

Tulsa is literary agent for best-selling Christian authors

By **BILL SHERMAN** World Religion Writer | Posted: Saturday, February 15, 2014 12:00 am

Tulsa attorney and literary agent Tom Winters, working quietly out of the public eye, has represented authors with 35 books on the New York Times best-seller list. Twice he had three books on the list at the same time.

Winters is a partner in the Winters, King and Associates law firm, on the 59th floor of the Cityplex Towers.

His office with a commanding view of south Tulsa was once the office of Oral Roberts, and he has been told but cannot verify that Oral Roberts and Billy Graham once met in that office.

Winters, King and Associates is a global law firm representing churches, ministries and nonprofits.

Thirty of the nation's largest and fastest-growing churches have been among its 4,000 nonprofit clients in 40 nations.

Winters' authors have sold more than 80 million books, and he has negotiated more than \$60 million in advances for them.

Many of them are household names in the Christian world T.D. Jakes, Tammy Faye Baker, Joyce Meyer.

His biggest-selling book came out of an invitation to have lunch with Joel Osteen, pastor of America's largest church, Lakewood Church in Houston.

"As we were leaving, I told him that if he would like to write a book, I would help him out," Winters said.

His response was, "What would the book be about?"

"I said, 'It needs to be about your life message ... a positive, motivational message.' "

Osteen, who writes out his sermons word for word, assembled some of them into what became his



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Tom Winters shows some of the best-selling books he has represented. Courtesy

book, "Your Best Life Now." It was on the New York Times best-seller list for several months. Winters has now done eight Osteen books, with sales of close to 10 million.

Another book deal came out of a chance meeting with a woman on an airplane. He would not have been on that plane if he had not missed an earlier flight because the GPS in his rental car directed him to the wrong Los Angeles airport.

The woman talked to him about Mormonism and said she was one of 22 children of a man living in Mexico who had multiple wives. He told her he was a book agent and later sent her some books.

Four months later the woman's aunt, one of the multiple wives of another man, showed up in Tulsa with three of her daughters asking to have lunch with him to talk about a book she had written.

He asked his secretary to go to lunch with them. The secretary came back and told him, "They've flown in from Mexico (and elsewhere)... you've got to talk to them."

As he listened to the woman's story, he knew it would make a great book. He found a publisher and got her a nice cash advance, and the book became a best seller.

When Sarah Palin burst onto the national scene, he quickly put out a book about her life that was a best seller. Later he traveled to Wasilla, Alaska, where he met her at her home and talked to her family members about a different book deal.

Winters said he got into the publishing world about 1995 when some of his clients, pastors of major churches, began to ask him about finding a publisher for books they had written.

At that time, major book publishers dominated the market. It was a segregated system with little crossover between Christian books and the general book market. Family Book Stores, a Baptist outlet, for example, would not buy books from secular publishers.

Winters helped change that.

His client T.D. Jakes was one of the first Christian writers to cross over into the major book chains.

When Christian books broke into the mainstream market, they became one of the fastest-growing segments, he said.

The digital world and the Internet have radically changed book publishing, Winters said.

As reading tablets grew in popularity, e-books grabbed a larger part of the market and now account for about 30 percent of books sold.

"And we expect that to grow to 50 percent," he said.

That means less money for authors and for publishers because e-books cost less than half as much as hardcover books.

Traditional bookstores are disappearing.

"Borders is gone," Winters said. "Barnes & Noble is closing stores. We lost Steve's Sundries here. Publishers are in trouble in the long term. They're certainly OK for right now.

"People will always write books and read books, but I think we will see less and less traditional publishing and more and more of a self-publishing model, where people retain their own rights but are able to get their books out to the public."

Self-publishing, which has had a negative connotation among authors in the past, is gaining respectability.

Winters formed a company last fall, Winters Publishing Group, which he calls a hybrid between traditional publishing and self-publishing. The company has shipped 50,000 books since October.

Under that model, the author and the publisher each invest in the book. The publisher edits and produces the book and handles marketing. If the book does well, the publisher refunds the author's investment, and they share the profits. The author retains rights to the book.

"We're pretty new into it," he said. "We're excited about it. I'm convinced that's the direction publishing is going. It's either do this, or get out of the way, or get run over."

A traditional book deal with a major publisher and a cash advance is getting harder to find, he said, but if an author can get it, that's still the best deal.

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Who is Tom Winters?

Tom Winters was born and raised in Ohio and attended Miami University there for two years, finishing his undergraduate work at Oral Roberts University in 1980.

While he was studying at the former ORU law school, he worked for a law firm that assigned him church clients, setting a pattern that he has followed through his career.

He graduated from the ORU law school in 1983, two years before the school closed.

He joined with Mike King, a litigator, in 1987. Winters, King and Associates usually has close to a dozen attorneys.

Winters and his wife, Michele, have four children.