

Getting the Word Out

Written by Margaret Evans
Thursday, 16 April 2009 01:39

Local attorney, columnist and author **Scott Graber** will be signing copies of his debut novel *Malachi*

on Saturday, April 18th at Beaufort Bookstore (11 am- 1 pm) and at McIntosh Book Shoppe (3 – 5 pm). Editor

Margaret Evans

recently spoke to him about the book, its characters, and the brave new world of publishing.



M.E. – Scott, you’ve been on quite an odyssey with this book, yes?

S.G. – Well, that’s true. After finishing the book – which took about a year and 1/2 – I was thrilled to have it accepted by a wonderful agent in California who loved it and gave me lots of encouragement. She told me I should “get ready to be a public figure,” that it “wasn’t a matter of if, but when” the book would be published. But after 2 & 1/2 years, I began to have my doubts. The publishing industry is really hurting, like everybody else, and they tend to be playing it safe right now – going only with the sure things, the big names that guarantee big sales.

M.E. – Like your good friend Pat Conroy, for instance?

S.G. – Exactly. (Incidentally, Pat’s new novel “South of Broad” will be out in September.) Anyway, Richard Brooks, my editor at Beaufort Today, and I were sitting at Emily’s one night, discussing my dilemma, and, on a Dickensian whim, I said, “Hey, Richard, why don’t we serialize my novel in Beaufort Today?” He asked me how many chapters the book contained, and I told him 22. He said, rather prophetically, “Scott, I’m honestly not sure Beaufort Today has 22 more issues in its future.” We decided to give it a go, anyway, and we published 14 installments before Beaufort Today folded.

M.E. – So your loyal readers were left hanging?

S.G. – Yes. But even before the demise of BT, I’d been hearing from readers that they were frustrated with having to wait a week for each new chapter. Gratified by their enthusiasm, I had already begun looking into self-publishing. I ended up going with a company called Lulu. We did the whole thing via Internet. My wife, Susan, designed the cover, which features one of her paintings, and I’m very happy with the finished product.

M.E. – For those who didn’t start reading the book in Beaufort Today, can you tell us a little about Malachi?

S.G. – The story is set in a small, southern coastal town a lot like Beaufort. The protagonist is a young, idealistic lawyer who moves to this town, joins a respected old law firm, and is taken under the wing of the firm’s senior partner, Malachi. He also becomes fast friends with a young

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developer. Without giving too much away... when our young lawyer has a falling out with his mentor, Malachi, he begins volunteering for an organization out on one of the islands called the Palmetto Peace Alliance. There he meets an intriguing African woman who fascinates him and challenges his thinking, and he also begins to uncover some “dark secrets,” as they say, involving his developer friend. So that’s the set-up. To find out what happens to our young protagonist... read the book!

M.E. – Rumor has it that some of the characters in Malachi are based on real people here in Beaufort County. Is there any truth to the rumor?

S.G. – Well, I always tell folks that my characters are composites of many people I’ve known over the years. But some of those people are so distinctive – such “characters” in real life – that they’re pretty hard to dilute or disguise. That’s all I’ll say.

M.E. – But what about the African female character you mentioned? I know you’ve spent a lot of time in Africa. Is she based on a real person?

S.G. – Actually, she is. And yes, I’ve been lucky to make many trips to West Africa, where I’m involved in the production of PR videos, at the behest of various governments there. I’m not sure what keeps drawing me back there. The countries I visit are in chaos – lots of violence, coups going on, HIV epidemics – but I just feel so energized when I’m there. I haven’t been back in a couple of years, now, and I’m really starting to feel the itch...

M.E. – When you were preparing Malachi for publication, you asked a group of 20 friends to each proof-read a chapter or two. How did that work out?

S.G. – It worked out well! I went to people, like you, who know words and love words. Some were more zealous than others. For instance, you, Margaret, stuck with punctuation. (You were great with quotation marks!) Another friend was very enthusiastic about the book, but wanted to virtually rewrite it. Most of my readers fell somewhere in between. A few of my female editors made some helpful suggestions about the sex scenes in the book. My wife says I write about sex like a fifth grader, so I was grateful for the advice!

M.E. – Well, now that our readers are duly titillated... you should have big crowds at Beaufort Bookstore and McIntosh Book Shoppe Saturday! Best of luck to you, Scott.