

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

By Craig Lancaster

My debut novel, *600 Hours of Edward* ([http://www.amazon.com/600-Hours-Edward-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1606390139/ref=pd\\_sim\\_sbs\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/600-Hours-Edward-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1606390139/ref=pd_sim_sbs_b_1)), while not exactly a literary phenomenon, has enjoyed some delightful adulation from folks who have been kind enough to read it. The story, about a 39-year-old man with Asperger syndrome dealing with rapid and unwelcome changes over the course of 25 days, seems to have enough whimsy and heart to capture the imagination of even cynical readers. This seems to bear out in the reviews it garnered – including one here at Coffee, Books and Laundry (<http://melissa-coffeebooksandlaundry.blogspot.com/2009/11/600-hours-of-edward-by-craig-lancaster.html>) – and the awards it has won.

So, naturally, for my second novel, the just-released *The Summer Son* ([http://www.amazon.com/Summer-Son-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1935597248/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Summer-Son-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1935597248/ref=pd_sim_b_1)), I opted for a dark, psychological, painful tale of separation and reunion between an abusive father and his grown son. Clearly, I am not trying to leverage my position as a feel-good novelist, perhaps to my own detriment.

I won't lie to you: I worry some about how readers who loved earnest, endearing Edward Stanton will take to the much more angsty Mitch Quillen and his attempts to find common ground with the father he loathes. I'm fully prepared for a much more diverse range of opinion, which is a nice way of saying I'm prepared for people to tell me they dislike the new story.

When it came down to it, I had to write the story that was inside me. *The Summer Son* is as close to a love letter to my father as I can imagine writing. The father character, Jim Quillen, isn't my dad – not by a long shot. But he's cut from cloth that my father would recognize: a difficult childhood, a livelihood drawn from working against the earth, broken marriages, difficult relationships. To write a novel, I have to feel the story in my gut, and it has to be kicking and screaming to get out. That's what *The Summer Son* did. I had no choice but to write it.

This does bring up an interesting question of what readers have a right to expect from their favorite authors. I don't know the answer; I don't know that I'm anybody's favorite author, so it may be a moot point for me. I don't think I'm the sort of writer who can chase trends or build serials; when a story ends, my interest moves quickly to the next character, the next premise, the next challenge. What I expect of myself is to write honestly and diligently, to try to capture authentic situations and emotional experiences, and to offer them up for readers' consideration.

In that spirit, I offer this excerpt from *The Summer Son*. Mitch is on his way to the airport in San Jose, California, where he lives, to see his father in Montana. I hope you'll consider it:

*All the way up the 880 to the airport, I kept thinking that if I just said the word, the cab driver would veer off the freeway, turn around and take me home. I could run up the sidewalk to our house, fling open the front door and tell Cindy that it had all been a big mistake, that I would be husband of the year from now on. It could be just that easy.*

*At the exits for Stevens Creek, then The Alameda and then Coleman, I felt the urge rise in my throat, the words sticking to my wet tongue. Each time, I swallowed hard and choked them back down. The driver pressed on, oblivious to the mental battle spilling into his back seat.*

*Cindy had left earlier that morning to take the kids in for a checkup – a coincidence that I half-bitterly accused her of having rigged so she wouldn't have to deal with this. I knew, of course, that the kids' appointment had been set weeks earlier, and my wife took my frustrated jibe gently and said, "You'll do fine. You know I'd go if I could. You also know that it will be better if I don't."*

*I knew. The way I had it figured, disaster or disappointment loomed as the outcome of this trip, whatever the circumstance. But if I were to put Jim Quillen and the battle royale between his son and daughter-in-law in the same room, God save us all.*