

WRITING RECOGNITION

Local authors win 1st at Pacific Northwest Writers Association conference

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In his 20s, Bruce Rettig worked at least 12 hours each day of the week — on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

“We were trapped in a time warp, interactions almost exclusively limited to the confines of a camp consisting of seven barges and 10 tugboats anchored off a thin spit of land jutting into the Arctic Ocean,” he states in his new nonfiction novel “Refraction.”

Now 30 years after his summers spent on Alaska’s North Slope, Rettig has chronicled his experience working in the Prudhoe Bay Oil Field in his memoir, which took first place in the nonfiction/memoir category of the 2017 Pacific Northwest Writer’s Association contest held from Thursday, July 20, through Sunday, July 23.



COURTESY / BRUCE RETTIG

Local author Bruce Rettig spent four summers in Alaska during his 20s. His nonfiction novel “Refraction” chronicles his experience.

“[PNWA] has a conference once a year, and in addition they have a yearly contest. I was awarded first place for narrative nonfiction/memoir, which was a nice surprise,” Rettig said.

The South Lake Tahoe-based author was one of hundreds of applicants who attended the

conference, which awarded prizes to participants across 12 categories. While his story happened three decades in the past, it remains relevant today.

“A reason it might be gaining some notice now is there’s been so much news and current events with the Dakota Access Pipeline

and other pipeline systems being approved — this was one of the first major pipelines that went in.

“I was in my early 20s, in a rite of passage and making really good money, and now I’m looking back 30 years later at the oil industry. The story is told in 20-year-old eyes when I

was working as a merchant marine on a boat. There are also chapters I wrote now looking back on it,” Rettig noted.

At a workshop in Squaw Valley, “Refraction” was described as “a cross between ‘Heart of Darkness’ and ‘Into the Wild.’” The story follows Rettig’s time spent working on a tugboat and barge operation known as Arctic Marine Freighters, which serviced the Prudhoe Bay Oil Field and Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Rettig, who in addition to working in Alaska for four summers also attended the University of Colorado, has surrounded himself with adventure for quite some time.

“As a writer you talk about the setting or place where it’s set in as a character almost — it has so much importance, it’s so unique. It’s how Tahoe is too — a distinct area that’s removed from a lot of things when I go out hiking and exploring, which is why I went to Alaska to begin with — I wanted to get away and get a sense of

adventure.

“With Tahoe it’s a similar field, when I take a hike our house backs up to the forest. A lot of my ideas come from sitting on the river and reflecting, which is the same type of process as when I used to sail out in the middle of the ocean — there’s nothing out there, so you turn towards yourself, learn a lot and get to know yourself a little bit better,” Rettig explained.

“Refraction” has not yet been released to the public, but Rettig is currently working on finding a publisher — a mission that continued while in Seattle, Washington, for the PNWA conference.

“I talked with a few [agents and editors] — I have about six that asked me to read the full manuscript, and two asked me to send it to them, which is the next step. It’s a long process,” Rettig said.

Over 10 of his other works have been printed in publications including “pacificREVIEW,” “Tahoe Blues” and “The Peralta Press.”

“Bruce is one of the most talented creatives I know,” said Tracy Owen Chapman, one of Rettig’s long-time business partners. “He’s caring, insightful and downright funny.”

Rettig is also a founding member of Tahoe Writers Works, an organization comprised of people interested in the art of writing.

Fellow local creative David Anderson, who was formerly a member of Tahoe Writers Works, was also recognized at the PNWA conference: Anderson won first place in the poetry category for his works “Siren,” “The Fall of ‘16” and “Continental Rift.”

“It is a great feeling to have my work selected, and I appreciate that PNWA provides a venue for writers — it is a helpful organization. I have, until recently, concentrated on short fiction and have won several awards.

“Over the past five years I have been managing editor for EDGE Literary Journal, published by Tahoe Writers Works, and Bruce served as publisher. After a 10-year run, we ceased publication after the 2016 issue,” Anderson said.

Additional information about Tahoe Writers Works is available at www.tahowritersworks.com. Learn more about Rettig and view his complete list of publications at www.brucerrtig.com.



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