

You were born into a theatrical family. Can you give us further details?

My older sister, Natalie, came into the world with a pile of talent, which my parents fostered. As a child, she took tapdancing lessons and performed with a local group called the Megland Kiddies.

When I came along (with no discernible talent), my dad enrolled us with Central Casting in Hollywood. Whenever a crowd scene called for Italian-looking kids, we were called. Prior to the outbreak of WWII, we each appeared in a number of films (sometimes together).

Wartime gas rationing ended my “acting” career. By the time Natalie was in her early teens, she had developed a magnificent operatic voice and the dramatic acting ability to go with it. To launch her career, my father founded (and managed for many years) the Santa Monica (CA) Civic Opera. He also played some guitar, but only at home.

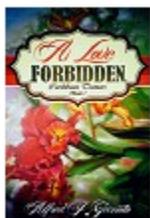
My younger sister and I dropped off the talent map and went into hibernation (just being kids). Only as an adult did Toni’s talent for acting and comedy manifest itself.

What happened that drew you to ministry instead?

Even as a young child, I was drawn to the spiritual life (though I had no idea what that meant or entailed). By middle school, my heroes were the priests of our parish. I wanted to be like them. At the end of 8th Grade I took the exam for enrollment in the high school portion of seminary training. I advanced to college seminary and then four more years of theological studies. After a total of 12 years, I was ordained to the Catholic priesthood. I remained an active priest for 18 years, before feeling a call to change my life course.

How did your 'writing bug' come about?

When I withdrew from active ministry, a desire to write for publication came over me with a sudden rush. I freelanced for a national health magazine and local newspaper. I also ghost-wrote for the owner of a chain of fitness equipment stores. I then collected materials from my clerical life and wrote a trilogy of non-fiction books under the series title, Adult-to-Adult (published by Winston Press, Minneapolis). When the books sold well, I thought, “Wow! This writing and publishing thing is easy.” So, I decided to write a (“great American”) novel. Fiction writing/publishing turned out to be a whole different animal. It took 8 years to complete the first novel (A Love Forbidden). It too was published commercially (to some modest success). Eight books later (both fiction and nonfiction), I’m still at it. I have more ideas in the pipeline than I have time to write.

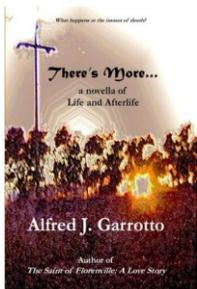


What inspired you to write the Caribbean Tremors trilogy? Briefly explain the three books and how they tie in together.

After publishing A Love Forbidden, my next two novels (Finding Isabella and I’ll Paint a Sun) were also commercially published. Each book tells a separate story with new characters. Having

regained the rights to all three books after they went out of print, I totally re-edited and updated those stories. (I’m a better writer today than I was two decades ago.) Since all three books are set in or related to the same fictitious Caribbean island, I packaged them as a trilogy and self-published them solely in ebook format via Kindle Direct Publishing and Smashwords.com, which gives access to other major ebook outlets. I discovered in the re-editing that I still really liked those stories and felt good about giving them second life in a newly packaged format.

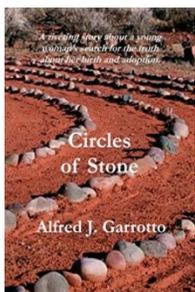
Everybody wants to know your take on life after death as told in your novel, There’s More: A Novella of Life and Afterlife. Since none of us really know what happens at the instant of death, we have to go on our faith alone. What is your take on that subject in the book?



As a Roman Catholic, a priest, and later for two decades as a lay minister in a local Catholic parish, Afterlife has been part of my daily consciousness and questioning. It's true, "None of us really knows what happens in that instant of separation of body and spirit." My own imagining of Afterlife has changed and developed over the years. The history of Catholic art and theology has also evolved over the many centuries of exploring the possibilities. I have come to understand that one of the key questions each of us must ask is: What kind of God do we have? Our sense of Afterlife hinges on our answer.

That's a long introduction to the major theme of *There's More*. I set out to create a scenario in which the majority of the story takes place at the instant of death. In other words, what happens when the soul frees itself from its lifelong partner, the body? What follows is a novelist's imagining of the answer. I no longer believe in the kind of Purgatory I grew up with—a temporary place of suffering to atone for past sins as a condition to being admitted to heaven. Rather, I imagine that, at the instant of death, I will experience a "nanosecond" of enlightenment during which I will see the entirety of my life. In that process, I expect to be aware of all the times I was a real "jerk" (sinner). In that same instant, I will be overwhelmed by God's love and mercy and know that I am welcomed "with open arms," no matter what.

This is what happens to big league pitcher John Thorne when he is mortally struck in the forehead by a batted ball during the final game of a World Series. I add a wrinkle by assigning as John's companion on this journey . . . Bishop Charles Francois Myriel, the catalyst character of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. Why? As a novelist I refuse to believe that the characters we give birth to are not living people. They are too real to me, and they come to life for readers and stay with them—sometimes for years beyond the actual reading. To me, they exist in some "parallel universe" and are accessible to the God who created them through the authors.



How did you get your concept for the novels, *Circles of Stone* and *Down a Narrow Alley*?

Being an adoptive parent of two Central America-born daughters, I have explored this theme in these and other of my books as a way of delving deeper into the meaning, mystery, and miracle of adoption.

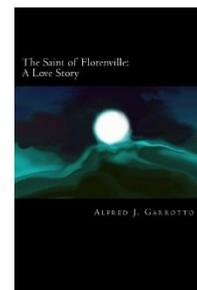
The series begins with *Circles of Stone* chronicling the life Natalia (McCrory), one of the world's top fashion models. It and continues with *Down a Narrow Alley*. When I can get to it, I will write a third novel in this series, continuing Natalia's story.

Peruvian-born Natalia is the adopted daughter of a well-to-do San Francisco couple. At the peak of her modeling career, Natalia begins a search for her birth mother, only to discover that her "adoptive" father is actually her birth father. She was born of a secret extramarital affair with a Peruvian woman he had no intention of marrying. Having discovered this life-changing truth, Natalia returns to Peru to search for her birth mother. She begins that quest in Lima at the orphanage from which she was adopted and which, she learns, aided her father in the cover-up.

Natalia finds a new life in Lima. She becomes a "hands-on" patron and volunteer of the orphanage, splitting time between her career and the care of orphaned and abandoned children.

What inspired you to write *The Saint of Florenville*? And why is it a love story?

The deep background is that I had a friend here in the States who was a nun from Belgium. She later returned home to work in her own country. When I traveled to that lovely country a few years later, I contacted her. She offered to show me the wonderful medieval city of Bruges. I became so enthralled with that city that I decided to make it the locale of a future novel.

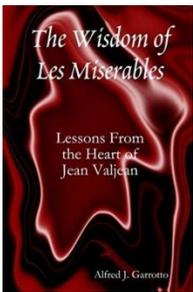


In *The Saint of Florenville*, I create a scenario based in part on my real-life experience. The main protagonist is a Belgian nun, Sister Therese. When contacted by Fr. Tom, an American priest acquaintances, she agrees to meet him in Louven and travel with him to Bruges. (That's where real history ends.)

In the novel, the two are drugged and kidnapped in Bruges by a stranger they befriended. He subsequently imprisons them in the basement of his home. They are kept for many months in adjacent but separate jail-like cells. Sister Therese is eventually rescued and returned to her convent in Florenville, but not before Tom has been taken away and presumably murdered.

Sometime later, a mentally damaged man appears at the convent gate. Sr. Therese and her sisters give him shelter. At first, she does not recognizing him as her friend, the presumed murder victim. When Therese discovers the identity of the disabled man, she and the sisters decide to hide him in plain sight as their groundskeeper.

Which of the two is ultimately the “saint” of Florenville and why? That is for the reader to decide.



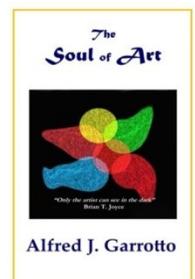
Explain what you mean when you say that the novel, *Les Miserables*, encompasses all the arts?

Victor Hugo wrote this monumental work as a social and political commentary on life in France. He chose as his protagonist (Jean Valjean) a man who represented the failures of the French political system to protect the poor and most vulnerable in the land. He uses as his catalytic moral example of the failure of the system is this: Is it lawful to break a law in order to feed a starving family. In other words, is law the final arbiter and standard of human behavior? Or do the needs of desperate people take precedence over the law?

That seminal theme has engaged the imagination of artists of every major genre: literature, dramatic and musical theater, ballet, multiple screen reiterations and variations, as well as fine arts and photography. Hugo (like other classical storytellers before him) unleashed the creative, artistic spirit in nearly every conceivable art form.

The Soul of Art. What inspired you about writing on that subject?

My familial connection with and commitment to the arts finally found expression in me, but not until mid-life. After writing seven novels and pondering the nature of “creative source,” I knew I had to write about the deeper meaning of artistic gifts, however they find expression in individual people.



Rather than focus on individual genres, I wanted to explore the psycho-spiritual / supernatural source of creativity. Using as my launch theme, “Only the artist can see in the dark,” I delved into an exploration of what it means to “see in the dark.” That took me to “imagination” and “dreams” (of all types). That took me to the realization that artistic gifts—even in the very young—are to be valuing rather than chastising the dreamers among ourselves as adults, our children, and youth. Another strong theme is the obligation of gifted people to share their gifts for the good of society.

I conclude the book with a chapter on “success.” When can an artist say, “I am successful in my chosen field”? How do we measure success in a dollar-driven society?

Within the next year, I intend to write a second, expanded edition of *The Soul of Art*. Since publishing the original book, I have discovered so much more material and further ideas that I want to include.

Does your faith guide you while writing?

I cannot separate my writing from the underpinning values that guide my life. At the same time, I carefully avoid proselytizing. The characters who populate my novels might be saints or sinners, but their presence on the page must be in the service of telling the story. What readers take away from it is up to them. I'm just trying to tell the best story I can.

In my nonfiction works, I can choose to be more direct in expressing what I believe and value but, again, never with any heavy-handed attempt to proselytize. Rather, I'm simply saying, "This is who I am and what I value...today."

What can you give aspiring writers who want to write, but are having difficulty finding their "niche"?

I still seek out writing workshops and often hear from writing coaches the same key message: "Write what you know." That may be just another way of saying, "Follow your passions." I strongly recommend associating oneself with a writing community, whether it's a small critique group of fellow writers or a larger writing community.

For the past 25 years, I have been active in the California Writers Club, a statewide professional organization with over 20 branches statewide. Thanks to my fellow authors and the learning opportunities I have experienced with and through them, I can honestly say I am a much better writer today than I was when my first works were published over 25 years ago.

Is there anything else you would like to add for your fans?

I am ever grateful to my readers, first for buying and reading my work, and second for the positive and helpful feedback they give.

I went to a Catholic High School but I'm not Catholic. From what I can gather, in summary, the Catholic belief is that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are three separate entities. Yet in my own faith, they are one and the same, connected, but not separate. Kind of like one person having three personalities. But it's still just one person. What is your belief on the three entities?

I'm happy to say that your faith and understanding of Trinity is very Roman Catholic!!

Christian churches seem to get jumbled up in the use of inadequate human language that simply cannot express the inexpressible. For example, Catholics use the term "person" for each of what you term "personalities." But we are talking about the same meaning: one divinity manifesting as three persons/personalities. The Nicene Creed (4th Century) took a stab at "explaining" this phenomenon. It's a statement of essential beliefs that we and many other Christian churches still use. Even so, it is an inadequate attempt to "define" the indefinable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I'm a native Californian now living in the San Francisco East Bay Area. I was born into a theatrical family and began my career in the arts at the age of 7, with my big sister, doing bit parts that required Italian-looking kids. My sister used her magnificent coloratura voice to pursue a career in grand opera. By my teens, I had taken a different road into academics and spirituality. Although I did a lot of writing (mostly on Christian themes), I did not get the book-bug until my forties. Once the muse bit me, I couldn't stop and have written 12 books through both commercial and independent publishing. These include both fiction and non-fiction.

My most recent fiction works are the Caribbean Tremors Trilogy: A Love Forbidden, Finding Isabella, I'll Paint a Sun.

The Soul of Art (nonfiction) explores the underlying spirituality that gives birth to all creative endeavors. I use the book as a source for workshops for creative people of all genres, called the "Spirituality of the Arts." Contact me for details and possible bookings.

My novella, There's More, explores the greatest mystery of all: what happens at the instant of death? In it, a major league ballplayer--a former Catholic priest--is simultaneously murdered and killed during a game by accident and by two different people! The plot explores questions about death and afterlife, as the ballplayer-priest reviews major moments and decisions of his life under the guidance of none other than Victor Hugo's catalytic character in Les Miserables, Bishop Charles Francois Myriel.

My love for Les Miserables (in all its iterations) led me to write my nonfiction book The Wisdom of Les Miserables: Lessons From the Heart of Jean Valjean. My next nonfiction project is to back that up with a book titled The Wisdom of Les Miserables: Lessons From the Heart of Bishop Myriel.

Other novels include Down a Narrow Alley and Circles of Stone.

In addition to writing, I am a freelance writer and manuscript editor (need help?) After 20+ years, I retired in 2018 from my day-and-night job as a lay minister in a Roman Catholic parish in the Oakland (CA) Diocese.

I invite you to visit me online at:

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