



PRESS RELEASE POINT

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Novelist Barry James Hickey Ignores Rejection

By Doug Smith

Barry James Hickey checks his Colorado Springs mailbox. Almost every day for the past month a form letter arrives, often from an assistant to a literary agent in New York. Hickey smiles at the envelope, knowing its contents. "Another 'Dear John' letter for CHASING THE RIVER," he says.

He opens the letter and skims the short paragraph. "Thank you for considering us... while we find much merit... due to the extreme demands of the market we have decided to pass..."

"This is way tougher than being a Hollywood actor," Hickey reminds me.

He logs in to his computer, searches a database of 200 literary agents he has researched and types a note: PASS... Hickey places the rejection letter atop a pile of others. "For the IRS," he says.

"They like documentation."

Barry James Hickey knows all about rejection. Before deciding to be a novelist, he spent fourteen years as a Hollywood actor and screenwriter.

"It seems I spent half my life at auditions for movies, plays and commercials."

He stood last in line for a cattle call in Hollywood for his first lead role in REVENGE OF THE STOLEN STARS. After nine hours, he finally got in to see the producer and director. Two weeks later, he was in the jungles of the Philippines and a star was born.

"Persistence really does pay off," Hickey says. "But few have the stomach for it when they weigh rejection into the equation."

Since 1984, Barry James Hickey has had several feature films to his credit not only as an actor, but as a screenwriter, director and producer. He even appeared on Cagney & Lacy and Growing Pains.

"But I wasn't feeling like an actor. I spent all my spare change mailing out scripts, singing and recording music. I thought maybe I belonged in Nashville."

Hickey went to Nashville with a handful of demo songs, made the rounds of music labels and landed a publishing contract.

"I was almost ready to move there, then I was hired to line produce a string of low-budget movies and my window of opportunity was lost," he remembers. "I realized I was stretching myself way too thin. I was trying to do everything at once."

He spent the next three years working for the heads of three major studios and CBS Television, writing screenplays in his spare time.

"I wasn't on the inside track," Hickey says. "My agent wasn't a player. My scripts went nowhere."

Hickey returned to Colorado Springs to get back in touch with his large family of brothers and sisters. "My father was sick, my mother nearing retirement. I still had one last picture to shoot in India," he says. "The producers kept putting it on hold so I raised a few bucks and shot THE SUMMER INTERN, a straight-to-video movie here with Rick Zahradnik, an old college friend. We had a ball making it. The finished picture was nothing like the original script. Actor schedules, locations, time constraints, no money, lots of improv. But we did it. We lost money on it, so it may be a cult film by now."

After the picture wrapped, Hickey went off to India to shoot a Tamil language picture.

"I spent three months there before the producers ran out of money. It was never finished."

Hickey returned to Colorado Springs, had a world premiere for *The Summer Intern*, did the Broadway musical *I DO, I DO* at Castaways in Manitou and vanished from the Arts scene. Sort of...

"I took a job teaching high school English for a few years. I loved it.. Meanwhile, I was trying to decide if I really wanted to go back to Hollywood," Hickey says. "I just wasn't feeling it anymore. I was single, no kids, a bunch of B movies. I felt like a hack."

Now he is on a novelist track with three completed books. His first was recently published through Outskirts Press. *THE FIVE PEARLS* is a bittersweet coming of age novel about a mysterious teacher and his impact on five angry teens in an after-school program.

His second book, *CHASING THE RIVER*, is an adult novel. A marriage is tested when the husband decides to take off for the summer to rejoin old kayaking friends on the wild Arkansas River. The 240-page manuscript is a good read, a real page turner. But so far, all he has is a stack of rejection slips.

"I had the same problem with *THE FIVE PEARLS*. Nobody offered to read the book, everyone passed on my query letter. Just like in Hollywood, I've learned that this is a business of relationships. Getting a book published nowadays is a near impossibility for ninety-nine percent of writers."

"Agents and publishers have tens of thousands of manuscripts to choose from. But what they really want from a novelist isn't a book. It is a platform. How many readers do I have following me? What is my promotion plan? If they decide to represent me, what is their realistic return on investment from an unknown writer? Do I have the money and time and connections to market and promote myself successfully..."

Never a man to wait for the next rejection, Hickey is tweaking his third novel.

"I'm still searching for a title. It's about a handful of down-and-out women that work at a luxury hotel in San Diego. They decide to start a rowing team against the wishes of management. It smacks of *DIVINE SECRETS OF THE YA YA SISTERHOOD*. There is a great underlying subplot with a mystery. I'll probably have to submit the book with a female pseudonym."

Hickey talks of other books in the works. He has ideas for at least a dozen, some based on his unread screenplays.

"I tend to write stories about average people trapped in extraordinary situations that change their lives forever. You might label me a nostalgic romantic."

He hopes to return to teaching soon so he can take summers off to promote his books.

"It would be nice to make money with them, but at the same time, writing is a real need for me, a form of expression. It's a very personal thing, writing a book, a wonderful pastime. I spend hundreds of hours at a computer, surrounded by research and maps and character bibles as I thread together a story. There is always a time in the process when the characters jump off the page and dictate their arc. I love to entertain and inform others. I want to write the kinds of books that readers can't put down. Blame it on my show business past, but a book is performance art as well, one that I am wholly responsible for."

THE FIVE PEARLS is available at Amazon.com, Borders, or Barnes and Noble. You can also find it at the Pikes Peak Library in the New Releases section next to John Grisham.

You may contact the author at: barryjameshickey@yahoo.com.

As for me, I lived in Colorado Springs for 28 years. Barry inspired me to follow my bliss. I am in Hollywood now, living Barry James Hickey's old dream. I am a Hollywood actor. My apartment is just below the Hollywood sign.

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