

Former Resident Continues Dual Career as Periodontist – and Novelist



Dr. Alan Winter

Former Livingston resident Dr. Alan Winter has a dual identity: he's both a periodontist and a fiction writer – with a new novel out.

A 1965 graduate of Livingston High School, Dr. Winter now lives in Bernardsville. His family, however, lived in Livingston for 20 years, and to this day, he still retains close ties to his hometown.

A periodontist/implantologist with a thriving practice in Manhattan, Winter is an old hand at technical writing. He founded a dental journal, *Periodontal Case Reports*, in 1979 and served as its editor for 12 years. Throughout his career, he has published a number of scientific articles as well.

But he caught the "creative writing bug" more than 30 years ago, working on novels and screenplays in between work and family duties.

In 1991, he published his first novel, *Someone Else's Son*. Interestingly, the idea for that book was inspired indirectly by his periodontal practice. In his office, Winter recalls, he had photos of his young sons on the wall. The two boys did not resemble each other, and a patient once asked him why he had a photo of someone's else's kids on his wall. "So that started me thinking," he says. "What if my kids didn't look alike because one got switched in the hospital?" He thought it would be fun, as an intellectual exercise, to write such a story and make it believable, and he set about doing so – some five or six years before an actual case of baby switching was reported in Florida.

For five years he worked on the story, writing on the train into New York and in the early morning hours on the weekends. At the suggestion of his literary agent, he hooked up with a writing mentor, John Bowers, and the two would meet each week to review what Winter had written. *Someone Else's Son* was eventually accepted for publication and became a success.

Winter, following the cardinal rule of "write what you know," had set his novel in Livingston and laced it throughout with autobiographical elements.

His next novel, *Snowflakes in the Sahara*, was a suspense thriller that came out in September, 2000 that featured as a protagonist a forensic dentist named Carly Mason.

Now, 13 years later, he has just published his third novel, *Savior's Day*. Winter's book interweaves fact and fiction in tracing the Codex of Aleppo, the oldest Bible ever written, through 1,000 years of history. When the Codex was rediscovered after being hidden for 600 of those years, a third of the book was stolen. That part of the story is fact, Winter notes. His novel then recounts how the Mossad is called in, but the Israeli intelligence agency cannot – or will not – recover the missing pages. "This novel is about the 'why' behind the Mossad not recovering Israel's greatest artifact," he says. Told through the eyes of both a New York police detective and a powerful New York Cardinal, the story interweaves into the Codex tale the history of the Black Muslim Movement.

The title, *Savior's Day*, is a deliberate reference to Saviours' Day, a holiday established by Elijah Muhammad to commemorate the birthday of Nation of Islam founder Master Wallace Fard Muhammad on February 26, 1877. Winter is reluctant to say more for fear of giving away the plot, but he does admit, "the beauty of the title is that it aptly describes the book – after you have read it."

As background, Winter explains that a man named Marcus Garvey founded a group after World War I called the Universal Negro Improvement Association. "He had a band leader who wrote the black national anthem, Arnold Ford," Winter states. "Ford felt that blacks could not have originally been Christians, but were something else – i.e., Jews. He founded a black synagogue in Harlem, which still exists. In its heyday, there were ten synagogues affiliated with this movement, although none of the congregants were circumcised or bar mitzvahed originally."

Winter continues, "Ford collected money from his congregants to buy land in Ethiopia and then disappeared. A man calling himself W.D. Fard or Professor Ford arrived in Detroit soon after. He also said that there were no black Christians in Africa, but instead of theorizing that they were Jews, said they were Muslims, and founded the Black Muslim movement. Eventually,

a Rabbi Ford appeared in Ethiopia. Connecting the dots, there is a theory that Arnold Ford and W.D. Fard were the same person."

Although he won't reveal more of the plot, Winter says, "It is a fun story," and one that has long intrigued him. "It took me more than 20 years to craft the components of the story into a work of fiction."

He explains, "I tried to write a brief summary of the Black Jew story soon after writing *Someone Else's Son*, but I didn't know what to do with it. This was also around the time a man named Hayim Tawil came to me with the story of the Codex of Aleppo. We worked on it for a couple of years, but any book that I tried to write wasn't very good.

"I first wrote it as historical fiction. It was awful and I threw it away. Then I wrote it as a non-fiction book proposal. A prominent agent loved it, but asked who would actually write the book. I said I would. She rejected us – me because I was a dentist, and Hayim because he was from Yemen and not comfortable writing in English."

The story idea, meanwhile, "hibernated in my mind for another ten years," Winter says, "until I realized that if I marry the Codex of Aleppo with the Black Jews – I get a great story! Once that idea took hold, I wrote the first draft in about three months. That was five years ago. Since then, I have rewritten it many times until I am satisfied that this version, the one published now, is the best I can make it, and that it will be enjoyable to readers."

In the two decades since his first novel was published, Winter feels he has definitely evolved as a writer. "My writing is tighter, with less exposition. I have taken many writing and film courses over the years and understand the craft better. It also means that over the last 20 years, I have read hundreds more books – and the more writers read, the better writers they themselves become."

In the meantime, he remains very enthusiastic about his latest book. The history of the Codex of Aleppo, he says, "is truly a fantastic, true story that few know about it. They have done a documentary on it in Israel, and the *New York Times* wrote an article in its magazine section last summer." Regarding *Savior's Day*, he notes, "One of the best ways to tell the truth is to write it in fiction. We all learn from well-written novels. Since I am not a journalist or a PhD, this is the most credible way I can tell a story."

Savior's Day has just been published by iUniverse.com and is available in hardcover, paperback and eBook through iUniverse, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble.