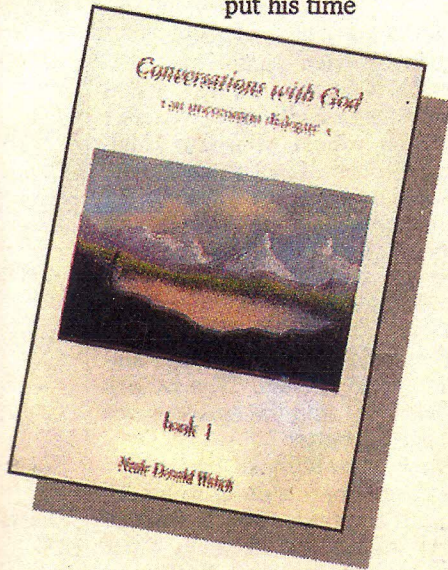


BOOKS

Illustration becomes a winner for local artist

BY ROY A. BAHL
STAFF WRITER

WHEN LOCAL ARTIST Louis Jones was asked to paint an image full of moody realism for the cover of a metaphysical book, he wondered if he should even bother. After all, he figured, he could put his time



"Conversations With God," with a cover illustration by Louis Jones, was sold by Hampton Roads Publishing Co. to G.P. Putnam's Sons.

toward other paintings which would surely be more profitable than the sum offered up-front by the small local publishing company.

But something about this request "just felt right," Jones said.

Right it was.

His painting "The Lake," a scene showing a human figure standing in front of an oval lake backed by snow-covered mountain peaks, was printed on all 100,000

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copies of Neale Donald Walsch's "Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue."

Brisk sales followed.

Then it happened — G.P. Putnam's Sons, one of the largest publishing houses in the world, bought the rights to the book from Hampton Roads Publishing Co.

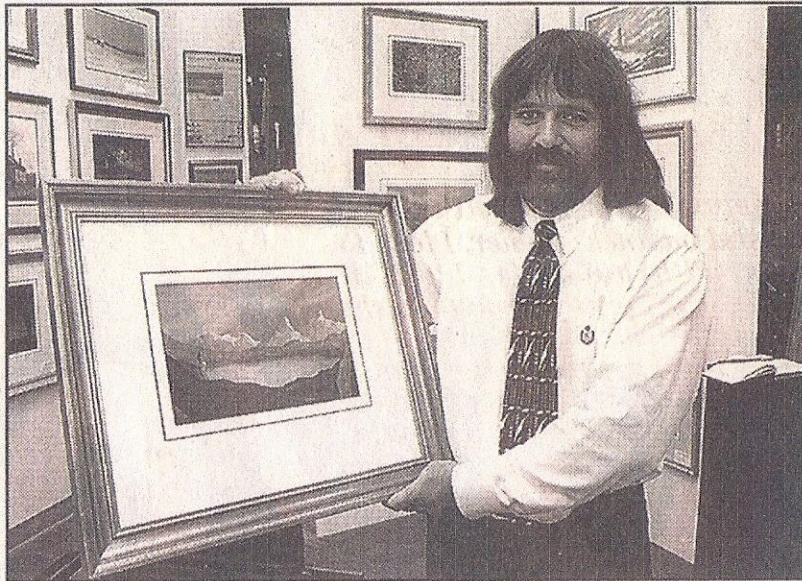
The first 300,000 hardcover copies by Putnum officially go on sale today. So far, printing rights have been sold to 14 foreign publishers. Projected worldwide sales reach into the millions.

Jones' image will also grace the front of the three-volume audio version hitting the stores at the same time. The readers include Ed Asner and the author.

"I felt the book had a significant message," Jones said. "It's like most books having to do with religion. You may not agree with everything there, but it does force you to think. It's almost a guidebook to life."

Reprints of his painting also are advertised in each book and sales so far from the initial printing are in the hundreds.

The questioning prose inside the book is brought out front through Jones' painting.



RICHARD L. DUNSTON/The Virginian-Pilot

Louis Jones' painting "The Lake" shows a person standing in front of an oval lake backed by snow-covered mountain peaks.

"The person is questioning the sky and the heavens," Jones said. "He's questioning it all. He's got his arms outstretched and he's asking, 'What's the answer? Explain this to me. I don't get it.'"

Jonathan Friedman of Hampton Roads Publishing Co. spotted the book's potential early.

"I knew the first time I read the book it was going to sell millions,"

Friedman said. "I was telling everyone that this was going to be the biggest New Age book of all time."

Art is a family affair for Jones. His wife, Susan, and son, Ryan, are artists as is his father, Herb, who has had a successful painting career.

This is Jones' first book cover and he is amazed at the book's

success.

"I didn't expect it," Jones said. "But that just reinforces the theory of 'Do the best you can on every project because you never know which one's going to be a breakthrough project.'"

"Off this one image over the next several years," Jones said, "I should make enough to retire. It's kind of interesting that my other 4,000 paintings have been to get me by and this one image will probably make the same amount of money."

So now that he can, is he about to retire at the age of 44?

Far from it.

He has already finished the painting that will grace the cover of the second of the "Conversations With God" three-book series. He has also painted five more book covers for Hampton Roads Publishing Co.

"Book II is the same scene," Jones said, "but you are in the air looking down into the lake and the figure has jumped off the rock and is just hanging over the water. A leap of faith, as it were."

And his ideas for the cover of Book III?

"Again the same scene," he said, "except you're in the lake looking up from under water. I've got my work cut out for me with that one."