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Acclaimed Novel Chronicles Family Ties and Saving Graces

An intimate look at the unusual relationship between an avowed atheist and the beloved granddaughter he raises from birth reveals a series of difficult choices and surprising alliances, provoking laughter, tears, and contemplation of all that makes us human

The Grace of the Ginkgo

Author
 Michael Hardesty

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 Fiction/Contemporary

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Michael R. Hardesty's contemporary novel, *The Grace of the Ginkgo*, chronicles the 24-year period of divorced loner David Foley's guardianship of his granddaughter Liesl, who is tragically orphaned at birth.

David is an avowed atheist, making conflict with Liesl's maternal aunt, a devout Catholic and mother of seven, inevitable. Realizing that Liesl needs a family relationship beyond what he can provide, David skillfully and humorously navigates these troubled waters for his granddaughter's sake. Meanwhile, his attempts to balance his own social, psychological, and sexual needs with Liesl's welfare lead to a number of comedic encounters before he finds his true soulmate.

As Liesl matures, she and David become involved with a variety of memorable characters. They include Dexter, a dangerous fugitive who confronts them in a road rage incident, Samantha, a banal but lovable teenager who becomes Liesl's cherished babysitter, and Joel, a teenage schoolmate whom David stumbles upon in a compromising position with his granddaughter.

There's also Sheila, the wealthy, married, and promiscuous mother of one of Liesl's private school classmates, Alan Martin, a grad student Liesl falls in love with while away at college, and finally Nestor, a brutal family abuser who preys upon his wife and daughter, both clients of Liesl, who has become a counselor at a women's shelter.

As time passes, the tale seamlessly moves between humor, sadness, hope, and despair, especially when David's desire to die as he has lived – on his own terms – calls to mind the ginkgo tree and carries the metaphor of the grand and poignant recycling of life to its inevitable conclusion.

Hardesty comments, "I was determined not to be one of those unfortunate souls who pass from this earth with an untold story 'up there' in my head. The specific germ that became this book was beholding my eighteen-month-old granddaughter in the back seat of my car via the rearview mirror and wondering what might happen if I had this little one to take care of 24/7."

"In David (Foley), Hardesty gives us a character who defies all stereotypes of older men. He is as nurturing as any mother; he is atheist; he has normal sexual appetites; and he acts decisively in totally unexpected ways. Readers will have to judge for themselves whether they consider all his actions moral – which is always one of the pleasures of reading a good book. This is one you'll want to discuss with others."

~ **Donna Meredith, Southern Literary Review**

Author: Michael R. Hardesty is a graduate of the University of Louisville and holds a Certificate of Writing in long fiction from Stanford University. He is retired from his marketing communications firm, Black & White, and lives in Louisville, KY, where his favorite activity is hobnobbing with his three grandchildren.