

By Mark Wellman

LOCAL AUTHOR DAVID BECKETT Shares His Local Roots and His Labor of Love

A 1986 *New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung* article featured an extraordinary Canyon Middle School student. His original short story, depicting a poker game between President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, had been acclaimed by *Scholastic Magazine*. This was the same honor Truman Capote won as a teen, so David Beckett's literary future seemed preordained. He explains, "I'd just finished Capote's masterpiece, *In Cold Blood*, and I was overawed to be mentioned in the same context. I began to receive letters of congratulation from college professors. It was a dazzling experience."

Before the *Scholastic* writing prize, Beckett had earned a more dubious distinction. "During middle school, I received more 'pink slips' [conduct reprimands] than any other kid. I was a regular in the principal's office, where I met the 'Board of Education' – a euphemism for Coach Weidner's wooden paddle – at least a dozen times. My frustrated 6th grade math teacher, Mr. Klein, often called me 'undisciplined.' I said, '*Undisciplined?* I get disciplined

every week!' Herr Klein failed to appreciate the jest."

Having survived Mr. Klein and the Board of Education, Beckett entered Canyon High, where he played football, acted in school plays, and starred on the Academic Decathlon team. Summers and holidays he spent tubing the Guadalupe or sailing, swimming, and fishing on Lake LBJ. At 16, Beckett became a deep water lifeguard at Schiltebahn. Later that year, thanks to his near-perfect SAT score, Beckett won a full scholarship

to the University of Texas' Plan II Honors Program. "It was lucky that my SATs were so good. Money was tight, my grades were mediocre, and the Longhorns did not covet my services on the field."

Beckett did his first "professional" writing in Austin, composing editorial columns for *The Daily Texan*. He was promoted to Associate Editor and became the paper's first Legal Research Director. "Oh, that was a special title, created for someone with my skill set. I'd earned a bar card in '96, so I began advising the paper on several interesting legal cases. For example, we challenged a UT policy against year-round political

campaigning. The rule purported to ban political speech until the month preceding an election, even if students were speaking and organizing off campus. We argued



David Beckett
8th Grade

it was an unconstitutional infringement of free speech, and the court agreed. Later, I helped the *Texan* editor defend her right to choose which articles appeared in the paper. Two extreme left-wingers submitted a hit piece on legendary coach Darrell Royal. From researching the facts and interviewing a variety of Texas football luminaries, we determined that the article's accusations were false. The editor rejected the submission, but the authors sued, claiming a right to be published. We insisted upon the editor's exclusive discretion, and we prevailed."

After graduation, Beckett passed the bar exam and accepted a position in the federal judiciary. Eventually, he entered private legal practice in Alamo Heights. Yet, for years, it seemed his pre-destined literary fame might never materialize. Then one night, Beckett's wife issued a challenge. He recalls, "I was on a snobby rant, listing errors and deficiencies in [Dan Brown's international bestseller] *The Da Vinci Code*. Catherine was sick of my carping. She said, 'If you can write something better, do it.' That was my inspiration."

One year later, Beckett had crafted a lush, inventive, 300-page manuscript. "I was just writing, with no contract, no agent, and no long-term plan. My focus was creating something cool for us to enjoy." In 2012, Beckett's wife encouraged him to enter a writing contest "sponsored by Tuscany Press, with a \$1,000 cash prize. I did some background research, determined the contest wasn't a scam, and gave it a shot." Before long, Beckett had a publishing contract. "We flew to Cambridge and met the boss [Tuscany Press founder Peter Mongeau]. It was a fun trip. We hardly discussed business. Instead, we bonded over poetry. I recall Peter's ardor for Longfellow. We spent lunch discussing *The Divine Comedy*."

When Beckett's novel, *The Cana Mystery*, finally became available, he was dazzled again. Amazon's entire inventory sold out in less than a week! "My publisher did not anticipate such a positive response," Beckett remarked, grinning. "He hadn't prepared enough paperbacks." Tuscany Press rushed to make additional copies available, and the sales juggernaut resumed. As Beckett explained, "Peter loves great literature. I created an adventure story. He was hesitant to enter the commercial mystery-thriller genre, but now we're Tuscany's fastest seller."

Only time will tell if *The Cana Mystery* can top the *New York Times*' list but, from Beckett's perspective, the journey is already a success. "I wrote this book for my wife. She read it. She loves it. I'm incredibly flattered that others are reading and enjoying it too, but that's all secondary. *The Cana Mystery* was a labor of love."

