

## ***THE CONFLUENCE MEDIA KIT***

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## I. Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New LGBT Time Travel novel to Be Published by Literary Wanderlust**

Denver, CO, March 1, 2020— *The Confluence*, a literary LGBT time travel novel by debut author Gregory Josephs, will be published by Literary Wanderlust on July 1, 2020

*The gods created it to ensure a perfect timeline... so why would the coin link together two people from a half century apart?*

Elliot, a young man postponing college to save up money and leave his difficult home life, finds himself stuck in the past when Cam, his secret childhood crush, returns to town. Elliot is forced to confront old wounds and is struggling to confess his true feelings about Cam, when he finds a mysterious coin that brings on strange hallucinations of a missing girl from 1959.

Deep in the swampy lush lands of 1950's Massachusetts, eight-year-old Sofia is shocked when she, but not her parents, sees Elliot standing in her flower garden. Elliot warns Sofia of the double-homicide of her parents set to happen in six days. The case was marked as unsolvable in Elliot's time because the clues all were washed away by a devastating once-in-a-century-flood. In view of this news, Sofia struggles to convince her parents she isn't simply an imaginative little girl but communicating with Elliot from the future.

With time growing short, Sofia desperately tries to ensure her parents stay alive, Elliot battles against the inner demons ripping him away from Sofia's numbered days, and the harbingers of fate fight to take back control of the coin that binds Sofia and Elliot together. Can Elliot overcome his own problems as he and his grade school crush attempt to stop a sixty-year old cold case?

*The Confluence* is set for publication on July 1, 2020.

### About Gregory Josephs

Gregory Josephs is an author of speculative and LGBT fiction who spends a lot of time indulging his insatiable curiosity—about everything. He believes in self-love, authentic food, and that procrastination is the product of an intensely creative mind.

Though he was raised in Colorado, Gregory spent many of his summers in Wisconsin, where he fell in love with the idea of everything North.

Growing up in the west, at some point there was more hot sauce than blood running through his veins, and thanks to his foodie parents it's a rare day that he doesn't down a jalapeño. He's a foodie too, now (with a serious addiction to cooking magazines). When he isn't writing he's likely in the kitchen fermenting something—bread dough, cheese, sauerkraut, and of course, peppers!

Unable to resist the allure of a northern climate, Gregory relocated to Massachusetts in his early twenties, where he's lived ever since. He is passionate about the local food movement and has been volunteering one day a week at an organic community farm since 2016.

Alongside his photographer husband, Gregory regularly collects Fiestaware and sips whiskey while entertaining his two rambunctious cats, and a dog. He can't imagine a better life.

#### About Literary Wanderlust

Literary Wanderlust publishes well-written novels and short story anthologies in the romance, science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, women's fiction, and mystery/suspense genres, as well as nonfiction. Visit us at [www.literarywanderlust.com](http://www.literarywanderlust.com).

## II. Author Biography

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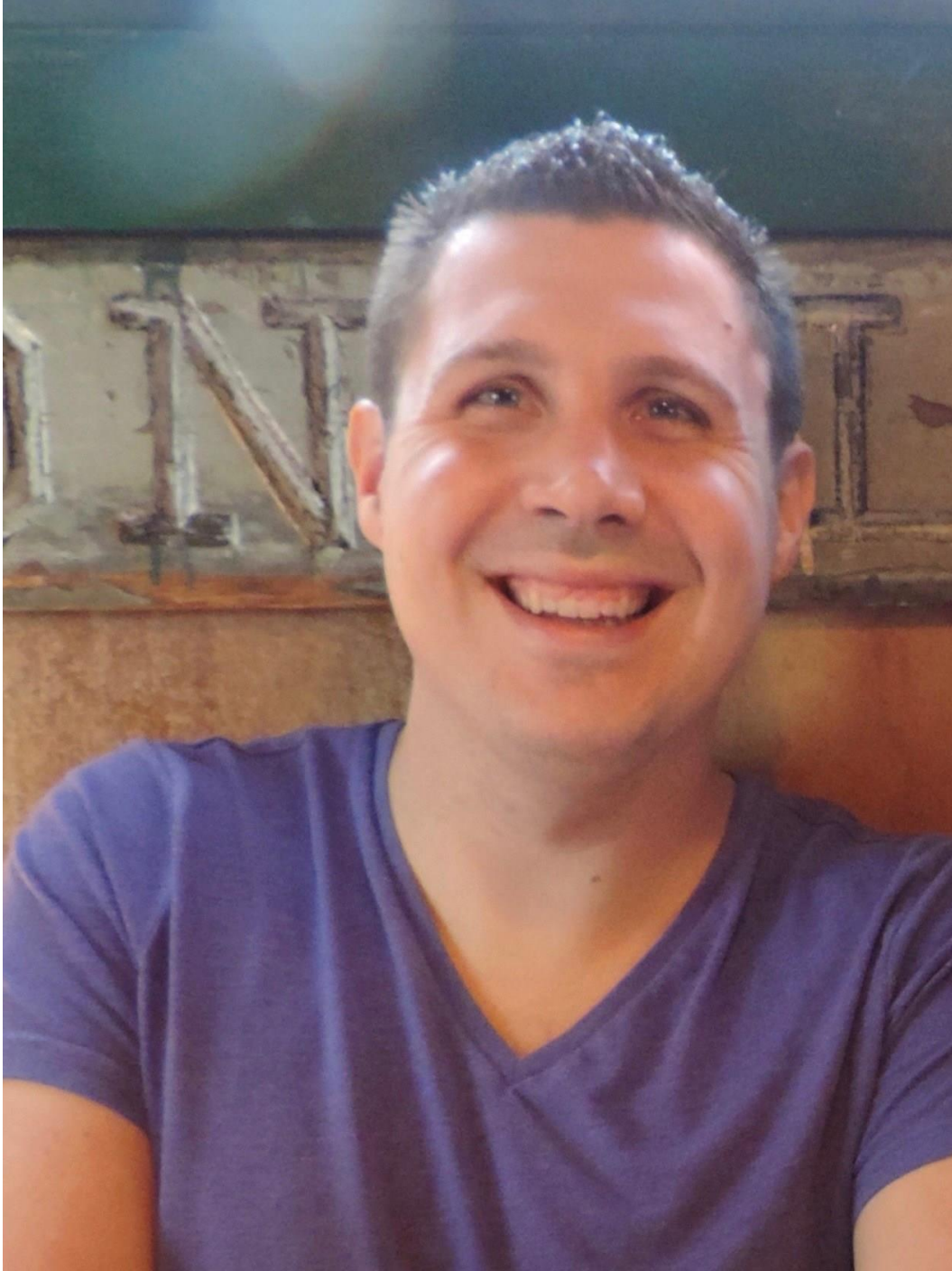
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[www.gregoryjosephs.com](http://www.gregoryjosephs.com)

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### III. Author Photo



IV. Book Photo



## V. Sample Q&A

Can you describe what your book is about in one sentence?

When a young man in the present begins to see and interact with a doomed child living sixty years in the past—the face of his small New England town's greatest tragedy—he realizes if he can change the past, he might save her future.

What is the theme of THE CONFLUENCE?

The overarching theme is one of free will struggling and triumphing over fate. THE CONFLUENCE is about rejecting what life, society, the universe expects of us and finding the courage to forge our own paths against adversity in all its forms.

It's also about friendship, identity, and love, and the way these things intersect as we endeavor to control our own destinies.

How do you develop your plots and characters?

I'm a hybrid between a plotter and a pantsier. My ideal writing method involves putting characters in situations and letting them figure it out as they go. THE CONFLUENCE didn't entirely lend itself to this, though. Because it involves two timelines that have to intersect precisely, it took more planning in the beginning than I might typically do.

I started with a calendar and wrote down the major plot points on dates where events in the separate timelines needed to match up. Then when I got to the actual writing, I went more into pantsier-mode. I knew where characters needed to end up, and when, and provided situations that would drive them toward those inevitabilities. How they ultimately got from point A to point B was never really planned.

In terms of developing characters themselves, I think that comes from situations also. In real life, the way we respond to events big and small help to shape us. And so it is in writing fiction as well. I had an idea of who each of my characters were as people when I started writing THE CONFLUENCE but used the unfolding events of the story to get to know them better. How is Elliot going to react to this? What does that say about him? Then maybe I'd get an inkling of something in his past that caused him to be a certain way and think, hey, if I can present situation X, then maybe I can dig deeper into this.

And it doesn't take long. Once I feel like I know the characters better, the plotter in me can throw in situations later in the story that help them grow. Again, it's a sort of a this-is-where-they-are, this-is-where-they-need-to-go thing. Despite our best efforts, I think as people we tend to grow better organically than through our own focused intents. And ... so it is in writing fiction.

What was your favorite part of writing THE CONFLUENCE?

The intensity! I'm not generally a fast writer, but when I started this project, I found a way to completely immerse myself in it. I sat down every morning, cleared my head, and pushed. I was able to complete a first draft in about eight weeks. I don't know if I'll ever be able to write like that again, but the experience was exhilarating.

Give us some insight into your main character. What does he/she do that is special? What are his/her character flaws?

At the beginning of the book, Elliot is a few days away from his twentieth birthday, and he's a mess. After the tragic death of his father when he was thirteen, in a lot of ways his emotional development stalled. He'd been on the verge of coming to terms with his sexuality, and everything was looking good. But after his father, his mother fell apart, money grew scarce, and he had to focus more on surviving than figuring out who he was as a person and where he fit into the world. We get the idea, though it isn't expressly stated in the book, that he missed out on a lot of normal teenage experiences. In this way, by the time we meet him, he's legally an adult, but feels emotionally stunted.

But beneath his struggles regarding his sexuality and his tendency to feel sorry for himself—to kind of play the victim all the time—Elliot has a heart of gold. When he meets eight-year-old Sofia, he immediately finds a way to put his own issues second to hers. He is stubborn and resourceful.

I think Elliot feels a lack of unconditional love in his life (he's wrong, there is plenty of it, he just doesn't know right away where to look), so with Sofia he is determined to be there. To keep showing up. To figure out how to save her. He feels like there isn't anyone in his life that would do that for him, and he knows he's the only one with the ability to do that for her. That's what makes him special. Even with his own life in tatters, he digs deep enough to try to make a difference for this girl sixty years in the past.



If you could spend time with a character from your book, which character would it be? And what would you do during that day?

Cameron. Hands down. I think that, personality-wise, he and I are most similar. He's thoughtful, open-minded, and wise for his age. I think we'd probably talk about vegetables and books and make some kind of delicious food.

Tell us about the conflict in this book. What is at stake for your characters?

At the surface, the conflict revolves around Sofia. She is alive in 1959, and from his vantage point in 2019, Elliot knows she is going to disappear after the murder of her parents and a catastrophic flood in a few days' time. How is anyone's guess. Elliot is determined to save her, but to do so he has to convince her she is in danger, and she has to convince her parents. There's no actual time travel in this book, so everything has to be done from the characters' own timelines. For Sofia, the stakes are literal life or death.

On a broader level, the conflict is about fate versus free will. There's something bigger going on that, out of necessity, Elliot and Sofia don't get to know much about. The entire scenario is part of *Le Jeu*, or *The Game* in which these ancient beings are observing and testing the premise that humankind is better served by self-determination than by pre-determination. In a way, Elliot and Sofia embody the roles of "chosen ones," but because the whole thing is about fighting pre-determination, they're not allowed to know that their actions are at all important outside the bubbles of their own lives.

There is another conflict that weaves itself through, which is Elliot's struggle with his sexuality. I love coming out stories, and I love coming of age stories, and there is some of both here. For Elliot, it's happiness at stake. He's been miserable for a long time, and the events of the book give him the chance to stop feeling sorry for himself and find a way back to who he really is.

What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating THE CONFLUENCE?

I learned—maybe already knew deep down—that the em dash is my favorite piece of punctuation. Also, when I write and edit, as hard as I try to cut out empty words, some are just invisible to me. Susan Brooks, Literary Wanderlust's Editor-in-Chief identified my gross overuse of the word *again*. As a personal growth exercise, I did an intensive line edit myself and cut the instances of *again*

from about 350 to around 200. Then, using word's FIND command, I cut out another 125 superfluous uses that I still hadn't noticed. So, I suppose it is surprising to me how blind I can be to certain things in my writing. More eyes on the words are always better.

The other surprising thing I learned was how rewarding collaboration can be. While working through this with my phenomenal editor Patrick Munnely, I was amazed by the ways Pat picked up on elements of my story that were bothering me and knew exactly what to do to fix them. He even found things that were bothering me that I didn't *know* were giving me so much trouble until he pointed them out.

My first novel was self-published. While I enjoyed that process, and put out the best book I was able, I know this one is light-years better if for no other reason than it has been in the hands of other talented people. They've pushed me and this story not to accept *good enough*.

How do you choose which genre to write in?

It's important for me to write what I know, be that through research or experience, but I find the *through experience* part to be both easier and more rewarding. As a gay man, I think I'll always write LGBT characters. I love the opportunity to add to the culture's literature while still writing books that are for everyone. I like to be able to show that, despite our diversity as humans, we are blessed with an inherent sameness.

Beyond LGBT, my biggest interests are speculative fiction, magical realism, and historical fiction. When I think of a story idea, I start to imagine how I can work these genres into it.

Honestly, I don't think a lot about genre when I'm starting to write. It's a blessing and a curse. I think my work would fit more neatly into a box if I paid more attention, but I also think the genre bending is what helps make my work unique.

What makes your book different from other books in your genre?

A lot! When I was querying, I struggled to find good comp titles. As I've sought author endorsements, it's been the same story. I think this book is different because it's kind of a time travel novel, but it isn't. It's a coming out story, but

that's not the central focus. It's got hints of the "chosen one" trope but doesn't go there.

Also, a lot of LGBT literature is dripping with sex. There's nothing wrong with that, but you won't find that in this book. There's romance, and there's longing, but the characters are never overly sexualized.

Of all the characters you have created, which is your favorite and why?

I don't think I could pick a favorite character, but there are two in this book that I thoroughly enjoyed writing.

The first is Sofia. I love how clever and excitable she is. She is innocent, but not naïve. She is smart and sharp-tongued, and I adored every opportunity to go inside her head.

The second would be Destin. By the time she shows up in this story, she and her powers are severely diminished, but we get glimpses of what a force she used to be. In life and in fiction I'm drawn to powerful female characters. I could easily—happily—write a whole book about Destin. Who she was. Maybe who she becomes after this story is over. Oh, and she and I have identical taste in cocktails.

Tell us about your background. What made you decide to pursue writing?

It's such a cliché, but I knew from about first grade that this is what I was meant to do. I think between watching the yearly broadcast of *The Wizard of Oz* on TV, and my mother reading me *The Chronicles of Narnia* before bed, this fire sparked in me. I loved getting lost in these imaginary worlds and wanted nothing more than to make up worlds of my own and share them with everyone. I started writing stories. I started inventing characters in my mind.

I wrote my first big chunk of a novel when I was in the seventh grade, but that dropped off. For a while I turned away from writing to pursue music composition. Then, right as I was coming out at seventeen, I wrote about 40k words of another novel I didn't finish.

I went to college for a while, studying music composition and French, but a personal tragedy in my early twenties knocked me off course. I chose not to deal with it in the most constructive way, packed up my life, and moved clear across the country. It took a while, and it was a circuitous path, but eventually I found

my way back to writing. I had to tell the story of that tragedy through the medium of fiction. It was important to me both personally and creatively. It was a chance for me to finish healing, and also the kick I needed to get serious about writing.

That first novel took six years to complete. Mostly written in fits and starts. But finishing it taught me the discipline I now apply to the craft. I'm continuing to learn and grow. I'm happy to say there won't be any more detours.

What is your writing process?

It starts with an idea. I chew on it. I pace around and think. Sometimes it incubates for weeks. Months. Eventually it becomes less nebulous, and at that point I'm ready to sit down and start.

When I'm drafting, it goes like this: Get up in the morning. Make coffee. Reread the last couple pages of yesterday's progress, then sit down and crank out some words. I try to put down between 2000 and 2500 words in a session. Then I export the whole work in progress as an EPUB. I read the day's new material on my iPad during my commute into work and highlight errors/make notes about things I don't think work or need to be reworded. Then the next morning I start by making those corrections as I re-read and plunge into the new words for the day.

In this way, when I finish the first draft, it's kind of already a second draft.

When I'm editing, I always have to read the entire manuscript, even if I know there are only certain passages that need work. There's always something to tinker with. Something that can be improved.

Tell us about the challenges of getting your book published. How did it come about?

The biggest challenge was getting to the "yes." In all, I queried about thirty agents with this project before I connected with Pat through #DVPit. I think I ended up in a lot of *maybe* piles, and in retrospect, I know that my use of a prologue probably disqualified this project in the eyes of a lot of agents. Even though I queried my first novel, when I started sending this one around, I still had a lot to learn.

But—and I can't stress this enough—I'm so grateful to every agent that passed on this project. If one of them had picked it up, I wouldn't have connected with Literary Wanderlust. I think, unfortunately, there's sometimes this stigma in the writing community that working with a small press that accepts unagented submissions is akin to winning a silver medal. This couldn't be farther from the truth. If one of those agents called me up tomorrow and said "We want to buy out your contract. Come work with us!" I'd vehemently decline. Working with Pat has been an absolute joy, and without his vision, this book just wouldn't be what it is today. And Susan exudes such passion, professionalism, and demand for excellence that I can't help but strive to be a constantly better writer.

What kind of feedback have you had from your readers and editors?

Overwhelmingly positive. I think there is a lot of excitement around *THE CONFLUENCE*, and that's a great feeling for a writer.

If you knew then (before embarking on the journey of publishing through Literary Wanderlust) what you know now, what would you tell yourself?

Don't write a prologue! You are NOT the exception to the rule. Ha!

Please give us a quick list of the pros and cons for the traditional publishing route.

Pros: No financial burden on the author (for editing and production), a collaborative editing process, support from industry professionals every step of the way, working with people who are as invested in selling your book as you are, help with marketing

Cons: Slower than self-publishing, giving up complete creative control, lower royalties than self-publishing

I'm not too worried about the cons. I really wanted to experience the traditional route with this book, and I don't regret my decision one bit.

What is your favorite genre to read?

I really love modern literary fiction. Basically, any fiction that warrants an interview on NPR.

What are some of your favorite authors or books?

Right now I'm obsessed with Lauren Groff. I also love everything by Patricia Highsmith. Other favorites include Stephen King, Philip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, Ann Patchett, Christopher and Anne Rice, Tom Perotta ... It's a long list.

Who are your readers and why will they love your book?

I won't lie: this is a tough question. I think my readers are thoughtful and educated students of the human experience. They're people who love beautiful imagery and thinking outside the box. They're members of the LGBT community and our allies. They like organic vegetables.

They'll love the book, because its twists and turns will surprise them. They'll also see themselves reflected in the characters, or maybe see the reflections of people they know.

What other projects are you working on?

I'm starting research on my next novel. If all goes as planned, it'll be an imaginative retelling of the Breton legend of the city of Ys, set in the American West from the 1830s through present day. Another split narrative. It's going to be really ambitious, and I'm kind of terrified. I think I can pull it off though ...

Do you have a day job in addition to being a writer? If so, what do you do during the day?

I work in campus recreation, specifically aquatics. Over the years I've worn many hats—lifeguard, swimming instructor, lifeguard instructor, instructor trainer (certifying new instructors), deck manager, aquatics director for our summer camp. As time has passed I've pared that down. Now, for all intents and purposes, I'm a full-time unionized lifeguard. It's good work, if you can get it. I get to hang out at a pool every day, and I don't bring any work stress home with me at the end of the day. It also allows me to keep my brain fresh for writing.

I also work at my local community farm one day a week throughout most of the year. I have a work share, which means that in exchange for my help, I get a full share of produce every week. It's intensely rewarding work, and helped inspire the setting and circumstances behind THE CONFLUENCE.

What motivates you to write?

Another cliché. I can't *not* write. When I don't have a steady creative output, my mood suffers drastically. I get irritable and restless. I have to let the stories out.

I'm also writing for a better life, and that drives me forward. I like my aquatics job, but the hours are terrible, and they take a toll on my home life. I don't need to become a millionaire author, but I'm determined to get to a point where I can use writing as my primary source of income. I think there are ways to achieve that today. My husband and I live in an area with an astronomical cost of living. A few years from now, we hope to cash out the equity in our condo and relocate somewhere quieter. Someplace we don't need as much. At that point, hopefully I can lean into writing full-time.

But the words I write today help make that future more and more viable. So, I'd say that's a huge motivator.

Why did you write THE CONFLUENCE?

As I've hinted, my first self-published novel was the book I *had* to write. I'll always love that book, but I'm not sure it's the kind of book I ever want to write again. THE CONFLUENCE, however, is exactly the kind of story I *want* to write.

I had this experience with an old abandoned house when I was seventeen that has always stuck with me. I knew I wanted to write about it someday. Then, after my first book, I was thinking really hard about what I wanted to tackle next. As I mentioned earlier, I'm all about the write-what-you-know thing. I started thinking about how I could combine the idea of this old house with other things I love: farming, New England, running, thoughts about time, coming out and coming of age stories.

Eventually it all clicked in my mind. The concept came together and I thought, yes! I have to write this book.

Who did you write THE CONFLUENCE for (audience)?

Honestly, I suppose I initially wrote it for myself. But thinking about audience, as mentioned earlier, I wrote this for thoughtful, curious people. This is for anyone who loves the beauty of language, good stories, and isn't averse to the strange. It's for people who love a little darkness, some mystery. And it's for people who've struggled to find where they fit into the world, or who struggle to accept themselves as they are.

Where can we find you online?

Lots of places! I'm most active on Twitter and my website, but I'm also on Facebook and Goodreads.

Twitter: @gjosephs

Facebook: /gjosephsauthor

[www.gregoryjosephs.com](http://www.gregoryjosephs.com)

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Make writing a priority. I only accomplish what I do by giving myself over to it completely. When I'm drafting, especially, I put everything else on the backburner. Sometimes the grocery shopping doesn't get done. Once in a while I forget to pay a bill exactly on time. My poor husband has to pick up that slack. But I need that intensity. I need to be so invested that it's torture to stop and take time to shower.

I understand not everyone is this way, and other people have responsibilities that can't be ignored, like children and family obligations. Multiple jobs. I know not everyone has the luxury of giving themselves over as completely as I can.

If you're an aspiring writer, or a writer in progress, you don't have to go to my extreme. But you do need to make it a priority. None of us have enough time to do everything we want and need to do, but carve it out whenever and wherever you can. If it's important to you, isn't it worth the sacrifice?

What are the most important elements of good writing? According to you, what tools are must-haves for writers?

My two favorite elements of good writing are imagery and dialogue. Choose interesting verbs and adjectives. Did the sun set before the moon rose? Or did the sun tuck itself to sleep beneath the horizon before the moon crawled out from under the distant hills. That's just an off-the-cuff example, and probably not particularly good, but you get my point.

And dialogue! Writer's should listen—with intent—to people speaking. Real life conversations wander. People cut each other off. Thoughts trail into the ether. I love writing dialogue that gets interrupted, so I love reading dialogue that feels



broken and messy at times. Keep it authentic and real. Don't always make characters wait their turns. And try to give each character a particular voice. Is there a turn of phrase they always use? Do they structure their sentences in certain ways?

What question have you always wanted to be asked in an interview? How would you answer that question?

Sorry, this one is a cop-out. My dream has always been to be interviewed on NPR someday. Any question asked of me on-air would qualify as one I've always wanted to be asked. And my answer would probably be a little rambling, but utterly truthful.

Do you try to be as original as possible? Or do you prefer to stick to what you know your readers and publishing house are looking for?

Yes, I try to be as original as possible. I want to write books that will sell. I want to write books that will delight my readers and inspire my publisher. But I also want to write books that are art. That are an authentic representation of my vision. That doesn't always fit into a predictably-sized box.

When did you first experience the power of literature?

I always loved reading, but the coming out story inside *A DENSITY OF SOULS* by Christopher Rice made me feel *seen* for the first time. It inspired me to start my own coming out process and take it by the horns.

How much time do you spend writing per day / week?

Generally, between two and four hours a day, Monday through Friday. This includes drafting, editing, blogging, marketing, and time spent on social media and doing other platform-building stuff.

What do you tend to edit out of your books after the initial writing?

Nothing! I rewrite lots of sentences and try to tighten things up, but I actually tend to add things in as I edit, rather than take them out. In the future, I'll be looking for more of those empty, invisible words like *again* that I tend to overuse. But I don't think I've ever cut a scene.

What are the hardest scenes for you to write?

Writing action scenes doesn't come naturally to me. It's a struggle for me to keep the pace moving without my sentences becoming choppy.

Also, I'm not great at jumping across large swaths of time. If, say, three weeks pass between scene A and B, I have a really difficult time bridging that gap with a simple "Three weeks later..."

Any last thoughts?

No. This has been thorough, and a great pleasure. Thanks.

## **VI. Book Synopsis**

*The gods created it to ensure a perfect timeline... so why would the coin link together two people from a half century apart?*

Elliot, a young man postponing college to save up money and leave his difficult home life, finds himself stuck in the past when Cam, his secret childhood crush, returns to town. Elliot is forced to confront old wounds and is struggling to confess his true feelings about Cam, when he finds a mysterious coin that brings on strange hallucinations of a missing girl from 1959.

Deep in the swampy lush lands of 1950's Massachusetts, eight-year-old Sofia is shocked when she, but not her parents, sees Elliot standing in her flower garden. Elliot warns Sofia of the double-homicide of her parents set to happen in six days. The case was marked as unsolvable in Elliot's time because the clues all were washed away by a devastating once-in-a-century-flood. In view of this news, Sofia struggles to convince her parents she isn't simply an imaginative little girl but communicating with Elliot from the future.

With time growing short, Sofia desperately tries to ensure her parents stay alive, Elliot battles against the inner demons ripping him away from Sofia's numbered days, and the harbingers of fate fight to take back control of the coin that binds Sofia and Elliot together. Can Elliot overcome his own problems as he and his grade school crush attempt to stop a sixty-year old cold case?

## VII. Sample Chapter

### Chapter Four

August 15, 2019 - Thursday

Elliot finally found the attendant for the Reference Desk in a particularly dark corner of the periodicals section of the Haverford Free Library. The short woman, nearly as wide as she was tall, was struggling to push a bound annual of National Geographic onto a shelf barely within her reach. "Can I help you with that?" he asked.

She abandoned her struggle and turned to him with a broad smile. "Oh yes, thank you. I should've brought the step stool. I didn't realize this was so high up."

Elliot took the volume and placed it neatly onto the shelf. "I wonder if you could help me. Do you have any old newspaper accounts of the flood in 1959?"

The woman considered. "I should think so. Probably on microfiche. We were supposed to digitize all that back in '08, but then the recession hit and, well, you know. Projects got shelved. Do you know how to use the readers? We've got the old ones that are kind of like microscopes."

He nodded. "Yeah, I think I used one in middle school."

"Alright, give me a minute. That was, what—August? Wow, sixty years ago this month. What a terrible tragedy." She considered. "My mother used to tell me stories. Homes washed down for miles. Lucky for Haverford it was only the Pentucket corridor that got hit—the Merrimack swelled but never went over its banks. Kind of a morbid thing to be researching, huh?"

"Yeah, I uh...Got my syllabus early for the American history course I'm taking this fall at the community college. I'll need to write a paper on local history and figured I'd get a head start. Everyone else will probably write about the mills and factories, or the colonists buying the land from the Native Americans, so I thought I'd take a different approach."

She nodded her approval and bumbled away, returning a minute later with an enormous smile. "Looks like you're in luck. 1959 was one of the years we actually got scanned. Follow me." She led him to an ancient computer console and showed him how to work the system. "Now, it's not like Google—not yet. You can't search *flood* or anything, just dates. Start anywhere in August of '59 and you'll find it. I'm sure it was front-page."

He thanked her, and after she walked away, he started with today's date—the 15<sup>th</sup>—sixty years before. He clicked forward from day to day, for a little more than a week, until the screen lit up with an evening edition from Sunday, August 23.

The photograph on the front page was devastating. Taken from a window in one of the mill buildings at the confluence—the place the Pentucket emptied into the Merrimack—the photo showed an island of destruction churning through murky water. The roof of a house peeled off like the lid of an aluminum can bobbed alongside shattered tree limbs and a menagerie of incidental detritus. Though the image was grainy, Elliot imagined he could make out car tires, and mailboxes. One particular bump nosing up out of the dark water looked like the front end of a sedan.

#### WALL OF WATER WASHES OUT PENTUCKET CORRIDOR

Early last evening, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, at approximately 6:20 pm, a wall of water reaching a height of 20 feet in places, cascaded down the path of the Pentucket River, according to witnesses. Early reports from officials suggest debris blocking a bridge below Lake Haverford caused a damming effect, later resulting in the wave of terror when the said bridge gave way in the early evening.

It may be several days before the full scope of the destruction is known. At the time of printing, it is confirmed that at least 17 homes have been destroyed or irreparably damaged. In addition, at least four persons have been reported missing and are presumed drowned...

...While the Merrimack came close to overflowing its banks, water levels already high on account of this summer's record-breaking rainfall, downtown Haverford, the riverfront and mill districts were blessedly spared. The bulk of the debris has remained within the confluence, and rescuers continue to search the water for any sign of the missing...

Heartbreaking as the story was, most of this Elliot knew already. He clicked forward to the next day, and the headline caused him to catch his breath.

#### COUPLE FOUND MURDERED. YOUNG DAUGHTER STILL MISSING.

Late last evening, the bodies of Robert and Margaret Calisti, co-owners and operators of the Wright-Calisti Farm, were discovered in the farmhouse on their property, dead of apparent multiple stab wounds, according to police. The discovery was reported by one George Calisti, brother to the deceased and co-owner of the farm, who was forced to report the crime in person at the police station, as telephone service at the murder scene has been disrupted by Saturday's flood.

According to police, Mr. Calisti was hysterical with grief and has been admitted to the Haverford Regional Hospital. At this time, he is not believed to be a suspect.

Pressed for comment on the existence of other suspects in the nascent investigation, police directed the Haverford Herald to Detective Arthur Mulvaney, who will be heading the police inquiries.

"At this time, we have identified a suspect, but are not yet at liberty to discuss the details," Mulvaney said. "We understand both the violent nature of this crime, and the fact the deceased were much-loved members of our community, will draw great interest among the residents of Haverford. Unfortunately, the flood has had the effect of compromising the crime scene. While I have every faith justice will

be served in this matter, I ask for patience as the department and myself work to solve this horrible crime.”

In a further, tragic twist, the daughter of the deceased, one Sofia Calisti, aged 8, is unaccounted. Mulvaney expressed optimism that she may yet be found alive. “I believe it is significant that the daughter was not found with the parents,” Mulvaney said. “There is every possibility she was able to escape the attacker and may yet be found alive. I can say with absolute certainty this crime occurred before Saturday’s flood, and therefore have no reason to believe young Ms. Calisti was caught up in that other tragedy.”

Mr. Mulvaney urges anyone with information as to the whereabouts of Sofia Calisti to contact the Haverford Police immediately. A photograph will be published if and when one can be obtained.

Elliot felt the urge to continue on—to keep following the thread of the story through the archives—but it was too much. He imagined Sofia fleeing from an attacker, terrified. Or had she succumbed, and somehow her body washed away, even as the corpses of her parents remained in the house? He closed the newspaper file and stood, slowly walking toward the edge of the periodicals section, yearning for the warmth and light of the hot August sun outside.

As he passed the Reference Desk, the attendant raised her face from the magazine she was perusing. “Did you find what you needed?”

“Um,” he said. “Some of it. Is that—is it available anytime?”

She smiled. “Anytime we’re open. Now you know where it is, feel free to use it as you need.”

“Thanks,” he said, then headed for the exit.



Lindsey was waiting on the porch of her family’s cozy two-story when Elliot walked up the garden path thirty minutes later. Rising gingerly out of her wicker chair, she greeted him with a warm smile. “So, which is it?” she asked.

“Huh?”

“Are you more Kristen Wiig or Melissa McCarthy?”

Elliot regarded her, confused. “What are you—”

“Ghostbusters, dummy!” She punched him lightly on the arm. “How’s all your creepy paranormal investigation going? Or did you get heat stroke after our last run?”

“Har, har!” he replied, rolling his eyes as he started to sit.

“Oh no! On your feet. You’re late already, and I have stuff to do after we’re done.”

“Fine,” he said. “Ready?”

“Let’s go.” She started at a slow trot down past the garden gate. He followed, and when they turned right onto Pentucket Road, he began to match her stride—they were going for six miles today, no need to take it out too fast.

“I didn’t have a heat stroke,” he said.

“No? So, what did you see?”

"There's a little girl. Her name is Sofia Calisti, and she vanished sometime before the flood in 1959."

"As in *the* Calistis? Like, Calisti Hardware? Calisti Real Estate? Like...Cameron Calisti?"

"One and the same. I even talked to Cam about it yesterday at the farm. He confirmed she was real—like, that she lived. And she disappeared."

Lindsey stopped hard and placed her hands on her knees. "Sorry, what? *You had a conversation with Cam?*"

"Come on, Lindsey," he said, jogging in place. "It's no big deal."

"I think it's a *huge* deal. You guys were so close when we were younger." She started to run again. "Does this mean—you guys should hang out. He could help you, you know—"

Elliot felt his face flush a deep red and knew he couldn't blame it on the as-yet minimal exertion from their run. "Help me what, exactly? Come out? Why is everyone always so concerned about my sexuality? Jesus Christ."

"Woah. Sensitive. I'm just saying—"

"Well, I wish you wouldn't."

"Fine. Lips are sealed, except—I was going to say I'm headed into the city on Sunday. Going to see Jared. Do you want to come?"

Elliot sucked in his breath and held it, despite the burning he was starting to feel in his lungs. Jared was Lindsey's older brother, getting ready to enter his senior year at Harvard. He was intelligent, attractive, confident, and—like Cameron—unabashedly open about his sexuality. Jared saw right through Elliot's facade. In fact, Elliot was fairly certain it was Jared who'd put the idea he was gay into Lindsey's head in the first place. He could imagine exactly how it would go: an afternoon at a little cafe in Cambridge, constantly avoiding Jared's all-knowing gaze, hours of trying to blend in with the walls, lest someone expose his well-guarded, but apparently easily-discerned secret.

And then, of course, there would be the *feelings* to deal with—the unwelcome sense of longing that would linger for hours, even days afterward. The phantom kiss of the sun long into the evening after a day spent on the beach. With Jared, it wasn't attraction in the traditional sense—not like he felt it with Cam. It was a realization there was another way to exist. A different way to be. An alien happiness. Nothing was more terrifying.

"I think I'm busy. Sorry."

"Shut up, Elliot. You're not busy. You're coming. In other news—more about this Sofia. How do you know she's real? How do *I* know she's real?"

"Great question. I don't know. I can't even convince *her* that she's a ghost."

"I'm still saying heat stroke."

Elliot shook his head, hard. "Enough talking for now. If we keep a pace where we can have a conversation, we won't finish until it's dark."

"Sheesh," Lindsey said. "Sorry." Then she leaned into her stride and pushed forward.



When he returned home after the run, Elliot's mother—on the sofa, wine and knitting needles in hand—informed him everyone would be around for dinner. Left up to her, that translated to cold-cuts between stale bread, so Elliot offered to cook. He went out and picked up three chicken breasts to grill, then prepared a salad of fresh tomatoes, cucumber, and onions—all from the community farm—and tossed it with salt and white wine vinegar from an old bottle starting to grow a skin. Later, once Tony got home, Elliot fired up the grill. He'd brought home some plump pattypans the day before, and he sliced and brushed them with oil to put on beside the chicken.

The meal came together, and they had a seat at the little round dining table. Mostly they ate in silence—if you could count Tony as *silent*. Elliot cringed inwardly every time Tony took a bite—teeth gnashing behind a half-open mouth and inhaling sharply between swallows, as though the simple act of eating left him out of breath.

Halfway through dinner, his mother said, "You did good, kiddo. What is this vegetable you grilled?"

Elliot tried to ignore the slight slur at the edge of her words and take the compliment for what it was. "Pattypan," he said. "It's a summer squash."

"It's good! Tony, don't you think it's good?"

Winded. Ruddy-faced. Tony grunted.

His mother nodded her approval, then her eyes widened. "What's the date today?"

"The fifteenth," Elliot said. "Why do you ask?"

"Hoo! Time flies! Your birthday is—Monday?"

He fought from rolling his eyes. How many decent mothers needed to ask their own children to confirm their date of birth? "Yep. Twenty years old." There was ice in his voice, and he hated it.

She didn't seem to notice. "Well, we're going to have to *celebrate*. That's a big deal. No longer a teenager. Tony, isn't that a big deal?" Tony grunted and shoved an over-large slice of chicken into his greasy mouth. "What do you want? Anything. I mean, within reason, right? And what do you want to do?"

He sucked air through his teeth. "I don't know. We don't have to do anything."

"Elliot! Nonsense. I'll plan something. We'll do something really nice. But come on. What do you want? What do you need?"

To move out, he thought. To feel like an actual adult, and not an overgrown adolescent. To be able to afford a four-year school. To be rid of the disgusting man sitting across the table, and to reclaim some semblance of the mother I once knew.

But then he registered the excitement on her face, and it reminded him of the woman she'd been before. There she was, if only for a moment: the mother he'd had when his father was alive. He smiled in spite of himself because she was still in there somewhere. "Well, I really need a new pair of running shoes."

Horrible Tony laughed and swallowed hard. "Oh, is that all?"



He set his face. "Yeah, that's all."

"What a goddamned waste. Maybe if you *worked* a little more and *ran* a little less, you could buy your own goddamned shoes rather than putting all that on your poor mom. When I was twenty—"

"I *do* work!"

"What, two mornings a week at your little hippy farm? Picking *arugula*? Fucking *pattypan*? More like *pansy-pants*." Amused by his own dim wit, Tony erupted in laughter so hard it ended in a coughing fit.

"Go ahead and laugh. I still see you shoving my fucking *pansy-pants* into your fat face."

Tony slammed his meaty fists down onto the dining table, rattling the plates and silverware with a seismic jolt. "Listen here you little *faggot*. You'd better watch your tongue and remember who's paying the bills around here."

To the bleating protests of his mother, Elliot shoved his chair back and stood up. "Elliot!" she cried. "Elliot, sit down please."

"No Mom. How can you sit there and let him talk to me like that? Who does he think he is? We were fine without him. We were *fine*. I'm out of here."

She turned to Tony, and for a brief moment, Elliot felt his heart swell with love as he regarded the rage coloring her normally too-white cheeks. "Tony! You apologize to him. You fix this."

Tony laughed, but when he spoke, his voice was dead calm and full of menace. "You'd do well to remember who's carrying the weight around here too, Lari. Now shut the fuck up and have another glass, why don't you?" Without looking at him, Tony continued. "Go ahead, boy. Run away like you always do."

Elliot shook his head slowly, not attempting to hide the hot tears that streaked down his cheeks. "No problem. I'm gone."



The sun was dipping low as Elliot leaned his bike against the usual sapling, and commenced the slow, short walk to the old farmhouse. All around, the forest and meadow basked in the rich light of the golden hour—soft, warm, tender, hopeful—but he noticed none of it. He was a husk as empty and rotten as the farmhouse itself. As he sat clumsily on the second step of the porch, he realized there was no magnetism left to this place. Whatever he'd seen in it before had been an illusion—the naïve hope that something extraordinary might rise from the dusty detritus of circumstance. Its best days were behind it. So are mine, he thought.

He regretted it immediately—regretted the childish drama of the notion—but couldn't help the feeling. He knew he'd find a way out. He'd find the money and never look back. But in not looking back, he'd have to accept what he was leaving behind. He ached for his mother—for the woman she used to be—and wished so desperately he could save her. He wished Tony was dead—that somehow, he could've been the one walking down the side of the road that night instead of his

father. It would be fitting. Tony, the enabler. Tony the drunk. Tony mowed down by an inebriated driver.

He thought of his father. Sweet. Kind. Strong. His father was killed by the recklessness of others. It was the car that had crushed his body, but alcohol in the driver's blood had been the murder weapon. How ironic that his mother—once so pure and pristine—had succumbed to the very substance that had ruined their lives.

But in the end, it wasn't Tony's fault. His mother was broken, and there would always be another Tony. There would always be—

"Are you sad because you're a mean boy?"

Startled out of his reverie, Elliot gasped to see Sofia sitting beside him. "You have to stop sneaking up on me!" He sighed. "Still, I'm very glad to see you."

She scowled. "I wasn't going to talk to you anymore, but you looked very sad like you wanted to apologize."

Elliot laughed. "Aw, Sofia. I *am* sorry."

"So, you won't say those mean things to me anymore?"

"Well, I'll try not to, but—" he took a deep breath. "Sofia, I'm not really your imaginary friend."

She crossed her arms. "Yes, you are. That's why no one can see you but me."

"Well, see, that's what I'm trying to figure out. Do you know why I said the things I did?"

"That I was a ghost?"

"Yes."

"Because you're a mean boy?"

He laughed. "No. And I promise I'm not a mean boy. I'm a nice boy who wants to help you. See, what year is it, do you think?"

She rolled her eyes. "It's 1959. Everybody knows that, Elliot."

"Well, no. See, for me, it's not 1959 at all. For me, it's 2019. Sixty years later."

"So, you're from—the *future*?"

He laughed. "I guess. So, maybe you can imagine why I think a little girl from 1959 might be a ghost?"

She considered for a while, slowly nodding her head. "Okay, Elliot. But I'm still not a ghost."

"Well, I'd love to believe that, but how can I be sure?"

Leaping to her feet, she smiled, looking very certain of her answer. "Because I went to market with Mama today. It's Saturday and we always take vegetables to market on Saturday. And on the way home, we stopped in the cafe and Mama bought me a piece of blueberry pie. Ghosts don't go to market. Ghosts don't eat blueberry pie. Ghosts don't eat anything at all."

"That's true, but—" he stopped mid-sentence. Saturday? It was Thursday. Did that matter to a ghost? "Sofia, do you know what the date is?"

She nodded, slowly. "Saturday, August the fifteenth."

"And here it's—Thursday, August fifteenth. Sofia, when did you last see me?"

"Yesterday. You were mean, remember?"

He had an idea. It was crazy, but maybe—"Sofia, does your Papa get the newspaper?"

"Yes."

"Okay, this is *very* important. Can you meet me here tomorrow at, say, three?"

"Yes."

"And can you look at the newspaper in the morning? Remember the headline. The first story on the very first page. Can you do that?"

"If I do, will you believe me? Will you believe I'm not a ghost?"

"If you do, I'm not sure what I'll believe anymore. But yes—*you*—I will believe."

## VIII. Blurbs & Testimonials

"THE CONFLUENCE is a suspenseful, time-hopping mystery that offers readers both a fantastic adventure and a heartwarming story about how simple human choices can be more powerful than magic."—Tiffany Quay Tyson, award-winning author of

THE PAST IS NEVER and THREE RIVERS

"Josephs holds nothing back in this modern day fairy tale, filled with memorable main characters, disturbing foils, and a mystery that must be solved in order to save a young girl...and maybe even mankind." — Leslie Tall Manning, award-winning author of

UPSIDE DOWN IN A LAURA INGALLS TOWN