

INTERVIEW #1

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Stephen King gave his fans a fright in January when he told the Los Angeles Times he was going to retire. In 1999 he had a scare of another kind: he was struck by a minivan and nearly died. This month King, master of the horror novel, is publishing a collection of short stories, *Everything's Eventual: 14 Dark Tales* (Scribner). Is this really the final chapter? TIME's Andrea Sachs finds out.

How are you feeling?

I can do all of the things I used to do, except that I do them slower.

Why do such awful things happen in your new book?

I think that any kind of story where something really terrible happens makes your own life look better by comparison. They give us a scale, if you will, to measure our own problems by.

Are you really going to retire?

It will be interesting to see what you say about this, because there's almost a willful misunderstanding among the press or among people about what that means. I can't imagine retiring from writing. What I can imagine doing is retiring from publishing.

You mean writing but not publishing?

If I wrote something that I thought was worth publishing, I would publish it. But in terms of publishing stuff on a yearly basis the way I have been, I think those days are pretty much over.

Well, you seem awfully productive at the moment.

A year from now, people will say the idea that this guy was going to retire is a laugh. I've got three novels to finish up [in] this Dark Towers cycle that I've been publishing since 1982. There's a book coming out this fall, *From a Buick 8*, and so far as I know, that's the

last Stephen King novel, per se, in terms of it just being a novel-novel.

Don't some writers have great late periods?

I'd like to think that I have gotten better, that the writer you're talking to now is a better craftsman than the one who wrote *Carrie* when he was 22 or 23 years old. But I don't detect in my own work any particular late blossoming [laughs].

How have you stayed so productive for so long?

The answer is, Stay healthy and stay married. And other than having a guy come over the top of a hill and hit me with a van, I've been able to do both.

So how much money have you made in your career?

I have no idea.

Are we talking hundreds of millions?

No. But we're probably talking maybe \$100 million, \$120 million. I couldn't tell you exactly. A lot.

Won't your fans be crushed if you really retire?

They might be crushed, but think of all the other people in the publishing business, in the writing business, who will breathe a sigh of relief and say, "At last—he shut up!"