

## New Book by Hershey Author Satisfies: “Beautiful, From the Characters to the Plot to the Prose”



by Allison Meckley

**S**ound + Noise by Curtis Smith is a short and bittersweet story of a man and woman living their lives not quite in the present, looking back at lives so distant they almost seem not their own. Their unlikely connection stumbles as they search to live a life in the present and future. Initially I disliked the main female character for her unflattering mix of self-indulgence and self-deprecation, and the storyline for seeming simple and like something I may have seen on Lifetime last weekend. There was something about the beauty of the writing that kept me reading; the author’s ability to find the perfect word reminds you that writing is an art.

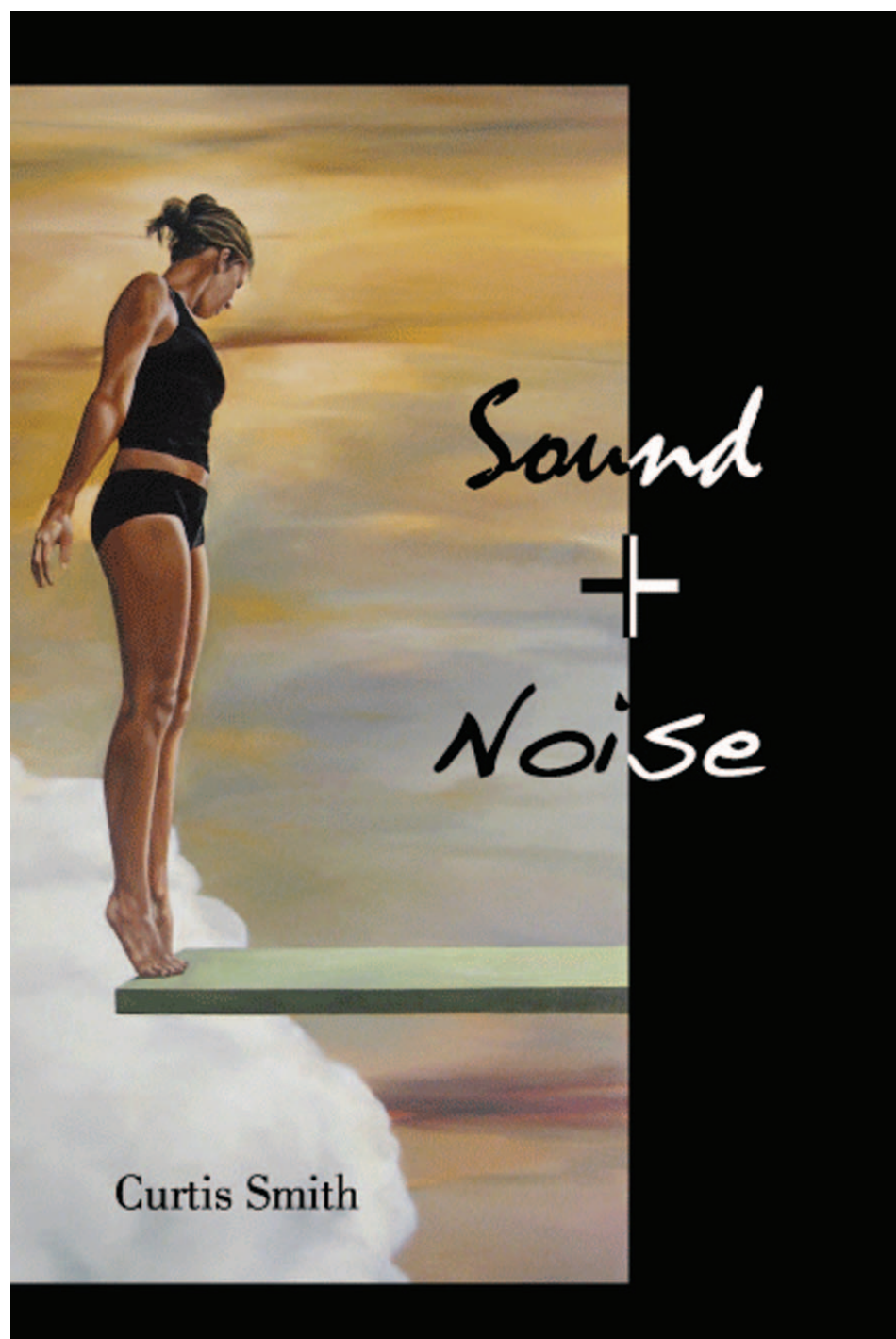
Tom, the main character, is an art professor who reminisces occasionally asking students, “Would the Sistine Chapel or Guernica or Pollack’s splatterings be any less stunning if no one ever saw them?” He then thinks, “Wonderful, the beauty of a shared emotion. True art resonates with the element of spirit...this is the most human of all emotions, the desire to touch another, to express a hint of our undefinable souls.” It was this passage that hooked me. This book, a work of art itself, expresses a hint of Curtis

Smith’s soul. After reading this passage I understood that this book is not about an intricate storyline, but rather the beautiful intricacies of art and life. How something so simple, whether it be a novel or view at the end of a hike, can be so meaningful.

Thankfully, Jackie, the female protagonist, completely redeems herself in my eyes. She, with Tom’s accidental help, realizes the significance of being in the present and alive. Through this growth she sees the beauty in everyone when she notes, “What flawed jewels we all are, the silent pains we carry, the brittle histories we construct beneath the camouflage of our skin.”

If I were the wordsmith Curtis Smith is I might be able to craft a more musical summation, but the best I can write is that this novel is beautiful, from the characters to the plot to the prose. This title is perfect for a good book club or self-reflection, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

*(Editor’s Note: Allison Meckley is special events manager at a major library in the ShowcasePA! region. She is an avid reader and many people count on her expertise and contacts to make things happen. She is a graduate of Gettysburg College and speaks Latin fluently.)*



### Hershey Author Curt Smith Sits Down With ShowcasePA!

**ShowcasePA!:** Will you tell us a little about your life so far?

**Curt Smith:** I grew up in Ardmore, just outside Philadelphia. I went to college in Kutztown. A few weeks before I graduated, I was fortunate enough to land a job teaching at Lower Dauphin High School, the job I still have twenty-five years later.

**ShowcasePA!:** What’s the first book you remember reading? Or being read to you?

**Curt Smith:** I remember Green Eggs and Ham, and other Dr. Seuss things: The Cat in the Hat, If I Ran the Zoo, If I Ran the Circus. Not only were they entertaining in both a narrative and visual sense, but I believe there were elements in the language, its rhythms and rhymes, that made them impossible to forget. As a young person I loved Ray Bradbury and then Kurt Vonnegut. In high school, books like The Great Gatsby and A Farewell to Arms had a big impact on the way I viewed fiction as an art form.

**ShowcasePA!:** Your jobs before and



after college.

**Curt Smith:** I did all sorts of work through high school and college—mainly landscaping and construction and factory work. They were wonderful jobs for a young man to have; they kept me busy and active and taught me a number of skills I wouldn’t have been exposed to otherwise. Since college, I’ve taught at a public high school. A lot has changed in that time, but I still enjoy being in the classroom.

**ShowcasePA!:** How did you get your first book published?

**Curt Smith:** My first two books were small, chapbook-sized collections of short-short stories. They were put out by March Street Press, and the man who

runs March Street also ran a literary journal called Parting Gifts, which specialized in poetry and short-short fiction. He’d published a number of my stories, so it was a pretty easy process to go ahead and collaborate on those collections. My first novel, An Unadorned Life, wasn’t as smooth. For a few years, it bounced around among agents and publishers, garnering interest here and there but it never got to the point where it was signed. It landed with a small press that, unbeknownst to me, was swiftly going under. It came out in 2003, got decent reviews despite its lack of production values, but now it’s out of print.

**ShowcasePA!:** How did your first story or book “come to you”?

**Curt Smith:** I don’t think it came to

me. I think I wrestled with it, and in the process, mangled it pretty horribly. Or more precisely, my vision of it was so murky and ill-defined that I didn’t really stand a chance of having it emerge on paper in any cohesive manner. My first story, and no doubt my first dozen or so stories, was all part of the learning experience. My first published story came to me on a walk on a June night—I smelled a backyard pool, that clean, crisp scent of chlorine—and with that scent, a story began to unfold, and I just followed where it led.

**ShowcasePA!:** Have you always wanted to be a writer?

**Curt Smith:** My standard answer is if I could draw, I’d be a visual artist. After

*continued on page 9*



continued from page 7

## Interview with Author Curt Smith

that, yes, I'll go with being a writer. I always wanted to do something creative. When I first started writing in my late twenties, I was also dabbling in woodwork—I wanted to dedicate myself to some endeavor, so I opted for writing. Woodwork probably would have been a lot more practical, but that's not how it worked out.

**ShowcasePA!: What was your biggest surprise after being a published author?**

**Curt Smith:** I always buy the annual Best American Short Stories anthology. My first published story received a mention in it as one of the year's notable stories. It was a real thrill.

**ShowcasePA!: Name some of the experiences you've had in promoting your books or talking about writing.**

**Curt Smith:** I've done lots of things to promote my books. Writers are pretty solitary folks—but promoting your titles turns the tables on you because suddenly you're obligated to leave the insulation of your desk and meet the public. I've had some really great experiences—some cool reading venues and nice talks with reading and writing groups. I'd much rather meet with a group and answer questions than sit in a bookstore

and sign books.

**ShowcasePA!: Tell briefly how you write – when, how long at a time, on a Remington Typewriter?**

**Curt Smith:** I've worked out my own process, one that works for me and would probably seem odd to most. I gather ideas in a journal then consolidate them into another notebook. Next I block out the story scene by scene. Then I write a rough draft in longhand. Then I revise it and often rewrite it. Then I type it and begin another round of edits. After a few drafts, I'm hopefully happy enough with it to send it out for consideration.

I wake early and stay up late to write. I eat lunch on my own to write. It's not easy work, especially getting that first draft on paper, but the process is engaging and rewarding.

**ShowcasePA!: Tell us about ideas for new books, or your hopes for continuing in the field.**

**Curt Smith:** My only plans are to keep writing and working on the projects that grab my interest. Writing for me isn't a money-making affair, which is cool because I'm free to pursue whatever I want. My novel, *Sound and Noise*, is just

out. Early this summer, my essay collection, *The Agnostic's Prayer*, will be released. And in spring 2010, my next story collection will be out. Right now, I'm finishing the final stories for that collection.

**ShowcasePA!: What advice would you give the novice writer?**

**Curt Smith:** I'd advise them to read voraciously and then emulate the things they find that they admire. I'd urge them to try to understand their own aesthetic and inner sensibilities and to use them as their guides. I'd suggest they have both patience and perseverance. And once they start submitting, I'd advise them to have a thick skin.

**ShowcasePA!: Tell a little about the joys you receive from writing—a philosophical thought?**

**Curt Smith:** Writing, or the pursuit of any art form, is its own reward. An artist is constantly asking himself questions, questions not just of craft and aesthetics, but also deeper questions. Even if your character is nothing like yourself, you need to continually define your beliefs and stances. Writing is a solitary pursuit; it's kind of like wandering off into the wilderness within and seeing

what there is to see. But unlike many solitary pursuits, you're returning from that inner wilderness with a product intended for consumption, a product you hope will reflect something about your understanding of the world while also striking a chord within someone else. Making that kind of connection with another person is pretty cool.

**ShowcasePA!: When and where can people meet you; where can they buy your books?**

**Curt Smith:** My books are available in a number of bookstores, depending on distribution. All are available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble and a host of other web-based sellers. People can contact me for signed copies through my website—[www.curtisjsmith.com](http://www.curtisjsmith.com)

### MEET CURT SMITH:

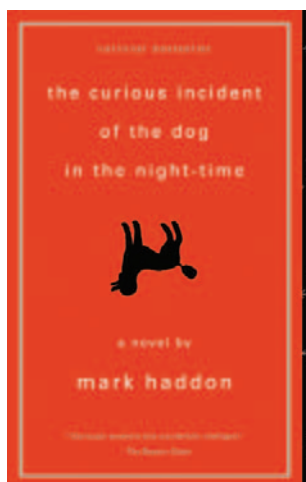
- Middletown Area Arts Collective Thursday, October 23, 6:30 to 8 p.m. 944-1187
- Sunday, October 26 at 5 p.m. at MJ's
- Coffeehouse at the Allen Theater, Annville
- Saturday, November 8 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Borders, Harrisburg
- December date at the Lancaster Borders
- December dates TBA

## A Look Back: Jan Thoman Surveys Past Titles for One Book, One Community by Jan Thoman

### 2007

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Haddon**

This is one of those books that take a bit of work, but is so worth it in the end. Written from the perspective of a 15-year old with a supremely logical brain who cannot handle everyday interactions due to his autism, this insight into what it might be like to see the world as Christopher does is also a first rate mystery. After being accused of killing the neighbor's dog, Christopher uses his encyclopedic knowledge of Sherlock Holmes's methods to find the true killer. This title is available in both print and audio formats.



and care she adapts and eventually marries. Given the opportunity to rejoin white society, she declines and spends the rest of her life as a member of the tribe. This book is available only in print.

### 2004

***Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickam, Jr.**

This memoir tells of growing up in the West Virginia town of Coalwood. The town's name says it all, because the only options for employment are in the local coal mines, where Hickam's father works and expects his son to follow. After 14-year old Homer witnesses Sputnik flying over, he and some friends are inspired to build and launch homemade rockets, which cause upset in the community and between Homer and his father. An understanding teacher encourages Homer to follow his dream of going to college and becoming a scientist. Hickam went on to work for NASA and after retiring as a payload training manager for the International Space Station, wrote the sequel to "Rocket Boys" and served as a consultant on the film adaptation which was titled "October Boys". In addition to the film which is available on DVD, this book is available in print and audio formats.

### 2003

***Tuesdays with Morrie : An Old Man, a Young Man and Life's Greatest Lesson* by Mitch Albom**

When Albom, an award-winning sportswriter, finds out that his favorite college professor and mentor is dying, he decides to go and see him. That initial visit becomes a series of weekly visits to Morrie Schwartz, visits during which the irrepressible older man shares his insights on living, loving and finally, dying. Available in print and audio, this book has also been adapted in a made for TV movie which is on DVD.

## A Look Back



### 2006

***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini**

Beautifully written, *The Kite Runner* is the story of two friends in Kabul, Afghanistan, one of whom is the son of a rich, educated man, the other the son of the servant. After an act of betrayal by Amir, the rich man's son, Hassan and his father leave the city to return to their native village. Years later, an old family friend contacts Amir, now living in America, and asks him to return to Afghanistan, to find the son of his former friend. The horrors Amir finds in a country run by the Taliban and the resolution to the problems he faces lend a dash of action to this unforgettable book. Available in print and audio, this book has also been adapted into a visually stunning film, now on DVD.



### 2005

***The White* by Deborah Larsen**

A novel based on the true story of Mary Jemison, a young girl who is stolen by a raiding party of Shawnee Indians from her wilderness home in mid-eighteenth century Pennsylvania, near Gettysburg. After the trauma of seeing members of her family killed, she is sold to sisters from the Seneca tribe and due to their kindness

