

Watch for an interview with Teresa Toten in a future issue of The Teaching Librarian.

**Rob:** What was it like to live in Zimbabwe at the time of the civil war there?

**John:** Interesting! One thing it gave me, which comes out in many of my books, is a sense of how readily we adapt to extreme circumstances. Before Zimbabwe, I never really understood how or why people put up with the hardships of war, exploration, etc. While I was in the country, I adapted because it was the sensible thing to do. For example, I carried a gun on geology fieldwork, never stood before an uncurtained window at night—it still makes me nervous. It was only afterwards, that I realized what a strange and stressful situation it had been. As a result, many of my characters, especially the younger ones, Greta, in *Flames of the Tiger*, and Sergei, in *Four Steps to Death*, adapt remarkably well, if not particularly healthily, to the extreme circumstances they find themselves in.

**Rob:** You were born on the Isle of Skye, and now live on the “left coast” of Canada, on Vancouver Island. Is it just a coincidence that you’ve chosen another island as your current residence? Is there something in particular that attracts you about living on an island?

**John:** Actually, I was born in Edinburgh and moved to Skye when I was 3 months old, but the question still stands. No particular attraction to an island, and certainly not the ferries, but I do have an attraction for the ocean and coasts. I loved living on the prairies, the clear air, the openness, but I did miss the sea.

**Rob:** Who is your favourite author and why?

**John:** George Orwell. I admire his rigorous honesty and commitment to a certain worldview. His writing too, especially in his essays, is superb. It reads as if it’s simple and easy to do, but try it. It’s much harder than a lot of the flashy, word acrobatics that are being lauded today.

For more information on John Wilson and his books, try the following blog: [www.johnwilson-author.blogspot.com](http://www.johnwilson-author.blogspot.com)

**Rob:** What or who has been one of the greatest influences in your life?

**John:** Obviously, Orwell, for his worldview as well as his writing. More personally,

a history teacher I had in high school. I still vividly remember some of the lessons he gave back in the 60s, and the excitement I felt at hearing the stories he made come alive. He’s still alive and lives in Scotland. I found him through Google after I dedicated *Battle Scars* to him.

**Rob:** Do you use a word processor in your writing, and if so, do you use a spell-check?

**John:** I do use a word processor and I do use spell-check, although with reservations. It’s wonderful at picking up my bad typing habits such as putting “teh” for “the” and I use it to standardize US–British spelling since different publishers have different requirements. I wouldn’t be caught dead using a grammar checker, though.

**Rob:** What was (or were) your favourite place(s) on your trip around the world?

**John:** Everywhere, but that’s a cheap answer. India was special because of the connection with my parents, but basically I love anywhere that has a good collection of ruins to rummage around in. ■

*And true to his words, Mr. Wilson, his wife, and one of his daughters will be spending part of the summer in Languedoc (the south of France), exploring the ancient sites of Béziers, Montségur, and Carcassonne, doing research for a novel on the Cathars, a religious sect from the Middle Ages.*

