



The Remainders

A Novel in Progress

Fun A Day Reseda 2016

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Why *The Remainders*?

You may find it strange that I would name a book about a community I grew up in and still love *The Remainders*. The word “remainder” doesn’t have a positive connotation. It certainly doesn’t for a writer. You don’t want to see your book in the remaindered bin.

“Remainder” means something that is unwanted or unneeded, an afterthought, something to be discarded. We feel Reseda has been treated that way for a long time, even when I was a teenager in the 1970s.

Reseda was a self-contained rural community for the first part of the 20th century. We had a bustling downtown with department stores. But as new communities popped up in the Valley, people were attracted to the new and shiny stuff. Why shop in a busy downtown when you can enjoy the comforts of air-conditioned Topanga Plaza and Northridge Fashion Center a short drive away? Why live in an old wood-framed house built in the 1950s, when modern housing tracts were being built a few miles away?

What's sadder than doing that to communities is when we do that to people. Circumstances can cause people to feel thrown away. A job loss, a bad investment, a serious illness, or the consequences of poor choices can drive once successful people into poverty. I know people who feel thrown away by their families. Unresolved conflicts, irreconcilable differences, and stubborn pride have kept family members apart for years.

My story is about people who, for one reason or another, found themselves as remainders. It shows their struggle to save or regain their humanity.



About *The Remainders*

One of the “remainders” in the book is Dylan, an 18-year-old from Dana Point in Orange County. He lived an affluent, but wild and dissipated life, and he wound up dropping out of high school. His mom and stepfather, a successful self-help author, throw Dylan out of the house. Dylan drives off in the SUV his father gave him on his 16th birthday until it runs out of gas – in Reseda.

Now living in that SUV, he tries to rebuild his life. He gets a job at Buck ‘N’ Awesome, a dollar store on Sherman Way. He makes friends and finds support from the people he meets – including Pearl, a young woman who has problems and secrets of her own.

Dylan’s efforts to rebuild his life are threatened by his struggles with homelessness, self-destructive thoughts that have plagued him throughout his life, and the lure of old addictions. Can Dylan overcome and make a better life for himself?



Dylan Describes Himself as a Remainder

(Note: This scene is a draft and may be removed or changed in the final.)

Home was my Ford Explorer.

I had parked it behind the abandoned movie theater. I don't know why I chose that particular spot except it was where the Explorer started chugging and stalling as it used the last drops of gas. Maybe I knew I would be left alone there. Maybe it was because the theater was a crumbling old building, a piece of junk sitting there to rot. It had no value. Worthless. A remainder.

Just like me.

I didn't feel that way at first. I was angry for a long time. I hated Mom and Steven for kicking me out. I hated Dad for going on with his life with a new woman and family. I hated my sister Muriel for being so perfect in everything, and then doing the perfect thing by going to college out of state so she could get away from our family. I didn't think she even knew that I was sleeping in an SUV in Reseda. Or would even care. I hated my fake friends who were "ride and die" with me when I had money and weed but weren't there when I needed them. I hated Orange County. I hated its shopping malls, its Starbucks, its beaches and its fake girls with their fake boobs and fake tans, its sanctimonious right-wing hypocrites. I hated having to get a new iPhone every year because you weren't cool if you didn't get one the day it came out. And you had to get the right case, and the right wallpaper, and the right apps. "Are you on Fleekchat? Everyone's on Fleekchat now." Go to hell!...



I then started hating myself.

I didn't come right out and say it, but it showed up in weird ways. I'd accidentally leave the doors of the Explorer unlocked at night in the odd chance someone would come to steal my stuff and slit my throat. When I heard some people talking about the Orange Line, I thought about stepping in front of one of those trains. I learned that these were buses on their own special roadway, but stepping in front of one would still do the job. And if I couldn't find that Orange Line, I'd just step in front of one of those cars rushing by on Sherman Way. I wondered if anyone would notice or care. If anyone would miss me.

In truth, I'd been feeling that way for a long time. Even when I was little. But I'd blaze or take some bars or down some shots, and the feeling would go away. For a while anyway.



Reseda and Me

Reseda is my hometown. It is here where I grew up, learned the value of creativity and community service from my mom, and decided to become a writer and started learning my craft. Whenever I write, I turn to Reseda for inspiration.

Although Reseda often appears in movies, TV shows, and song lyrics, it's frequently depicted as "Generic Middle Class Suburbtown, USA." That's not what Reseda is. Reseda has a history, a culture, and an identity that makes it unique from all other communities in the San Fernando Valley.

As Resedans, we have to tell our own stories. We have to celebrate our community as it is.

We also have to get involved. I am excited about all the progress the community has made in recent years, thanks to the support from Downtown and the hard work of community workers and volunteers, like the Reseda Neighborhood Council and Reseda Renaissance. By getting involved, we can make sure that city money and effort is used for much needed services. Volunteers can build community pride and improve the quality of life for all of Reseda's citizens.

I moved from Reseda nearly 30 years ago, but I still consider my experiences there the core of who I am. You can leave your childhood home, but your childhood home never leaves you.

To see more of my writing and find out the latest about *The Reminders* and my other books, visit www.matthewarnoldstern.com and follow me on Twitter at @maswriter.