

'Crooked Tree'

His best seller hasn't changed the boy next door

By Lynn Orr
staff writer



Bob Wilson is an ordinary guy, flirting with fame

He smiles a lot and likes to talk and certainly doesn't look like a writer who vividly portrayed bones crunching and legends brewing in one of the last forests in the Lower Peninsula. He is just turned 30, the same age as his father when he penned a book about World War II. But he doesn't act like a guy who's flirting with fame — writing the screenplay for his best-selling first novel, "Crooked Tree," and collaborating with "Exorcist" director William Friedkin to bring his grandfather's namesake, Axel Michaelson, to the screen.

And he has no plans to move to the Hollywood Hills or a New York penthouse. Redford Township suits him fine.

He seems barely touched by every writer's dream — a smashing first novel and the nearly instantaneous return

to the best-seller lists with the paperback edition this summer.

IF THERE'S ANY storm and drump pummeling Wilson's psyche, he reserves it for his imaginative literary efforts.

He likes to golf and play softball, which he does with his former colleagues at the Wayne County Prosecutor's office. He nibbles on cheese crackers when he's not on the Scarsdale diet, and he drinks Strohs.

He sees a lot of his relatives, his parents who live in northwest Detroit where he grew up, and his in-laws, Ted and Esther Corombos, who live a few streets away in Redford.

There's no sign of new wealth in the '80s tri-level he moved into last October with his bride, Jeanne Corombos, a

Redford Union High graduate and research analyst.

There's a pot of marigolds and a worse-for-wear green frog in the yard, a University of Michigan mug next to a wax bear perched on the mantle and a "Welcome to the Mortgage of the Month Club" ashtray on the endtable.

It's the kind of home where Sancho, the couple's doberman, roams freely and flops next to a bean bag chair in front of the console television.

WILSON'S DEN shows the only signs of an author at work.

It's there where he pounds his typewriter, transcribing from yellow tablets filled during excursions up north. He usually writes at his family's cottage in Grayling, where he spent all his summers until he graduated from Catholic Central High. He just returned

last week from a few weeks there working on his second novel, another suspense thriller set on a particular piece of Michigan terrain.

"I make a reference to it in 'Crooked Tree,'" is the only hint the author reveals, partly to tantalize prospective readers, partly because Wilson doesn't like talking about a work in progress.

But he's happy to gab about anything else, from the James Bond-type book he wrote in ninth grade to Saturn pictures to why Michigan will always be his home base — "It's green."

A mammoth white pine, its top hooked by the westerly winds, marked the new home of the Ottawas. The tree served as a beacon for Indian canoeists traversing the choppy lake waters in their fragile birch-bark craft. The Ottawas

called the area *wau-go-naw-ki-sa*, "the land of the crooked tree." Like the Anglicized Ottawa name for the area, the crooked tree survived, miraculously preserved from the crosscut saws of the lumberjacks.

ONE MORNING last week he shared breakfast with a doctor who wants to try his hand at fiction, and during this interview he stopped more than once for a phone call from an aspiring writer.

He seems almost grateful to get away from the solitary life of a writer he's pursued since he left the prosecutor's office earlier this year so his "next book wouldn't take four years."

Despite the many lectures, public re-

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