

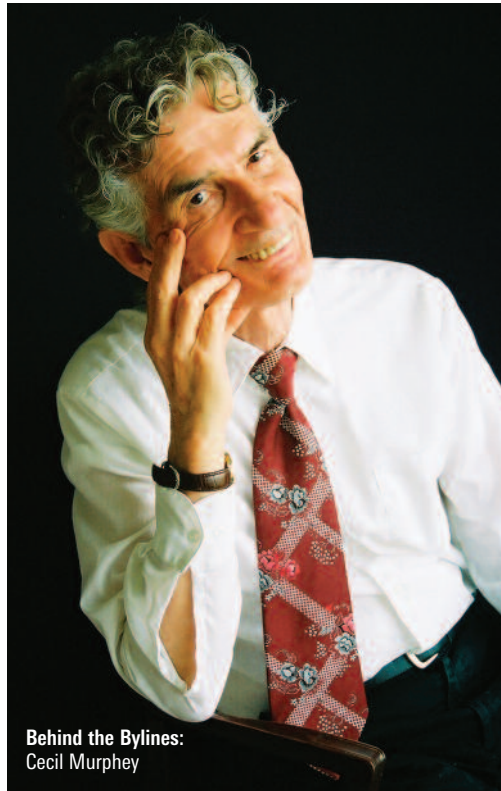
The Holy Ghostwriter

Cecil Murphey is the most famous Christian author you've never heard of. With an athlete's discipline, Murphey, 74, writes books—over 100 since 1975—on wide-ranging topics like health and fitness, business, and inspiration. Though he has sold over 6 million books, you won't recognize him by the name on the front cover. More than half the books written by Murphey were autobiographies that he “ghostwrote,” under the names of celebrities, influential leaders, and even women.

An editor rejected Murphey's first book idea. But that same editor recognized the former pastor and missionary's talent and gave him his first ghostwriting assignment, the autobiography of singer B. J. Thomas.

Murphey's first bestseller was *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, published in 1990. Carson, a frustrated inner-city kid, became director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins and gained worldwide recognition for performing the first successful separation of Siamese twins. Murphey has also ghosted books for NFL star Shaun Alexander, Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy, and Billy Graham's son Franklin.

For the past several months, the *New York Times* best-seller list has included Murphey's *90 Minutes in Heaven* the story of a Baptist minister who died in a car accident and miraculously returned



Behind the Bylines:
Cecil Murphey

to life with memories of heaven. Ghostwritten for Don Piper, the book has sold over a million copies.

Many of Murphey's books include stories of people who struggle against great odds and triumphantly overcome them to become an inspiration to the rest of us. This theme resonates with Murphey because it is one he himself has lived. The son of an alcoholic father,

Murphey's childhood was filled with pain and uncertainty. “I was never a child,” he says. “I grew up taking care of my parents.” But Murphey overcame the obstacles.

Understanding that his success is a combination of hard work and God's blessing, Murphey has always paid it forward by encouraging other writers through teaching at conferences, mentoring relationships, and personal friendships. While his name may be unknown to the average reader, to those who work in Christian publishing Cecil Murphey is a rock star without the ego. Above all else, he's a giver—of time, money, and love. This also explains why the writing community came together in a hurry to support “Cec” when tragedy struck the Murphey family.

On Feb. 27, 2007, the Atlanta area home Murphey shared with his wife Shirley, daughter Cecile, and son-in-law Alan caught fire after a candle accidentally ignited a mattress. Flames engulfed the house. While Murphey, his wife, and daughter all escaped, the flames trapped his son-in-law; Alan Hege died of smoke inhalation at 49.

As Murphey watched his world burn to the ground, he thought of the Book

of Job. Particularly of the moment when Job's wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” Job replied, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

“As that verse filled my mind, I heard myself say, ‘Who am I to be exempt?’” Murphey later recalled.

He was able to salvage his passports and his hard drive, both of which he counted as blessings. “We saved almost nothing,” said Murphey, “but neighbors and our church family rallied around us. People provided clothes for us. So many have done so much to help us and we're grateful.” Within hours, writers and publishing profes-

sionals from around the world networked to send money, prayers, and return the encouragement Murphey had given them.

As Murphey struggles with his own feelings of grief, it would be easy to understand if he wanted to retire from writing. But within days of the fire, he was back at work.

“There are two kinds of ghostwriters,” he says. “The first is the kind that tells you all the facts. The second helps you to know the person. A good ghostwriter *feels* what other people feel.”

—Jennifer Schuchmann



Chart Toppers:
Murphey's work includes several bestsellers.