



VERTICAL DREAMS

Four Arizona climbers head south to Venezuela to establish a new big wall route

By Andrew Wisniewski



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Into the Storm



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Words That Work

Shedding one's flaws to uncover the real in Pat Spears' *Dream Chaser*

Almost 25 years ago, I wrote a short story for an undergraduate fiction workshop. It was about working class guys getting drunk and learning hard lessons. There were no women in the story other than barmaids and objects of attraction. One of my classmates, Pat Spears, called me on it. She told me she knew women who could drink my characters under the table and stomp their balls to Jell-O, and those women needed to be in my stories. That phrase stuck with me all these years later. It's so graphic. Nothing hammers a point home like stomping balls to Jell-O.



Author Pat Spears. Courtesy photo

I thought Pat Spears was the best writer in that large, prestigious writing program. She wrote about working class characters, too. But where I was just a kid trying to find my voice, Pat was already an established writer. I not only looked up to her, I looked through her stories for things I could steal. In the decades between

graduating and now, I kept my eyes open, waiting for a Pat Spears book that never arrived. Until, finally, a couple of months ago, I got the advance review copy of her first novel, *Dream Chaser*.

The novel tells the story of Jesse McKnight, a down-on-his-luck factory worker who just lost his job and his wife. Jesse has to take care of their three kids, two of whom don't like him very much, one of whom just got thrown in jail. On top of it all, in a drunken moment of weakness, he gets suckered into buying a wild mustang for his 11-year-old daughter. Now the mustang is running

loose around a North Florida national forest. For Jesse, this seems to symbolize everything that's beyond his control, everything he needs to reign back in to get his life on the trail again.

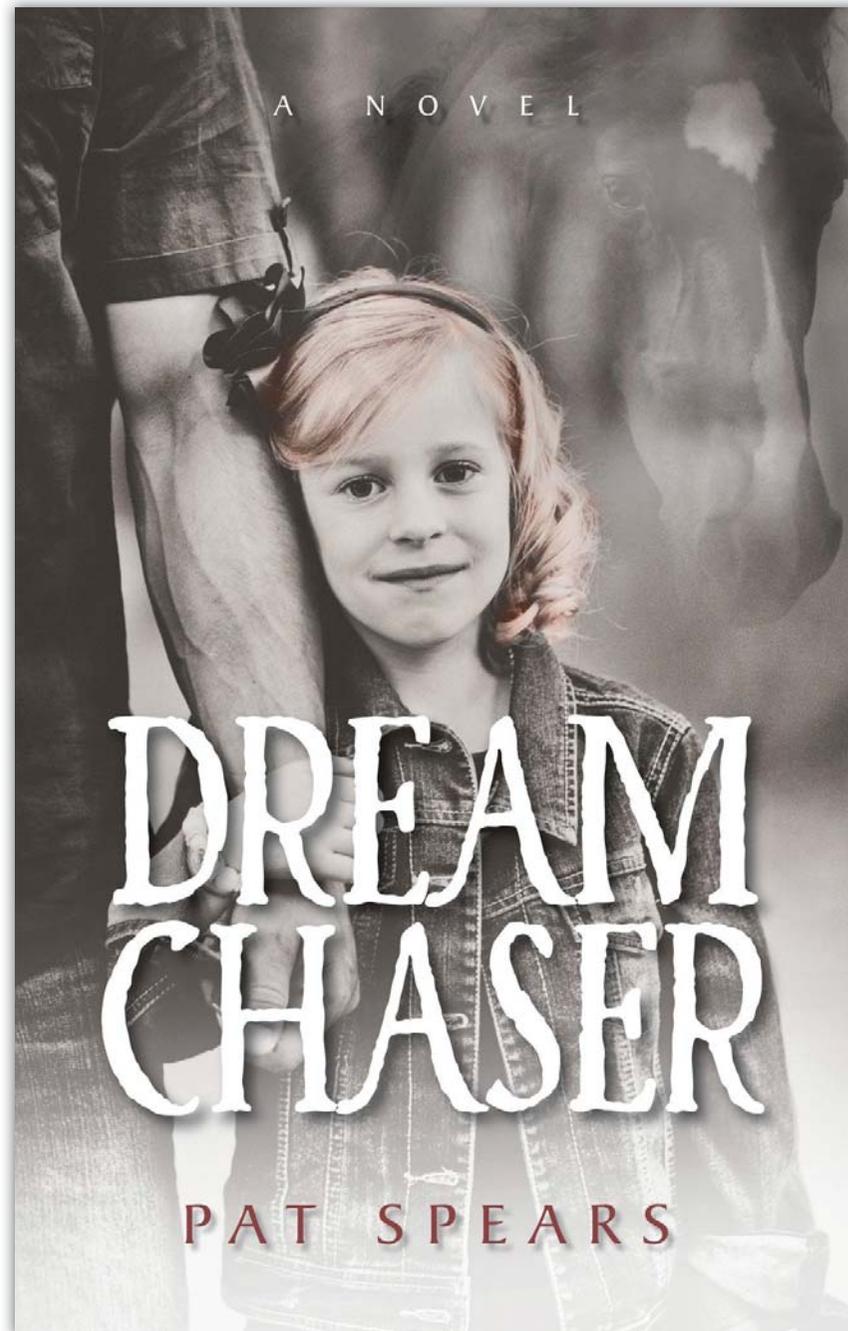
Jesse's many attempts to wrangle the horse back onto his property and into a pen make up a lot of the action scenes within the novel. They

also take the reader through a place where books never tread: the lush, beautiful Florida panhandle and the small towns scattered off I-10. More than the horse, the novel is about Jesse finding the support network he needs to raise his kids. This is the journey that interests me most.

At the beginning of the novel, Jesse has become everything he's supposed to be as a working class man. He's physically strong. He hides all his emotions (besides anger) behind

a mask of invulnerability. He works with his hands. He drinks beer. He's a veteran of one of the Gulf Wars. He believes that he needs no help from anyone, that he can take care of everything himself. In short, he's a tragic hero in the traditional sense: that which makes him great is what destroys him. In order for him to pull his life together, he'll have to shed most of these characteristics. He'll have to learn to show his emotions, to nurture and love his kids. He'll have

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It hit too close to home: that struggle of working full-time jobs that pay just less than my very modest monthly expenses, that sense of futility accompanying the knowledge that I'll get through this, but things might never get better.

to reach out to people, ask for help, accept their help. He'll have to change what it means to be a man so that he can be the man he needs to be.

As I read the novel, I wanted Jesse to do this. I just didn't have much faith that he would. I've known too many Jesses in my life. I grew up in working class Florida. For a time, I lived not far from where this book takes place. When Jesse gets a job driving a forklift, I know what that feels like because I drove a forklift in a warehouse for a while. When Jesse looks into his empty refrigerator, then his empty wallet, it triggered ghosts of hunger pains in my past. Spears is such a realistic writer, all her characters are so recognizable to me, that at times this book became painful to read. It hit too close to home: that struggle of working full-time jobs that pay just less than my very modest monthly expenses, that sense of futility accompanying the knowledge that I'll get through this, but things might never get better. At times, I was reading this book thinking, *Wow, Pat, you finally did it.* You wrote a novel that stomped my balls to Jell-O.

I know from firsthand experience that

writing honestly about working class characters is career suicide. If we ever acknowledge that institutionalized injustice spreads to poor white people, that poor white people aren't trash, aren't very privileged and, in most cases, are poor because they've been systematically denied opportunities for advancement (or, at times, survival), then our whole political and economic system in the United States could crumble. I don't think Spears would be too upset with that. She seems to be a writer more concerned with justice than a career or money. I'm glad someone finally had the good sense to publish her.

I have to give her publisher credit, too. This book represents independent publishing at its best. It's a book that mainstream publishers would be afraid to put out, despite Spears' prodigious talents, because the content matter is too progressive, too transgressive. Twisted Road Publications is small and nimble enough to take these chances. Despite the emotional hurricane *Dream Chaser* put me through—or perhaps because of it—my world is a little bit better for having read it. To see more of Pat Spears' work, visit her website at www.patspears.com. 

Wheeler Park:

Children's Music and Arts Festival. Featuring music, theatre and dance performances by local youth, recycled arts and craft projects, musical instrument workshops, painting, sculpture, bounce houses, carnival games, food vendors, a climbing wall and more. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. All ages. On Humphreys between Birch and Aspen. 213-2312

MUSIC EVENTS SAT 8.16**Altitudes Bar and Grill:**

Bob Einweck. 7-10 p.m. 2 S. Beaver. 214-8218

Flagstaff Brewing Co.:

TBA. 10 p.m. 16 E. Rte. 66. 773-1442

The Green Room:

Optimal and DJ Element. Hip-hop from Phoenix. 9 p.m. Free. 15 N. Agassiz. 226-8669

The Hive:

Second Embrace. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. \$5. All-ages. 2 S. Beaver, Ste 190.

Main Stage Theater:

DJ ill.Ego Presents: Back 2 Skool Party. 9 p.m. Free. 1 S. Main St. Cottonwood. (928) 202-3460

Mia's Lounge:

BLUME. Beats and cinema. 9 p.m. Free. 26 S. San Francisco. 774-3315

The Museum Club:

Ricochet. Country music from Oklahoma. 9 p.m. \$15. 3404 E. Rte. 66. 526-9434

Oak Creek Brewing Co.:

Cris Jamison. 3-6 p.m. Open mic. 8 p.m. Free. 2050 Yavapai Drive. Sedona. (928) 204-1300

Pepsi Amphitheater:

Stepping Feet with the Dave Matthews Band Experience. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., show starts at 8 p.m. \$15, plus fees. Exit 337 off I-17 south of Flagstaff at Ft. Tuthill County Fairgrounds. (480) 657-7333

Raven Café:

Fish Out of Water. 8 p.m. Free. 142 N. Cortez. Prescott. (928) 717-0009

Sedona Rouge Resort:

Linda Sandoval. Jazz singer and pianist. 6-9:30 p.m. Red's Restaurant. 2250 W. Hwy 89A, Sedona. (928) 340-5321

Sound Bites Grill:

Esteban and Teresa Joy Sedona dinner concert. 6-9 p.m. \$79 dinner and show; \$35 show only. 101 N. State Rte. 89A. Sedona. (928) 282-2713

The Spirit Room:

Filabusta. 2 p.m. Sir Harrison. 9 p.m. Free. 166 Main St. Jerome. (928) 634-8809

Tinderbox Annex:

Kyle Merritt. 7:30-9:30 p.m. 34 S. San Francisco. 226-8400

VARIOUS EVENTS SUN 8.17**Arizona Snowbowl:**

18th annual NAU Wine and Dine in the Pines. Featuring the finest wines from around the world and culinary delights from the best restaurants in northern Arizona. Benefit. 2-5 p.m. 523-5353

Canyon Dance Academy:

Flag Freemotion. Conscious movement and freestyle dance. Moving meditation to dance-able music. Minimal instruction and no experience required. Every Sunday. All ages. First time free. 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 2812 N. Izabel. 225-1845

Canyon Dance Academy:

Flag Freemotion. Ballroom dance lessons and dancing every Sunday. Learn social and ballroom dancing. 5-7 p.m. No partner needed. \$8, \$5 for students. 853-6284. 2812 N. Izabel. 814-0157

Doris Harper-White Community Playhouse:

Theatrikos and Theatrikids Presents: *James and the Giant Peach*. Sun at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. \$10. 11 W. Cherry. www.theatrikos.com. 774-1662

Heritage Square:

Art on the Square. 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Free. Aspen between Leroux and San Francisco downtown. (520) 405-9294

Historic Brewing Co.:

Banjoes, bikes and beer. Open mic every Sunday from 3-6 p.m. \$3 pints for those who participate or ride in on a bike. Brewery is open from 2-7 p.m. 4366 E. Huntington Drive. 707-0900

Hops on Birch:

Poetry Night hosted by Barley Rhymes. Every other Sunday of the month. 8 p.m. signup. Free. 22 E. Birch Ave. 774-4011

Human Nature Dance Theatre and Studio:

Youth Aerial Lyra ages 10 and up. 5-6 p.m. \$15. Adult Aerial Lyra ages 18 and up. 6:15-7:15 p.m. \$15. Every Sunday. 4 W. Phoenix. 773-0750.

Mary D. Fisher Theatre:

Film screening: *Supernensch: The Legend of Shep Gordon*. (4 p.m. Sun, Mon and Tue.) *War Story*. (7 p.m. Sun, Mon and Tue.) \$12, \$9 for Sedona Film Fest members. 2030 W. Hwy 89A. Sedona. (928) 282-1177

Tranzend Studio:

Flagstaff Latin Dance Collective. Lessons: beginner and all level fundamentals, technique and musicality. 7 p.m. Open dancing in main room with salsa, bachata, merengue and cha cha; side room with zouk and kizomba until 10 p.m. Every Sunday. \$8 drop-in, \$5 for students. 417 W. Santa Fe. 814-2650

MUSIC EVENTS SUN 8.17**1899 Bar and Grill:**

Vincent Z. Acoustic world music. Every Sunday. 6:30-8:30 p.m. 307 W. Dupont. 523-1899.

Altitudes Bar and Grill:

Bob Einweck. 3-6 p.m. 2 S. Beaver. 214-8218

Flagstaff Brewing Co.:

Viola and the Brakemen. 2-5 p.m. 16 E. Rte. 66. 773-1442

Josephine's:

Vincent Z for brunch every Sunday. Acoustic world music. 10 a.m. 503 N. Humphreys. 779-3400

Lowell Observatory:

Percival Lowell Summer Sunday Music Series: Featuring Ponderosa Players. Mixed woodwind and string quartet. 5-6 p.m. Rain or shine. Free. 1400 W. Mars Hill Road. 774-3358

Oak Creek Brewing Co.:

Brandon Decker. 3-6 p.m. 2050 Yavapai Drive. Sedona. (928) 204-1300

Rene at Tlaquepaque:

Linda Sandoval. Jazz singer and pianist. 3-8:30 p.m. on the patio. 336 State Rte. 179. #B118. Sedona. (928) 282-9225

Sound Bites Grill:

Rick Cyge. Soft rock classics. 6-9 p.m. Free. 101 N. State Rte. 89A. Sedona. (928) 282-2713

The Spirit Room:

The Retros. 2 p.m. Free. 166 Main St. Jerome. (928) 634-8809

Tinderbox Annex:

Shawn Dennehy. 5-7 p.m. 34 S. San Francisco. 226-8400