

A List of  
**Suggested Interview Questions**  
for  
**William Timothy Murray**

**Note:** The following questions cover topics across the span of the entire work of *The Year of the Red Door*. The answers might contain spoilers. In fact, some of the questions may also be spoilers because they are about passages that take place later on in the story that some readers may have not reached.

1. How much of the main character, Robby Ribbon, is based on you?
2. Was Robby's father modeled on your own father?
3. Robby worked at his father's store, but you worked with your father, isn't that so? What was that like?
4. There is a rather contemplative tone running throughout *The Year of the Red Door*. For example, you take us inside the heads of various characters—not just the main characters—but many of them. But by putting us inside their heads we learn more about them as they think over things, as they ponder things. That's pretty unusual for a work of fantasy. Why did you do that? Why didn't you just describe what happens, what the characters do?
5. Now, perhaps we should back up just a little and say that *The Year of the Red Door* is published in five separate volumes. Most people call it a series, but you say it isn't a series, right? Could you explain why?
- 5b. Follow-up question:** And there are also two companion books available, too. And you've written a number of stories about some of the characters, too. Could you talk about those? The two companion books are available in bookstores, but not those other stories. Why is that?
6. You are from the South. The American South, that is. How did that shape this story?
7. Speaking of races, let's talk a bit about one of the races in this story, the Elifaen. That means, The Fallen Ones. They once had wings. That was during the early period of the world call the Time Before Time. That was a time of peace, kind of like the Garden of Eden. But a number of them grew disobedient and were stripped of their wings, while the rest of them departed the earth to some heavenly abode. Those who remained behind, have scars running up and down their backs where their wings once were. And their offspring develop those scars, too. You explain in the story that the Elifaen are immortal but that they can and do die. Can you explain that to us?

**7b. Follow-up question:** So what you are saying is that being immortal or having a perfect memory might not be all that great. Why might that be?

**8a.** You describe the Elifaen, like Esildre and Robby's mother, Mirabella, as having a different sense of time than regular mortal people. Can you explain that?

**8b. Follow up question:** It seems like having that ability would make the Elifaen smarter and wiser, less apt to make mistakes. But that's not the case, really. Why not? Why don't they think things through a little better?

**9.** In *The Nature of a Curse*, we meet Lord Tallin and he has perfect memory. But he is being slowly driven mad by it. Do you think that would be the inevitable result of having perfect memory?

**10.** So let's go back to Tulith Attis, the old fortress where Robby rings the bell. That place keeps cropping up over and over throughout the story. It was where Lyrium lost her Bloodcoins. It was where Pellen betrayed his people that led to the massacre. Bailorg was there. Billy's ancestor died there, and so did one of Robby's ancestors. In fact, they did side by side. When you were writing the story, did you know, starting out, that so much would stem from that place?

**11a.** How did the idea of this story first come to you?

**11b. Follow-up question:** So what you are saying is that power is a kind of trap?

**12.** One of your characters says that "Ignorance has never been a stumbling block to those who seek power." Do you really think that is so? Were you thinking of anyone in particular?

**13.** There is an incident in *A Distant Light* where Robby uses his dreamwalking ability to help out his friends. What happens is that his friends come to a lake at night, and on the other side of the lake is a town where they hope to find shelter. And there's a ferry, but the ferryman won't take them across until morning. And Robby and his friends are cold and wet. So Robby invokes a terrible in the ferryman's sleep. We aren't told the particulars, but it's pretty clear that the ferryman thought that the nightmare was a warning about what might happen to him if he did not take the group on across the lake. Ashlord pieces together what happened and he somewhat scolds Robby, reminding him to be very careful with his abilities. He says to Robby, "Remember the old saying that the gods expect much of those they curse, and more of those they bless." Is that an actual "old saying?" And what was meant by that?

**14.** Let's talk about Sheila, Robby's love interest. The story starts out with her. In the prologue to *The Bellringer*, we learn that she is the daughter of a powerful lord and that she is sent away so that she'll be safe from persecution. And we later learn that her mother, who was Elifaen, was at Tulith Attis. And the whole mystery of Lyrium's Bloodcoins are tied up in Sheila's story. But it is rather odd to have her featured so prominently in the beginning of the story, a story that is essentially Robby's story. Until, that is, the end. It turns out that she is destined to wield great power, equal only to Robby. But I want to ask about Sheila and Esildre. They are almost identical in appearance. And it turns out they are related. In fact, they are first cousins, right? Could you talk about Sheila and Esildre just a little?

**15a.** *The Year of the Red Door* is full of little stories. There's the story of the leaf that fell one summer and brought down a mighty kingdom. There's the story of the woodcutter who fell in love with the Queen of the Wood and because of his love for her, she withered away along with the forest, in spite of the woodcutter's good intentions. Then there's the story of the beginning of the world, the creation story, if you will (The Fall of the Faere), and there's the story of the discovery of Griferis. Those are in addition to the stories of the individual characters, how Mirabella met Robby's father. How Ullin and Micerea met and fell in love. The story of Valcose the Demon, and the story about dead city in the desert and how all its people disappeared. And many other stories are told. Those stories help explain things to the readers. But how difficult was it to work them in? Might there have been other ways of imparting the same information?

**15b. Follow-up question:** So what you are saying is that, to you anyway, it isn't believable when characters in books *don't* tell stories to each other in the way of explaining things. Right?

**16.** Do you think we still have a society that is open to telling and listening to stories?

**17.** Besides stories, literature itself is pretty important throughout the story. There are books and collections of books, and there are libraries. And there are lots of passages where a character is described either reading a book, or talking about reading, or looking for a book to read. It seems that literacy, beyond just knowing how to read letters and words, is very important in the story. It's more than just a plot device, isn't it? It's something that you're rather passionate about, too. Am I right?

**18.** Let's talk about the Bloodcoins. What are they? And why are they so significant to the story?

**19.** In the last volume, *To Touch a Dream*, Robby wants Serith Ellyn's Bloodcoins because he thinks he knows how he can use them as they were intended to be used. Robby wants to convince the Queen of Vanara, Serith Ellyn, to give up her Bloodcoins, and to give them to him to use. But there's a problem. Those Bloodcoins have become important symbols of the Queen's rule, of her authority as the rightful Queen of Vanara. So she isn't about to give them up. By this time in the story, it is fairly clear to us that Robby can just take them without even asking. He has the power to do that. But he doesn't. Instead, he takes a different approach. He arranges for the Queen to be visited by a dreamwalker each night for about a week. A different dreamwalker each night, more or less. And they show Queen Serith Ellyn things that Robby hopes will help bring her around in her thinking, and that she'll give up her Bloodcoins willingly. So, starting out, she absolutely refuses to give up her Bloodcoins and takes offense at the very idea of it. But, she gradually changes her mind about things. She learns, through Robby's dreamwalkers, that she has been wrong about very many things for a very long time. At the end of that week of visits, she has been transformed from a haughty and powerful queen to a meek and humble person.

Now I have a lot of questions about all of that. That part of the story seems very familiar, or at least has the ring of something familiar. And the chapter in which all of that takes place in is the title chapter for the volume, *To Touch a Dream*. Could you talk about that? Where did you get the idea for her transformation to take place in that way? And why? Why not just have Robby take the Bloodcoins, which he can easily do. Why was it important to him to have Serith Ellyn willingly agree to give them up? Why is that the name of that volume? Just jump in on any one of those questions!

**20.** Let's jump to the end of the story. In *To Touch a Dream*, Robby brings about an event that changes the world. What happens is that the line that separates life and death gets erased. Isn't this foreshadowed in a sense by the dream world, by dreamwalking?

**21.** Okay, but what about the bad guys? What about all of the terrible suffering that they've inflicted on others? On the one hand, it doesn't seem fair that they should be forgiven without being punished. Are you saying in this story that, ultimately, it doesn't matter what you do because all will be forgiven in the end?