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Slugline Making the ordinary extraordinary
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By SARAH DANIELS / sdaniels@mpnewspapers.com

Bruce Sweet looks good for a guy who is supposed to be dead.

"I almost died two years ago," Sweet said in his cozy Charlotte home a mile from Lake Ontario.

Sweet, 68, had been teaching creative writing at St. John Fisher College in Pittsford when he had to leave his post as writer-in-residence for health reasons.

"They didn't know what was the matter with me," Sweet said.

Sweet eventually underwent quadruple bypass heart surgery and almost died from internal bleeding. The passionate and energetic writer, poet and playwright pulled through.

Two years after his medical feat, Sweet has accomplished a publishing feat. Sweet had three volumes of poetry published this fall, a rare accomplishment in the publishing world.

His 30-page book of poems, This Is a Good Thing, was published in October, his 80-page book of poems, Archaeology, was published in November, and his illustrated book of animal poems for children, A Dream of Animals, was published in December.

Sweet's volume of animal poems, A Dream of Animals, originally intended for his grandchildren, snowballed into something bigger.

"I didn't intend to publish it," Sweet said. "Someone suggested illustrations to go with the poems, so I called Sarah Cushman because I loved her note cards with illustrations of animals. I called her, and she agreed."

Sweet decided to send the book to the publisher of his longer book of poetry, Archaeology.

"I passed it onto Michael Czarnecki (of Foothills Publishing) and said, 'Why don't you consider this?'" Sweet said. "He just loved it."

Sweet grew up in New York City and moved to the Rochester area in 1985. Sweet met his wife Madeleine in 1986 while working at the Aesthetic Education Institute. The couple married Aug. 8, 1988 at 8 a.m. and moved to Charlotte in 1995.

Sweet has published more than 200 poems, a dozen short stories, more than 100 essays and theater reviews and has had 26 of his plays produced. Sweet is going to teach creative writing at Roberts Wesleyan College in January. Sweet also has a radio program on WXXI, "What's the Word?", on which he reads poetry.

Sweet's love affair with poetry began in grade school. His first poem was published in a nature magazine when he was in the fourth grade. He was paid \$16 for the poem.

"My parents took me out to the best Italian restaurant in Brooklyn," Sweet said.

It's a tradition Sweet has continued. Whenever he receives a check for a poem, he and his wife go out to dinner.

Although Sweet enjoys writing fiction and plays, he said he is especially drawn to the concise art of poetry. Sweet said his poetry springs from his love of family, his fascination with animals and his need to expose unintentional or intentional dishonesty.

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"When I see it, I want to write about it," Sweet said.

While discussing poetry, Sweet periodically jumps out of his chair and heads into his paper-lined office to retrieve a poem that illustrates a particular event or emotion. Pictures of animals fill the remaining wall space that hasn't been overrun with heaving bookshelves.

"It's a pleasure to be able to write something and share it with someone," Sweet said.

Sweet's friend, Marjorie Searl, of Brighton, shared one of Sweet's poems with her family during Thanksgiving dinner. Searl said the poem moved everyone to tears.

"Bruce can take moments of ordinary life and remind us they're not so ordinary," Searl said.

For Sweet, highlighting the beauty of everyday life is the essence of poetry.

"It's what you want to say when you look into the face of a newborn baby," Sweet said. "What you want to say when you look into the face of the woman in the casket."

For more information on **Bruce Sweet's** books, visit www.puddinghouse.com and www.foothillspublishing.com.

Father

under rocks quietly unearthed
lay baby copperheads asleep
how comfortable in coiled colors
how peaceful was the braided
tangle of their rest my
father gently took away
my hand

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