ghost towns and just try to imagine living... You know, I can't even imagine living like that. You know, it's like where I live now, you want to relocate me so we can just tear everything else down over here, but that's kind of like what they were trying to do. It's like consolidating. I was like, "Wow."

>> Canady: Actually you mentioned that people just stopped wanting to listen to the news because it's so bad.

>> Dickey: Yeah.

>> Canady: Now during hard times people often gravitate toward happily ever after escapism.

>> Dickey: Yeah.

>> Canady: Without giving away too much of the story, why did you decide to create a provocative, gritty world without a storybook ending?

>> Dickey: I don't do storybook endings. I... because for me, storybook endings, a lot of times, one, they're really false. It's like you create all this wonderful conflict, and it's almost as if the writer has no way of ending this. So they just either march everybody into a church or they throw a ring on a woman's finger, and everybody's... everything becomes happily ever after, and we know in the real world that it's... it just doesn't work that way. I think a writer needs to... the conflict that's been created, he or she needs to remain true to the conflict and don't look for an easy way out, and that's what happens with a lot of the... to me, the happily ever after stuff. I mean, to me, Cinderella, a story like that, the story doesn't start until she got married to the Prince, and then she moves into the castle. Yeah, she better have some food tasters, [laughter] bodyguards. That's where the story... that's where the story starts right there, I mean, because I guarantee that in a scenario like that, it's never what you thought it was going to be like when you moved in. So far as marriage, work doesn't begin until after the I do's. That's not the end. That's the beginning. You know, some people think that is the end. That is the beginning. That's where now you're cohabitating and compromising and changes have to be made and, oh, expectations. Oh, I didn't know that you expected that of me. Oh, you know, so it's something totally, totally different. You know, it's not like in the movies. Well, it's no different than "Desperate Housewives." You know, I used to watch that show years ago, but all of it... everyone has if you look at it from the outside, everyone has everything that they should need to be happy until they fall into a grave, and yet they're not, and that's the way we are as people. You know, the numbers for divorce would not be so high [laughter] if there were any other way.

>> Canady: If we had more realistic expectations.

>> Dickey: Had realistic... but part of it is understanding yourself. It's difficult enough to understand yourself and try to understand somebody else.

>> Canady: Obviously your understanding of the human conditioning has helped you become so successful.

>> Dickey: I try, I mean, on some levels. I mean, I don't generally talk about this stuff a lot, but and a lot of times I'm listening to other people who are "experts" on self speak, and most of them I think is just bull because I don't think they know what they're talking about, but because what happens is they are preaching to a particular audience and when they step on stage, on mike, whatever, all they do is say what the other people want to hear. They get an applause, and they get a nice contribution at the end of the show. You know, they don't really speak any hard truths. Character's behavior, you know, and for a lot of people

even in the stories I write I focus on character, you know, not character in the sense of, oh, someone is 6 foot 1, and oh, she has this particular physical build, their behavior and their actions, and every action and behavior that I create is motivated by something. It's not just... there's never just a character in the book who's an antagonist for the sake of being an antagonist.

>> Canady: Well, obviously character development is an important part of your success, but I read something interesting.

>> Dickey: Okay.

>> Canady: In addition to writing you've also worked as a software engineer, an actor, a standup comedian.

>> Dickey: The first one I was paid for. The last two were hobbies. [Laughter]

>> Canady: Well explain to me...

>> Dickey: That's what the IRS told me. The IRS said if you're paid for it, it's a job. If you're not paid for it, it's just a hobby [laughter] and don't try to write it off.

>> Canady: Well, tell me... explain to me how your hobby of standup comedy prepared you for your very successful career as a writer.

>> Dickey: Well standup is performing and writing. I mean, I think a lot of people don't think about it, every comic who gets on stage no matter off the cuff his act or her act or the jokes seem and everything has been written down. You know what I mean? And that's a big thing, and that tailors you for writing something for yourself or for someone else that when performed gets a laugh, you know, and you... I did a book, "Friends and Lovers," back in '96 or 7, and the thing one of the characters was a standup comic, and the thing was was like okay, how do I write a character who's funny, you know? And a couple of things I did was I said, "Well, a big thing that says someone's funny is the audience's reaction, you know. He did a bit. This is how the audience reacted. So I had to, you know, you have to work on that, you know, and then the stuff that he did, I had to write... I had to include stuff that for the most part read funny on paper, you know. A lot of the comics' acts because it's a performance art, they don't necessarily read funny on paper. Most of the stuff that Robin Williams has done probably doesn't read as being hysterical on paper, but you have to see Robin Williams do it, you know. So for this one, I had to find stuff that read funny, but anyway, the comedy is I got used to writing, man. I mean because it's... you're perpetually writing. You're perpetually writing. You're perpetually rewriting. You're performing. You're learning that brevity is the mother of wit, segways set up punch lines, and so far as this, you know, segways set up punch lines. I mean, it doesn't always have to end with a joke, but a lot of scenes I write, you know, you segway into it and I'm setting up something bigger that happens later on.

>> Canady: Now the theme of this year's festival is "Celebrate the Joys of Reading Aloud." What is your most memorable storytelling experience either as a child or as an adult?

>> Dickey: [Laughter] Well storytelling of experience as a child... Well, it's funny, being a public author, you've... I've read stuff where it seriously connected with readers. I was thinking in particular of one particular reader when I first started out, had read "Sister, Sister," and she... and for me, it's like all the characters are created. The scenarios are created. It's, you know, it's, you know, again, it's beginning, middle, and end, and I was reading this section, and she just started crying, you know, which is... which really scared me, you know? [Laughter] Because, you know, you think like I did something wrong, you know? But she connected with what was going on in the book, and it's one of those moments where you realize how powerful even fiction is, you know, how powerful words are, you know, and I used to be just so worried about people just reading and being bored, but here's a lady who just, you know, she just broke out in tears. She was having the same exact issue at home with her husband, and all I could think was, "I don't know your husband I promise, promise. [Laughter] I don't even know him. I've never met him. I don't even know who... you know, and it's just so funny. It's like even then when you try to write something that's original, I mean even their dialogue, she's like, "That's the exact conversation that we had. That's exactly what he said to me," and I was like, "Yikes," you know, but it's just, I don't know, it's just really... because the thing about being a writer as opposed to say like if you do film, if you do film, you can go into the theater when the film is playing if it's, you know, if that's the case. You can sit in the audience. You can hear the laughter. You can see the expressions when people are leaving after the movie's over. You can... you know what I mean? You...

>> Canady: Right.

>> Dickey: You're there as they experience it. With a novel it doesn't work that way. It's that you see people after the fact. You don't really see people as they are reading your work. You know, it's just totally different, you know. So I did a screenplay years ago called "Cappuccino," and it was on the circuit, and I would sit in the audience, and you know, no one knew who I was, you know. No one ever knows who the screenwriter is anyway, or I don't even think they care. They want to see the guys on the screen, and but, you know, just be able to sit there and just go through it with the audience was just like so amazing, you know. You don't get that with a novel. [Laughter]

>> Canady: I have just one question. Maybe there's a yes or no answer. My son's a fan of your Gideon series, and he wanted to know whether Gideon and Arizona will ever get together.

>> Dickey: [Laughter] Gideon and Arizona. I have no idea. It's funny, you know, a lot of people ask about Gideon, Arizona, Gideon, Hawkes, Gideon and a couple of other characters. I think at this point Gideon is just really too busy trying to survive. You know, I don't know. I have no idea because maybe if I get down to... if I write enough, I guess enough Gideon novels and it just seems like a time to "retire him," I'll make

some decisions, but right now I'm just really enjoying the, for one, the international aspect of the series and all the characters that come along with the series because it's like with each novel, they become a little bit more dangerous and a lot more intriguing.

>> Canady: Well, on that note, Mr. Dickey, thank you very much.

>> Dickey: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, and I look forward to being there.

>> Canady: And we look forward to having you. You will appear on Sunday, September 25, in the Cutting Edge, located in the Pavilion of the States at the National Book Festival on the National Mall. Again, thank you.

>> Dickey: Okay, thank you.

>> Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at LOC.gov.