

Richard Paul Evans is a *New York Times* bestselling author. His debut novel, “The Christmas Box” has been read by millions around the world and was made into an Emmy-Award winning TV movie starring Maureen O’Hara and Richard Thomas. All 16 of his subsequent books have been bestsellers and several have made the jump to the screen. His first young adult book, “Michael Vey: The Prisoner of Cell 25” will be published in August. It features a teenager with superpowers and Tourette Syndrome. Richard and his son Michael both have TS.

### When were you diagnosed with TS?

I was 40. I actually had a really amazing experience when I was diagnosed with TS. I knew I had impulses and tics, but no one had named it. All I knew about TS was what I’d see in the media. I didn’t shout swear words so I didn’t think I had TS. The reason I was diagnosed was my son. He had tics and behavioral disorders. After he was diagnosed I went to find out if I had it.

The research specialist only agreed to see me because one of my books had impacted his life. He had lost a child and the book was healing to him. He said that it’s “...not a coincidence that you’re able to write a book that reaches people who are hurting.”

I started to cry when I was diagnosed. I was crying for the little boy who used to sit at lunch alone. The little boy who was surrounded by the kids at summer camp, who said I was a freak.

I wet the bed that night. I wanted to kill myself. I was nine and it was horrid. My family had just left Arcadia, California and moved to Utah. My TS had just started to really manifest. At eight I was shrugging my shoulders and my mother took me to a chiropractor. My mom would tell me to stop and I’d hold it for a little while, but eventually the tic would come out.

I have three manifestations of TS: tics; the need to touch sharp objects; and the impulse to spit in the face of famous people. I have more than 20 tics, which were more severe when I was younger. I have sharp objects with me all the time and fold dollar bills into sharp objects. I had this unbelievable impulse to spit in President Clinton’s face. I had to step back. I had a funny dialog with Glenn Beck. I didn’t want to spit at him. We joked about him not being famous enough.

### Do you think that your TS has had an impact on your career?

I have a line in one of my books: “We do not succeed in spite of our difficulties and challenges but precisely because of them.” When I lived in Chianti, Italy, I was out walking through the vineyards and I stopped to talk to a farmer. I commented that he must have really good soil to grow such great grapes and he said, “No sir, if the grapes are in good soil the root system is weak

and the grapes are poor. In hard land, the vines have to work and put down deeper roots that pull up nutrients and other things to produce world famous grapes.” It’s a great analogy for having TS. We’re in hard ground and we have to stretch out further to make things happen. That doesn’t happen to people who have it easy.

### How did your family respond when your tics began to occur more frequently?

My mom meant well, but she didn’t know why I was doing what I was doing. You know how parents will say, ‘Don’t make that face or your face will stick like that.’ My mother pointed to a hunchback and said that if I didn’t stop shrugging I was going to look like that.

### Your son is lucky to have your support and understanding. I’m sure it helps him at school, too.

In our home we are able to talk about TS directly. My wife Keri and I go to his school every year and we show “I Have Tourette’s but Tourette’s Doesn’t Have Me” to his class. Emotionally it’s difficult, but it’s also very cool. The kids are very attentive and interested. They ask Michael questions and he handles it very well—even when he was only eight years old, he explained TS to them. Being the expert put him in a cool place in the class and they treated him better after that.

### Do you have any advice for the parents of children with TS?

Parents want to know that their kids will be OK and have good lives, and do the things that ‘normal’ people do. Look for role models and relax. The most important thing is that your child knows you love them the way they are.

When I wrote my book “The Gift” the character has TS and is cured in the first chapter. I knew that most people don’t understand TS and that the critics would not understand it. I put in the front of the book that the character’s symptoms were based on mine. At book signings all over America people turn up with their kids with TS. They are grateful for a role model.

### Please tell us a little about the new book.

This is the most exciting thing I’ve done in years.



It’s my first young adult novel. I was actually working on my regular fall release and this idea came to me. It’s been the most fun and I think it’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I didn’t even tell my agent about it until she came to town and I gave it to her. She was blown away by it.

I gave a copy to my son’s seventh grade English teacher and we did a test, letting 200 kids read it. The response was phenomenal: 91% of the kids loved the book; 8% thought it was OK and less than 1% didn’t like it. In her class some kids went from ‘F’ to ‘A’ and ‘B’ because of it — reading the book and connecting with the character, Michael Vey.

It’s exciting to me to have a character in a major novel with TS who is a hero. Believe me, growing up with TS I felt like anything but a hero. But people who are a little different can be very special and achieve great things.

### What do you think of the media’s image of people with TS?

I thought they were heading in the right direction. With the Michael Vey book, the teacher did a survey about TS in her classes. I thought we were making progress but I was stunned. More than half the kids thought we were talking about ‘bugs’ when we talked about ‘tics.’ The vast majority thought it was contagious. No wonder they don’t want to touch you or sit with you. I was stunned, but the kids’ parents knew even less than the children.

At book talks I always say I have TS and I’ve been asked if I’m going to die. I’m hoping that Michael Vey will help change that image. Imagine if Harry Potter had TS. What would that have done for knowledge of TS? □