


WILLIAM MORROW
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers
10 East 53rd Street, New York, New York 10022



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An evocative tale of one last road trip along America's most famous lost highway, Route 66, that offers life-affirming insight into the twilight years

THE LEISURE SEEKER

"**THE LEISURE SEEKER** is pretty much like life itself: joyous, painful, funny, moving, tragic, mysterious and not to be missed." —*Booklist*, starred review

"In this affecting road novel, an elderly married couple leave their Detroit home and take off in their camper for one last adventure together. ... an authentic and funny love story." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A bittersweet fable of the golden years likely to offer consolation to readers who've ever known anyone old or have plans to get old themselves." —*Kirkus*

ON SALE JANUARY 27, 2009

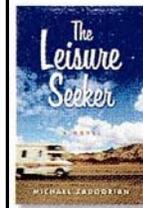
In May 2000 Michael Zadoorian published his debut novel *Second Hand*, to critical acclaim and to overwhelming bookseller support, with the novel named a Booksense pick, a Barnes & Noble "Discover Great New Writers" title, and a Borders "Best of 2000" Fiction & Literature Selection.

But like so many children of the Baby Boom, Zadoorian spent much of the past decade focused on his family, specifically the declining health of his parents. It affected both his life and his writing. Taking his cues from that experience, Zadoorian delivers his second novel, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** (William Morrow, On Sale: 1/27/2009, ISBN 13: 9780061671784, \$24.95), the unforgettable cross-country journey of a runaway elderly couple determined to meet the end of all roads on their own terms.

GALLEY TALK

■ Carol Schneck, Schuler Books & Music, Okemos, Mich.

Michael Zadoorian's first novel, *Second Hand*, introduced us to a writer with a brilliant eye for local color, a great ear for dialogue, a wry sense of humor, and characters that hook the reader from the very first page. His new novel, *The Leisure Seeker* [Morrow, Jan.], is even better. What do you do when the life you've shared for over 50 years is coming to an end? Ella, who has cancer, and John, who has Alzheimer's, leave behind their doctors and



"One of the most delightful books I've read in years."

grown kids for one last road trip to Disneyland. They follow Route 66 from their hometown of Detroit, visiting former tourist attractions that are nearly as decrepit as they are. With nothing to lose, determined to live their remaining lives to the fullest, they do so with love, humor and charm. Zadoorian's offbeat humor and obvious sympathy for his characters takes a story that could have been grim in the wrong hands and turns it into one of the most delightful books I've read in years.

Incredibly touching, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** is also laugh-out-loud funny with the same dark, offbeat humor that lead *Booklist* in their review of *Second Hand* to say that Zadoorian has “appeal” for “those of us who enjoy the work of David Sedaris.” Michael Zadoorian writes that, “The story grew out of a particularly tough time for my whole family, dealing with my father’s Alzheimer’s disease. For me, what started as a short story about an older couple driving an RV to Disneyland eventually grew into **THE LEISURE SEEKER**. It wasn’t long before I realized that I was writing about what I had just been through.”

In **THE LEISURE SEEKER**, John and Ella Robina have shared a wonderful life for more than 50 years. Now in their eighties, Ella suffers from cancer and has chosen to stop treatment; John has Alzheimer’s. Yearning for one last adventure, the self-proclaimed “down-on-their-luck geezers” kidnap themselves from the adult children and doctors who seem to run their lives to steal off from their home in Detroit on a forbidden vacation of rediscovery — seeking to find “the happy ending” that “we all want but never get.”

A much buzzed about acquisition, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** also caught the eye of noted film producer Jeffrey Sharp (*Boys Don’t Cry, You Can Count on Me*) of Sharp Independent at HarperCollins, who acquired the film rights simultaneously with his Morrow Senior Editor Jennifer Pooley in a pre-emptive bid to agent Sally van Haitsma that the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “speaks volumes about the rapidly shifting terrain in the book-to-film world and the increasing convergence of New York literati and Hollywood filmmakers.”

Darkly observant, and told with affection, quiriness and understated irony, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** is an elder odyssey through the ghost towns, deserted trailer parks, forgotten tourist attractions, and crumbling back roads of America. Mostly though, it’s the story of Ella and John: the people they encounter, the problems they overcome, the lives they have lived, the love they share, and their courage to take back the end of their own lives.

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ABOUT MICHAEL ZADOORIAN:

Michael Zadoorian was born in Detroit, Michigan and has lived in the area for his entire life. His father Norman was a photographer for The Detroit Edison Company for 35 years, photographing nuclear power plants, parades, “All Electric Kitchens,” corporate bigwigs and victims of electrocution. His mother Rose Mary was a homemaker. Both encouraged creativity in Michael and his sister Susan. He attended the public schools in Detroit, then went on to graduate from Wayne State University with a Liberal Arts degree.



In the mid-eighties, he discovered the work of Raymond Carver, which inspired him to start writing fiction. After a few years of working on his own, he decided to return to Wayne State to study Creative Writing. While working toward his M.A. in English, he was the recipient of the Loughead-Eldridge Creative Writing Scholarship and three Tompkins Awards for his fiction and essays.

During this time, he continued to work his day job writing advertising copy for used car dealers, processed meats, banks and pizza chains, but kept working on his stories. Though it took a while to shake off the influence of Carver, he soon started to develop his own voice and a style that reflected his own sensibilities. More and more, he found himself writing about his hometown of Detroit and the people he knew there. Before long, his work started to appear in various literary magazines and journals including *The North American Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *The Literary Review*, *American Short Fiction*, and the *European journals Panurge* and *Paris Transcontinental*.

Zadoorian’s first novel, *Second Hand* (W.W. Norton), about a Detroit junk store owner was released in 2000. The *New York Times Book Review* wrote *Second Hand* “may be a gift from the (Tiki) gods” and called it “a romantic adventure that explores what Yeats called ‘the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.’” *Second Hand* was selected for Barnes & Noble’s Discover Great New Writers Program and as an American Booksellers Association “Book Sense” pick; it also received the Great Lakes Colleges Association prestigious New Writers Award. Recently translated into Italian, it continues to be a cult favorite, still popping up on blogs and “favorite book” lists nine years after publication.

Zadoorian still works as a copywriter in the Detroit area. He has also worked as a journalist, a magazine feature writer, a voice over talent, a shipping room clerk, and a plant guard for Chrysler. He lives with his wife, Rita Simmons, a librarian, in an old house filled with things that used to be in the houses of other people. He still loves Detroit, no matter what anyone says.

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A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL ZADOORIAN

THE LEISURE SEEKER

WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR THE BOOK?

MZ: **THE LEISURE SEEKER** was definitely inspired in many ways by my parents. All through my childhood, my Mom and Dad took my sister and I camping all across the country in an Apache pop-up tent trailer built in Lapeer, Michigan. We often headed west from Detroit, staying in many of the same kind of places—state parks, tiki-themed campgrounds, small trailer parks (where I was amazed to find people actually lived), and Kampgrounds of America or “KOAs.”

Unfortunately, the book was also inspired by my family’s later experiences with my father’s Alzheimer’s disease. When he got ill, we went through a pretty awful five-year period. So at the heart of the story, are those times traveling with my parents and those times suffering with them.

WHEN DID YOU START TO WRITE THE NOVEL?

MZ: After my dad died in 2004, I just started writing the book. About ten years earlier, I had written a short story about an elderly couple on their way to Disneyland who stop at a roadside attraction and experience a jarring look at their not-so-distant future. That was my starting point. I returned to that story after my father’s death, and even though the characters took on their own lives and histories, it didn’t take me long to realize that in many ways, I was writing about what I had just been through with my family.

YOUR PROTAGONISTS ARE EIGHTY-SOMETHING, WE DON’T SEE MANY ELDERLY PROTAGONISTS IN FICTION, WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

MZ: Some people are put off by the subject matter. When I was trying to find an agent to represent the book, I ran into a lot of almost instantaneous rejection. After about 35 agents, I started to get the idea that maybe the characters’ age was at issue. One of them even suggested that I make John and Ella younger! Maybe in their fifties? Needless to say, that person didn’t end up being my agent. I think they weren’t seeing the potential audience for the book, **THE LEISURE SEEKER** is the story of so many Baby Boom families right now. Elderly mothers and fathers who survived World War II, trying so hard to remain independent, yet growing more frail; their fearful children trying to keep them safe, but feeling the roles reversing, believing it’s up to them to run their parents lives. It’s a power struggle between the survivors of this once powerhouse of a generation and the biggest generation in America that they produced.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE ROUTE 66 FOR THE CHARACTERS PATH TOWARD DISNEYLAND?

MZ: Like a lot of things from my childhood, I became fascinated with Route 66 as an adult. For me, it made perfect sense that John and Ella would take a road that’s part of an America that’s slowly dying away. In fact, Route 66 becomes a kind of mirror for Ella and John. Ella often sees herself in what she spots along side the road—things broken and worn, remnants of a near forgotten time.

DID YOUR FAMILY EVER TRAVEL “THE MOTHER ROAD”?

MZ: I believe we did take Route 66, but only in small stretches on some of those childhood road trips. Happily, writing the book became the excuse for my wife and I to take the trip we’d always meant to take, under the guise of “research.” I’d written several drafts of the novel at that stage we set off, but once I actually traveled the road the way it is now—experienced the landscapes, the weather, the people, the buildings, the air—it definitely altered the texture of the book.

ELLA AND JOHN BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY IN DETROIT, WHERE YOU’VE LIVED YOUR ENTIRE LIFE. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT GROWING UP THERE?

MZ: I remember when I was a kid and Detroit was still on top of the whole automotive industry. I used to wonder how I could have been so lucky to be born “where they made all the cars.” I’ve been kind of obsessed with cars, especially their style and design, for as long as I can remember. My mother used to tell me that I could identify particular brands of cars when I was three years old. I’m sure that wasn’t terribly unusual around here. Growing up in Detroit, the automotive industry is a part of every aspect of life. You truly can’t escape it. Everyone knows someone—and usually more like dozens—of people who work for the Big Three. There are generations of families who have worked on the line. And if you don’t directly work for one of the auto companies, you work for a company that supplies them. I work part-time at an ad agency that does all the advertising for Chevrolet. They just laid off nearly a hundred people on December 9, many of whom were my friends. Times are tough everywhere now, but we’ve been feeling it in Detroit for quite some time. I think we got hit first and possibly hardest. Everyone around here knows someone who’s lost a job or their home. My neighbors lost their house last year. One day they were just gone. We’re all kind of numb these days.

HOW DOES BEING FROM DETROIT INFORM YOUR WORK?

MZ: Detroit is a huge part of what I am as a person and a writer. I grew up in the city, got both my degrees at Wayne State University in Detroit, so it’s ingrained pretty deeply in me. It’s home. I love it here and don’t want to live anywhere else. There’s a spunk and spirit that the city possesses that you won’t find anywhere else. There’s something about being from a place like this, as monumentally screwed up as it often is, that inspires creativity.

When I was writing **THE LEISURE SEEKER**, I thought I would miss having the story take place outside of the area, but it was just the opposite. Writing about Ella and John gave me a chance to write about a Detroit that I didn’t necessarily know first hand, but one that I had only heard about from my parents and aunts and uncles. Detroit is still a big character in the book since it was writ so large in the lives of Ella and John. The Detroit of their era is a completely different place, full of wonderful memories, but also conflicted feelings and fear. It felt important to me to feature some of that Detroit in **THE LEISURE SEEKER**, if only in their memories.