Books in The Jack Harper Trilogy

Riding Out the Devil (Book 1)

Riding Out the Tempest (Book 2)

Riding Out the Rough (Book 3)

For more details on these and other books, go to:

https://hilarywalkerbooks.wordpress.com/

Riding Out the Turbulence

is a tale about one of the characters in The Jack Harper Trilogy.

If I told you who it is, I’d ruin the story. Sorry about that.
This story is dedicated to the memory of

Callow Double Clover aka

“CD”

A beautiful Irish Draft/Thoroughbred cross gelding my husband and I bought in Ireland when he was five years old, CD is among the last of the progeny of the famous Clover Hill stallion.

Generous to a fault, and kind to nervous or beginner riders, he excelled at showjumping, eventing and dressage and was enormous fun to be around.

He passed away on 1st February 2017 at the age of 26.

After 22 glorious years together, losing him has been very hard.

Rest in Peace

CD
Contents

The Arrival

Double Cream

Thanksgiving

Parental Pressure

End of an Era

Sylvan Walk

A Deepness

Father & Son

The Witness

Turmoil

Journey’s End

About the Author

Discover Other Titles by Hilary Walker

Connect with Hilary
The Arrival

American Eagle’s Embraer ERJ-145 touched down lightly on the runway at Albermarle Airport at precisely 1:55 p.m. and Timothy Shepherd appreciated its punctuality.

The flight had only lasted one hour and 26 minutes, but he hated turbulence. The jet was small, and being buffeted about by strong winds had given the successful financial adviser a nasty taste of vulnerability which didn’t suit him at all.

And after the grand bustle of New York’s La Guardia, how disagreeable it was to be greeted by this sleepy airport in Charlottesville, Virginia!

He was making this trip over Thanksgiving to keep the parents happy and placate his sister Stella. She would do the Christmas duty, which he’d done last year.

Timothy hadn’t been back since then and his mother had threatened, “Your dad has a weak heart so you’d better get your sorry rear end home. You’ll regret it if you don’t!”

Mr. Shepherd Sr. stood at the luggage carousel waiting for his son to appear. Tall and upright, the retired English teacher looked as if he’d been farming all his life, in an olive green Barbour jacket, and beige corduroys hanging loosely over his heavy boots.

He didn’t appear to Timothy at all as if he had a heart condition. His face had the ruddy complexion you’d expect from a man who cycled ten miles a day, weather permitting, and who spent the rest of his time taking care of three horses and small acreage.

Timothy was vexed. Mom had conned him into this visit!
Riding Out the Turbulence
He hugged his dad awkwardly, and made use of the half hour drive back home to shift his thoughts, from the client he’d hoped to bag before Thanksgiving, to slow life in the Virginia hills.

Double Cream
He took as much as he could stand of his mother’s enthusiastic greeting and thanking God for his safe arrival before announcing that he wanted to pay a visit to his old horse. Anything to escape this parental clinginess!

“He’s getting on a bit,” his father warned.

“It’s only been a year, Dad. He can’t have changed that much.”

Mr. Shepherd patted him on the shoulder. “He’ll be pleased to see you again.”

The temperatures were close to New York coldness, and as Timothy stepped outside a chilly breeze whipped his face. He pulled the parka hood over his freezing ears and plunged bare hands into the jacket pockets as he braced himself for the short walk down to the barn.

The stalls opened onto a rubber-matted area under an overhang. From there the horses could wander out at will into their large paddock. But it was almost bereft of grass and the blanketed animals were eagerly tearing strands off a large round bale of hay under the extended roof.

All three turned their heads towards the sound of Timothy’s footsteps on the frozen path.

His own horse whinnied a loud greeting of recognition and Timothy felt a pang of guilt at not having been to see Double Cream, or DC, for so long.

It was hard to gauge the horse’s body condition, with his blanket on. But his face was gaunt and dominated by soft brown eyes, as large and kind as ever. The once dappled legs were covered in white hairs, longer and thicker than in previous winters.

© 2017 Hilary Walker
Riding Out the Turbulence

Timothy approached the fence, cursing himself for not bringing a treat. With slightly unsteady steps, the old horse walked over to meet him.

Timothy bent down and grabbed as much dead grass as he could to offer the gelding. “Hello, old boy!”

DC gently took the tuft, his eyes half closed. Timothy stroked the gelding’s wide forehead and pulled affectionately on the furry ears, as his mind wandered back over their rewarding years of partnership.

He’d been the same age as DC when his parents acquired the five year old.

The Irish Draft cross had been bought for Mr. Shepherd. But when he realized what a quiet, well-mannered animal he’d had the good fortune to find, it wasn’t long before his son and daughter were riding the horse, too. First on, then later off, the leading rein.

In a reversal of the usual situation, the girl Stella lost interest while Timothy really took to DC.

He recalled how the quiet gray had created the erroneous impression that all horses take care of their riders. Timothy grew up believing that every equine will slow down when he feels his passenger losing balance in the saddle, and thought it was normal for a horse to do his best to get over that fence, no matter how badly he was presented at it.

Timothy pictured the tack room walls: they were covered in ribbons from their show-jumping and eventing successes.

They would go on long trail rides to vary DC’s workload. The horse would walk into the trailer with no hesitation and show Pimento, his father’s anxious chestnut gelding - bought after Timothy took DC over - that it was safe to enter the conveyance.
Riding Out the Turbulence

DC’s relaxed attitude along any path or through water had calmed Pimento. This enabled parent and child to take their two horses anywhere, and some of their best father and son chats had taken place on those rides.

Timothy picked another handful of grass. “Next time I’ll bring treats with me.” He stroked the animal’s soft muzzle then walked back to the house.

Aromas from the kitchen announced that roast pork was on the dinner menu. His mother stood over the stove tending the gravy, while his father placed the cutlery and napkins on the dining room table next door.

“DC looks a little wobbly, Dad.”

“Son, I’m afraid he has cancer.”

Timothy breathed in sharply. “Is he in any pain?”

“Not that I can see. But we need to keep an eye on him.”

Helping his mother carry the food to the table, Timothy realized that he’d not thought about New York and his clients for a full hour. It felt unexpectedly good.

They said grace and Timothy made an awkward Sign of the Cross with his parents. He did it to prevent an argument, not from any conviction.

While Mr. Shepherd fed the horses after the meal, Timothy assisted his mother in the kitchen, grateful that she kept the conversation firmly off the Catholic Church.

Thanksgiving

The next morning was Thanksgiving Day. At 6:30 a.m. Timothy accompanied his dad to the barn while Mom turned on the oven and dressed the turkey.

As DC made his faltering way to the water trough, Timothy studiously avoided his father’s eyes.
Mr. Shepherd cleared his throat noisily. “You coming to Mass with us this morning, son?”

“Dad, you know I don’t believe that stuff anymore.”

“You’ll make your Mom sad.”

“Isn’t that better than being a hypocrite?”

“I can’t say that I agree. What happened to ‘honor thy mother’?”

“I can honor her by keeping an eye on the turkey while you’re both in church.”

“I think God would rather you came to church and let Him keep an eye on the turkey.”

“Well, think of me as God’s hands in the kitchen.”

His father sighed deeply.

Together they finished their barn chores and walked back to the house. But not without furtive looks at the gray horse taking unsure steps into the paddock and balancing uneasily on the toes of his hind hooves to urinate.

Mr. Shepherd caught Timothy’s eye, and his son nodded sadly.

_I know, Dad, I know._

**Parental Pressure**

During Thanksgiving dinner that afternoon, Timothy regaled his parents with stories about his job and how much money he was making.

He was somewhat peeved when his mother told him that he should be spending more time storing treasure in heaven.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also: Matthew 6:21,” she quoted.
“Mom!”

“Just saying, Tim. One day you’ll regret all this chasing after money.”

“We can’t survive without it!”

“No, but - just like food - we don’t have to make it the be-all and end-all of our lives.”

“I have plenty of other interests.”

Mr. Shepherd had just speared a piece of turkey with his fork and was about to place it in his mouth, then changed his mind. “Name one.”

A surprised Timothy thought for a bit. “We-ell, I don’t have a lot of time for hobbies right now, Dad. I just need to get a couple more deals under my belt, then the pressure will ease off and I’ll have more leisure time.”

“Do you have time to date anyone?” his mother asked.

“Mom!”

With a bland expression she said, “I just wonder what all the money is for. You’re twenty-seven now. Don’t you plan to get married and have kids some day?”

“Some day, yes, but not today!”

This was precisely why Timothy hated coming home. Didn’t he get enough pressure from his job without needing more from his parents?

Desperate to be alone when the meal was over, he told his dad that he would take care of the evening barn chores by himself.

Mr. Shepherd said, “Thanks, son. Then I can help your mom clean up from dinner.”

A relieved Timothy donned his thick parka, pulled up the hood and put on his gloves. At least his horse wouldn’t challenge his life style!

© 2017 Hilary Walker
An icy wind hit his face when he opened the door.

Snow had not been forecast, but the air was heavy with the threat of it. This was a bad evening to be outdoors and hopefully DC had the sense to stay in his stall.

The automatic light outside the barn came on as he neared.

DC lay huddled on the ground outside the stalls and Timothy ran the last few steps to open the side gate and reach his horse. He ripped the glove off his right hand with his teeth and dug into his pocket for the chopped apple he’d remembered to bring.

On seeing him, DC raised his head feebly.

Timothy’s heart was racing and his throat went dry. He could barely say the words, “Hi there, boy. What’s up?”

He knelt by the animal’s head and offered a piece of apple. DC sniffed at it. Inquisitive, the other two horses moved towards the prone gelding.

Trying to stay calm, Timothy stood up, using the apple to lure Pimento and Fritz into their stalls and shut them in. He pulled big swathes of hay off the round bale to throw in and keep them occupied while he dealt with DC.

How long had he been down?

He placed some hay by the horse, but the animal wasn’t interested in it.

Maybe he needed a drink? Timothy grabbed the full bucket from the empty stall. He placed a few apple chunks in the water before setting it down by the horse’s head.

DC rooted around in the bucket and after chewing the fruit, took a long draught of water. He was very thirsty and Timothy suspected the horse had gone down as soon as he and his father reached the house.
Riding Out the Turbulence

He sat down and pulled absentmindedly at the old gelding’s bushy forelock. “You always did have the thickest mane and tail of any horse I ever saw!” He peered into the gentle brown eyes. “Wanna get up, old man?”

But DC was tired and his answer was clearly, ‘No. I’m very sorry, but this time I can’t do what you’re asking.’

His owner got to his feet. “O.K. buddy, I understand. I’ll be back shortly.”

Eyes welling, Timothy ran to the house, oblivious to the searing cold reaching deep into his lungs.

Mr. Shepherd saw Timothy’s expression. “DC?”

Timothy nodded numbly. “He’s down, Dad, and doesn’t want to get up.”

Mrs. Shepherd appeared in the doorway and her husband said, “Call the vet, would you, Vera? Use my phone - I’ve got her in my contacts. Tell her it’s DC. She’ll know what it’s about.”

“I’ve locked the other horses in their stalls, Dad, but I’d better go back down and check on them.” He didn’t want to be away from his gelding.

Fritz and Pimento were happily munching on their hay so Timothy hunkered down next to his old horse. DC’s head was stretched out, his eyes closed against the strong winds grabbing at his mane and raising the hairs on his neck, exposing patches of black skin underneath.

Timothy caressed the soft face and ears. “You’ve been a wonderful horse, DC - thank you for everything. If there is an afterlife, I look forward to seeing you there.”
Riding Out the Turbulence

Sylvan Walk

When it was over and the vet had left, Timothy and his father spread a large tarpaulin over the inert body. Timothy had irrationally insisted that the horse keep his blanket on for warmth against the bitter cold.

The two men weighed down the tarp with bricks to prevent access to marauding animals.

Mr. Shepherd surveyed their work. “That should keep him comfortable until we can bring in a digger tomorrow.”

“Do you think it’s O.K. to let the other horses out?”

“I think it would be a good thing. It’ll let them know what’s happened and they’ll have an easier time dealing with his death.”

“But won’t they - ?”

“No, I don’t think so. I hope they’ll have too much respect for him.”

“Dad, I need to go for a walk. When I come back I’ll check that all’s well.”

“Sure. If not, they can spend the night in their stalls.” He squeezed his son’s shoulder with a strong hand. “See you later.”

The property bordered an extensive forest, and Timothy used his cellphone flashlight to illuminate his path. Tears froze on his face as soon as he shed them, while an uncaring wind boomed through the trees.

DC had been the bedrock of his existence - in addition to his parents, of course - and now he was gone.

He’d had the horse for 22 years!

The only consolation Timothy could glean was that he’d made it back in time to say goodbye to his beloved gelding.
Riding Out the Turbulence

He stopped in a clearing and raised his eyes to the sky. The tall trees swayed wildly back and forth across the open gap: above them busy clouds scurried over the face of a bright moon.

“Do you have a soul, DC? Are you up there, looking down on me? I hope so! We had such good times together and I miss you terribly. Thank you for waiting for me to come home.”

Worried about the other two horses not respecting DC’s space, he hurried back to the barn. But he needn’t have been concerned. Fritz and Pimento were standing respectfully in the entrances to their stalls, facing their comrade as if saluting him.

Timothy said, “Good night, dear friend,” to the tarpaulin and returned to the house.

A Deepness

His parents were asleep.

Timothy lay in bed with his arms behind his head and stared at the ceiling. DC’s death was making him think about death and the meaning of life for the very first time.

He was having trouble letting go of his horse and desperately wanted the gray’s spirit to still be alive. Surely their 22 years together hadn’t just vanished into the ether? DC’s life had to be worth more than that! It must have had a purpose.

In wishing his gelding’s life to have meaning, Timothy was forced to admit that he must want his own life to have meaning, too.

Suddenly he wondered whether it was pure coincidence that his horse should die on the day that he’d refused to go to Mass with his parents?

He couldn’t help feeling that something bigger than all of them was at work here. Did some cosmic force lie behind today’s events? He wasn’t prepared to go as far as believing that force was God - although, of course, his parents did.

© 2017 Hilary Walker
Riding Out the Turbulence

He so wanted to talk about his grief with them! But his mother would turn it into a religious discussion.

* 

Early the next morning he and his father heard the heavy engine of their neighbor’s digger grinding down the drive. They walked to the barn, past the two live horses running around excitedly in the big paddock.

They shut Fritz and Pimento in their stalls and Mr. Shepherd helped his son remove the bricks and tarpaulin off the white body. The wind had died down, leaving behind a biting cold, and Timothy was glad DC was wearing his warm blanket.

He knelt to kiss the bony head and say a final farewell. He looked up. “Dad, do you mind if I don’t stay for the next part?”

“Of course not, son. I understand.”

Afraid of his mother’s sympathy in the house, he walked back into the woods. The freezing temperatures exactly mirrored the numb pain inside him.

When his father texted him half an hour later that it was all over, the bereaved financial adviser wished he still had tears to cry. For illogically he now felt worse than yesterday: the finality of his horse being buried was somehow harder to bear than having his dead body lie above ground.

His father was feeding the other two horses when Timothy reappeared at the stables. The son averted his eyes from the massive heap of fresh earth covered with crude tire marks.

He filled the water buckets and kept the stall doors to prevent the horses from stealing each other’s food. “Dad, do you think DC has a soul?”

“Definitely, son. And I hope he’s gone to be with God his Creator.”

“So you believe animals go to heaven?”

© 2017 Hilary Walker
Riding Out the Turbulence

“I don’t know for sure, although the Book of Revelation does mention horses. And I believe that if our animals are important to our heavenly happiness, God will reunite us with them. However, we do have to be careful: the Catechism says that we ‘should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.’”

“So I shouldn’t love my horse too much?”

“We shouldn’t even love people too much, Tim. We’re supposed to love God more than any of his creatures - both human and animal.”

“But even if I subscribed to that (which you know I don’t) surely God doesn’t mind my mourning the passing of a wonderful creature like DC, and honoring him for everything he gave me?”

“As long as we temper our sorrow with thanksgiving to God for creating DC and bringing him into our lives, I don’t see that He would have a problem with our being sad to let him go.”

“Surely, by being sad at his passing, we are by default acknowledging the beauty of God’s creation?”

“Careful, Tim! I’ll think you’re beginning to believe in God again.”

“You know I’m speaking hypothetically, Dad. So don’t go telling Mom I’ve returned to the fold.”

“I won’t, son. But DC’s death has got you thinking and that’s got to be a good thing.”

“Well, I don’t enjoy it.” Timothy made a face.

His dad said, “I know. Let’s make up the afternoon feeds.”

Father & Son

Timothy’s sadness increased during the rest of the weekend.
Why did people and animals have to die? And how had he managed to avoid worrying about it until now? He brought up the subject with Mr. Shepherd when his mother wasn’t within hearing. “Dad, are you afraid of death?”

“A little. But when it comes I’ll be in good hands.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean, Tim. Jesus and His mother Mary will be there at the end to lead me to the Father. I will probably have to pay off my debts in Purgatory for a while, but I have confidence that I will be in heaven with God after that.”

“So death doesn’t frighten you?”

“The unknown frightens me. But in this case I know what to expect, so - no - the prospect of dying doesn’t terrify me. Although I am concerned about you and your mother after I’m gone.”

“She has her faith to see her through.”

“Yes, but what about you?”

“I have my job.”

“Son, I don’t know of a single person who said on his deathbed ‘I wish I’d spent more time at the office.’ It’s not at the top of their priorities when the end comes.”

“My work keeps me going.”

“Seems to me it keeps you away from the things that matter.”

Timothy rolled his eyes. “I’m going to regret asking, but what things?”

“I guess I should have said, ‘the thing’ in the singular. You know - getting to heaven.”

“But you have to believe in heaven first.”
Riding Out the Turbulence
“If you don’t believe in heaven, then why are you concerned about where your horse’s soul has gone?”

Timothy frowned. “Because I hate the idea of his being gone.”

“If you hate the idea of your horse going into oblivion, you can be sure that your heavenly father hates the idea of your going into oblivion after you die. You are a Child of Christ, Tim. He’ll not let you out of the palm of His Hand.”

“That’s a lovely thought, Dad, but how do you know it’s true?”

His father quoted several passages from the Bible pointing to God’s protection over us and how He wants us to be with Him in Heaven.

Timothy hadn’t meant to get into this discussion and replied with a non-committal grunt.

When his father dropped him off at Albermarle airport around noon that Sunday, he asked: “Promise me you’ll think about everything I’ve said?”

“I promise, Dad.”

The Witness

Despite his early arrival, only two free seats were available at the crowded departure gate.

*Everyone wants to get out of here and back to civilization!* thought a wry Timothy, whose trip had not turned out as expected. Instead of a boring country break, it had become an occasion of grief and intense introspection.

Furiously juggling numbers at his desk was far more relaxing than what he’d just been through.

He took one of the open seats just as a figure in a distinctive black soutane and white dog collar was easing into the unoccupied one next to it.

© 2017 Hilary Walker
Riding Out the Turbulence

Is this God’s idea of a joke?

He pulled out his tablet and began checking the financial markets. The thirty-something priest was reading a book - the title wasn’t visible, but it wasn’t thick enough to be the Bible - and minding his own business.

Timothy was strongly aware of the contrast between himself and this man of God: one super-worldly and agitated, the other supernatural and serene.

He was trying to ignore this uncomfortable disparity when an old man walked up to the cleric. He looked hard-bitten: was he about to loudly harangue the Catholic Church?

Timothy cringed in anticipation.

“Are you a Catholic priest?” the man asked.

The black-robed pastor rose. “Yes. I’m Father John. How can I help?”

His face reddening, the man shook the proffered hand and lowered his voice. “Father I haven’t been to confession for a very long time - and I mean a very long time. Then I saw you and a nagging voice told me I needed to ask you to hear mine now.”

“Ah, that would be the Holy Spirit. He can be very persistent when He chooses.” Father John extended an inviting arm. “Shall we?”

Relief flooded the old man’s face. Most likely unsure of his reception, this grizzly character had shown great courage and humility in approaching Father John.

Timothy applauded the man for it.

The priest led the lapsed Catholic away from the gate area to a couple of secluded seats by the restrooms. The location was rather unglamorous!

Priest and penitent sat facing each other, on the edges of their chairs, and Father John made the Sign of the Cross as the Sacrament began.
Riding Out the Turbulence

Observing them, Timothy had an uncharacteristically deep thought.

Here is a man being reborn into the Church in a lowly place which parallels the humble manger where Christ was born.

Where on earth had that analogy come from? ‘The Holy Spirit can be very persistent when He chooses...’

He really shouldn’t be watching such an intimate meeting, but Timothy couldn’t look away. He was moved by the priest’s caring demeanor during the man’s long litany of sins, which he ended by covering his face with his hands.

It was now the priest’s turn to speak while the penitent looked up at him, hunched in emotional pain. Timothy saw him nodding several times.

After this Father John made a Sign of the Cross over the returning Catholic and granted him absolution. That done, Father John shook the man’s hand heartily with a beaming smile.

Smiling in response, the forgiven man stood up with a straighter back, and as he walked away his step had a new spring to it.

Timothy was awestruck at the power which Father John had just exercised in the name of God.

How intoxicating to believe you can forgive sins! And what an incredible feeling to bring a lapsed Catholic back into the Church!

Witnessing the old man after his release from sins, Timothy briefly thought, I want what he has!

The loud speaker then announced that his gate was boarding and his thoughts returned to New York and the deals he hoped to close this coming week.
Riding Out the Turbulence

Turmoil

The Embraer ERJ-145 is a narrow plane with single seats on the left side and double ones on the right.

Timothy was peeved to discover that his designated seat was by the window on the right. Someone annoying would sit beside him and he’d have no easy bathroom access.

*Next time I’ll pay better attention when booking this flight.*

He buckled his seat belt and pulled the in-flight magazine from the seat pocket in front of him.

Noticing the Sudoku hadn’t been solved, he thought smugly about how the puzzle was too hard for most of the flying population - and by extension, the rest of humanity.

As he pondered over the grid, someone took the seat next to him. The passenger was Father John.

Timothy grimaced: God was having another little joke.

“Hello again!” the cleric said brightly.

Timothy responded with an insincere smile and turned his attention back to the puzzle. The priest quietly pulled out his own in-flight magazine and, much to Timothy’s annoyance, also found the Sudoku.

Why couldn’t the man do the crossword instead? Did he have to impinge on Timothy’s territory?

It was now a contest: God versus Timothy.

*Those are impossible odds! Father John has an unfair advantage!*

*But you don’t believe in God, remember?*
Riding Out the Turbulence

Oh, shut up!

Timothy worked furiously, trying to ignore Father John’s unnervingly swift filling in of the blanks and his calm Sign of the Cross as the plane took off for the flight to La Guardia.

Less than ten minutes into the journey the little Embraer hit turbulence. At first it was a little bumpy, then the plane suddenly dropped what felt like a few feet, although in reality it was probably a lot less. Passengers gasped in fear, but not Father John.

Timothy thought, We’ll be O.K. - we have a Catholic priest on board.

Again he was annoyed. This didn’t fit into his secular world view.

The priest’s pen wasn’t moving anymore: he must be praying.

Good! Timothy thought irrationally.

The plane dipped again and this time Father John pulled a Rosary of sapphire blue beads from his soutane pocket. He was definitely praying now!

Yet Timothy still felt that strong calmness emanating from the holy man. He recalled his father’s words about life after death and his promise to think about them.

He was definitely thinking about them now! Suddenly those financial deals awaiting him in New York appeared very insignificant. What did matter in this precise moment was what awaited him on the other side of death if this plane should crash.

Was it nothing, as he’d assumed for so long? Or was there indeed an Omniscient Being who calls us to account for how we’ve spent our lives?

In short, was there really a heaven - and by inference, a hell?

Timothy Shepherd realized that he feared death.
Riding Out the Turbulence

But clearly this priest was as unafraid of dying as his dad. What was their secret?

Father John finished the second decade of his Rosary and said, “I sense you want to ask me something.”

Timothy shook his head stubbornly.

“Apologies. My bad.” The priest returned to his beads.

But as if on cue (Timothy would later say) God made the plane pitch hard and a prolonged bout of severe rocking followed.

Terrified passengers gripped their armrests as a loud admonition from the pilot reminded everyone that the fasten seat belt sign was on and not to get up and roam around the cabin.

“What do you believe happens when we die?” Timothy suddenly blurted to his neighbor.

Father placed the Rosary on his lap and answered in a gentle voice, “If we are pure and close to God, we go to Heaven. But most of us aren’t. If we’re impure believers who have genuinely tried to follow Christ, we go to Purgatory. In fact, we actually want to go there because we know we aren’t yet ready to face our Awesome God, Who Is Absolute Goodness, and be with Him forever.

“Purgatory - as the name implies - purges us of our sins and makes us pure enough to enter Heaven.”

“I guess that makes sense, although where does it talk about Purgatory in the Bible?” Timothy asked.

“In several places, actually.”

Timothy wanted to hear the Church’s reasoning on Purgatory sometime, but with the plane being hurled around the sky, he had a more pressing issue. “What’s the deal with hell?”
Riding Out the Turbulence

Father John folded his hands as if about to pray and Timothy noticed the simple wedding band on the cleric’s left ring finger. What was that all about?

The priest began his explanation. “Those who know about God, yet still reject Him - even at the hour of death, when He gives us one final chance to repent and fall on His Mercy - those people condemn themselves to being separated from God forever.

“Since they’ve chosen to turn their backs on Him, they get what they want - eternity apart from God. They are forever with Satan. But before they are hurled into the burning abyss, they briefly experience the beauty and joy of being with God and understand what they’ve lost by denying Him.

“But by then it’s too late. There’s no turning back for them. Christ wants us to believe in Him in this life, when we can’t see Him, otherwise it’s not faith.

“We need to repent and ask for His Mercy before we die. After our death He becomes the Just Judge, and we receive no mercy - only our just deserts.”

Timothy was taken aback. “That’s pretty harsh!”

“Not at all. We don’t deserve God’s Mercy at all - It’s a gift He wants to give us. But He can only do so if we repent and ask for it. Otherwise, if we tell God to get lost, we get what we ask for: eternity in the burning flames of hell together with Satan. And who wants that?”

Father John looked at Timothy and irrelevantly added: “And as it says in Mark 8:3, ‘What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?’”

Had the priest penetrated Timothy’s soul and seen the rank materialism living there? Was God using Father John to warn him what lay ahead if he continued on his current path?

Deflecting the uncomfortable attention from himself, he said, "I saw you take that old man's confession."
Riding Out the Turbulence

"I know."

"He looked as if a huge burden had been lifted off his back."

"It had." Again, that warm, welcoming smile.

"It must feel wonderful to be able to do that for someone."

"Strictly speaking, I’m not doing it. Christ is operating through me."

"In persona Christi." Timothy was surprised that he recollected the phrase.

"Lapsed Catholic?"

Timothy nodded, half-afraid and half-excited about what was coming next.

"Want to talk about it?"

Journey’s End

Many years later, Jack Harper visited Father Timothy Michael Shepherd at Our Lady of Sorrows Church.

Hearing Jack’s confession, the priest was transported back in time to the reconversion he’d witnessed at Albemarle Airport and his life-changing conversation with Father John aboard the Embraer.

*In persona Christi*, Father Michael absolved the horse trainer of all his sins and returned him to the Catholic Church.

That same Power which flowed through Father John to the old man at the airport and then to Timothy on the plane, was now also operating through Father Michael.

As he saw the transformation in Jack, his heart beat joyfully: *This is why I became a priest!*

© 2017 Hilary Walker
Riding Out the Turbulence
THE END
About the Author

Hilary Walker hails from England, but currently lives in Maryland with her husband, two horses, two English bulldogs, schizophrenic barn cat and somewhat tame ginger house cat.

An avid dressage rider, she has written horse-related short stories, fiction and non-fiction books. Her short stories have won competitions in the United Kingdom and the United States.

*The Jack Harper Trilogy* is a new Christian inspirational series through which Hilary hopes to bring readers to a richer understanding of the merciful nature of Christ, Who is always working in our lives to bring us closer to Him.
Riding Out the Turbulence

Discover Other Titles by Hilary Walker

**Christian Inspirational**

*Riding Out the Devil* (Book 1 in *The Jack Harper Trilogy*)

*Riding Out the Tempest* (Book 2 in *The Jack Harper Trilogy*)

*Riding Out the Rough* (Book 3 in *The Jack Harper Trilogy*)

*Brittle Diamonds*

**Equestrian Guides**

*A Step-By-Step Guide to Entering Your First Dressage Competition*

*The Beginner Rider’s Guide to Stress-Free Horse Buying: How to Purchase the Perfect Horse for a Beginner Rider without Going Insane*

**Equestrian Autobiography**

*Part One: First Catch Your Horse*

*Part Two: You’ve Caught Your Horse: Now What?*

*Part Three: The Aim of All This*

*Part Four: What Horses Do to You*

**Short Stories**

*How I Lost My Husband’s Horse*

*Felicity’s Show Flair*

*A Dog Named Blue*
Riding Out the Turbulence

The Horse Inside

How Not to Rescue a Racehorse

Bridled Passion: A Horse Trilogy

The Horse That Went to Church

Connect with Me

Visit my webpage:

https://hilarywalkerbooks.wordpress.com/

Subscribe to my blogs:

http://christiantales.weebly.com/

http://horsetales.weebly.com/

Read an interview with Hilary at:

https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/HilaryWalker

© 2017 Hilary Walker