

Movie Reviews,  
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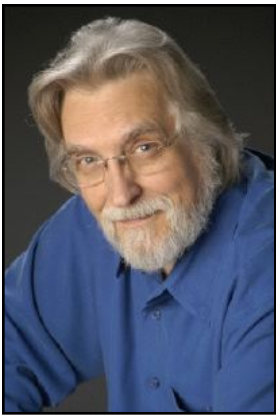


*Stanley Robinson*

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*A conversation with director Stephen Simon and author Neale Donald Walsch  
about their new movie, "Conversations With God"*



Neale Donald Walsch

The movie, "Conversations With God", opening Friday, October 27th, is an adaptation of the books by Neale Donald Walsch, which have inspired and changed the lives of millions of readers' worldwide!

"Conversations With God" is the true story of a tragic accident resulting in Neale losing literally, everything.

At the lowest point in his life, Neale asked God some very hard questions. The answers he got from God/within became the foundation of an internationally acclaimed book series, which has sold over 7 million copies and translated into 34 languages. The movie, directed by Stephen Simon, brings to the big screen, Neale's true story, with actor Henry Czerny in the title role.

Sitting down with the author of a book that has been made into a movie, and the director of that movie in a candid conversation, is quite an experience! I've worked in the Motion Picture Industry for over 22 years so conversations with actors and production persons are always easy going. This was different. The person the movie is based on, author Neale Donald Walsch, the director of the film Stephen Simon, and myself, sat down for a lively, and certainly stimulating conversation!

I couldn't resist my first thought so I asked, "Why this film?" with a chuckle...

Stephen Simon: I've always been a fan of the books! It was when I got to know Neale, I realized what a wonderful way to use the events of his life as a metaphor for anybody's life. We've been very careful, I hope, of not making the film into a bio-pic. It really represents everybody and everybody who's been through a dark night of the soul. Neale went through a much more extreme one than most people go through. It's the metaphor on how we can survive that, to transcend it, and transform our lives"

Stan: Neal, when was the moment when you decided that you're were going to write this down!

Neale Donald Walsch: what happened was, I heard a voice, an exterior voice, then internally, that was inspiring me and bringing me messages that I wrote down on legal pads, never intending for a moment that the writings would see its way into a published book. It was like keeping a journal.

At one point further on, it said that one day this would become a book, so I decided that I was going to test that. It's the only statement I thought was measurable, that offers an opportunity for a measurable outcome. I'm going to send this to a publisher and say that I'm having a conversation with God, and he's actually going to publish it, then I know its some power higher than my own making this happen!

Stan: what were some of those questions you were asking/writing down?

Neale: I was having an extremely dark night of the soul, and it really was night (laughing) and I was

writing, “What does it take to make life work?” “What have I done to deserve a life of extreme struggle?” When I started writing them down, I heard a voice ask me,” Do you really want answers to all these questions, or are you just venting... (We all laughed at this statement!)

Stan: how much collaboration between you, Neale, and the screenplay writer?

Stephen: It was complete. We sat down with Neale in January of 2005; at Neale’s house along with our script consultant and our cinematographer, João Fernandes!



Director Stephen Simon

We had him involved from the first conceptual meetings, the first time I’ve ever done that in my 30 years career and it was the first time he (cinematographer) had ever done it in his career. We sat down for lots of hours with Neale. Neale was involved with every single aspect of development and pre-production. Neale wasn’t on the set though...

Neale: It was a difficult challenge for Henry (Czerny who played Neale in the movie). There are three levels of challenge for an actor. Level one, to play the part of another human being who’s widely known! Level two is playing the part of another human being who’s widely known and still alive right now!



Actor Henry Czerny as Neale, and Director Stephen Simon on the set of “Conversations With God”

And level three is playing a person who’s widely known, and still alive, and standing on the other side of the camera! (Extreme laughter by all) I thought it would be wholly unfair to Henry!

Stephen: And the screenplay writer was on the set, I actually don’t agree with the theory that some filmmakers have that writers shouldn’t be on the set. Its really wonderful having the writer around because when you come up on something that sounds great on the written page but doesn’t work on its feet, its great to have someone there to work you through it.

Stan: (To Neale) A favorite scene is the agent and publisher sequence when you were offered a million dollars to sign with the publisher for the first book!

Neale: That’s exactly how it happened, in an airport; I was overwhelmed, especially when my agent pushed it to 1.5 million!

Stan: And you sat there speechless the whole time...

Neale: It was way beyond my expectations!

Stan: Neale, are you happy with the film?

Neale: I’m more than happy; I’m ecstatic about it! You’re not the first person who can recite almost chapter and verse, when I see a person sitting across from me, quote lines from the film with such accuracy as you have Stanley, I’m clear that Stephen has made a memorable film, that touches people at a very deep level!

Stephen: I’m proud of the fact that people will walk out feeling better being a human being and, actually try to be better human beings...

It was quite an experience to be able to ask the subject of a film, those direct questions of what was in the film. The opportunity the talk with the director with the dedication and the earnestness of conviction to his craft is inspiring. When I left the interview, I felt like a better human being, which is quite remarkable...

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