

Inside Story



Make 'em laugh

A sense of humour and a love for words inspire Alberta writer

Deep roots and a fruitful ministry (see Psalm 3:1) characterize Alberta writer Phil Callaway to a tee.

Born, raised and educated in Three Hills, Alberta, Phil is still there, writing and raising his family. However, the author of 15 books and a speaker with a best-selling video series, he has a worldwide ministry. His secret? He has mastered the art of making people laugh, and then think.

A Christian since childhood, Phil says God was “all over the place” when he was growing up. His parents, on staff at Prairie Bible Institute, had a “very real faith,” he says. Phil’s mother was a writer, and her love for words rubbed off on both Phil and his older brother, Tim.

Although Phil did well in English and loved to read, school was often a struggle—he calls himself “the poster boy for ADD.” While in Grade 10, Phil wrote an English essay describing events in their class. His teacher read it publicly to humiliate him, but it backfired.

“The students loved it,” says Phil. “They cheered. They stood. But he gave me a D.”

After high school, Phil went to Prairie Bible Institute with three goals: get into art, teach Physical Education and “get married before the Rapture of the Church.” While attending Prairie he discovered he loved writing papers, but it didn’t occur to him that he could make a living as an author.

After college Phil found himself working in Prairie’s art department, where for five years, he designed and illustrated for the school’s magazines. But something else was happening, too.

“In reading the articles I was to illustrate,” says Phil, “I began to think, ‘I wouldn’t have said it that way. I could perhaps just maybe almost make this better.’ That’s when I realized I was probably qualified to be a writer.”

He wrote a children’s story, “Nightmare on Freddy’s Street,” and submitted it to a children’s magazine. It was accepted. “I thought at the time that this was normal,” says Phil. “I’ve since received my share of rejection slips.”

In 1988, Phil was asked by Prairie to start a magazine to edify, encourage and educate believers. Servant magazine is still going strong, and Phil is still the editor.

“I suppose I’ve stuck with it because we love living in this little community where I’m just Phil, where I have friends who will tell me when I’m full of it,” Phil says. “I talk to celebrated Christians all the time who would give almost anything to say that. Prairie has given me much freedom to travel and write and be who God made me, so that’s helped as well.”

Phil’s first two books, Honey, I Dunked the Kids and Daddy, I Blew up the Shed, were born from material published in his “Family Matters” column in Servant. An editor at Harvest House Publishers read one of his columns to



the president and from there they asked Phil to write a book.

"I hate to tell that story to writers," Phil says. "The truth is I was just being faithful to the little bit God had given me to do, and He gave me a little bit more."

Phil's wife, Ramona, has been a major influence for most of his life—she moved into the house next door when he was in Grade 10. Since much of Phil's material comes directly from his life, everything he writes goes past Ramona first.

Phil calls his wife his biggest encourager, "despite the fact that I've written extensively about our marriage," he jokes. The couple has three teenagers—all are voracious readers, and two of them want to write.

Phil currently has a number of projects underway: a sequel to his first novel, *Growing up on the Edge of the World*, a second book about golf and life, a book with U.S. comedian Martha Bolton and a book for a "secular" company. "I'm increasingly aware that non-believers are reading my books, so I just write about life and laughter, about children and failure and difficulty, and try to show that we were not made to face these things alone," says Phil.

In addition to his writing, Phil takes on about 100 speaking engagements a year. Radio and television programs are also in the works.

"People need good reason to laugh these days," says Phil of his success, "and it seems I'm able to help them. My message is one of hope. I guess God gave me the gift of a warped mind! People seem to like that. I'll continue doing this until they stop laughing and start looking at me funny."

That won't be any time soon.

Visit Phil Callaway's Web site at www.philcallaway.ab.ca

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