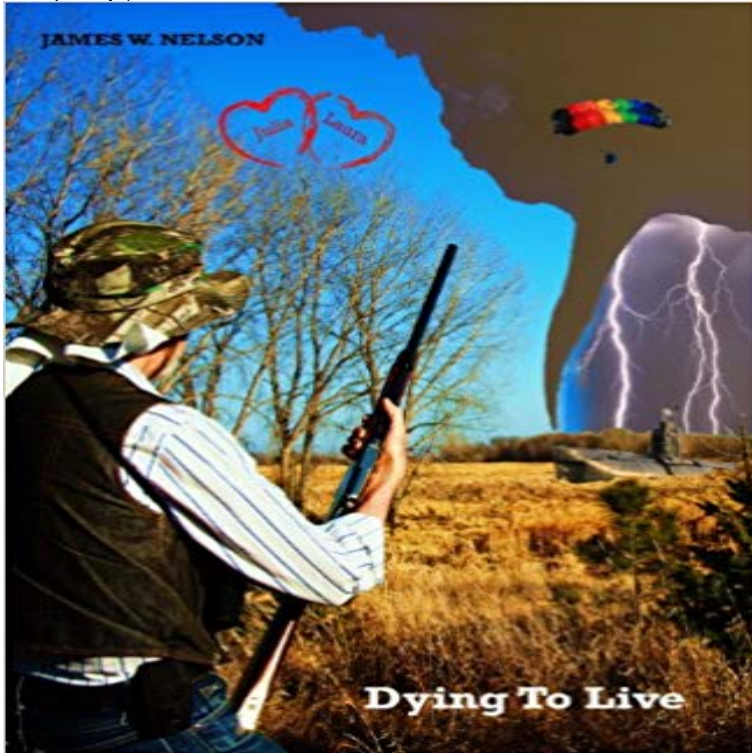


Dying To Live: The life & times of Jimmy Nelson



My true account of growing up on a storybook farm, experiencing a killer tornado, surviving teenage confusion, an adventurous four-year ride on a submarine, a skydive, not maturing into your regular adult, discovering the world is not a bowl of cherries, a crash to the bottom, and, finally, accepting that the only person responsible for me, is me. But first I had to descend into the deep depths of the emotional chasm. From C4 HELLS ISLAND We must have crossed the bridge to Hells Island in the night. I dont remember the trip over, only that heartbreaking trip back with the boy called Duerr (to start all over again at day one) after we thought we had made it. I dont remember too many details of those weeks in boot camp. I was too sleepy. Too scared. Too lonely. Too homesick. Many times I felt like crying, but I couldnt cry. For awhile I developed a propensity for nosebleeds. My company commander, who really wasnt a bad sort of guy, commented once that if I didnt stop having nosebleeds they might have to send me home.... (Home, my god, Id love to go home!) I even, consideredonceforcing my nose to bleed, to at least not try stopping itI wanted to go home! We marched a lot, did calisthenics, did drills with our rifles, spit-shined our shoes, did laundry on concrete tables with scrub brushes and a little soap, hung our clothes on clotheslines without clothespins, pressed our dungarees, etc., with our hands, and stood plenty of inspections. From C5 COMPANY311 You remember I said my first company commander wasnt a bad sort of guy? Well, he wasnt. I also dont remember his name. Chief Thomas was my next company commander. (Choker Chief Thomas, I would later learn at Class A school, from Instructor First Class Petty Officer Raspberry E-6.) Thomas was black. He joined the Marine Corps when he was sixteen. He made two World War II

landings in the Pacific before he was discovered to be too young. But they didnt kick him out. They then let him join the Navy where he worked his way to E-12, the top of the enlisted mens ranks. Yes, he was tough. And weme and seventy-nine other snot-nosed kids like mewere going to make Company 311 not only his last boot camp company before his retirement, but also his BEST. He guaranteed it. We would take all honors or we would bleed. From C6 TORNADO Then the barn and other outlying buildings begin leaning east, again as if a magnet pulling, not wind pushing. Everything close is still so quiet. Farther away everything is happening so fast, and its so hard to believe, and accept. We still have no full realization of a dangerous wind. No realization we should do anything but stand, watch, in shock believing that nothing so bad as whats happening could really be happening. From C9 SKYDIVE! Move all the way out. Brians second command is what Ive feared the most. But I cant stop now. I wont stop now. I reach for the strut (the 45 degree support for the planes wing). Right hand secure. I thrust my body up, securing my feet on the platform, left hand also on the strut, then, hand by hand, leaning, I move outward, into 90-knot wind. Fear does not exist right now. Nothing does. My mind is in total wooden shock. From C16 SYDNEY And talk about rockets and collision alarms. Her soft lips become food for my soul. Her taste, her touch, her manner becomes unending memory. What is it about that one woman who can stir a young mans genes and hormones? This is my first romantic kiss as an adult. The image and wonder of it has stayed with me for forty-three years. Sue, I will never forget you. Following my memoirs is my most recent short fiction Waiting to Die a tale of today and the coming, feared, pandemic. END OF PREVIEW

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