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Persistence Pays Off for Newly Published Author



Rachel Portesi for NowU

Tim Weed was 30 years old when he decided to become a novelist. The Vermont native had already led an adventurous life, directing college semesters abroad and other educational travel programs in Spain, Australia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Argentina and Cuba.

But the journey to becoming a published author turned out to involve even more way stations.

Last year, after earning a master's degree, writing a dozen short stories and two unpublished novels, Weed published "Will Poole's Island" (Namelos Editions), a supernatural adventure story about an orphan who flees a repressive Puritan colony in 17th-century New England and is taken in by a shamanistic Native American.

Weed was 49 years old. That would be old for a rookie in many endeavors, but writing is unique among creative pursuits in that it rewards knowledge and perseverance as much as energy and genius.

"Don't get discouraged by starting late," Weed advised aspiring authors. "A lot of great

writers have started late: Richard Adams, Annie Proulx. Writing is the only art where people can start later, because so much of it depends on life experience."

Writing Time Can Be Found Amid Daily Demands

When the writing bug hit him, Weed was living in Venezuela with his wife, who was pregnant. With fatherhood impending, he needed a job and a home base.

He found both in Putney, Vt., where he became a director of Putney Student Travel, which sets up summers abroad for high school students.

Settling down gave Weed even more motivation to write. He made a deal with himself: If he was going to work an office job, he was going to have a creative outlet, too.

So he enrolled in a low-residency master of fine arts program at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C.

Twice a year, he spent 10 days on campus. The rest of the time, he worked at home under the long-distance tutelage of a writing professor.

Because he was raising two children and holding down a job, he wrote in short sessions of 45 minutes to an hour. Most days, he squeezed in two or three hours.

"Rather than spending two years doing nothing but writing, I was able to have a full-time job, and (the writing program) required 25 hours a week," he said. "I have a really incredible wife. She would take care of things in the mornings, and I would take the afternoons."

Family's History Provided Writing Inspiration

"Will Poole's Island" was inspired by Weed's family history: One of his ancestors emigrated from England to Connecticut as a boy in the 1630s and was orphaned after his father returned home to fight in the English Civil War.

Weed is also descended from Native Americans and "was fascinated by the clash between the two societies." The character of Squamiset, an English-speaking member of the Wampanoag tribe who teaches Will Poole to hunt, fish and project his visions, was based on Squanto, a Native American who aided the Pilgrims.

The book took three years to write and another year and a half to edit. Weed found a publisher when a novelist friend sent the manuscript to his editor at Namelos. (Networking is as important in writing as it is any other business.)

Because every book needs a marketing category, Namelos published it as a young adult novel, although "it's really intended for all ages," Weed said.

Reader Feedback Fuels His Passion

Weed still travels the world, lecturing as a featured expert on National Geographic Expeditions of Spain, Cuba, Argentina and Chile. He also teaches at GrubStreet, a Boston writer's collective where he encounters plenty of aspiring middle-aged novelists.

And he's working on another historical novel about two Irish highwaymen who flee to the U.S. in the 1820s. One becomes a schoolteacher, but the other pursues his old livelihood on the roads of New England.

"With the publication of 'Will Poole's Island' I began to receive feedback from actual readers," he said. "So there's no question that publishing my first novel changed my life. Or at least it changed the way I feel about my creative work. Knowing that there are so many readers out there has sent me back out to the writing garret with renewed passion and energy."